REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS INITIATIVES AROUND THE GLOBE 2020

A COMPARATIVE STUDY

PREAMBLE

In 2014, 21% of European citizens had heard of the EQF, while 9% knew at which EQF level their qualifications were located. These numbers will have gone up in the meantime, but Regional Qualifications Frameworks (hence RQFs) do not speak to the imagination of citizens. RQFs are tools that are conceptually far away from people. Their working is often indirect, and their effects difficult to measure. Despite this, we can speak of the EQF as a global brand and the most well-known RQF in the world. The EQF is not the only RQF, however. RQFs usually connect several countries' NQFs in a single world region. They are often linked with regional Economic Communities like the EU, ASEAN, CARICOM or SADC. Some frameworks are not united by geography but by other binding elements such as language, a common heritage and shared culture or common interests. We used the term Transnational Qualifications Frameworks in the past, but in this publication the terms RQF is used to be in line with the EQF Recommendation.

In a world where people learn and work in different contexts, qualifications are formal documents to signal people´s assessed knowledge and skills. Qualifications can be passports to enable international mobility. Though countries can also use NQFs as gatekeeing devices to control entry. RQFs are instruments aiming to ensure that qualifications become passports, supporting the development and linking of NQFs. In our interconnected world, mobility for work and learning is not only limited to mobility between countries *within* the same regional economic community. In practice, many people will move from one such "region" or economic bloc to others Notably,the EU receives more migrants from outside its borders than it sees migration between its own member states. During the COVID-19 crisis, remote working and learning has become much more normal and physical distances matter less. It will have accelerated, for example, platform working, so that many people from outside a world region remain in their own country but work on contracts for employers based in another. This makes it important to look beyond the existing boundaries of regional qualifications frameworks.

The EQF Recommendation of 2017 was forward-looking as it invited the Commission, in cooperation with Member States and Stakeholders, to explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison (the word used in the Recommendation[1]) of third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF. A project group was established with members from different countries in the EQF Advisory Group, different Commission services and Cedefop and ETF, to explore the approach, topics and procedures for this comparison.

The group asked ETF to prepare a background study on the current situation of RQFs. The current study was prepared over the summer of 2020, relying largely on interviews, as written documentation on RQFs is often limited. The information collected clearly shows the breadth and scope of RQFs to date, how different they are from another, but also where they have commonalities with the EQF.

We hope the report will stimulate thinking about comparison and possible links between RQFs. Given the nature of the evidence, our findings represent a snapshot of developments

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[1] „Referencing" is used, in the EQF context, specifically for the formally-approved linking by EU, EEA and Candidate Countries of their NQFs to the EQF. It has defined geographical limits and a specific political meaning.

at a certain point of time. We believe that they form a good basis for a first discussion on how to link the EQF with other RQFs. The discussion in the Project Group was used to test our initial findings and recommendations. While this work was originally only intended to be addressed to the Project Group and the EQF AG, throughout the research period it became clear that our colleagues in other parts of the world engaged in developing other RQFs might be interested in these findings, too. It was thus suggested that we share the results of this report with a wider audience.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

Regional Qualifications Framework initiatives

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AQF, ANQAHE Model	Arab Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
CAMES	Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement superieur
CQF	CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Qualifications Framework
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GQF	Gulf Qualifications Framework
MCAP	Marco de Cualificaciones Alianza del Pacífico
MCESCA	Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior
PQF	Pacific Qualifications Framework
PRQS	Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
TQF VUSSC	Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

Further abbreviations

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
ANQAHE	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AP	Alianza del Pacífo (Pacific Alliance)
AQVN	African Qualifications Verification Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
AU	African Union
CAMES	Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement supérieur
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CICan	Colleges and Institutes Canada
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community West African States
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQF AG	European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAP	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme [> PQF]
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HE	Higher education
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
LMD	Licence-Master-Doctorat
IUCEA	Inter-University Council for East Africa
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality assurance
QF	Qualifications Framework
PRED	Programme of Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas [> CAMES]
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UAE	United Arab Emirates
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation [> SADC QF]
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	Vocational Education and training

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the study is to map the latest developments of Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) and explore the feasibility of comparison with the EQF. The starting point was the exploration of approaches for the comparison regional qualifications frameworks outside the geographical scope of the EQF with the EQF in the light of the EQF Recommendation of 2017.[2]

The study supports the EQF Advisory Group Project Group exploring the comparison process. There is currently only limited documentation available on RQFs, hence this study had to rely largely on interviews. The research partially coincided with the mapping undertaken of the developing African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF), which provides rich and updated information on the state-of-play and dynamics of qualifications frameworks on that continent.

The study identified and compared 15 RQF initiatives. The EQF and the QF EHEA are not included in RQFs studied as the exercise aimed at collecting information on the feasibility of comparing other RQFs with the EQF.

RQF initiatives identified and investigated	
1. African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)	9. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa
2. Arab Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (AQF; ANQAHE Model)	10. Marco de cualificaciones Alianza del Pacífico (Pacific Alliance) (MCAP)
3. ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)	11. Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación superior centroamericana (MCESCA)
4. CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF)	12. Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards/Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)
5. Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement supérieur (CAMES)[3]	13. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Qualifications Framework
6. ECOWAS Regional Qualifications Framework of West Africa	14. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Regional Qualifications Framework
7. East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)	15. Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF VUSSC)
8. Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF)	

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[2] Art 13 recommends that the Commission, in cooperation with member states and stakeholders within the EQF advisory group explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison of third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN

[3] CAMES is an intergovernmental institution for the harmonisation of policies and integration of the Higher Education Systems of Western and Central Africa and the Indian Ocean. In respect to the implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system CAMES plays a role of support, advice, and monitoring. CAMES is a Regional Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency and thanks to its Programme of Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (PRED) – it can also be considered as a regional qualifications framework (in higher education).

Most of these RQFs are instruments developed by regional economic communities. These blocs' aims vary by case, but commonly include promoting trade between the community's members and so stimulating economic growth, greater labour mobility, broader socio-cultural development and cooperation in the region and enhanced educational exchange. A number of RQF initiatives have been developed by non-state actors, in particular organisations of QA agencies working in Higher Education. Most of the RQFs 's members are middle-and-low income countries and are part of the regional economic development agenda. Limited financial and HR support has been an issue for a number of the surveyed RQF initiatives. Most RQFs have implementation plans, but their timetables are threatened by the current pandemic and lack of resources. International organisations and donors support or have supported a number of RQF initiatives with technical assistance and subsidies. The EU as the largest donor in the world has been involved in many initiatives. Most of this support is timebound and only available during a limited period of development.

The stated objectives for RQF initiatives fall mainly into the following three areas, which are partly interlinked: (1) mobility (of workers and learners), (2) quality/quality assurance and (3) harmonisation towards comparability and transparency. Many RQF policy documents refer to labour and learner mobility. The Asia-Arab migration context is particularly noteworthy. Most RQFs have explicit quality assurance requirements and are often integrated with the QA agencies. There is a strong link between registering qualifications and quality assurance. The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) , for example, is underpinned by quality assurance principles for (i) registering and accrediting agencies; (ii) assessment of learning and (iii) regulating the issuing of certificates. The quality assurance of online provision and micro-credentials is an important emerging issue.

Some frameworks initially focused on higher education, or on vocational education, but the outcomes of this research have shown a clear trend towards comprehensive or unified frameworks. In number of levels in a framework, one can observe a prevalence of 10-level RQFs across the globe. Many RQF initiatives are progressing in implementation, , with some displaying significant developments especially in the past few years. Nevertheless, for a number of RQFs, progress has been difficult. Regional governance is a key issue. Implementing bodies can be at the national level as well as the regional level. Some RQFs are working on RQF registers, but very few of the RQF initiatives to date have dedicated websites to promote their frameworks, or provide further information about them. One of the exceptions is the website for the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)[4].

Links between qualifications frameworks are an important feature. Only a couple of the RQF initiatives explored currently have alignment/referencing processes in place that systematically link the member NQFs to the RQF in the way that the EQF does. The most relevant examples are the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and the AQRF. RQFs have porous boundaries and are not an exclusive and closed space for cooperation and benchmarking between NQFs.The report shows that bilateral links exist between several NQFs that are not part of the same RQF while some NQFs are part of more than one RQFs.

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[4] https://prqs.spc.int/

Many have been comparing themselves unilaterally to the EQF. There is a strong interest in a dialogue of existing RQF initiatives with the EQF towards a comparison with the EQF. However, few of the initiatives have reached a stage of implementation that will allow for comparison with the EQF in the very near future. The question therefore is how to strengthen the dialogue beween RQF initiatives and the EQF(which clearly comes across as a request in the interviews), if comparison with the EQF is not (yet) an option.

2   INTRODUCTION

2.1   Introduction & objective of this report

This report is the outcome of a research assignment carried out as part of ETF's support to the EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG), supporting the work of its dedicated Project Group on Comparing the EQF with Third Country Frameworks. The work was carried out between July and October 2020. The results were discussed in the Project Group (composed of the Commission, ETF, Cedefop and some Member State experts from the AG) in November and December 2020. Feedback from RQF stakeholders on individual qualifications frameworks fiches was received in January 2021. The report was shared with the EQF AG in February 2021. This version of the report will be discussed at a webinar organized by ETF for stakeholders from RQFs and the EQF AG in March 2021, after which a final version will be published.

The objective of this report is **to map the latest developments of RQFs and explore the feasibility of comparison with the EQF.** The comparison of the EQF with other RQFs has been facilitated by the revised EQF Recommendation of 2017. Rather than providing a comprehensive and full-scale study on RQFs (this would not be possible nor intended given the size and timeframe of this project), this work in particular sought to provide up-to-date information on RQFs to address information gaps and thus provide valuable input to the EQF AG Project Group in relation to a potential comparison with the EQF.

Written information about RQFs that is publicly available and easily accessible is rather limited, hence this study had to rely largely on interviews with stakeholders. The oral nature of the information required us to validate our findings (i.e. the RQF factsheets in the second half of this report) with the stakeholders once our analysis was completed. The present report presents our findings and our understanding of the situation on the development and implementation of RQFs across the globe in 2020. It is a working document that informed the work of the Project Group on comparison. Due to the high level of interest expressed by the representatives of RQFs, the report has been made more widely available.

Existing RQF initiatives display a large diversity in terms of goals, setup, features and functionality. They may act as overarching or referencing frameworks. They differ in their goals e.g. mobility of individuals, mutual recognition, harmonisation and integration of qualification and education systems, raising the quality of learning outcomes in a wider sense, in their regulatory nature and their governance. The study thus sought to capture both the similarities and differences of existing RQFs as well as their evolution over time.

2.2   Key definitions

This report uses reference definitions with international currency, as listed below.

Qualification:

- ▪ Means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

(*Source of this definition: European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Recommendation of 22/05/2017, annex I)[5].*

National Qualifications Framework (NQF):

- Means a policy and instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.
(*Source of this definition: European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Recommendation of 22/05/2017, annex I)[6].*

Regional Qualifications Framework:

- A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country. (*Source of this definition: ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, A Practical Guide and All you Need to Know. p. 33[7]).*

Validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) or recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the process of confirmation by a competent authority that an individual has acquired learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings measured against a relevant standard. VNFIL or RPL can help individuals acquire a formal qualification that matches their knowledge and skills, and thereby contribute to improving their employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem. It may lead to a partial or full qualification; (*Sources of this definition: EQF Recommendation 2017, ILO Skills for Employment 2017*)

An ETF study on Transnational Qualifications Frameworks from 2011 identified the following characteristics of such frameworks. 'Transnational qualifications frameworks usually (i) have less regulatory and more communicative purposes;(ii) include a wide range of sectors of education and training, if not all; (iii) have a range of national and regional policies, accords, conventions and protocols supporting them, but are not underpinned by enforceable legislation;and (iv) have limited, often voluntary, institutional arrangements for governance and management' (ETF, 2011).

Due to the explorative nature of this research, we did not set any additional criteria for RQFs to be met in order to be covered in this report. When reading their descriptions, it is evident that not all of the RQF initiatives covered meet the requirements of a 'qualifications

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[5] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN
[6] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN
[7] https://asean.org/storage/2018/12/AQRF-Publication-2018-Final.pdf

framework' in a strict sense. The report acknowledges this by often speaking of 'RQF initiatives' instead of RQFs, to express this diversity.

Below is an overview of the 15 RQFs that were investigated:

Table 1 List of RQF initiatives identified

RQF initiatives identified and investigated	
1. African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)	9. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa
2. Arab Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (AQF; ANQAHE Model)	10. Marco de cualificaciones Alianza del Pacífico (Pacific Alliance) (MCAP)
3. ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)	11. Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación superior centroamericana (MCESCA)
4. CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF)	12. Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards/Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)
5. Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement supérieur (CAMES)[8]	13. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Qualifications Framework
6. ECOWAS Regional Qualifications Framework of West Africa	14. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Regional Qualifications Framework
7. East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)	15. Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF VUSSC)
8. Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF)	

Note that the EQF and the QF EHEA are not included in this list as the purpose of the exercise was to collect information on the feasibility of comparing other RQFs with the EQF.

2.3 Background

The revised EQF Recommendation, adopted by the Council on 22 May 2017, recommends *'that the Commission, in cooperation with Member States and stakeholders within the EQF Advisory Group explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison of third countries' national and **regional qualifications frameworks** with the EQF'.*[9]

The Project Group established by the EQF Advisory Group, has developed a proposal for procedures and criteria for comparison of other (non-EQF) country frameworks with the EQF.[10] The proposal foresees a staged approach with interested frameworks proving first the mutual benefits and readiness for comparison, before a dialogue can start comparing the qualifications frameworks on mutually agreed criteria, resulting in a joint report on the comparability of the qualifications frameworks.

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[8] CAMES is an intergovernmental institution for the harmonisation of policies and integration of the Higher Education Systems of Western and Central Africa and the Indian Ocean. In respect to the implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system CAMES plays a role of support, advice, and monitoring. CAMES is a Regional Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency and thanks to its Programme of Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (PRED) – it can also be considered as a regional qualifications framework (in higher education).

[9] It is understood that the term 'third country' is not undisputed in this context. While the EQF Recommendation uses this term, this research will try to avoid the term, whenever possible.

[10] Minutes of the 52th meeting of the EQF Advisory Group. https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupMeetingDoc&docid=41736

Cooperation between the EU and other countries on the transparency of qualifications can foster a better understanding in the EU of qualifications awarded in other countries and vice versa. The Project Group discussed giving priority to a comparison between the EQF with an RQF over a comparison between the EQF and any NQF linking to that RQF.

That said, belonging to a specific RQF does not excluding further links. This report shows that biliateral links exist between NQFs that are not part of the same RQF while some NQFs are part of more than one RQF. RQFs have porous boundaries and are not an exclusive and closed space for cooperation and benchmarking between NQFs.

The comparison between an RQF and the EQF can go beyond the strict education and training context. It can involve aspects related to labour mobility, free movement of persons and migration, and consider the contexts of trade relations with the EU, in which portability of skills and recognition of qualifications are important.

It can be noted that cooperation between the EU and third countries in matters of qualifications frameworks is explicitly included in several international agreements concluded between the EU and third countries. This fosters comparison between the EQF and the qualifications frameworks developed in other parts of the world and underlines that such frameworks are seen as useful complements to deep and comprehensive trade relationships.

There is, however, limited comparative literature available on the topic of RQFs. The most significant piece of work is the above-cited comprehensive ETF Study on Transnational Qualifications Frameworks,. The Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks, the result of a cooperation between the ETF, Cedefop, UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, provides biannual short descriptions on the progress of RQFs but it has been more a stocktaking exercise than a comparison of RQF developments.

2.4   Methodology

To cope with the resource and time constraints of this research, the adopted approach focused on identification of reliable information sources to fill in the gaps with regard to specific RQFs, and to follow up on the development and status quo of those where currently scarce information is publicly available.

In terms of scope, the research focused on the 14 RQF intiatives identified through desk research by ETF in the Terms of Reference, plus one additional initiative identified during the research. The evidence for some of these initiatives was very weak and we planned therefore to focus first on the less well-known RQFs, in order to establish the authenticity of the potential initiatives. The tight timeframe, the initial difficulty to establish interlocutors, the need for more information for all initiatives, and the timing of the research during the summer months forced us to follow a more pragmatic approach. In the end we tried to pursue as many interviews as possible.

The research partially coincided with the mapping of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF), also conducted during 2020. The ACQF mapping study provides rich and updated information on the state-of-play and dynamics of qualifications frameworks on

the continent. It comprises a collection of published reports and analyses: a) reports on qualifications frameworks of 13 country and 3 regional economic communities; b) a final mapping study; c) a synthesis and an infographic. These mapping study reports provide extensive information on four African RQFs, the ACQF, EAQFHE, ECOWAS QF and SADC QF, and are key sources for this analytical stocktaking of RQFs globally. Africa is the continent with the highest number of RQF initiatives, albeit without interactions and systematic cooperation between them. According to the underpinning AU policy context, the ACQF will interact with national and regional qualifications frameworks in Africa and support developments at national and regional levels. It is worth mentioning that the importance of the African continent for the dialogue and testing of comparison / cooperation with the EQF is rooted in the strategic priority of Africa-EU relations, with high expectations concerning the driving force of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The EU has committed to supporting the development of the ACQF, as defined in Action 4 of the *Communication on a New Africa–Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs: Taking Our Partnership for Investment and Jobs to the Next Level*, a communication adopted on 12 September 2018 by the European Commission.[11] This communication was endorsed by all heads of state of the EU, at the European Council meeting of 18 October 2018.[12]

In this report, we only present the ACQF as a case study. The breadth and depth of developments across the African continent go beyond the focus of our study and have been addressed in the final report of the above-mentioned ACQF mapping study.

For RQF initiatives in an early stage of development, the research focused on obtaining robust information on whether there is commitment to the development and implementation of the respective RQF, to identify the 'owners' and 'supporters' of the initiative, to investigate the technical criteria applied for the RQF, and to obtain information on future plans and priorities for further development.

For RQF initiatives that can be considered more advanced, research was generally more comprehensive, focusing in particular on the policy framework, objectives and scope of the RQF, to gauge a possible common interest for a comparison process with the EQF.

As pointed out before, there is little information available online that provides sufficient detail on the actual state of implementation of these RQFs. The research thus essentially relied on qualitative key informant interviews, complemented by desk research. The key informant interviews were also instrumental in identifying additional literature and documentation on these RQFs.

Based on the information obtained, a short 'RQF factsheet' was drafted for each relevant RQF initiative identified. It is important to note that these initiatives are at various stages in their development or implementation. Hence, the length of these factsheets varies significantly across the different initiatives.

They can be found in the second part of this report. The list of persons interviewed for this assignment is included at the end of this report. Due to time and resource constraints, we

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[11] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-africa-europe-jobs-alliance-communication-643_en.pdf
[12] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36775/18-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf

could only do a limited number of interviews and, with a few exceptions, were not able to go in depth to the national and stakeholder levels. In total, 15 individuals were interviewed.

3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Criteria for analysis

The research identifies and investigates 15 RQF initiatives across the globe[13]. We have tried to analyse and compare these framework initiatives on the basis of a number of criteria:

Ownership and commitment of RQFs, is looking at the ownership, feasibility and strength of the mandate for the initiatives through a number of aspects including: who are the owners and supporters of the RQF; what are the resources and capacities for development and implementation; what kind of support is there from donors and international organisations. As we were unsure in advance about the authenticity of some of the initiatives that were identified through desk research based on limited evidence, we had originally defined this as selection criteria for further analysis, but later abandoned this approach.

Objectives of RQFs and their policy framework, which considers the scope of the RQF, and the main purpose (free movement of people and integration, quality assurance in education and training, mutual recognition, etc). All RQFs are part of wider initiatives that have been considered in this analysis.

Mobility and migration are key drivers for a number of RQFs promoting more mobility for learning and work. We will unpack this further based on a number of cases.

Quality Assurance is an explicit key aspect and key objective of many RQFs in order to strengthen trust in qualifications and support mutual recognition and the improvement of provision and assessment and certification processes.

Progress in implementation, looks at the distance RQFs have travelled thus far, based on the criteria formulated in the paper on '*Qualifications Frameworks and their development stages*'. [14] This paper is another by product from the work on comparison and integrated Cedefop and ETF approaches to progression stages for the development and implementation of QFs. It covers both NQFs and RQFs. RQFs are complex constructs that take time to develop and implement. In this report, the existing support and capacities for the development and implementation of RQFs is discussed in order to understand why they advance at different speeds.

Priorities, milestones and outlook, examines each RQF's ambitions and to what extent they have formulated specific milestones for the years to come.

Impact of COVID-19. The COVID-19 crisis has been frequently mentioned as altering plans for the future. This subchapter analyses the disruptive effect on collaboration between

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[13] EQF and QF-EHEA were not objects of this research.
[14] Qualifications Frameworks and their development stages, Cedefop, ETF, 2020, distributed in the EQF AG Meeting 24-25 November, to be published jointly by Cedefop and ETF in 2021 as an EQF Briefing Note

countries, which threatens to slow down current initiatives, but which is also resulting in new forms of cooperation with a stronger focus on digitalisation of processes, procedures and instruments and more virtual interactions.

Links between RQFs looks at the linkages that exist between RQFs and associated NQFs, which may overlap in membership, objectives and collaboration activities.

Comparison with the EQF discusses how far the RQF initiatives consider possible comparison with the EQF desirable, to what extent they have been inspired by the EQF and have already taken the EQF into account unilaterally, and whether they would be ready to enter into a formal comparison at their present stage of development.

How different other RQFs are from the EQF looked at the diversity of RQFs and how this might influence our ability to compare them with the EQF and what the EQF might be able to learn from these different RQFs.

In addition, this report features the African Continental Qualifications Framework. **The ACQF**, supported by the Africa-EU Partnership, is in its first development stage, which runs from 2019 to 2022. The ACQF is a vital policy of the African Union, required by Agenda 2063[15], the AU free movement Protocol[16], the African Continental Free Trade Area[17], and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2025)[18]. The ACQF is seen as an overarching framework and policy instrument to enhance transparency and comparability of qualifications and QFs at national and regional levels, to facilitate recognition and mobility, support developments at national level, and act as a reference framework for international cooperation.

It was not our intention to analyse each framework on all these criteria but rather to compare them and underpin some general observations with specific examples that show how these features of RQFs might influence the comparison process with the EQF.

Ownership and commitment of RQFs

Most of the RQFs are part of **regional economic communities**, (Alianza Pacífico, ASEAN, CARICOM, ECOWAS, EAC, GCC, IGAD, SAARC, SADC, SPC) and wider Unions (AU, EU), whose objectives include increasing the free movement of people and improved mutual trust in qualifications. Most of the members are middle-and-low income countries and the RQFs are part of the regional economic development agenda. **Intergovernmental agreements** can provide strong political commitment for the development of RQFs but are also difficult to agree if developments in some countries lag behind those in other countries, which might make them less inclined to make firm commitments. Countries may alternatively choose not to make very precise arrangements (e.g. ASEAN countries do not need to develop an NQF in order to reference to the AQRF) or agree common milestones but resort more to voluntary steps. These **voluntary steps** are important especially in the early stages

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[15] https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview

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

[17] AfCFTA: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf; Factsheet on the AfCFTA: https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/faqs/2377-african-continental-free-trade-area-faqs-june-2018-update/file.html

[18] CESA 2016-2025. At: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf

when new arrangements are tested and they can be trailblazers for the other countries to follow.

A number of regional qualifications framework initiatives have been developed **by non-state actors** in particular organisations of QA agencies working in the field of Higher Education such as the Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA) in Central America, and the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) with a key role in the Arab Qualifications Framework. These initiatives can rely on a **network of committed professional organisations**, with often a very high level of technical understanding of the arrangements for implementation, resulting in high quality technical documents. But these initiatives are often unable to generate additional resources and capacities to drive the frameworks forward.

The African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) is one of the most experienced quality assurance and accreditation institutions, created in 1968 in Niamey (Niger). CAMES gathers 19 Member States, mostly French-speaking. CAMES is an intergovernmental institution for the harmonisation of policies and integration of the Higher Education Systems of Western and Central Africa and the Indian Ocean.

The table below provides an overview of the implementing bodies of the RQF initiatives identified.

The role and capacity of the institutions behind the framework largely determine progress and performance against defined objectives. The Gulf Qualifications Framework and the Arab Qualifications Framework, for instance, both include all the Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council but are linked to different institutions. The GQF has governmental commitments in particular from Ministries of Labour to develop and recognise the skills needed for the labour market, including those of migrant workers. Its development was supported mainly by the National Qualification Authority of the UAE, which merged with the Ministry of Education in July 2020. The AQF has been developed by QA institutions from the region, but has difficulty in advancing in its development as it does not have any governmental support for strengthening its capacities for implementation. The GQF has reportedly not advanced much because not all the GCC countries have already established an NQF. For instance, interviewees pointed out that the GQF might be formally used once Kuwait, the last country in the region to develop an NQF, has adopted its framework. Some regional frameworks focus more on strengthening NQFs before developing the RQF, in others the RQF and NQF developments go hand in hand. The ETF study on RQFs (ETF, 2011) concluded that RQFs that play an enabling role in developing NQFs are more likely to progress towards the objectives set by the regional policies and constituencies.

The table below provides an overview of the ownership and governance issues of the different RQF initiatives. Implementing bodies can be at the national level as well as the regional level.

Table 2 Ownership and governance of RQF initiatives

Ownership and governance of RQFs	
1. African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)	ACQF is in development (2019-2022). Ownership: African Union (AU). Adoption of future ACQF policy and technical document – by Summit of Heads of State. Coordination: AU Commission - HRST Department. Future governance and implementation structure: to be proposed.
2. Arab Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (AQF; ANQAHE Model)	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)
3. ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)	AQRF Committee, supported by ASEAN Secretariat
4. CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF)	CARICOM Secretariat
5. Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement supérieur (CAMES)	Political level: The Council of Ministers: the highest body of CAMES, the functioning of which is backed up by a Committee of experts. The Summit of Heads of State (every 3 years): from the decision taken in 2018 during 50th anniversary of CAMES. Technical Authority: The General Secretariat. The Council of Ministers appoints a Secretary General for a term of 5 years. Supported by Committee of experts. Commission of Ethics and Deontology
6. ECOWAS Regional Qualifications Framework of West Africa	ECOWAS – Department of Education, Science and Culture
7. East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)	IUCEA (Inter-University Council for East Africa): custodian and governing body; delegated by and reports to the EAC. Principal Education Officer – EAC
8. Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF)	To be determined. Development work led by the UAE (National Qualifications Authority, recently merged with Ministry of Education)
9. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa	No information.
10. Marco de cualificaciones Alianza del Pacífico (Pacific Alliance) (MCAP)	To be determined. In charge of current development work: REMCAP working group of the AP (consisting of NQF leaders in the four countries of the AP); supported by a Technical Secretariat led by Colombia.
11. Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación superior centroamericana (MCESCA)	CSUCA (Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano – Central American Regional University Association): guardian of the framework and driver of the process
12. Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards/Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) SPC: Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Community
13. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Qualifications Framework	SADC Council of Ministers, Ministers responsible for Education and Training, the TCCA (Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation), the TCCA Executive Committee (TCCA EXCO), supported by SADC Secretariat. The planned SADCQF Implementation Unit is not yet established.
14. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Regional Qualifications Framework	To be determined. Current three-year project funded by the SDC and supported by the ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia.
15. Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF VUSSC)	TQF Management Committee (two representatives from each main region) Supported by Education Specialist at COL Commonwealth of Learning)

RQF initiatives may have relatively optimistic roadmaps for their development and implementation during initial conceptualisation, but the example of EQF, SADCQF and CQF show that these original milestones are difficult to meet. In some cases, the large disparities between member countries and language barriers contribute to exacerbate the effect of very limited financial, technical and other resources. SADC illustrates the challenge posed by large differences in countries' education systems and structures, and level of development of their qualifications frameworks. Indeed, as results from the interviews confirmed, **limited financial and HR support** has been an issue for a number of the surveyed RQF initiatives.

- The **AQF** (ANQAHE model), for instance, is a HE initiative sustained by volunteer work. The AQF does not have an office, nor paid staff. The Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) is a private non-governmental organisation. Limited financial and HR support has also been an issue for MCESCA, TQF.
- **SADCQF:** In 2020 SADC approved the new Labour Migration Action Plan 2020-2025, in which support to implement the SADCQF features prominently in strategic objective 3, and is endowed with a budget for regional coordination costs (80,400 US$). In 2017, the SADCQF was launched with an implementation model that consists of six programmes (see Figure 5 below) and an implementation process owned and driven by the Member States of the region. The Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) mobilised the SADC Member States to technically drive the SADCQF implementation model (programmes). Currently the countries leading these programme are: South Africa (alignment to SADCQF), Botswana (Quality assurance), Eswatini (Verification), Zambia (Advocacy and communication), Namibia (articulation, RPL, credit accumulation and transfer). TCCA and SADC Secretariat are entrusted with governance. Implementation is based on national capacities (human, technical, financial) and regionally coordinated government funding. The country assuring the rotating presidency chairs meetings, supports the SADC Secretariat in convening of meetings, minutes and collating and sharing information. This is also a temporary arrangement to ensure that work continues while the SADCQF Implementation Unit is not operational yet.
- **TQF:** The Virtual University of the Small States of the Commenwealth (VUSSC) found a home in the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), but is quite different from other COL initiatives. Resources/capacities are reported to be minimal.
- The **PQF** is in need of a review to make adjustments to its framework to move it to the next stage, especially since a number of NQFs reviewed have incurred significant changes. This venture has been put on hold due to funding issues, as the Secretariat would need to consult with the countries and engage in comprehensive discussions.

International organisations and donors have been or were supporting a number of these initiatives. They play an important role in promoting and financially supporting the development and implementation of RQFs. The current feasibility study for a SAARC qualifications framework, for instance, is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and supported by the ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia. The

ongoing development work towards a qualifications framework for the Pacific Alliance region (MCAP) is meanwhile supported by CICan (Colleges and Institutes Canada). The EU support for the ACQF process provides a framework for joint cooperation and development; the EU also supported the development of MCESCA. Furthermore, individual countries can also be important sponsors for the development of NQFs and RQFs. Australia and New Zealand have formal links to both the AQRF and the PQF[19]. The role of the Commonwealth of Learning Secretariat to the TQF is also a good example of the importance of international organisations.

This support also creates responsibilities. The EU as the largest donor in the world has been involved in many initiatives.

Objectives of RQFs and their policy framework

As pointed out above, the majority of RQFs identified are part of regional economic communities. In many cases, the policy framework and objectives of these RQFs are often closely tied to the objectives of these economic communities. The objectives stated for RQF initiatives mainly fall into the following three areas, which are partly interlinked:

- mobility (of workers and learners);
- quality/quality assurance;
- harmonisation towards comparability and transparency.

The objectives of mobility and migration, and of quality assurance are described in more detail in the next two sub-chapters (2.4 and 2.5).

All RQF initiatives have more than one single objective: mobility, recognition, regional integration, promotion of lifelong learning, transparency and quality are mentioned in almost all cases. Some regional frameworks may focus more on strengthening NQFs before developing the RQF, while in others the RQF and NQF developments go hand in hand. Some RQFs have a more transformative purpose, steering towards harmonisation across countries, while others focus more on increasing comparability and transparency.

- The **AQRF**, for instance, is first and foremost considered a quality assurance tool, using quality as a means to strengthen trust for mobility. While the AQRF aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks within ASEAN countries, other RQFs seek to induce a harmonisation of national qualifications systems and frameworks.
- The key purpose of the **SADCQF** is to enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally, and enhance participation of migrant workers in socio-economic development processes in the countries of origin and destination[20]. This justifies the importance of articulation, RPL and credit transfer

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[19] Both Australia and New Zealand supported the development of the PQF. While EQAP (Educational Quality and Assessment Programme) still receives funding from New Zealand, however, Australia's funding for the PQF implementation was not renewed.
Further examples of support provided include: UNESCO/EU supported SADCQF. UNESCO supports ECOWAS. The Interamerican Development Bank and UNESCO support CARICOM QF.
[20] SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025), approved. Strategic objective 3 – Output 3: Promote SADCQF.

in SADC implementation model. In addition, SADCQF has a very strong orientation to quality assurance and verification of qualifications.

Pillar 3 of the new Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030) focuses on Social and Human Capital Development. Strategic Objective 3 (Increased access to quality and relevant education and skills development, including in science and technology, by SADC citizens) gives high prority to skills development for regional industrialisation (Outcome 2) and to enhanced implementation of the SADCAF (Outcome 1).

- **MCAP** seeks to establish a common reference framework for the generation of synergies between qualifications frameworks of the Pacific Alliance countries and thus facilitate student and labour mobility among its member countries. The driving force behind the intention to develop an RQF for the Pacific Alliance region is labour mobility. In the region, there is currently still a lack of formal mechanisms to support student and labour mobility.

Examples of RQFs that have a more transformative purpose aiming at increased harmonisation, include the following:

- The key purposes of the **ECOWAS QF** are (a) harmonisation of basic education to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and learning in the ECOWAS region; and (b) recognition and equivalence of higher education degrees.
- The key objective of **MCESCA** is to support the reform, innovation and harmonisation of Higher Education curricula, through providing a reference tool, and improved quality assurance processes.

Further examples of RQF initiatives and their key objectives:

- **GQF:** The key driver behind the idea of developing the GQF is mobility of workforce (see also next sub-chapter). It aims at increasing mobility of workforce to ensure that the most qualified people can support the collaborative development of the GCC region. The meta-framework seeks to achieve consistency among Gulf education and training systems, compare and align qualifications within Member States, and allow mutual recognition of qualifications and workforce transfer within the GCC region.
- **SAARC QF:** seeks to facilitate harmonisation of skills at the regional level for enhanced recognition of migrant workers from South Asia in the destination countries. The prospective RQF is intended as a tool to enable comparison of qualifications across SAARC Member States, and also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in countries of destination, i.e. in particular also the Gulf (GCC) region.

The figure below provides an overview of key terms mentioned with regard to the objectives of the RQFs.

Figure 1   Objectives of RQF initiatives

Source: Word cloud created based on the objective stated in the RQF factsheets included in the second part of this report.

As pointed out above, the majority of RQFs identified are part of regional economic communities. Their objectives are often intrinsically linked to the underlying mission of the communities:

- **EAQFHE:** In the EAC, a regional qualifications framework (EAQFHE) was adopted in April 2015, with a basis in the treaty establishing the EAC, and the Protocol on the East African Community Common Market (PEACCM). The EAQFHE specifically refers to article 102 of the Treaty of the EAC, which has four pillars of integration, one of which is Common Market Protocol. Article 102 of the treaty is mainly on the commitment to cooperate in education and training, thus the basis for harmonisation and development of this regional framework. Development of the RQF is part of the operationalisation strategy of Article 11 of theTreaty of the EAC, which states that mobility of professionals within the East African community needs to be facilitated. In the case of higher education, there was a need to develop tools for the operationalization of Article 11 of the Protocol in order to facilitate easy mobility of learners and labour, which among others, requires the establishment of a framework to enable mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications across the region. This prompted the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) to embark on the development of the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), which would be an important tool for harmonisation of

education and training systems and the qualifications attained, and thus contribute towards transforming East Africa into a common higher education area.

In addition, the EAC undertook other measures to facilitate the mobility of professionals in the EAC, notably the signature of mutual recognition agreements between competent authorities regulating the different professions. By 2019, mutual recognition agreements had been signed for accountants, architects, engineers and veterinarians. Negotiations of mutual recognition agreements for land surveyors and lawyers have been concluded and are in the approval process. A study on effectiveness of mutual recognition agreements has since been undertaken. Negotiation meetings for the mutual recognition agreement for pharmacists is set to begin. The negotiations for pharmacists commenced in 2017 and are ongoing.

- The ASEAN Charter, signed by the 10 ASEAN leaders in Singapore on 20 November 2007, provides the basis for an ASEAN qualifications reference framework (**AQRF**). The AQRF is based on agreed understandings between Member States and invites their voluntary engagement.
- The overarching legal instrument that guides the development and implementation of the **SADCQF** is the Protocol on Education and Training (1997-2020). The Protocol promotes the comparability of standards, mobility and portability of qualifications across the region in order to ease mobility of learners, workers and educational services.

Mobility and Migration

Many RQFs have references to labour and learner mobility. There is an expectation that RQFs can facilitate mobility and migration, creating better opportunities for migrants and verifiable information sources for the recognition of qualifications for recognition bodies, employers and training providers. In Africa, freedom of movement and more labour mobility facilitated by recognition, is seen as an important factor for sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

In this context, it is also important to point to the new EU **Pact on Migration and Asylum**, which was adopted on 23 September 2020, and which sets out the European Commission's new approach to migration.[21] The pact foresees development of Talent Partnerships with countries outside the EU to manage legal migration.The pact will be embedded within the EU's overall collaboration with partner countries and aims to mobilise all relevant policies and tools jointly in order to advance cooperation with third countries. The European Skills Agenda also refers to the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

While mobility and migration play a role in all RQF initiatives, the Asia-Arab migration context is particularly noteworthy in this regard.

- **Asia-Arab migration context** – potential linkages between SAARC QF and GQF are being explored. Taking India as an example, the country is part of the SAARC union, the country is both a country of origin and transit, as well as a popular destination, for workers across international borders. Official figures suggest that there were over 30 million Indians overseas in 2018, with over 9 million of the Indian diaspora

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[21] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

concentrated in the GCC region. Over 90% of Indian migrant workers, most of whom are low- and semi-skilled workers, work in the Gulf region and South-East Asia. While exact numbers are not known, several studies point to the presence of larger outflows of labour migration and the presence of large numbers of undocumented migrants in the GCC region (ILO, 2018). India has already sought bilateral cooperation with Saudi Arabia and UAE on skills harmonization, to facilitate migration of skilled workers.[22]

- The potential of the **SAARC QF** has been studied by ILO through an international expert on QF. A report has been prepared on the feasibility and mechanisms for the SAARC QF. The terms of reference for the study makes reference to the SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration; the Declaration of the Senior Officials Meeting of the Colombo Process; the Abu Dhabi Dialogue; and the Global Compact on Migration (UN 2019), while in the proposal there is also emphasis on the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 and on labour mobility between SAARC member countries.

- Moving towards a system of legal circular migration supported by an RQF could mean important changes in the current migration mechanisms. Private recruitment firms are still the main actors used for labour matching in the Gulf region, in a system called 'Kafala' (employer-driven sponsorship), which also raised issues of poor working conditions. In any case, private recruitment firms, labour attachés of sending countries, and organisations responsible for bilateral labour agreements are the key stakeholders in the Gulf, and should be consulted closely on the above-mentioned feasibility study. New labour matching mechanisms(e.g. based on the qualifications frameworks could be quite different if the labour migration focuses on low-skilled, medium-skilled or high-skilled migrants.

- Common work on a Regional Qualifications Framework could make the necessary discussions on the migration issues less political, which in the Gulf and SAARC regions could easily escalate. The tool itself would probably be less important than the process, which could produce several positive spin-off effects. This RQF should probably focus on the currency of migrant qualifications. It could provide e.g. a platform for sharing common profiles (for occupations that are most in demand) and quality assurance and recognition processes that could help all the countries. Linking national databases of qualifications of sending and receiving countries using blockchain technology might, for example, allow the countries to share information in a safe way and offer them a concrete system rather than only a set of level descriptors. It could support the recruitment process, based on verified information. Again, the most qualified will benefit more, so it is not a solution for everyone. But the technical developments might facilitate integration of national systems that could never be achieved by political means.

- Very recently, many migrants left the Gulf to return home due to the COVID-19 crisis, which has had an enormous economic impact in the GCC countries. The reduction in remittances is likewise causing economic difficulties in the sending countries.

- Since so many foreign nationals work in the GCC, these developments may have truly global implications, which makes it also of interest for the EU and the EQF to observe and contribute to the process, where it can add value. It is also an interesting case for

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[22] https://www.orfonline.org/research/mapping-skills-a-roadmap-for-india-and-the-uae-69202/

the implementation of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. This pact foresees mutually beneficial partnerships with key third countries of origin and transit; developing sustainable legal pathways for those in need of protection and to attract talent to the EU; and supporting effective integration policies. These Talent Partnerships will support legal migration and mobility with key partners. The EU will increase support for economic opportunity and address the root causes of irregular migration. The EU proposes an EU Talent Pool for third-country skilled workers which could operate as an EU-wide platform for international recruitment, through which skilled third-country nationals could express their interest in migrating to the EU, and could be identified by EU migration authorities and employers based on their needs.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) adopted the new Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025) to promote skills transfer and match labour supply and demand for regional integration – promotion and implementation of SADCQF is one of the strategic outputs of the Action Plan.

As the 2017 estimates by the African Union show, SADC is host to 37.5% of Africa's 14.2 million international migrant workers, totaling an estimated 5.4 million. At the same time, the Southern African region is home to the largest stock of international migrant workers of up to 4.2 million, ahead of both East Africa and West Africa, with intra-SADC migration accounting for about 45%.

The SADC has adopted a new Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025) as part of efforts to promote skills transfer and match labour supply and demand for regional development and integration. The Action Plan, adopted through the Employment and Labour Sector in the Region, is in line with Article 19 of the SADC Protocol on Employment and Labour, which seeks to protect and safeguard the rights and welfare of migrant workers, to give them better opportunities to contribute to countries of origin and destination. The Action Plan is an integral part of measures aimed at the progressive elimination of obstacles to the free movement of capital and labour, goods and services, and of the people of SADC generally, in line with Article 5 of the SADC Treaty.

It is envisaged that implementation of the adopted policy instrument, through a multi-sectoral approach, will contribute to the protection of labour migrants' rights and give them an opportunity to make a greater developmental impact on both countries of origin and destination.

The Labour Migration Action Plan pursues three strategic objectives:

1. To strengthen labour migration policies and regulatory systems for better labour migration governance.
2. To protect migrant workers' rights and improve advocacy and awareness of their contribution to development and regional integration.
3. To enhance participation of migrant workers in socio-economic development processes in countries of origin and destination. Promotion and further implementation of the SADCQF is one the 3 outputs of this objective, with the following activities:
   - Support Member States in the development of NQFs that are aligned to the SADC QF.

- Support the development of sector-specific regional mutual recognition arrangements in line with the SADC QF.
- Conduct awareness and capacity-building workshops, as appropriate, targeting labour and employers' representatives in the region to promote the SADC QF.
- Conduct skills audits to profile supply and demand for selected sectors.

Other examples where migration is a key agenda issue for RQFs:

- **PQF:** Labour migration takes place in particular from smaller countries to bigger countries but especially to Australia and New Zealand.

- **MCAP:** The driving force behind the intention to develop an RQF for the Pacific Alliance region is labour mobility. In the region, there is currently still a lack of formal mechanisms to support student and labour mobility.

Quality Assurance

Many RQFs have explicit quality assurance (QA) requirements and are integrated with the QA agencies in the region. The following RQF initiatives in particular show a close integration of qualifications and quality assurance mechanisms: PQF, TQF, CQF, AQF, MCESCA and CAMES. Regional and national registers are often limited to quality-assured, outcomes-based qualifications. Although QA measures have often focussed on higher education, they are increasingly being extended beyond that sector. The quality assurance of online provision and micro-credentials is another important emerging issue.

Many RQFs aim at quality assurance and quality enhancement. This becomes very clear from this short overview of the objectives of a number of regional frameworks.

- **AQF:** Address the need for transparent mechanisms for assuring quality, rigour and consistency of regional qualifications for the country, employers, community and students.

- **ACQF:** the vision of the ACQF balances four complementary objectives, of which the first is: "Enhance comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications from all sub-sectors and levels of education and training and support people´s lifelong learning outcomes".

- **CAMES:** strengthening of the quality approach in all the activities and programmes.

- **ECOWAS:** ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and learning in the community.

- **EAQFHE:** reference for setting and assessing academic standards.

- **MCESCA:** improved quality assurance processes.

- **PQF:** the framework promotes peoples' access to good quality education and training; promotes and creates a culture of quality within agencies and institutions, and also in the design, delivery, assessment, and resourcing of education and training activities.

Quality assurance is important to establish trust in qualifications, making sure that they are relevant, understandable and expressed in learning outcomes before they become part of the qualifications framework, and making sure that assessment and certification processes are quality-assured. Quality assurance of providers is also seen as an important aspect of quality-assuring the frameworks.

In a number of cases, quality assurance agencies and regional quality assurance organisations such as EQAP (Pacific) and CAMES (French-speaking Africa) play an important role in promoting the RQF.

The RQF, its level descriptors and possibly additional statements on qualification types expressed in learning outcomes, are used as quality assurance tools by the quality assurance agencies. The regional framework may also have additional quality assurance guidelines.

EQAP (Educational Quality and Assessment Programme) uses the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) as a reference point for regional qualifications and micro-credentials and developed accreditation standards and criteria using independent evaluators. Accredited qualifications are registered on the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards.

In the Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF), internal verification procedures are complemented with a common external verification process based on the AQF level descriptors by reviewers and agency staff of national quality assurance agencies that have been trained to do this.

Although each SADC country has its own QA framework, the SADCQF (2017) in Annex 2[23] defines the 16 SADCQF QA guidelines. They are represented in an infographic, for easier communication to end-users[24].

Figure 2   Quality assurance guidelines of the SADCQF

The TQF VUSSC provides a common repository of quality-assured qualifications using flexible QA guidelines, that build on rather than replace existing QA procedures at national, sectoral or regional level.

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23 https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20booklet.pdf
24 https://www.saqa.org.za/sites/default/files/2020-04/SADCQF%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf

The EAQFHE is closely associated with the Regional Quality Assurance System, developed to promote comparability of education systems, enhance quality education and maintain international standards that would render the system competitive regionally and internationally.

MCESCA starts its QA processes bottom-up, building on the fact that universities are self-organised regarding qualifications and quality assurance. Improved quality assurance processes is one of the main objectives.

Learning outcomes are a key criterion for quality assurance. Often there are links between quality assurance and the competence-based approach especially in a number of French speaking countries. CAMES as an organisation is also paying special attention to the examination and award processes to complete the LMD cycles.

The AQRF is meant to be a real quality assurance tool. 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.

The COVID-19 crisis has had an impact as well in this area. During the interview on the AQRF, respondents stressed that with most education and training institutions, from early childhood to higher education, being forced to move their learning platforms online, the **need for rigourous quality assurance of online learning has never been more important**, specifically to ensure that the targeted learning outcomes have actually been achieved. .

Scope: trend towards comprehensive frameworks

The scope of regional qualification frameworks varies. Some frameworks initially focussed either on on higher education or on vocational education, but the findings from this current demonstrate a clear trend towards comprehensive or unified frameworks.

- In the case of the (prospective) **SAARC QF**, recent experience from the region has shown that many South Asian countries are increasingly working towards comprehensive national qualifications frameworks (although some have either frameworks for HE or TVET). This trend towards comprehensive QFs implies that the SAARC QF should be a comprehensive qualifications framework addressing VET, Skills Acquisition, Secondary Education and Higher Education and Lifelong Learning.

- A number of frameworks have started from a higher education perspective e.g. MCESCA, AQF (ANQAHE model), and EAQFHE. The regional Quality Assurance and accreditation System of CAMES is associated with the LMD system (Licence-Master-Doctorat) and is exclusively focussed on higher education.

- TQF VUSSC, notwithstanding its title, was never intended to exclusively cover universities.

- CQF brings together VET and HE developments in the 5-level Caribbean Qualifications Framework. There is also growing interest in the quality assurance of online provision.

- In the PQF, there is a growing interest in micro credentials, which are easier to develop and can have a wider application, given the large number of training providers on the Pacific islands that develop those sorts of courses.

The **EAQFHE**, as its name suggests, is a framework for qualifications in the higher education sector, and is an instrument of the East Africa Community's Common Higher Education Area. However, the framework was conceived as comprehensive and integrated, spanning eight levels, ranging from lower primary level to doctorate degree (see figure below). As regards its stated scope, the EAQFHE thus 'applies to all types of education, modes of delivery, training and qualifications from basic to higher education, professional and vocational institutions, obtained through formal, and/ or non-formal, and/ or informal learning.'

Also, the blueprint for the **AQF (ANQAHE model)** developed approximately one decade ago, foresees an HE-only framework. Meanwhile, however, the need for a unified framework covering both GE and VET has been recognised.

Figure 3   Levels of the EAQFHE

MINIMUM CREDITS FOR GRADUATION

Qualifications Type	Minimum Credits Required for Graduation	EAQFHE Level	Qualification Types
Doctorate Degree	540	8	Postgraduate
Master's Degree	180		
Postgraduate Diploma	120	7	
Post graduate Certificate	60		
Bachelor degree	360	6	Undergraduate
Advanced Diploma	300		
Graduate Diploma	240		
Graduate Certificate	120		
Diploma	240	5	Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Education and Training
Certificate	120	4	
		3	Lower Secondary School
		2	Upper Primary
		1	Lower Primary

SOURCE: IUCEA; EAC (2015).

Progress in implementation across RQFs

Cedefop and ETF have recently developed a paper on *Qualifications Frameworks and their development stages*[25], which also describes development stages for RQFs. The paper identifies the following development stages (1) the **explorative stage** that precedes the conceptualisation of the RQF, (2) the **design stage** that is used to describe the concept and features of the RQF and a possible roadmap, (3) the **adoption stage**, highlighting adoption of the RQF through a formal decision; (4) the **activation stage**, when the RQF is starting its implementation, and implementation bodies are identified, resources allocated and working methods applied, and the processes for alignment or referencing of NQFs to RQFs are put in place. (5) The **operational stage** is reached when most countries have related their NQFs to the RQF, the effects of the RQF on national policies become visible and there are impacts on

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[25] Qualifications Frameworks and their development stages, Cedefop, ETF, 2020, distributed in the EQF AG Meeting 24-25 November, to be published jointly by Cedefop and ETF in 2021 as an EQF Briefing Note

e.g. quality assurance and recognition processes. (6) **Review** and periodical external evaluation of RQFs, their features and effects can help in the redesign of the RQF.

For this stud,y the indicators for the development stages from the working paper on NQF/RQF development stages have been tested as far as possible. It was not possible to go into very much depth on the NQF-RQF links because we were only able to interview a limited number of representatives from NQFs. Initially, we intended to develop detailed time lines and a road map with key milestones for the development and implementation for each of the RQFs. This was only possible for some of the RQF initiatives, as not all were able to provide concrete information on their upcoming milestones. For a number of RQFs, intended developments and future priorities were mentioned, however, without the indication of an exact timeline. Furthermore, some milestones were pending due to funding or commitment issues. Moreover, the COVID crisis has caused additional disruptions (see special section below). Overall, it can be said that many RQF initiatives have started to develop and implement, with some displaying significant developments in particular in the past few years. Nevertheless, for a number of RQFs, progress has been difficult.

Most relevant for comparison based on the current stage of implementation are AQRF and SADC. Both RQFs have advanced with referencing/alignment processes.

Figure 3 below illustrates the timeline of the SADCQF, which started as early as 1997 with the signature of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training. While the SADCQF was approved by Ministers in 2011, this was followed by a period of little activity that lasted until 2017, when the SADCQF was revived. After the launch of the SADCQF in 2017, 8 pilot countries have started the process to align their NQFs to the SADCQF. In 2019, South Africa and the Seychelles were the first two to complete their alignment process. Mauritius has published its advanced draft alignment report.

Figure 4   SADCQF timeline
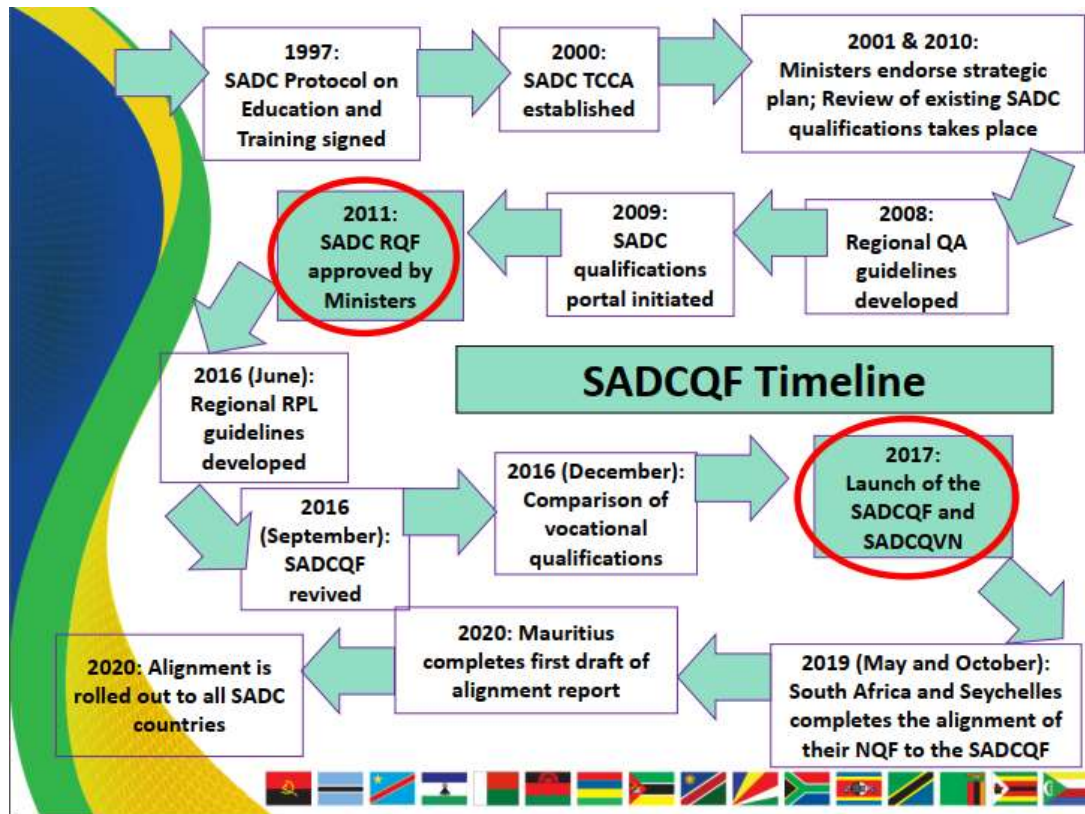
Source: SADC/Coleen Jaftha, Presentation at 6th ACQF Peer Learning Webinar (2020).

The implementation of the SADCQF was initiated through six different programmes that were at various stages of implementation at the time of writing this report. This is being done utilising national capacities and regionally coordinated government funding. The TCCA (Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation) mobilised Member States to oversee the development of these six programmes, as the table below illustrates.

Figure 5   Implementation of the SADCQF

Programme	Member States driving the programmes	Status
Development and alignment of NQFs to SADCQF	South Africa	Eight countries volunteered to pilot alignment of their NQF to the SADCQF. Two countries namely Seychelles and South Africa have aligned their NQFs to the SADCQF based on alignment criteria developed.
Quality Assurance	Botswana	Alignment of SADC countries' internal and external quality assurance systems with the SADC quality assurance (QA) guidelines is ongoing. Peer learning, sharing of experiences and strengthening the capacity of member states in their implementation of the SADC QA guidelines is facilitated by Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) and the Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment (SAAEA), working with the TCCA. SADC envisages a SADC

		Quality Assurance system aligned to the Pan-Africa Quality Assurance Framework (PAQAF).
Verification of Qualifications	Eswatini	A regional Qualifications Verification Network (SADCQVN) which is a member of the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) was established to ensure that credible, trustworthy information is shared across SADC and shares the common goal of ensuring that African qualifications can be trusted. A SADCQVN booklet was produced and is consistently updated annually and shared across the region. The annual collation of statistical information on learner and worker mobility in SADC, as well as on misrepresented qualifications, is a key feature of the work of the SADCQVN. A Draft SADC Recognition Manual is awaiting validation by the TCCA in October 2020.
Advocacy and Communication	Zambia	A SADCQF Communication strategy, Communication tools and Marketing materials have been developed. The SADQF is published on SADC social media sites. Currently, there is no database or register for the SADCQF.
Articulation, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS)	Namibia	The SADC region has a set of RPL guidelines and the status of implementation has not yet been determined. In addition, a Draft SADC CAT Guidelines is awaiting validation by TCCA in October 2020..
Governance	SADC Secretariat	The Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA), meets twice every year. A TCCA Executive Committee (EXCO) was established **based on the SADC Troika principles and** meets twice a year to review and monitor progress of implementation in the six programmes of the implementation of the SADCQF.

Source: ACQF mapping study: SADC. 2020. Country report.

Conceptual-technical specifications

Qualifications frameworks are characterised by a number of conceptual-technical features, or technical specifications. These include level descriptors, number of levels, the concept of learning outcomes used, domains of learning used, referencing/alignment processes between NQFs and the RQF, quality assurance arrangements (including evaluation and review), arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning, sharing of information on qualifications (e.g. through registers of qualifications), and the display of qualifications levels on diplomas and certificates.

In the following section, we have selected several of these technical criteria to describe them in more detail. The RQF factsheets in the second part of this report will provide more information.

3.1.1 Level descriptors

In terms of number of levels, one can observe a prevalence of 10-level RQFs across the globe. With the exception of the EAQFHE, MCESCA and AQRF, which are 8-level

frameworks, all other RQF initiatives investigated were 10-level frameworks i.e. this applies to the SADCQF, AQF, TQF, PQF, GQF and the CQF.

The figure below shows an extract of the level descriptors for the TQF VUSSC, for levels 8 – 10 of the 10-level framework.

Figure 6   TQF level descriptors for levels 8-10

Table 1: Overview of the TQF

	Levels and descriptors	Minimum credit	Qualification types
10	• Acquire and possess a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice. • Be able to create and interpret new knowledge at a most advanced frontier of a field of work or study through original and advanced research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication. • Possess the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques to be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge or to solve critical problems or to refute or redefine existing knowledge. • Demonstrate authority, innovation, autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility for the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice.	360	Doctoral Degree
9	• Have a logical understanding of a body of highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, as a basis for original thought and/or the conduct of research and/or enquiry. • Have a comprehensive understanding of the research skills and/or relevant established techniques applicable to their own research or to advanced scholarship that can be used to create and interpret knowledge. • Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge to solve problems, together with a practical understanding of how knowledge can be managed to transform work or study. • Possess a conceptual understanding of how to analyse and critically evaluate current research in their academic discipline, field of study or work and to apply where appropriate to solve problems.	240	Master's Degree
8	• Have systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge of the key aspects of their academic discipline, field of study or work. • Possess an ability to deploy accurately established analytical tools and/or techniques and enquiry within their academic discipline, field of study or work. • Be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills of a wide range of concepts, ideas and information to devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems. • Display a critical understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge and how it is developed. • Possess the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. referred research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).	120	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma; Bachelor Degree with Honours

Source: COL; Gertze, Franz (2017).

3.1.2   Referencing/alignment processes

Only a couple of the RQF initiatives explored currently have alignment/referencing processes in place that can be compared to the EQF, in the sense that there is a set of referencing/alignment criteria in place, accompanied by an agreed procedure. For the purpose of this study, the two most relevant examples to consider are the SADCQF and the AQRF, as they have gained first experience with several countries having already undertaken their referencing process to the RQF.

In the case of the **AQRF**, four countries - Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia - have already referenced to the AQRF and submitted a referencing report. The AQRF

referencing guidelines have subsequently been revised (in August 2020), to make them more straightforward. Initial experience from referencing had shown that the referencing guidelines were perceived as too complicated. The AQRF also provides the (theoretical) possibility for countries that do not have an NQF in place to undertake the referencing to the AQRF. So far, however, Member States tend to focus on NQF development first. For a referencing to the AQRF, countries should have a national AQRF committee in place. For Indonesia, for instance, this was a challenge, as 15 ministries had to be involved.

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. Eight countries (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia) agreed to be part of the pilot phase of alignment in 2017, while additional countries have since declared their interest for alignment.

To date, two countries have completed the alignment process (South Africa[26] and Seychelles[27]), and Mauritius[28] has adjudicated its alignment report to SADC Secretariat for validation while the others are at various stages of aligning their NQFs to the SADCQF. Mauritius has submitted its alignment report to SADC, and the draft is published[29]. The SADCQF factsheet in the second part of this report describes the experiences from the SADCQF alignment exercise in more detail. Figure 4 below shows the set of ten SADCQF alignment criteria, as well as the SADCQF alignment roadmap that illustrates the process between a country's decision to implement the SADCQF and the approval and publication of the SADCQF alignment report. The figure below shows the SADCQF alignment criteria and roadmap to be applied.

Figure 7   SADCQF alignment criteria and roadmap

| **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; |

[26] 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

[27] 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

[28] 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

[29] Mauritius (2019). At: http://www.mqa.mu/English/Documents/FS/Report15042019.pdf

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.
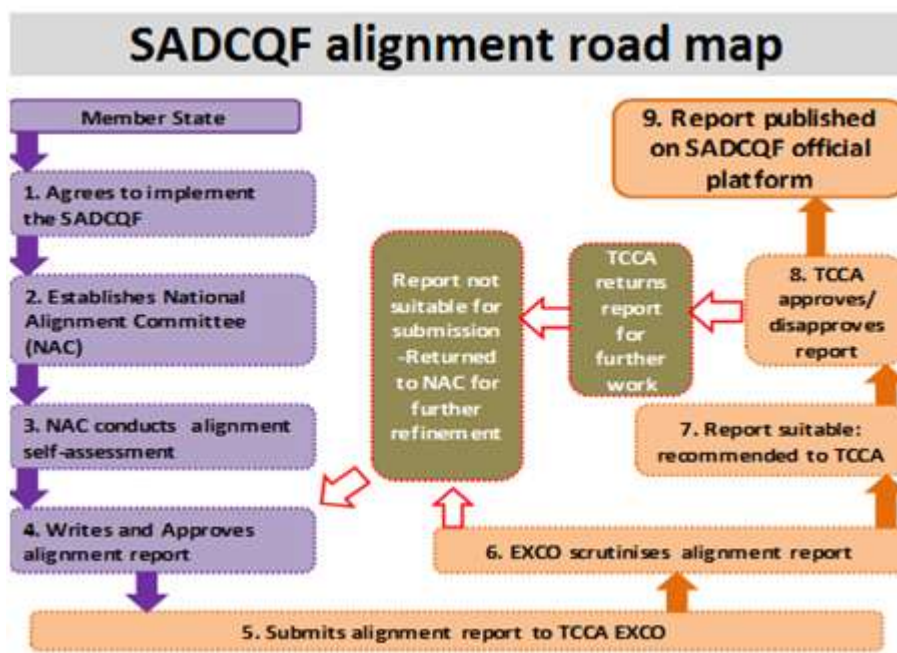
Source: SADC, Coleen Jaftha (2020). Presentation of the SADCQF at 6th ACQF Webinar, 22 October 2020. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-10/session_4_6th_plw_sadcqf_en.pdf

In addition to the AQRF and the SADCQF, a couple of further RQF initiatives have referencing or alignment processes ongoing.

Both the **CQF and the PQF** currently apply a more 'informal' way of referencing. In the PQF's case, the referencing processes undertaken so far were of a more informal nature, and carried out at the initiative of the EQAP - by taking a look at the qualifications framework and the system around it, and doing a comparison on how the country implements the framework. There are no clear referencing guidelines, these would still need to be developed. In the case of the CQF, the need for a more formal process of referencing has been identified. That is why CARICOM has asked its countries to put NQFs in place by 2021, and provides support to prepare countries for this process. Box 1 below illustrates the TQF referencing process as described by the TQF Referencing Tool.

The **TQF VUSSC** has also described a reference process that foresees the possibility both for countries with and without an NQF in place to undertake referencing to the TQF.

Box 1   The TQF referencing process as described by the TQF Referencing Tool

The TQF referencing process entails Member States referencing their qualifications frameworks firstly to the appropriate RQF (if one exists) and secondly to the TQF. For example, the Jamaican NQF will first be referenced to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) RQF and then to the TQF.

Since a number of small states do not have established NQFs, in such cases, the country can reference its national qualifications system to the TQF, or at the very least, participate in the development of VUSSC qualifications that are registered on the TQF. The figure below illustrates this process.
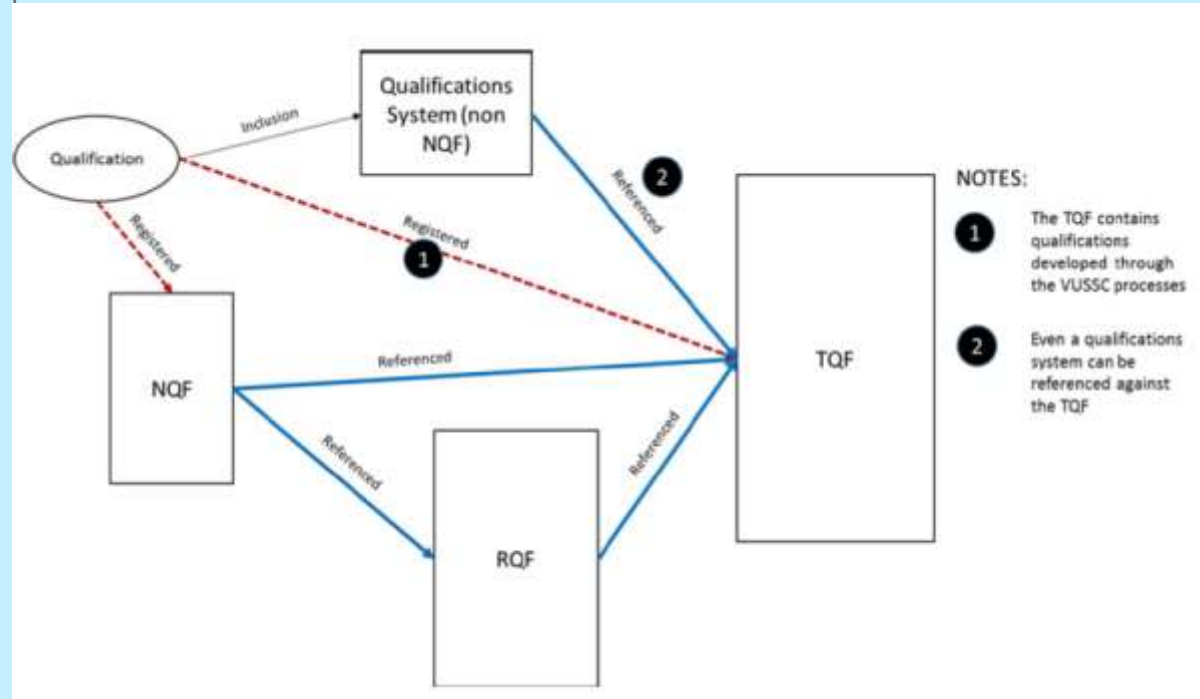
3.1.3   Regional registers of qualifications and joint regional qualifications

The regional qualifications initiatives described in this study have different objectives, but all of them aim to connect national qualifications frameworks and relate qualifications that can be obtained by individuals and support them in their learning, careers and personal development. Qualifications frameworks become operational when they are populated with qualifications and become *frameworks of qualifications*. This is usually done by including the qualifications in a register or database of qualifications.

There is a strong link between registering qualifications and quality assurance. Before qualifications become part of the framework there is often a quality check to ensure the qualifications have value, are relevant, current and understandable. Qualifications frameworks usually require that qualifications are expressed in learning outcomes and increasingly that they can be obtained through different forms of learning.

Apart from the qualifications that are part of the formal education system, qualifications frameworks that support lifelong learning include other types of qualifications. These can include micro-credentials or partial qualifications that are awarded to recognise the

knowledge, skills and competences for a specific purpose. They can be awarded, for instance, as badges or for the completion of a module. Only a few registers currently cover such micro-credentials, but they are seen as an important development. More and more learning pathways are individualised, which requires that these micro-credentials can be combined and accumulated, or stackable (aggregated). This requires that registers are not just repositories, but intelligent tools that support the combination of qualifications.

Another important recent development is linking different registers in a smart way, through inter-operable databases of qualifications. Blockchain technology can assure that each database is managed and stored separately by the (national) body that is responsible for it, but data can be transferred and used simultaneously.

Most RQF initiatives foresee linking the databases of the various member NQFs. Some RQFs go further and have or are planning an integrated regional register of qualifications.

TQF VUSSC was designed to be a registration tool to enable the VUSSC countries to register their courses onto the framework, and make them available to other small states. Qualifications that meet transnational qualifications criteria are registered on the TQF and are referred to as TQF-registered qualifications. National and Regional bodies are responsible for quality-assuring the quality of providers that provide TQF qualifications using their own quality assurance procedures. The number of qualifications and courses that are registered is still rather small. They have often been jointly designed in intensive sessions where experts from different small states met in one of the countries. The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the need for new approaches. There is interest from other Commonwealth countries to join the VUSSC. Plans also exist to establish a common database of available qualifications in Commonwealth countries. There is no separate online TQF register but some VUSSC courses can be found here: https://www.colvee.org/

The Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS) aims to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards. It was developed with support from the Australian Aid Programme, engaging key stakeholders through in-country and regional consultations and workshops to ensure alignment of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards with developments of national qualifications frameworks. It has three domains (1) accredited qualifications; (2) professional licensing and occupational standards; and (3) traditional knowledge and indigenous skills. The PQRS uses the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) as a translation device to bring them into the PRQS. Qualifications from Pacific Island countries and territories are referenced against the PQF and a level for registration on the PRQS will be confirmed.. Accredited qualifications are registered on the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards. Referencing is used as well to integrate NQFs into the PQF and the PQRS. Not all Pacific Countries develop their own NQF. They can also use the PQF directly. The PQF will also be the instrument that will establish comparability of Pacific qualifications with other international education and training systems. The PRQS can be accessed through this link: https://prqs.spc.int/

Recently, **regional qualifications and micro-qualifications using PQF as a reference point**, were identified as regional organisation need. In particular, the accreditation short courses lacked a national system, so a regional system was developed in order to accredit short courses as micro-credentials in the PQF.

Thus, they have put in place standards and criteria for the accreditation of short courses. The process includes an accreditation committee set up by EQAP (Educational Quality and Assessment Programme), but made up of people independent of the SPC and EQAP, including external evaluators and experts in the field. Accreditation is awarded by the board – the subcommittee of the governing body of SPC, which is formed by the heads of the education systems of the different countries who are members of EQAP. The registration fee covers the cost of the external evaluators. Starting in 2020, 11 courses have been accredited so far.

Experts and Ministries of Higher Education in **ECOWAS** are considering establishing a regional RQF body that will deal with setting up registers at the regional and national levels to ensure coherence.

Similar plans exist for the **EAQFHE** where the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) intends to establish a register that will also include qualifications that are registered nationally by Quality Assurance agencies.

The **CQF** does not have a common register yet but there are plans to set up a CARICOM Quality Assurance register which will help to reach harmonisation and standardisation. The CARICOM countries have however developed common Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs). These CVQs are qualifications that are based on occupational standards and also have common qualification levels and recognised throughout the region. There are CVQs from Level 1 to Level 5. The lower level ones can be provided by schools. The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) is the awarding body for the CVQs

3.1.4 Communication and dissemination

Findings from the research confirm that very few of the RQF initiatives to date have dedicated websites to promote their frameworks, and provide further information about them. One of the exceptions is the website for the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF). Among other things, this site provides information about the technical mapping between NQFs and the PQF, and also provides information about the respective country and its national qualifications framework.

Figure 8   Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) website
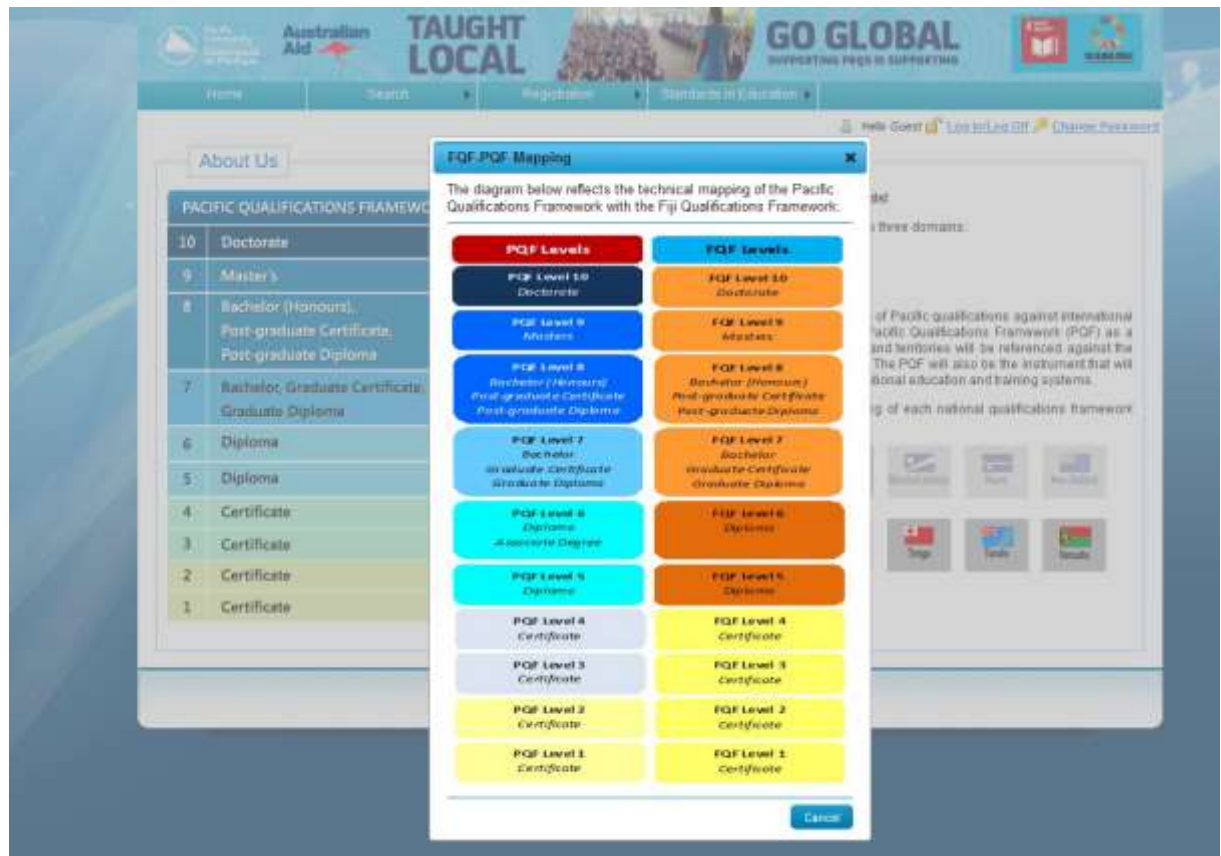
Source: Website of the Pacific Qualifications Framework – screenshot[30].

Overall, for a number of RQF initiatives, interviewees clearly stated that the RQFs were, to date, underutilised and that there was generally little awareness of them among potential stakeholders and users of the frameworks. This is certainly linked to the fact that a number of RQFs are in the early stages of development. Nevertheless, awareness-raising activities, and the promotion of RQFs – including the possible setup of qualifications registers or databases and the indication of qualification levels on diplomas and certificates – will need to assume a larger role within many of these RQFs in the future, as part of an approach to create effective and sustainable frameworks.

The box below outlines the communication efforts for the SADCQF:

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[30] http://prqs.spc.int/Default.aspx#

Box 3   Communication of the SADCQF

A SADCQF communication strategy, communication tools and marketing materials have been developed. The SADCQF information is published on SADC social media sites. Currently, there is no database or register for the SADCQF. A SADC qualifications portal which included part-qualifications and full qualifications was initially developed but was then discontinued due to inadequate funding. In addition, indicators for the SADCQF have been developed, coordinated by the Technical Committee on Education Management Information System (TCEMIS) (SADC Records of TCEMIS 2017). SADC envisages the revival and further development of an SADC Qualification Portal with data and information on qualifications and skills, covering qualifications both internally and externally acquired and evaluated in each country. This will facilitate the sharing of expertise and skills between countries in the region and beyond, thus minimising or alleviating skills deficits within countries in the SADC region. Stakeholders emphasised that for a portal to be operational, the capacity of Member States will need to be built and strengthened.

In the case of the SADCQF, the indication of levels on certificates and diplomas is a declared objective, and considered an important condition to move forward with the framework, in order to facilitate mobility, and thus to fulfil the key objective of the RQF.

Priorities, milestones and outlook

Almost all RQF initiatives surveyed were able to provide specific information on their milestones and outlook for the implementation of their framework, and for future planned steps. Yet, as pointed out above, limited financial backing has been an issue in quite a number of RQFs when it comes to working on their priorities and milestones. The current pandemic has added a lot of uncertainty to the equation, and several RQFs were quite open in their interviews about the probability that their current roadmaps might not hold.

- **CQF:** CARICOM asked its Member States to have national systems in place by 2021. Realistically, however, the milestones for the future may be difficult to implement due to human resource restraints. Interviewees hope that 25% of countries manage to establish national systems by 2021, but this may prove optimistic. .
- **MCESCA:** The current plan is to develop follow-up projects to expand the implementation of the RQF and to obtain funding for these projects.
- MCAP: The **REMCAP** working group is currently working on a proposal and work plan for an RQF in the Pacific Alliance region. The AP has recently sought international support from Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) for the four countries that allow the consolidation of the educational and labour mobility strategy in the region. Financial support is being provided for a two-year project which is currently ongoing. At the end of this two-year support, the aim is to have a proposal for an RQF on the table. Furthermore, one sector should be selected for a pilot run.
- For the **EAQFHE**, it has been noted that from 2020 the EAC Education sector has embarked on **a process of developing a TVET qualifications framework**. Assistance from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Bank is granted to support activities in this direction, involving the EAC TVET Technical Committee and other stakeholders. Plans are also underway for the development of a teacher education qualifications framework for the region.

- **TQF**: As take-up of the TQF is not as high as intended, a review was to take place in 2020, in order to modernise the framework. External consultants are analysing what is needed to improve usability and how to better promote the TQF. Furthermore, they seek to build relationships with national quality assurance agencies in the countries to give it visibility.
- **SAARC:** a project completed in December 2020 consulted stakeholders from the region to gauge the level of interest in an RQF in countries of origin in South Asia, and to assess whether there is sufficient interest and benefit to be expected from initiating the process now. This has led to a proposal for an SAARC QF and its governance, and the definition of preconditions for a successful launch of the RQF, including wider consultations, long term support, and a clear collective purpose. A draft road map has also been developed.
- **PQF**: It is being discussed whether there is a need to have a **formal agreement** in place to give the PQF a stronger mandate. There is no firm commitment so far. There are three further priorities for the coming years:
  1. A review of the PQF – there is a need, as a number of NQFs have been reviewed and there have been some significant changes. The PQF also needs to be looked at in the light of the changes in the countries. This is currently halted due to funding issues.
  2. Reference the PQF against other regional qualification frameworks (such as EQF or CARICOM).
  3. PQF countries offer some of their qualifications to learners from other countries. Participating countries need to agree procedures.

3.1.5 Sustainability of initiatives

Some RQF initiatives have optimistic roadmaps for their development and implementation - the examplea of SADCQF and CQF show that these original milestones are difficult to meet because of lack of capacities and resources.

Limited financial and HR support has been an issue for a number of the surveyed RQF initiatives. The **AQF (ANQAHE model)**, for instance, is an HE initiative sustained by people taking a voluntary initiative. The AQF does not have a dedicated office, nor paid staff. Limited financial and HR support has also been an issue for MCESCA, TQF and the PQF.

The further development and implementation of **MCESCA** is hampered by the fact that there is no competent regional authority that would have the necessary funds to implement the framework.

As for the **PQF**, a need to review the framework was identified, as a number of NQFs from Member States have been reviewed and have sometimes undergone significant changes. Yet, such a review cannot currently be implemented due to funding issues, as the Secretariat would need to go to the countries and have discussions. This is still planned but currently not possible.

SADC Member States volunteer, on a rotational basis, to provide support to the SADC Secretariat to assist in the convening of meetings, minutes and collating and sharing information. This is also a temporary arrangement to ensure that work continues while the SADCQF Implementation Unit is not yet operational. It is currently unknown when it will be fully implemented as they are facing constraints in resourcing and capacity at national and

regional level. SADC gives high priority to enhanced implementation of the SADCQF, as defined in two major regional development policy documents: (i) the Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025) and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030. This renewed importance of the SADCQF is likely to increase allocation of resources supporting implementation at national and regional levels.

As for the **TQF**, VUSSC found a home at the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) but is at the same time quite different from other COL initiatives, Resources/capacities available are considered minimal, though, limiting the potential of the TQF to move ahead.

3.1.6 Impact of COVID-19

While the impact of COVID-19 was not originally part of the research questions for this work, it certainly became an obvious aspect to discuss in the interviews, given the current pandemic situation. A number of interviewees pointed to the disruptive effect of COVID-19, and to the fear that it might slow down current initiatives.

On the other hand, it was also mentioned, for instance by an interviewee from ANQAHE, that there are hopes that this will speed up the process and the use of NQFs and the development of micro-credentials, and that it might ultimately lead to an improved recognition of distance and online learning (in particular for areas where recognition for distance and online learning is poor).

CARICOM, for instance, raised concerns about the disruptive impact of COVID-19, with some CARICOM countries currently (at the time of the interview in August 2020) particularly hard hit by the pandemic. At the same time, and on a more positive note, it was pointed out that *'we have moved ten years in three months'* in terms of using online technologies for learning.

- Related to the **GQF**, in July 2020, a merger of the National Qualifications Authority and the Ministry of Education of the UAE was announced, as part of a more comprehensive restructuring of the UAE government, under the banner of 'Preparations for the Post-COVID-19 Period'. The NQA is understood to have taken the lead in the development of the GQF. Due to this restructuring it was difficult to get first hand information on the further development of the GQF.
- In the case of the **MCAP**, due to COVID-19, the work of the REMCAP group that is currently working on a work plan for an RQF has been delayed and led to some rescheduling. The extent of the delay cannot yet be determined.

An interviewee from the AQRF summarised the current situation as follows:

*'In terms of utilising the framework, both nationally and regionally, the education and training sector was most impacted in many different ways, in many aspects of our lives, in which our referencing work is closely tied to. […] the **need for massive quality assurance in online learning has never been more important**, specifically in achieving the targeted learning outcomes […]*

*Therefore, Indonesia for instance, proposed to the committee to specifically emphasise the importance of the AQRF in **accelerating our collective knowledge of best practices in online learning**. We sincerely hope that the knowledge gained can be used by our*

respective countries to help mitigate any negative impact that might affect our future generations and ensure their future competitiveness.'

Links between RQFs

RQFs often have links with other RQFs in terms of common members, as Figure 6 below illustrates. It can, however, be also observed that some countries/NQFs engage in a bilateral dialogue with other NQFs while at the same time being part of an RQF initiative.

- Both **AQRF and PQF** maintain close links with Australia and New Zealand.
- **CQF & PQF** Most members of CQF and PR are also members of **TQF**.
- **AQRF** maintains a very active policy in fostering links to other RQFs and NQFs: there is an AQRF official representative in charge of facilitating communication between local NQF and other QF (EQF, AQF, NZQF, SAQF etc.) in the world on behalf of the AQRF Board.
- **PQF:** Countries' commitment to PQF appears to be hampered by the fact that some NQFs have established bilateral links & support e.g. with AUS and NZ. NZ currently provides bilateral funding to some of the countries. This is considered part of the reason why full commitment to the PQF as a common project is less strong.
- **SAARC:** would like to set up a dialogue with ASEAN (AQRF) on the experience of the regional framework and with the GCC (GQF) on the topic of skills development of the migrant workforce.The EQF is also mentioned as a benchmark for referencing together with AQRF.
- The **SADCQF** is currently not referenced to any continental or other regional qualifications frameworks. However, the SADCQF has benchmarked itself with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in terms of the level descriptors, coordination and implementation mechanisms of these regional qualifications frameworks. The benchmarking was facilitated by a 2017 study that reviewed, among others, the SADCQF with existing regional qualifications on the African continent and internationally[31] (2017) and TCCA EXCO peer learning visit in 2017 to the EU to study the EQF institutional arrangements and applicability to the SADCQF.
- Many key informants emphasised their interest in more dialogue with other RQFs.

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[31]
https://www.academia.edu/32433237/Southern_African_Development_Community_Regional_Qualifications_Framework_Analytical_Review_of_Level_Descriptors

Figure 9   Overview of RQF initiatives across the globe
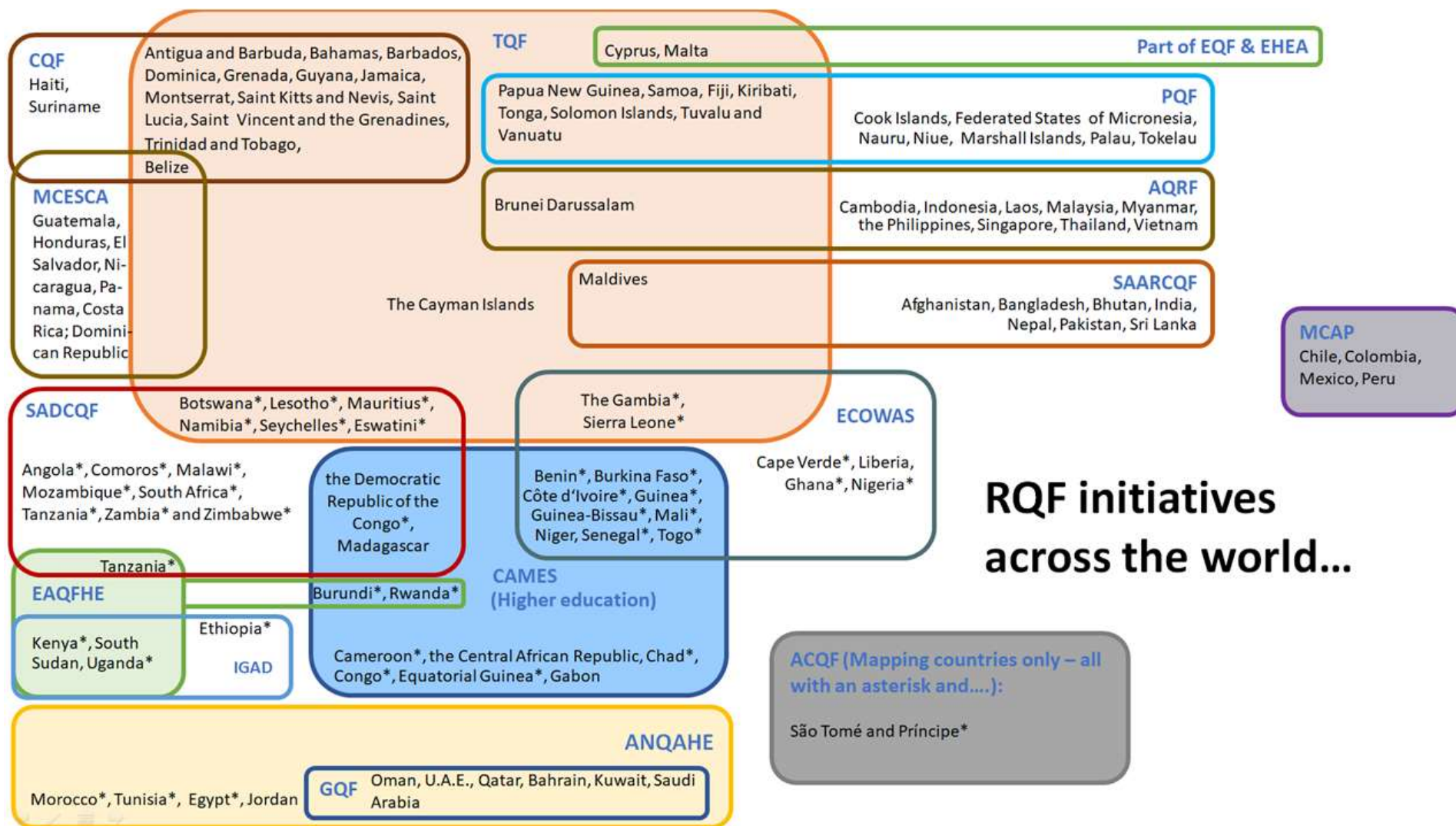
Source: Authors

Note: CAMES is an intergovernmental institution for the harmonisation of policies and integration of the Higher Education Systems of Western and Central Africa and the Indian Ocean. In respect to the implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system CAMES plays a role of support, advice, and monitoring. CAMES is Regional Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency and thanks to its Programme of Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (PRED) it can also be considered as a regional qualifications framework (in higher education).

Comparison with the EQF

3.1.7 Level of interest in a dialogue with the EQF

Throughout the interviews, informants emphasised their interest in a dialogue with the EQF towards a comparison with the EQF.

However, few of the initiatives have reached a stage of implementation that will allow for comparison with the EQF in the very near future. The question therefore is how to strengthen the dialogue (which clearly comes across as a request in the interviews), if comparison with the EQF is not (yet) an option.

The **AQRF and SADCQF** have the most specific expectations towards a comparison with the EQF. From the SADCQF side, there is interest in a comparison with the EQF, while it was also pointed out that the SADCQF has, in the first place, an African agenda. One of the principles of SADC is that development of the SADCQF is "home-grown" and guided by the demands of education and training in the region and driven by the local experts".

The AQRF voiced pronounced interest in dialogue/comparison with the EQF. The vision of such cooperation would be to build an ASEAN and European zone of trust that facilitates mutual recognition of jobs and skills qualifications in the ASEAN labour market and the mobility of persons. Their intention is to identify and learn from best practices but without copying them, in a way that helps the AQRF and thus the Member States to move forward.

From RQFs that are still in early phases of development or implementation, there is great interest in an exchange of experience and mutual learning with the EQF (e.g. MCESCA, MCAP, SAARC). From the perspective of **AQF**, there is great interest to build contacts with, exchange experiences with, and further learn from the experiences of other Regional Qualifications Frameworks such as the EQF. Mutual recognition and mobility are the goals of the AQF .

For the **TQF** a possible comparison with the EQF would be about alignment and comparing information and it might help to **overcome the divide between VET and HE**, especially since it can be translated into something that everyone can understand. RQFs are all in the business of quality, so this could be very useful.

Furthermore, it is important to take into consideration that unilateral comparison between some of these RQFs and the EQF already takes place. Several RQFs have compared, benchmarked or mapped their frameworks to the EQF on a unilateral basis, e.g. the AQF, SADCQF or CQF.

3.1.8 How different are other RQFs from the EQF?

The RQF initiatives explored in this research are both rich in similarities with, and differences from, the EQF. Key differences can be observed in particular in objectives e.g. the AQRF has a much more pronounced focus on quality assurance than the EQF; in characteristics e.g. a predominance of 10-level frameworks, common qualifications, sectoral orientation; and in differences in governance and institutional aspects.

At the same time, a number of these RQFs also show significant similarities with the EQF. For several RQFs, the EQF has obviously been a source of inspiration e.g. when designing alignment/referencing criteri).

Last but not least, some of the RQFs share similar challenges with the EQF, such as addressing the divide between VET and HE, or how to improve visibility of these initiatives e.g. by introducing levels on certificates/diplomas.

4. DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Education, skills and qualifications are at the heart of African renaissance. Therefore, the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is a vital policy underpinned by key strategies and initiatives of the African Union (AU):

- Agenda 2063[32]
- African Continental Free Trade Area[33]
- Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment[34] (AU Free Movement Protocol)
- Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)[35]

The ACQF contributes to the strategic objectives set in CESA-25, especially strategic objective 4 c) and d) which explicitly defines links with RQFs and NQFs. This linkage with RQFs and NQFs gives the ACQF unique opportunities and challenges.These include:

- establishing national qualification frameworks (NQFs) and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs) to facilitate the creation of multiple pathways to acquisition of skills and competencies as well as mobility across the sub-sectors;
- developing a continental qualifications framework linked to regional qualifications and national qualification frameworks to facilitate regional integration and mobility of graduates.

Figure 10 Vision for the ACQF
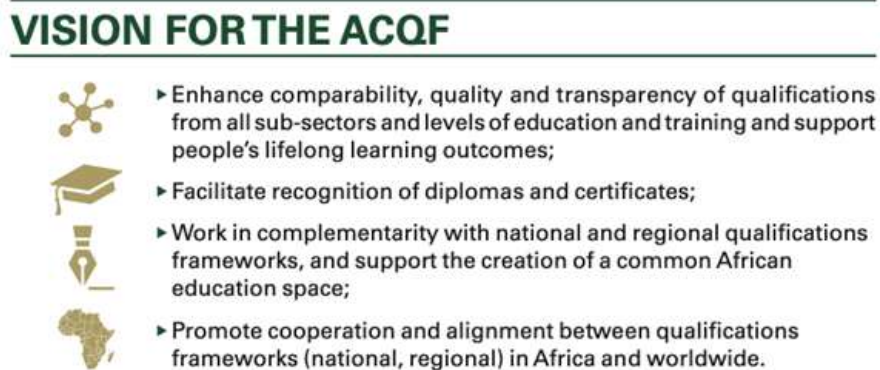
Source: ACQF Infographic (2020)[36].

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[32] Agenda 2063: https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview

[33] AfCFTA: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf; Factsheet on the AfCFTA: https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/faqs/2377-african-continental-free-trade-area-faqs-june-2018-update/file.html

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

[35] CESA 2016-2025. At: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf

[36] https://africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/acqf_infographic_en.pdf

The critical issue of sustainability of the ACQF is at the heart of the starting process of analysis of the options for the ACQF. Governance and operational capacity supporting the ACQF functions are vital in this discussion.

The issue of labour mobility

Among its policy recommendations, the *African Economic Outlook 2020*[37] emphasises the need to address obstacles to labour mobility to enhance growth's inclusiveness, within-sector productivity growth and cross-sector labour reallocations to reduce poverty in Africa. By simply allowing labour to move freely across sectors, African countries could increase incomes and reduce poverty and inequality. The African Economic Outlook highlights that implementing transnational agreements such as the African Continental Free Trade Area can help remove most obstacles to the free movement of workers between countries. Moreover, policies should contribute to increase the transferability of skills and qualifications across sectors or the acquisition of sets of new skills and qualifications to meet the requirements of receiving sectors.

Developing the ACQF

Development of the ACQF was officially launched at the inaugural workshop held at the AU headquarters on 2 to 3 September 2019. The process, which runs 2019-2022 is participative, based on analysis and evidence, and builds on African and global experience. The key project output - the ACQF policy and technical document, supported by an action plan - will be submitted by mid-2022 for AU decision-making. A set of technical guidelines, a web platform with e-learning tool and qualifications database, and a Network of experts trained during the ACQF development process will contribute to make the ACQF a sustainable policy instrument and platform for cooperation.

The EU has committed to support development of the ACQF, as defined in Action 4 of the *Africa-Europe Alliance on Sustainable Investment and Jobs*: *Taking our Partnership for Investment and Jobs to the Next Level*, a communication adopted on 12 September 2018 by the European Commission[38]. This communication was endorsed by all heads of state of the EU, at the European Council meeting[39] on 18 October 2018.

Most importantly, from the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the ACQF process took the road of active networking, peer learning activities and mutual understanding between national NQF stakeholders. This process combines learning and knowledge-building with networking and exchanges – creating bridges and supporting mutual understanding.

Development of the options and scenarios of the ACQF started from a baseline of three future scenarios:

1. Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects' – underscores support to effective networking, experience and knowledge-sharing, capacity development and communication. The ACQF website is fundamental, and the ACQF is a platform for all countries and RECs on the continent.
2. Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust' – beyond experience-sharing and communication, this scenario focuses on referencing of NQFs / RQFs to the ACQF, and eventually use of ACQF levels and label on qualifications of the linked NQF / RQFs.

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[37] African Development Bank Group, African Economic Outlook 2020 (pg 4): https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38116-doc-african_economic_outlook_2020_.pdf
[38] Commission Communication of 12/09/2018. At: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-africa-europe-jobs-alliance-communication-643_en.pdf
[39] EUCO 13/18, Conclusions: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36775/18-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf

3. Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons' – besides being a meta-framework for referencing, ACQF promotes new qualifications (standards, profiles) of a continental nature, supports automatic mutual recognition of qualifications (based on quality assurance and other considerations) and supports digital certificates.

ACQF Mapping study

The ACQF mapping study is the first building block of the process, providing an updated and comprehensive overview of the state-of-play and dynamics of qualifications frameworks on the continent. The study integrates knowledge and data collected through a combination of information sources: i) the online survey, which received responses from 33 countries; ii) deeper analyses at country and regional level and iii) desktop research of legislation, technical information and online resources; iv) digital meetings and experience sharing with NQF authorities and stakeholders.

The mapping study comprises several types of analysis: a) ACQF online survey report; b) available online[40]: country reports (Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Togo) and reports on qualifications frameworks of three Regional Economic Communities (REC) - East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC); c) comprehensive analysis and synthesis overview. Countries and RECs were selected for analysis based on four criteria, namely (1) coverage all four languages of the African Union; (2) coverage of different stages of development / implementation of NQFs; (3) coverage of different African geographical regions; and (4) RECs with more tangible development of their RQFs.

The ACQF mapping study pioneered the publication of analysis on qualifications frameworks / systems of a number of African countries and RECs, not included in the recent editions of the Inventories of Qualifications Frameworks[41]. These are countries whose NQF experiences are rarely known, albeit meaningful: Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Senegal, Togo and the qualifications framework of the East African Community (EAC). These cases have enriched our knowledge of the NQF models in the different cultural and regional contexts of the continent. Understanding and building on diversity to improve transparency and comparability of qualifications is a fundamental dimension of the ACQF development process.

As anticipated, qualifications frameworks are at different stages of development and implementation across the continent. Discussion and exchanges through the ACQF process unveiled NQF dynamics of different types and pace. For the purposes of dynamic analysis, the mapping study uses five stages to categorise the different situations of qualifications frameworks' development and consolidation:

1. Qualifications framework not in place, development process not started
2. Qualifications framework at early thinking stage, first steps to develop the NQF
3. Qualifications framework in development and consultation with stakeholders and experts
4. Qualifications framework in place, approved as legal act, implementation started

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[40] https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study
[41] CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO, UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks (edition 2019). https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/2019-global-inventory-qualifications-frameworks-out. Three previous editions are available online.

5. Qualifications framework in implementation for some time, reviewed, improvements adopted

Figure 11   Overview ACQF mapping study
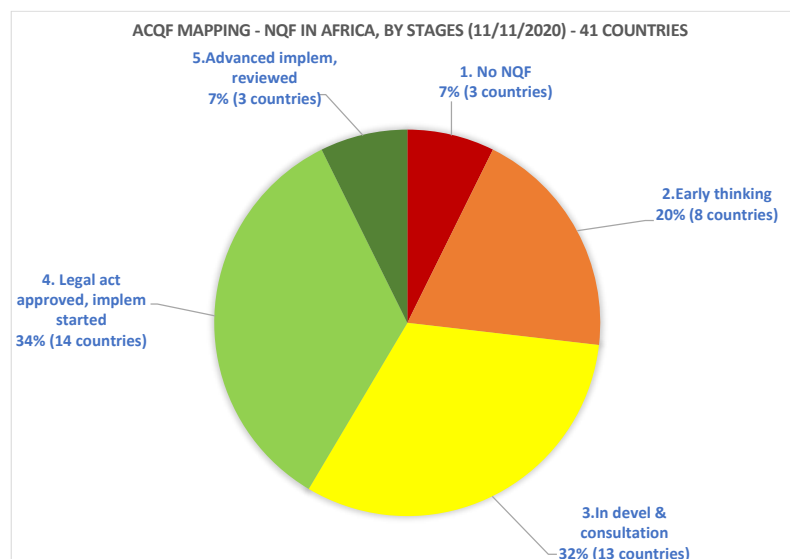
Source: ACQF Mapping study: a) online survey, b) country visits and reports, c) desk research, d) continuous exchanges (peer learning webinars).

The following situations are found in the different African geographical regions:

a. The majority of qualifications frameworks in Africa at the stage of implementation are in countries of the *Southern African* region, where the SADCQF is well-established. These NQFs have been implemented for a longer period, and as a result, have more mature legal bases, operational instruments and governance structures maintaining and assuring integrity of the NQFs. Two of the newest NQFs are located in SADC: Eswatini (approved in 08/2020) and Lesotho (approved in 06/2019).

b. Recent developments in *East Africa*, notably in Kenya (since 2014) are noteworthy, with the establishment of the legal base, governance structure, new online register of qualifications. Ethiopia designed the conceptual bases of its NQF, but start of implementation still requires enabling drivers.

c. In *West Africa* we found a more diverse panorama of qualifications frameworks: some countries, notably Senegal, Togo, have established sectoral qualification systems, such as the *Licence Master Doctorat* (LMD) in higher education, and a TVET system of levels of qualifications, but no comprehensive integrated NQF yet. Ghana implements an 8-level TVET framework and is developing an integrated NQF encompassing higher education. Cape Verde is a rare example in the region of a comprehensive NQF, with a decade of operational experience governed by a specialised entity, which was not well known before the ACQF mapping process. Other West African countries such as Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau started in 2020 the early stages of their NQF development processes.

d. In *Central Africa*, Cameroon has been implementing the LMD framework in higher education since 2007, and a system of qualification levels and types in TVET. As the country's education strategy 2020 gives priority to establish a national qualifications

framework, a stakeholders' group started reflection in 2017 and a specific project with sizeable resources was approved to start in 2020.

    e.   In the *North*, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have had legally-established NQFs for some time and continue working to put in place implementation structures and registers of qualifications. Egypt is in the process of enacting specific NQF legislation.

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

    a.   ***Integration, coherence and permeability*** between the learning outcomes and qualifications of all subsystems.

    b.   ***Quality, transparency, enhanced visibility and trust of end-users***: by introducing learning outcomes approaches, stakeholders' participation in qualifications development and approval, and accessible users' information through digital and online instruments.

    c.   ***Parity of esteem and value of learning in different contexts and subsystems***: academic, vocational, formal, non-formal.

    d.   ***Inclusion and redress:*** qualifications can be obtained via validation of non-formal learning, recognition of experience from work and life, accessible for people with scarce schooling.

    e.   ***Regional and global comparability*** and recognition of diplomas and certificates.

    f.   ***Wider societal and economic goals***, in particular: increase the stock of the qualified labour force; enhanced employability of holders of qualifications; strengthen competitiveness and productivity of the economic sectors; align the qualifications system with demand and changing skills needs.

The level structure of the analysed NQFs is diverse. Regional integration plays an important role in defining the NQF structure in certain parts of the continent. In Southern Africa the 10-level structure predominates. In the North two of the NQFs are 8-levels, one is 7-level. In West Africa the 8-level structure is established in some of the national qualifications frameworks. Ethiopia moved from an initial 10-level concept to an 8-level comprehensive framework. Although the sectoral scope of the framework conditions the level structure, there are several cases of sectoral frameworks spanning a large part or the full set of levels: this is the case of the TVET framework in Ghana (8 levels), the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework in South Africa (8 levels), and the proposed architecture of the revised professional qualifications sub-framework in Mozambique (9 levels). The Kenya NQF and the Lesotho NQF have both TVET qualifications pillars spanning 10 levels.

The range of **level descriptors** captured by the survey shows some diversity, but in the comprehensive national qualifications frameworks, and in some sector-specific (technical and vocation education and training and higher education) there is clear predominance of the domains: knowledge, skills, competence, attitude and autonomy and responsibility. The newest of the approved NQFs (Eswatini) combines the domain "Personal attributes" to the two usual domains "Knowledge" and "Skills"; and Lesotho opted for a combination of "Areas of Knowledge (depth, breath and complexity), "Nature of Skills", and as third domain - "Agency and context". Two countries (Morocco and Tunisia) opted for a combination of more than three domains of learning, adding "Complexity", "Adaptability" and "Communication".

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

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

In a number of countries (Cape Verde, Cameroon, Morocco, Tunisia), the quality assurance framework in TVET is closely associated with the principles and methods of the competence-based approach (*approche par competences*). The cycle of *the approche par competences* involves upstream prospective skills analysis, mostly with a sector delimitation, leading to design of standards of competence and of assessment. Graduate tracer studies are known to usefully contribute to evidence-based monitoring of the quality and relevance of learning and qualifications, but the mapping found only rare cases of regular conduct of such studies and use of findings to improve quality (Morocco is one such case).

The adoption of **learning outcomes** as a fundamental concept and instrument to design and organise qualifications and learning has gained ground in many countries. With this affirmation of learning outcomes approaches, firstly in TVET qualifications, but also gradually in higher education, systems and frameworks increasingly open up to *recognition of prior learning (RPL) / validation of the outcomes of experience (VAE) / recognition validation and certification of competences (RVCC).*

International practice shows that the establishment of **qualifications databases or registers** contributes to making NQFs operational, improving transparency, and also outreach and public use. Repertoires and registers of qualifications cannot be disconnected from taxonomies and classifications. In the examples below, the linkage to various related classifications differs. Not all countries link qualifications with ISCED fields of education 2013 (UNESCO 2013), but many link to the national occupational classifications. This issue could be addressed in a harmonised

manner at regional and continental level, and the ACQF could play a role. The ACQF mapping study found different situations and dynamics with respect to qualifications databases and registers, which can be grouped as follows:

a. Databases of quality assured qualifications *linked with the NQF, accessible and searchable online*, notably via the website of the NQF institution. Examples of this situation include the well-developed SAQA National Learners' Records Database, which includes all qualifications of all sub-frameworks and levels, and part-qualifications. The Kenyan NQA is finalising the development of the National Qualifications Information Management System (NAQMIS), which will bring together the qualifications awarding institutions, the qualifications that they award and the learners (launch foreseen in October 2020). The online National Catalogues of Qualifications of Mozambique and Cape Verde can be included in this group, although they comprise only vocational-technical qualifications linked with the NQF.

b. Listings and repertories of courses and qualifications *under oversight of the different sub-systems* (such as quality assurance agencies) and institutions (providers, sectoral organisations), accessible online in yearbooks, tables and legal acts of authorisation. The mapping study found a range of different examples with these characteristics, such as in Angola, Morocco and Senegal.

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

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

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

Monitoring and evaluation of national qualifications frameworks and measurement of their contribution towards wider and specific objectives is not often considered and organised early on. An increasing number of countries in Europe, and other continents are undertaking reviews and evaluations of their NQFs. Discussions during the mapping study with NQF instances showed that the problem of monitoring and evaluation of NQFs is considered, but more effort is required to improve data analysis, indicators and reporting and many countries welcome support to develop adequate tools and systems. The South African NQF went through several evaluations, which influenced its structural transformations and new legal basis. In some countries the NQF legislation stipulates the obligation to monitor progress and measure impact: Cape Verde is such a case, where the National Qualifications System (SNQ) has a new pillar focused on the function of monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement. In other countries, the education law mandates the state to assure regular evaluation of the education and training system by

specialised organs (Cameroon). Morocco's National Council of Education Training and Scientific Research (CSEFRS) is entrusted and equipped with the resources to conduct regular evaluation of all sub-systems of education and training and other specific thematic analyses.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND TENTATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was undertaken in the framework of comparison with the EQF. In our view this is a very relevant context as it touches on the relationships between qualificationa frameworks. It has also helped us to better understand what RQFs are for, what their added value is, what opportunities they create, in which conditions they develop and make a difference and where their limits are. Understanding a wider set of RQFsalso helps us to better understand the EQF as an RQF. Our study did not analyse the EQF and the related QF-EHEA as RQFs, but principally focused on the other RQFs. This was a deliberate choice at the start, but we have made some comparison to see if the RQFs would be comparable.

In Europe we often still see ourselves as the centre of the world. The EQF is probably the best known RQF but by no means the only RQF. It is neither the oldest RQF nor the most modern. RQFs elsewhere are different from the EQF. They are diverse in terms of objectives, in terms of mechanisms, in terms of implementation arrangements and this makes them sometimes difficult to compare. None of the RQFs analysed is a copy of the EQF, but all RQFs have been looking at the EQF at some stage. There was an eagerness of all interviewees to interact with the study, knowing that it aims at informing the possible comparison of the EQF with other RQFs. There is a big interest in sharing experience, to learn from other RQFs including the EQF and to learn about solutions for issues that a number of RQF initiatives are struggling with. Dialogue rather than comparison seems to be the main interest at this stage. RQFs can benefit from more peer learning and information exchanges.

There are more RQFs initiatives than we knew existed. The Global inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks (2019) described seven RQFs: the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, the CARICOM Qualifications Framework, the ECOWAS Qualifications Framework, the European Qualifications Framework, the Pacific Qualifications Framework, the SADC Qualifications Framework and the Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth, but we were able to identify *17* Regional Qualifications Framework initiatives, some of which are at an early stage of development.

RQFs are diverse and share features that the EQF does not (yet) have (common qualifications, QA protocols, common courses, sectoral orientation, addressing climate change, more 10-level frameworks than 8 level frameworks). The EQF could benefit from learning about these mechanisms. Many RQFs aim particularly at supporting QA in order to strengthen confidence in qualifications, and use their registers as depositories of quality-assured qualifications expressed in learning outcomes. Some have started to work on micro-credentials and many look at digitalisation and online learning.

The EQF has features and supporting tools that some other frameworks do not have. Its governance model with the EQF Advisory Group is unique. Its approach to transparency and peer learning leading to a large library of cases and thematic studies is also unique. Europass with its digital technology brings together many new features linking information about qualifications, learning, validation and recognition opportunities and careers.

Information on qualifications at European level is now displayed in [Europass](#), and comes from databases of national qualifications reflecting the National Qualifications Frameworks that are owned and managed by the European Member States. [Europass](#) offers the most up to date and rich repository of high quality data on qualifications, national qualification frameworks and learning opportunities in Europe, helping learners to find a course in another country and employers to grasp the value of a qualification from a different EU Member State. ESCO offers an extensive up to date classification of occupations, skills, competences that is free available in many European languages.

[Open Badges can align to](#)ESCO by linking to a standard terminology for the skills of learners, as an additional quality measure to support the recognition of informal and non-formal learning achievements. The [Europass Digital Credential Infrastructure](#) is in development to support efficient and safe recognition across Europe. Europass Digital certificates have a host of benefits over paper-based certificates: they can reduce administrative work for students and graduates as well as education and training providers and businesses. Europass Digital Credentials can also decrease the impact of credential fraud and contribute towards paperless workflows.

Europass Digital Credentials support instant verification; users can automatically verify information such as the identity of the awarding body or the quality assurance of a qualification.

Many RQFs have been looking at this technology but have dismissed it because of the required investment.

The current study is not comprehensive in the sense that it answers all the questions on RQFs. It has been a pragmatic exercise, carried out in a short timeframe and necessitated by the lack of information that is publicly available and accessible on RQFs. The study findings are mainly based on the results of interviews, and will need further validation by stakeholders beyond the interviewees. The study raises a number of questions about the future of regional qualifications frameworks that go beyond the question of comparison to the EQF.

RQFs represent serious international commitments that will take time, resources and capacities to implement. Most of these initiatives are not yet at a stage where we can "compare" them with the EQF. Although several have started some kind of a referencing process, it is not always comparable with referencing NQFs to the EQF. SADCQF and AQRF seem to be the RQFs that are most advanced in their implementation. They both now have a number of countries referenced, but these are not yet the majority of the member countries.

RQFs often have links with other RQFs. These can be geographical e.g. with specific countries being part of different RQFs. They may have common objectives e.g. sharing common qualifications and courses in the TQF and PQF, or joint migration interests in the GQF and SAARC QF, or may have joint cooperation. RQFs are not closed boxes/silos, they are porous entities.

Member countries can e.g. develop bilateral agreements on qualifications with countries outside the RQF e.g. comparing levels of SCQF, NLQF and Bahrain QF. The EQF also has

links with other RQFs e.g. links through European NQFs with other RQFs (or their members), through mobility partnerships and association agreements: e.g. the Mobility Partnership of Tunisia and statut avancé of Morocco (both part of ACQF) both refer to the EQF. There are links with the EQF through European-funded projects promoting the EQF, e.g. MCESCA. The EQF is often used as an example e.g. MCAP. There is direct cooperatio, e.g. SADC and AQRF representatives have visited the EQF AG. Sometimes there is common membership of two RQFs - both the EQF and TQF include Cyprus and Malta as members. Many RQFs have unilaterally compared themselves with the EQF at a certain stage of their development.

Other RQFs may have similarities to EQF due to the fact that a number of initiatives have looked to the EQF for inspiration (e.g. referencing criteria), there is a tendency towards comprehensive/unified qualifications frameworks, RQFs are based on learning outcomes. RQFs in other parts of the world face similar challenges: addressing the divide between VET and HE; how to improve visibility (e.g. levels on certificates/diplomas), how to deal with lifelong learning e.g. through micro-credentials.

RQFs can be quite different from EQF, having different objectives e.g. through a strong focus on QA, having different features (e.g. there is a tendency towards 10-level frameworks, a number of RQFs have common qualifications, RQFs may pay more attention to sectoral orientation, having different governance arrangements.

The ACQF is not an RQF comparable to the EQF or other RQFs, but an overarching framework of frameworks in Africa, supporting integration and transformation on the African continent, and bridging much stronger differences than in Europe.

International cooperation, donor support and advice are very important for the development of RQFs. This is exemplified by EU support for ACQF processes, providing a framework for joint cooperation and development, EU support for MCESCA, Australia and New Zealand support for PQF and AQRF, UNESCO/EU supported SADCQF, UNESCO support for ECOWAS, Canadian support for MCAP, Interamerican Development Bank and UNESCO support for CARICOM QF, ILO and Swiss Development Corporation support for SAARC QF, and CoL support for TQF VUSSC.

A number of the RQF initiatives identified and explored in this study are currently at a turning point in their development. It will thus be interesting to follow up on their activities and developments to see how the current COVID-19 crisis affects their development in the years to come, and whether/to what extent national and regional priorities might shift. Now, several scenarios seem possible – on the one hand, concerns that the crisis might reduce budget for NQF/RQF initiatives even more due to economic crisis and budget cuts. With many RQF initiatives already at this stage being hampered by a lack of (financial, HR) resources, the inevitable economic downturn will probably make it even more difficult for RQFs to mobilise the capacities and resources needed for a sustainable initiative – unless RQFs are identified as having the potential to alleviate the ramifications of a global ailing economy is recognised.

Many interviews revealed that the development of RQFs have been hampered by the COVID-19 crisis and they are trying to deal with the consequences. One outcome is that online learning is becoming a key theme, but few have experience with micro-credentials,

and recognising and quality assuring qualifications delivered through distance and online learning.

RQFs are very interested in a more substantial dialogue with EQF and other RQFs to support their development. Several have carried out a comparison with EQF levels unilaterally. There is a strong interest in exchange of experience/best practice while keeping initiatives home-grown.

6 COMPARING EQF AND OTHER RQFs - NEXT STEPS

The EQF Recommendation of 2017 asks the Commission and the EU Member States to explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison of third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF. The EQF as an RQF links NQFs in Europe and is now looking for links with NQFs and RQFs outside its geographical scope. With the comparison, the EQF is becoming an instrument for the EU's external relations policies, focussing in particular on migration policies, education & training, recognition arrangements, employment policies, development cooperation and trade. The EU has dialogue with many countries outside the EU, as well as with groups of countries, regional economic communities and international and multilateral organisations. Skills and qualifications are an increasingly important issue in international cooperation.

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected. Many people come to the EU for work, study, refuge or family reasons or are travelling from the EU to other countries and often experience difficulties in integrating into the labour markets and education systems of their host country. Growing numbers of people are also involved in cross-border work through the internet. Qualifications signal the skills of individuals but this signalling function becomes weaker in an international context. Comparison should facilitate a better understanding and fair recognition of qualifications. The aim of comparison is to support mutual trust to enhance transparency for individuals, employers and education providers, support international mobility and migration and support the international positioning and use of the EQF and other RQFs.

Each case of comparison of EQF and another RQF should be based on concrete mutual benefits, ensuring an added value of comparison. In order to be ready for comparison a RQF needs to be operational, which would mean that it meets most of the following criteria:

- The main working methods, procedures and tools to operate the RQF are in place (regular meetings, communication strategies, quality assurance criteria, arrangements and tools).
- Inclusion, referencing, alignment, articulation or harmonisation procedures and criteria to link a national qualification system or framework, and/or specific qualifications to the RQF are established and agreed among member countries.
- The member counties are supported to relate their NQF to the RQF, by comparing NQF levels and RQF levels and other criteria;
- First experiences with inclusion, referencing, alignment, articulation or harmonisation have taken place and the linkages between the national qualification system, NQF and/or qualifications with the RQF are formalised.

Comparison is a process where both RQFs are equal and should take place in a dialogue based on a set of mutually agreed topics. There is a proposal for comparison including different common topics and supporting questions to explore whether both RQFs are comparable. It is foreseen that these topics, and supporting questions, are refined in

dialogue in order to reflect contexts and diversity of RQFs. The result of this dialogue should be one common report developed and agreed together.

How RQFs can cooperate and support each others' development beyond comparison is not yet defined. From this study it is clear that many regional qualifications frameworks are still under development and cannot therefore be compared yet with the EQF. In the previous chapter we showed that there are many issues that could be addressed together among RQFs. This has to come from other dialogues beyond comparison. We hope that the discussion on this study between stakeholders that are involved in RQFs will help to create a basis for that dialogue.

7 **RQF FACTSHEETS** [42]

2. AQF – ANQAHE model

Title of RQF + acronym	**Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF) – ANQAHE model**
Short description of RQF	The AQF is a 10-level framework developed in 2012 which will serve as a translation tool for national qualifications regionally and internationally, once it is properly implemented.
Region/countries covered	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) Members: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Oman, U.A.E., Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	http://www.anqahe.org/about.html
0: Context	The AQF has been researched and developed with acknowledged input from the national frameworks already published in the region, or under development (Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia) and also with input from international frameworks (Australia) and reference to translation frameworks (EQF, Bologna) in 2012. Promotion activities have been ongoing since then, but the priority is still to establish NQFs in the member countries.
1: Ownership/ commitment	As part of its mission and objectives, ANQAHE has taken the initiative to develop the Arab Qualifications Framework for higher education levels and qualifications. The ANQAHE Secretariat is responsible for the promotion and development of the AQF. The ANQAHE Secretariat works on a voluntary and virtual basis. All staff volunteer their labour. Parts of the costs are funded by membership fees, which not all participating countries are able to pay, thus funds are very limited.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The Framework is not yet fully operational. There is no formal agreement regarding the AQF. **Objectives**: 0. Provide a single translation reference point to compare qualifications nationally, regionally and internationally 1. Provide a regional benchmark of qualified graduates, defined in a common language 2. Address the need for transparent mechanisms for assuring quality, rigour and consistency of regional qualifications for the country, employers, community and students 3. Provide guidance in designing and developing new qualifications 4. Provide an instrument to maintain parity in the demands and expectations of qualifications set at the same level 5. Help students make informed decisions about their education and training progression, mobility between levels, institutions, and in relation to employment opportunities 6. Serve as an indicator of occupational and employment relevance 7. Provide an additional tool for implementation of standards through quality assurance agencies, ministries and other national authorities and regulators of higher education 8. Indicate the outcomes required from programmes/courses set at equivalent levels in national frameworks within the region **Scope:**

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[42] This collection of factsheets starts with no. 2 (AQF), as no. 1 (ACQF) has been covered separately in chapter 3 of this report.

	The AQF covers 10 levels, reflecting widespread international practice, thus aiding mutual recognition of qualifications between nations. The 10 levels shall provide sufficient increments to accommodate the full range of distinctive levels represented in existing national qualifications present in the region, and scope for future development of qualifications.
	Currently, only the Higher Education levels (Levels 4 to 10) are populated, but there is a trend to also include VET qualifications in the region's NQFs. Other education sectors could theoretically be added in the future.
	Mutual interest:
	There is great interest to exchange experiences, build contacts with, and further learn from the experiences of other Regional Qualifications Frameworks such as the EQF. Mutual recognition and mobility are the goals of the AQF.
3: Progress in implementation	The framework outline exists, but most Member States still need to establish their own NQFs in order to make the AQF operational.
	Technical criteria:
	10-level structure. Level Descriptors: Knowledge, Skills, Competence
	Characteristics of principal Qualifications:
	▪ Level 10: Doctorate Degree
	▪ Level 9: Master's Degree
	▪ Level 8: Post Graduate Diploma (Higher Diploma in KSA)
	▪ Level 7: Bachelor's Degree
	▪ Level 6: Higher Diploma
	▪ Level 5: Associate Degree/Diploma
	▪ Level 4: Secondary School Certificate
	RQF-NQF relationship:
	The AQF strategic document foresees that 'to complement and enforce the internal verification procedure would be the role of external Quality Assurance Agencies as appropriate for the national system. Agency staff and the reviewers used by the Agency must be trained and wholly familiar with the framework such that it can be used and referenced in making judgments of compliance with the level descriptors.'
	A proposed alignment of the AQF with other regional and national frameworks, including the EQF, is also described.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	The strategic plan for the period of 2020-2024 foresees a revision of the strategic document of 2012, also the level descriptors will be updated, and new NQF agencies will be included in the work.
	Once more NQFs in Member States are up and running, they can be brought together and linked to the regional framework.

3. AQRF - ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Title of RQF + acronym	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)
Short description of RQF	The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a common reference framework that enables comparisons of education qualifications across participating ASEAN Member States.
Region/countries covered	Association of Southeast Asian Nations: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos (the Lao People's Democratic Republic), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/
0: Context	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic organization of 10 Southeast Asian countries, which was formed on 8 August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Since then, its membership has expanded to include Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Its aims include accelerating economic growth, social progress and sociocultural evolution among its members, protection of regional peace and stability, and providing opportunities for Member States to discuss differences peacefully. The ASEAN Charter, signed by the 10 ASEAN leaders in Singapore on 20 November 2007, provides the basis for an ASEAN qualifications reference framework (AQRF). While the goal is to make national qualifications systems explicit vis-à-vis the AQRF, referencing to it does not require changes in national qualifications systems. The AQRF seeks to respect its Member States' specific structures and processes in place that are based on national priorities. Another important ASEAN initiative related to the AQRF in terms of facilitating the free flow of skilled labour is the mutual recognition arrangement (MRA). Implementation of the MRAs for tourism and engineering in particular have moved forward in recent times. There is currently no direct link between the MRAs and the AQRF.
1: Ownership/ commitment	The **AQRF Committee** is tasked with overseeing the referencing process and further development of the AQRF, among other roles. The AQRF Committee is a rather new body, it convened its first meeting in February 2017. **Capacities and resources:** As a very new body in ASEAN, the work of the **AQRF committee** is currently fully supported by the ASEAN Secretariat. Funds are allocated by each Member State and donor agencies such as AANZFTA channel. They are also seeking funds for capacity building from the EU.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The AQRF is based on agreed understandings between Member States and invites their voluntary engagement. ASEAN is thus generally based on consensus i.e. there is no way to 'force' countries to move in a certain direction. 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 issuing of certificates. As such, these quality assurance processes build confidence and trust in national qualifications and in the value of the region's qualifications. **Objectives:** 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 - Lifelong learning within ASEAN - A more prosperous ASEAN - A single Community ASEAN Vision **Mutual interests:** Pronounced interest in dialogue/comparison with the EQF. The vision of such cooperation would be to build an ASEAN and European zone of trust that facilitate mutual recognition of jobs and skills qualifications in the ASEAN labor market and the mobility of persons. Their intention is to learn from best practices without copying them, in a way that it helps the AQRF and thus the Member States to move forward.
3: Progress in implementation	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. Subsequently, the AQRF governance and structure document was endorsed by ASEAN labour and education ministers in May 2016, and by economic ministers in August 2016. 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 With regard to the MRAs, tourism sector occupations and engineer have moves forward. From both sectors, ASEAN Tourism has more potential to be harmonised with the AQRF.
	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. The AQRF includes a set of regional level descriptors.
	RQF-NQF relationship: Indonesia,the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia have already referenced to the AQRF and submitted referencing reports. Experiences from the referencing processes so far: **Indonesia** encountered obstacles in establishing the national committee since developing it involved various Indonesian government structures (more than 15 ministerial bodies), consuming much time and effort. The IQF itself covers all sectors of education and training, both supply and demand side. **The Philippines and Thailand** encountered a similar obstacle. Instead of founding a new national committee, they established a coordinating organization to represent the various interests. **Thailand and the Philippines** have established various sectoral QFs that make it more difficult to achieve coordination. . The coverage is mostly supply side.

	▪ **Malaysia** has the most robust system in terms of QF, but the coverage is mostly supply side and heavy on formal education. Countries ready/planning to undertake a formal referencing process are Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Singapore and Brunei so far have provided information on Criterion 1 of the referencing process.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	Making use the AQRF as tools for improving quality of human capital planning and human resource development in each MS to promote: ▪ Flourishing trust with robust QA system in HR development ▪ Better mobility ▪ More understanding of each other ▪ Lifelong learning within ASEAN The mechanism to do that is through Criterion 11 (indication of a clear reference to the AQRF level on new certificates/diplomas issues) as well as harmonisation among various initiatives in ASEAN and other platforms of communication, including MRAs. As mentioned above, four countries have already undertaken referencing to the AQRF. Further countries ready/planning to undertake a formal referencing process are Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

4. CQF – CARICOM Caribbean Community Qualifications Framework

Title of RQF + acronym	**Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Qualifications Framework (CQF)**
Short description of RQF	Common 10-level reference framework to enable individuals, education and training providers, employers and other stakeholders to better understand and compare the qualifications awarded at different levels in countries across the region. It seeks to act as a translation device that facilitates educational and labour market mobility and supports career progression and lifelong learning.
Region/countries covered	Currently CARICOM has 15 full members, 5 associate members and 8 observers.
	Full members: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	https://actt.org.tt/images/documents/CQF/2018/ A_Report_on_the_CARICOM_Qualifications_Framework.pdf
0: Context	The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy was created to facilitate labour mobility and skills matching. Some of the major initiatives have been the development of the Sangster-Bethel Framework for tertiary level qualifications which was endorsed by the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) several decades ago. The framework was subsequently modified to include technical and vocational education and training (TVET) qualifications and adopted by COHSOD (Council for Human and Social Development) as a Regional Qualifications Framework in 2001.
	Developing coordinated TVET systems and reference mechanisms led to the creation of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) to implement and manage a regional training and certification system, to ensure standard and uniform delivery of competence-based TVET within the Single Market and Economy. CARICOM applies the principle of conformity and convergence, meaning that the Caribbean Association of Training Agencies (CANTA) – created in 2003 – establishes and governs a Regional Training and Certification System, and not just a qualification framework for transposing qualifications, with the aim to harmonize national TVET systems, develop regional standards and finally establish a regional system for assessment, certification and recognition of skills. To date, Member States still use their own national qualifications and the use of CVQs remains limited.
	The first workshop to develop the CQF was held in St Lucia in 2012 and produced a draft framework which was accepted by COHSOD. The second workshop in October 2013, reviewed the draft framework and related documents including regional and national implementation plans. The workshop was hosted with financial assistance and technical cooperation from the Commonwealth of Learning. The workshop's report also presented a comparison of the Proposed CQF, the TQF and the EQF. A third and final workshop was held at the CARICOM Secretariat in Guyana in October 2016 to discuss and finalise the CQF.

1: Ownership/ commitment	**Ownership and commitment:**
	CARICOM Secretariat
	Governance structure:
	Council of Human and Social Development (COHSOD): consists of Ministers designated by the Member States.
	Commitment:
	CARICOM Commission on Human Resource Development (HRD) 43: established in 2016 to develop the CARICOM Human Resource Development (HRD) 2030 Strategy; group of 17 specialists and other stakeholders in education and human resource development.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The document on the 10-level framework was approved at the 34th Meeting of the COHSOD, in 2018.
	Comprehensive framework, 10 levels, including all educational sectors – the 5-level TVET framework is currently being aligned.
	CARICOM has asked countries to align their NQFs with the CQF by 2021:
	Each Member State will be required to develop a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that establishes national standards for the award of qualifications at different levels. The NQF serves as a communication tool and a regulatory mechanism for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria or learning outcomes specified for each level of achievement.
	Mutual interests:
	In the region, CSME skills certificates are in place for regional mobility.
	The development of the 10-level framework was funded by the Commonwealth of Learning.
3: Progress in implementation	At this stage the CQF is a communication tool without a regulatory function.
	Each government has to endorse the framework at national level, so far only Grenada has endorsed the CARICOM framework.
	Technical criteria:
	Level descriptors: In the context of the CQF, the generic level descriptors identify the relative demand, complexity, depth and breadth of achievement, and autonomy of the learner in demonstrating the achievement at each level.
	▪ Knowledge and Understanding ▪ Application and Practice ▪ Communication, Numeracy and ICT skills ▪ Life Skills ▪ Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others
	RQF-NQF relationship:

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[43] HRD is being conceived as all education and training from early childhood to tertiary education and the workplace offered to citizens and all other people of the CARICOM Region.

	Currently, the referencing is informal. There is still a need to formalise the referencing process, once NQFs are in place.
	National Training Agencies are responsible for the QA of TVET, there is a slight overlap, but basically these are separate responsibilities.
	CVQs are pegged to NQFs (as well as national qualifications). Non-standardised qualifications should be able to be referenced to the CQF directly.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	▪ Get NQFs aligned by 2021 (at least in 25% of the countries) ▪ Establish an official referencing process ▪ Set up a CARICOM QA register which will help to reach harmonisation and standardisation (ongoing)

5. CAMES - THE AFRICAN AND MALAGASY COUNCIL FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION (CONSEIL AFRICAIN ET MALGACHE POUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR)[44]

Title of RQF + acronym	**The African and Malagasy Council for Tertiary Education (Conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur, CAMES)**
Short description of RQF	CAMES is an intergovernmental institution for the harmonisation of policies and integration of the Higher Education Systems of Western and Central Africa and the Indian Ocean. CAMES' activities are backed by a Regional Quality Assurance Policy, of which CAMES is the sole custodian for the harmonisation and integration of higher education systems in its space. This does not prevent Member States from having their own quality assurance systems backed by national policies and requirements. In respect to the implementation of the **Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD)** system CAMES plays a role of support, advice, and monitoring. CAMES is Regional Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency and thanks to its Programme of Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (PRED) – it is also a regional qualifications framework (in higher education).
Region/countries covered	Currently 19 countries are members of CAMES: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal and Togo.
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	https://www.lecames.org/

0: Context	The African and Malagasy Council for Tertiary Education (Conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur, CAMES) was established by the Heads of States of the African Malagasy Union, meeting in Niamey (Niger) on 22-23 January 1968, after the Conference of Ministers of Education held in Paris in 1966, decided to review in depth the structures and teachings of African and Malagasy universities.
	On 26 April 1972, the 16 French-speaking countries of Africa and the Indian Ocean signed an agreement for the recognition of qualifications in tertiary education in Lomé (Togo). In that agreement, they affirmed their determination to recognise all qualifications issued by their institutions as automatically valid or equivalent on the territory of each of them.
	
	One key initiative is that of introducing the **Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD)** system, i.e. introducing a three-level tertiary education structure corresponding to that of the Bologna Process.
	Of the nine current CAMES programmes, four are directly related to qualifications frameworks:
	    ▪ 1. Programme recognition and equivalence of diplomas (PRED);
	    ▪ 2. Inter-African Consultative Committees;
	    ▪ 3. Competitive examination;
	    ▪ 4. Quality Assurance Programme.
	The Strategic Development Plan 2020-2022 foresees 7 strategic aims with 33 specific objectives and 83 concrete actions. The aims are:
	    ▪ 1: Implementation of a 'Code of Ethics'
	    ▪ 2: Modernisation of the governance of CAMES

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[44] Please note. Information about this RQF initiative is largely based on the mapping study report prepared as part of the ACQF development project. https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study

	- 3: Setting up of a virtual lining programme at CAMES (programme Silhouette) - 4: Strengthening of the quality approach in all the activities and programmes of the CAMES as well as in research centres in member countries - 5: Support and promotion of training, research and innovation - 6: Development of synergies, partnerships and innovative projects - 7: Communication and Public Relations
1: Ownership/ commitment	**Ownership and commitment:** Technical Authority: The General Secretariat; **Governance structure:** The Council of Ministers of CAMES appoints a Secretary General for a term of 5 years. Political body: The Council of Ministers: the highest body of CAMES, the functioning of which is backed up by a Committee of expert. ; Academic and scientific body: The General Consultative Committee academic and scientific steering advisory body: grouping of heads of Universities, Inter-State academic and research institutions, research centers and partner private higher education institutions; Ethics and Professional Conduct Commission: established by the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and oversees the proper functioning of the institution's programs according to the values of CAMES; Chancellery of OIPA/CAMES: personalities, politicians, scientists or civil society, having rendered a service to Higher Education and Research in the CAMES space or elsewhere.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	**Mutual interests:** CAMES Member States (Gabon, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Senegal) are actively participating in international events such as the Bologna Policy Forum May 2018 (multilateral dialogue between EHEA and ministers from other countries), as well as in the process of establishing the ACQF.
3: Progress in implementation	In order to guarantee the achievement of its objectives, CAMES set up four quality assurance programmes. It also recognises the validity or equivalence of qualifications based on an assessment of the contents of studies, teaching methods, quality assurance standards and modalities. One initiative worth mentioning in this context is that of the WAEMU countries to introduce the **Licence, Master and Doctorate** system. The initiative is coordinated by UNESCO and aims to introduce a three-level or – grade tertiary education structure corresponding to that of European countries, in order to facilitate international mobility (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate). In France, a licence requires 180 ECTS, a master 120 additional credits. An 'LMD manual' (Licence – Maîtrise – Doctorate) describes training courses and defines transferable credits in all higher education and research institutions of the member countries. CAMES is furthermore committed to consolidating its regional framework for professional qualifications and qualifications, to better tackle recurring challenges of employment and unemployment of young graduates. In order to better address the problem of employability of young graduates who are unemployed in large numbers, in the context of a rapidly rapid African demographics and to accelerate the realisation of the expectations placed in the PRED, in terms of national and regional mobility, CAMES has taken the option in its strategic development plan (2020-2022) to move from the stage of recognition and equivalency of diplomas based on curricula analysis to another, more focused on the skills conferred on the practice of a trade that are usually taken into account in the context of a job or self-employment.

	Technical criteria The quality standards developed by CAMES include standards for: (i) institutional evaluation, (ii) face-to-face training offers, (iii) open and/or distance learning, (iv) research programmes
	RQF-NQF relationship: -
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	**Role of CAMES in LMD:** CAMES' role in implementing the LMD in partnership with various regional and international institutions 1. Decision of the Heads of State of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC, 2005); 2. CAMES Council of Ministers Resolution (April, 2006); 3. Bangui Statement on the need to support the LMD reform through the adoption of the quality approach (April 2008); 4. West African Economic and Monetary Union Directive (UEMOA, 2007); 5. Established the Network for Excellence in Higher Education in West Africa (REESAO, 2005), the linchpin of the LMD in West Africa; 6. CAMES quickly: provided the Diploma Recognition and Equivalency Program (PRED) with a repository adapted to the LMD system (December, 2007); made available to the countries of its space a book that gives the guidelines, the tracks, the strategies for a successful LMD (Construction of the new African and Malagasy space of higher education in the context of the implementation of the LMD system in the institutions of higher education of the space CAMES, 2007; 2009, revised version). 7. CAMES: Advocacy with countries and institutions of higher education and research, capacity building of actors, quality assurance programme, in support of the implementation of the LMD; 8. REESAO: Adoption of 8 academic fields, a credit system; harmonisation of science, technology and mathematics, with the support of UEMOA; 9. OOAS (West African Health Organization): Harmonisation of health curricula for ECOWAS countries, with the support of CAMES (process that began in 2009); 10. Creation of the Network of Higher Education Institutions and Institutions of Central Africa (REESIRAC, 2016), in support of the implementation of LMD and quality assurance. **State of the LMD in CAMES space:** 1. Complete adoption and implementation of the LMD system in the CAMES space (P. Gueye, 2016); 2. Not all CAMES member countries are at the same level in the implementation of the LMD system, the West African countries are more advanced than those in Central Africa; Challenges in LMS implementation: ▪ Support measures (necessary infrastructure and equipment, sufficient human, material and financial resources, educational guidance in number and quality, access to the Internet, well-documented and accessible libraries); ▪ Poor communication and lack of support and follow-up mechanisms; ▪ Low ownership of the LMD system by many players. ▪ Non-full compliance with the LMD's application texts, particularly the conditions for progression from one cycle to another.

6. ECOWAS - ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES[45]

Title of RQF + acronym	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
Short description of RQF	In the ECOWAS, the Ministers of Education approved in October 2012 the guidelines and roadmap for implementation of national qualifications frameworks and regional qualifications frameworks in the region. Currently the ECOWAS RQF is in the political commitment stage. This factsheet is based on the relevant NQFs and related developments.
Region/countries covered	West African States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	-
0: Context	The Ministers of Education adopted in October 2012 the Guidelines and Roadmap annexed to the UNESCO-supported report on development of NQFs and RQF in the ECOWAS region (UNESCO, ECOWAS, UNDP, 2013). In 2013, UNESCO, in partnership with ECOWAS Commission, UNDP and other international partners, initiated a discussion on the relevance and feasibility of developing national and regional qualifications frameworks in the ECOWAS region. Based on the Abuja Process which was initiated in 2009 by the ECOWAS Commission, UNESCO and the UNDP set up the Inter Agency Task Team (IATT) for the Revitalisation of TVET in the ECOWAS Sub-Region in 2009; a road map was developed and key areas of action were defined. The road map indicated that establishment of NQFs at national levels and an RQF at a regional level could be done at the same time. Since September, 2017, experts from the education sectors in ECOWAS Member States have been working on strategies and policies towards harmonising the educational systems and the equivalence of certificates in a bid to increase human capital in the region through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In December 2018, ECOWAS validated a draft framework on the recognition and equivalence of Higher Education degrees, and the West African regional office of UNESCO in Abuja (Nigeria) launched a quality assurance project.
1: Ownership/ commitment	**Ownership and commitment:** Not yet applicable. **Governance structure:** ECOWAS Commission in cooperation with UNESCO is proposing a new initiative to strengthen the capacities of ECOWAS countries for reforming qualifications systems while adopting a combined national and regional perspective. Experts and Ministries of Higher Education are considering steps towards the development and implementation of a regional RQF body. Governance will entail setting up registers at regional and national levels for ease of reference. Stakeholders' involvement in the building of the RQF will be key in defining its vision, roles and functions, as will countries' networking.

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[45] Please note. Information about this RQF initiative is largely based on the mapping study report prepared as part of the ACQF development project. https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study.

2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	**Objectives:** - Harmonisation of basic education to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and learning in the ECOWAS region - Recognition and equivalence of Higher Education degrees. Two approaches can be taken into consideration in order to achieve a regional framework: one is the regional harmonisation of the current systems of qualifications, based on a common design of the related curricula; the second deals with the description and classification of vocational skills to permit comparability with other countries' qualifications for the mobility of individuals. **Scope:** There is no ECOWAS RQF, thus the future scope is still an open issue. Based on the individual NQFs the current picture is as follows: Nigeria 6 levels (up to Doctorate degree), The Gambia 5 (including a fundamental level), Ghana and Cape Verde 8 levels (up to doctorate degree) and Senegal 5 levels (up to Engineering Level). **Mutual interests:** The ECOWAS RQF will hopefully learn from the examples of the EQF, SADCQF and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualifications Reference Framework on how they can interrelate.
3: Progress in implementation	It is hoped that the development, implementation and monitoring of the ECOWAS RQF will receive external support from UNESCO, CAMES, EU and other regional bodies such as the SADC that have developed RQFs; many of their Member States have NQFs in place. **Five Member States** in the ECOWAS region have developed or are in the process of developing an NQF or NVQF: Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and The Gambia. In addition, over the past years, many countries in the ECOWAS sub-region have developed policies and strategies aimed at strengthening their TVET institutions and skills development programmes. Regional cooperation of sectoral-specific scope **on certification of professional competences** has started, as illustrated by the 'Regional certification scheme for sustainable energy skills', under the umbrella of the 'ECOWAS Centre for Renewable energy and energy efficiency'[46]. Quality assurance at a regional level is notably different from that required on a national basis. At the ECOWAS regional level, efforts have been made to validate the ECOWAS **Framework on Recognition and Equivalence of Degrees** document and its benchmarks. Experts in the region also gathered to brainstorm the way forward with support from UNESCO and the Association of African Universities. The said framework will offer a grid to analyse and recognise foreign qualifications at regional and national levels, with the collaboration of designated agencies and in alignment with continental instruments like the Addis Ababa Convention and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

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[46] http://www.ecreee.org/certification

	Technical criteria: The technical criteria are still an open question: the language, nomenclature and engineering of level descriptors differ from one country to the other. In Nigeria, vocational and general education are organized in separate and distinctive tracks, awarding academic and technological qualifications. Skills qualifications do not emanate from learning level descriptors, defining instead competency levels to be demonstrated in the workplace. In Senegal, the Gambia and Ghana, skilled learning levels are described in a similar way, learning domains are variably dealt with. The Ghanaian National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework (NTVETQF) is structured to accommodate academic knowledge and occupational skills acquisition. While the hierarchy of levels differs across the countries, the use of the concepts of knowledge, skills and competence in the level descriptors aligns with the international trends.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	Follow-up actions will culminate in the Ministers adopting the Report of Experts on (i) Benchmarks, (ii) Framework and (iii) Roadmap (originally foreseen for December 2019). The future ECOWAS RQF will need to solve open questions such as to decide which pathway the RQF will take in setting level descriptors: a skill-oriented one or a blended academic-technological one. The second question relates to its scope and will entail deciding whether the RQF will be inclusive and comprehensive and cover qualifications from basic, secondary and higher education and training levels, as well deciding on the mechanisms for the validation, recognition and certification of competences obtained via non-formal and informal learning.

7. EAQFHE - EAST AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION[47]

Title of RQF + acronym	**East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)**
Short description of RQF	The EAQFHE is an 8-level framework for qualifications in the higher education sector of the East African Community (EAC). This framework was developed in 2015 by the IUCEA, with funding from Swedish SIDA. The EAQFHE, as its name suggests, is a framework for qualifications in the higher education sector. However, in the process of developing this framework, it was seen as helpful to develop a full qualifications framework, hence its final structure as an 8-level framework ranging from lower primary level to doctorate degree. It has been noted that from 2020 the EAC has embarked on a process of developing a TVET qualifications framework, with assistance from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Bank.
Region/countries covered	Six Member States of the East African Community (EAC): Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	http://iucea.org/eahea1/qualifications-framework/
0: Context	The East African Community (EAC) is, besides IGAD and COMESA with whom it has overlapping membership and roles, the regional economic organisation for eastern Africa. It was formed in 1967 and collapsed in 1977. A few years later there were efforts to revive the EAC. The treaty for the establishment of the East African Community was signed on 30 November 1999 and entered into force on 7 July 2000 following its ratification by the original three Partner States – Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. As of 2020, the total population of the EAC Member States is around 177 million people. The EAC has its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. The Mission of the EAC is to widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration, in order to improve the quality of life of the people of East Africa through increased competitiveness, value added production, trade and investments. The coming into force of the EAC Common Market Protocol in July 2010 prompted the urgent need to develop tools and systems that would facilitate its operationalisation. In the case of higher education, there was a need to develop tools for the operationalisation of Article 11 of the Protocol in order to facilitate easy mobility of learners and labour, which among others, requires the establishment of a framework to enable mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications across the region. This prompted IUCEA to embark on the development of the **East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)**, which would be an important tool for harmonisation of education and training systems and the qualifications attained, and thus contributing towards transforming East Africa into a common higher education area. Beginning in 2008, the EAC Secretariat and the Partner States undertook a process of harmonisation of their education curricula, examination structures and frameworks, certification and accreditation of education systems and training curricula. This led to

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[47] Please note. Information about this RQF initiative is largely based on the mapping study report prepared as part of the ACQF development project, with an additional interview undertaken. https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study

	the development of harmonisation strategies for the seven different cycles (pre-primary, primary, secondary, teacher education, TVET, adult, continuing and non-formal education, and special needs education). The harmonisation process also included the development of structures and frameworks for examination and certification for the different levels. Using these structures and frameworks, by 2018 the partner states had aligned their curricula to the approved, harmonised EAC curricula and framework.
	Following the harmonisation of the higher education level, in 2017 the EAC Heads of State declared the EAC region a Common Higher Education Area. In addition, the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) has developed and operationalised the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE) for further implementation of the Common Higher Education Area.
	The **EAQFHE** was adopted in April 2015, with its basis in the Treaty establishing the EAC, and the East African Community Common Market Protocol. The EAQFHE specifically refers to Article 102 of the Treaty of the EAC, which has four pillars of integration, one of which is Common Market Protocol. Article 102 of the Treaty is mainly on the commitment to cooperate in education and training, thus the basis for harmonisation and development of these regional frameworks.
	Article 11 of the EAC Common Market Protocol provides for the mobility of professionals within the EAC.To facilitate this, the partner states undertook to negotiate and sign **Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)** between Competent Authorities regulating different professions. By 2019, MRAs had been signed by Accountants, Architects, Engineers and Veterinarians competent authorities. Negotiations of MRAs for Land Surveyors and the Advocates of East Africa have been concluded and are waiting for signature. A study on the implementation of the signed MRAs was undertaken in 2018 and strategies to eliminate the identified barriers to implementing the signed MRAs. Negotiation meetings for the MRA for Pharmacists were set to begin. The negotiations for Pharmacists commenced in 2017 and are ongoing.
1: Ownership/ commitment	The overall mandate over the EAQFHE rests with the **IUCEA** (Inter-University Council for East Africa), which is the custodian and governing body, delegated by the EAC to coordinate the regional higher education sector. In the **EAC Secretariat**, education matters are coordinated by the Education and Training Department, headed by a **Principal Education Officer**. The policy and coordination of activities and programmes at the higher education level is under the purview of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), based in Kampala, Uganda. **Governance structure:** Monitoring of the framework is done by IUCEA, which reports to EAC.QA of qualifications in East Africa is done at institutional level and national level through the respective quality assurance authorities/agencies. For coordination and harmonisation of policies and practices, the IUCEA works closely with these agencies.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	**No legislation** appears to apply directly to the establishment of this RQF. The following legal instruments are understood to provide the legal framework for the EAQFHE: - Treaty Establishing the EAC; - The East African Community Common Market Protocol (EACCMP) - IUCEA Act; - National higher education policy and legislation of each partner state; - The declaration of the EAC as a Common Education Higher Area.. **Objectives:** Education, training and science and technology have a pivotal role in enabling the EAC to attain its vision and mission and to facilitate the operationalisation of the EAC Common Market Protocol, in addition to other key aspects of the EACs regional integration and development agenda. In recognition of this, in Article 102

(Education and Training) and 103 (Science and Technology) of the Treaty Establishing the East African Community (EAC Treaty), the EAC partner states commit to undertake concerted measures to foster cooperation in education and training, science and technology in the community.

Its stated purpose is that 'the EAQFHE provides the set of policies, objectives and information central to the organisation, management, implementation and monitoring arrangements for the qualifications framework. The EAQFHE:

- Provides important points of reference for setting and assessing academic standards for higher education providers;
- Assists in the identification of potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning; and
- Promotes a shared and common understanding of the expectations associated with typical qualifications by facilitating a consistent use of qualification titles across the higher education sector within the region'.

Scope:

The EAQFHE is a framework for qualifications in the higher education sector. The Higher Education Qualification Descriptors relate to programmes and not modules or course units.

The EAQFHE, as its name suggests, is a framework for qualifications in the higher education sector. In the process of developing this framework, it was seen as helpful to develop a full qualifications framework. As regards its stated scope, the EAQFHE thus 'applies to all types of education, modes of delivery, training and qualifications from basic to higher education, professional and vocational institutions, obtained through formal, and/ or non-formal, and/ or informal learning.'

3: Progress in implementation	So far, it has been difficult within this assignment to retrieve robust information on the actual state of implementation of the EAQFHE. The findings from the ACQF mapping study however suggest that the EAQFHE has become an important guide and reference for the higher education sector, as well as for the process of developing qualification frameworks for other levels of qualifications frameworks, and the EAQFHE is considered an important tool for implementation of the regional Common Higher Education Area. The East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education has developed the necessary documents to cover higher education in detail, and the lower levels of qualifications in general terms. With regard to its implementation it seems to have become a guide and reference document, informing further work on regional qualifications frameworks.
	Technical criteria: The EAQFHE is an 8-level framework, with level descriptors for all levels, based on learning outcomes. It is based on a credit system based on notional hours whereby 1 credit is 10 notional hours. One year of study is equivalent to 40 credits, or 400 notional hours. All qualifications listed on the EAQFHE contain outcome statements which describe the knowledge, skills and attributes of a graduate. The Higher Education Qualification Descriptors relate to programmes and not modules or course units. For qualifications, the framework of analysis of the EAQFHE contains the following descriptors: - Development of Knowledge and Understanding (subject specific); - Cognitive / Intellectual Skills; - Key Transferable Skills; - Practical Skills; and - Volume of Learning. The IUCEA intended to keep a register of qualifications. Otherwise, qualifications are registered at the national level, and maybe passed on from their register. Qualifications

are registered at the national levels by national QA agencies. [The status of these plans is currently not known.]

RQF-NQF relationship:
The correspondence between EQAFHE levels and NQF levels is shown below. It was, however, not possible to identify information as to how this correspondence was established, and whether there is a specific referencing or alignment process in place.

3.7.1   Levels of NQFs linked to EAQFHE

	EQAFHE	Burundi	Kenya	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda
PhD Degree	8	?	10	7	10	?
Doctoral Degree	7	?	9	6	9	?
Master's Degree Post Graduate Diploma Post Graduate Certificate	6		8	5	8	
Bachelor Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	5		7	4	7	5
Diploma Certificate	4		6	3	6	4
	3		5	2	5	3
			4		4	
	2		3	1	3	2
			2		2	
	1		1		1	1

Source: Kerre, undated.

Although the EAQFHE does not have a specific mandate regarding Quality Assurance, it is closely associated with the Regional Quality Assurance System, developed to promote comparability of education systems, enhance quality education and maintain international standards that would render the system competitive regionally and internationally.

The EAQFHE also refers to UNESCO frameworks and the Arusha Convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education in Africa.
In addition to the EAQFHE, the EAC partner states also rely on their own national frameworks (in as far these are in place) and interact with each other on various aspects of equivalencies, recognition of qualifications and education.

4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	It has been noted that **the EAC has embarked on a process of developing a TVET qualifications framework**, with assistance from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Bank. Plans are also underway for the development of a teacher education qualifications framework for the region.

8. GQF -GULF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Title of RQF + acronym	**Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF)**
Short description of RQF	Blueprint for a 10-level meta-framework of qualifications approved in Riyad in May 2014, since then formal approval pending.
Region/countries covered	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (i.e. members of the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC)
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	-
0: Context	The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The six Gulf nations that make up the GCC region have considerable global influence but small populations. At the same time, they are countries of destination for many migrant workers, especially from South East Asia. A common market was launched on 1 January 2008 with plans to realise a fully integrated single market. In January 2015, the common market was also further integrated, allowing full equality among GCC citizens to work in the government and private sectors, and access social insurance and retirement coverage, real estate ownership, capital movement, education, health and other social services in all Member States.
1: Ownership/ commitment	The UAE led the development of the GQF, which was subsequently approved in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 2014. Proposed governance structure: Gulf Qualifications Authority (not yet established). In July 2020, a merger of the National Qualifications Authority and the Ministry of Education of the UAE was announced, as part of a more comprehensive restructuring of the UAE government, under the banner of 'Preparations for the Post-COVID-19 Period'. It is not evident whether this has any implications for the further development of the GQF.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The key driver behind the idea of developing the GQF is **mobility of workforce.** Aims at **increasing mobility of workforce** to ensure that the most qualified people can support the collaborative development of the GCC region. The meta-framework seeks to achieve consistency among Gulf education and training systems, compare and align qualifications within Member States, and allow mutual recognition of qualifications and workforce transfer within the GCC region. The GQF is intended to be a translation device for: ▪ (a) referencing the national frameworks of the Gulf States to the GQF; ▪ (b) referencing the national frameworks between the Gulf States; ▪ (c) the potential future reference between the GQF and the EQF; ▪ (d) the development and mutual recognition of qualifications, in particular vocational and professional qualifications, within and between the Gulf States; ▪ (e) facilitating transfer of students and mobility of the labour force among Gulf States for the purposes of education/training progression and employment; ▪ (f) promoting the principle of lifelong learning, particularly through recognition of informal and non-formal learning; ▪ (g) fulfilling the needs and requirements of the Gulf Labour market for a highly skilled labour force.
3: Progress in implementation	On 22 May 2014, the Technical Committee chaired by the NQA approved the level descriptors for the GQF. There is no further evidence of progress in implementation.

	At national level, **Bahrain** participates both in the ANQAHE and the GQF initiative. At the same time, Bahrain has referenced its NQF to the SCQF in 2018, and has furthermore entered into a dialogue with the Australian and New Zealand National Qualifications Frameworks.
	Technical criteria:
	The blueprint for the GQF has been developed as a regional meta framework of qualifications comprising 10 levels that will allow GCC countries to relate their NQFs to a common reference framework.
	In terms of scope, the GQF has been planned as a comprehensive framework.
	RQF-NQF relationship:
	No information.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	According to the information retrieved, the GQF is still in the conceptual phase, as a blueprint of a comprehensive 10-level qualifications framework. Formal approval of the GQF is still pending.
	The research did not identify any evidence of recent activities in terms of further development of the GQF. However, despite several attempts, it was not possible to conduct an interview with a representative for the GQF initiative.
	There is thus no information currently available as to whether the framework has evolved from a purely conceptual phase.
	According to one informant, GCC framework Ministries of Labour met, but they are waiting for the establishment of the Kuwait and Qatar QF, then the GCC could probably move forward. One they have Kuwait QF it will probably be announced.
	According to one informant, the GQF development might possibly go ahead once all GCC countries have their NQFs in implementation.

9. INTERGOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY ON DEVELOPMENT (IGAD) QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IN EASTERN AFRICA

Title of RQF + acronym	Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Qualifications Framework in Eastern Africa
Short description of RQF	There is not a publically shared concept of a regional framework yet. There is reference to teaching, TVET, HE, recognition and lifelong learning in supporting documents.
Region/countries covered	Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, possibly Eritrea
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	There is no RQF website yet. Published links are provided in footnotes.
0: Context	The development of an RQF is addressed to recognizing and developing the skills of refugees, returnees and host communities in the region. The Djibouti Declaration on education for refugees, returnees and host communinities addressing the importance of synergies and common solutions between the countries. According to ILO[48] (2019) the main challenges IGAD is faced with are: 1. Developing adequate skills and competences and providing relevant training for its large and youthful population; 2. Providing skills and livelihood opportunities for the large numbers of migrants and refugees in the region. The ILO Report *The potential of skills development and recognition for regulated labour mobility in the IGAD Region* (2020)[49] proposes to explore the feasibility, benefits, and costs of a regional qualifications framework for IGAD. Country visits for this report point to the need for a combination of common regional standards, strengthened national systems, and innovative projects. The regional suite of qualifications should draw on existing qualifications that are offered in IGAD countries and that are well recognized by employers. After some consultation and contextualization, these qualifications can be offered regionally. Key steps towards the RQFs are • Djibouti Declaration 2017[50]. • 2 nd IGAD Member States education experts taskforce meeting on implementation of the Djibouti Declaration and Action Plan (2018)[51] • Workshop on development of an RQF for the IGAD region (2019). • Regional Education Policy Framework 2020[52]
1: Ownership/ commitment	On the IGAD website the reasons for the RQF are published and country representatives have contributed to background studies and participated in a workshop on the Development of the RQF.

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[48] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms_731236.pdf
[49] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/---sro-addis_ababa/documents/publication/wcms_751801.pdf
[50] https://igad.int/attachments/article/1725/Djibouti%20Declaration%20on%20Refugee%20Education.pdf
[51] https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/65412
[52] https://igad.int/attachments/article/2593/IGAD%20Regional%20Education%20Policy%20Framework%202020.pdf

2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The Djibouti Declaration (2017)[53] on education for refugees, returnees and host communities is removing policy barriers and legal obstacles. It also generates common goals and collective responsibilities in responding to the refugee crises in the region, in particular to the problem of access to quality education by refugee children. Most importantly, it aimed at creating a harmonized space to integrate refugees into national education systems. Inclusion helps host countries to avoid fragmentation, build synergies, and ensure sustainability. the Djibouti Declaration and the sectoral policies (like the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) and TVET strategy are vital instruments preparing refugees for the success of future generations. The Regional Educational Policy Framework (2020) describes IGAD Regional Education Qualifications Framework (RQF) as a tool to support higher education; TVET and post secondary training.
3: Progress in implementation	
	Technical criteria:
	RQF-NQF relationship:
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	According to the miutes of the 2nd meeting of IGAD Member States education experts taskforce on implementation of the Djibouti declaration and plan of action on refugee education the Regional Qualifications Framework should prioritise competency enhancement of teachers Other key elements are • Quality Assurance Mechanisms & Measures; • harmonization of education qualifications [through mutual recognition & equivalency] IGAD Member States to develop National Quality Standards where they do not exist or review national quality standards and adopt national learning standards that are applicable to both refugee and host community schools; • Regional skills demands should be mapped in particular for TVET and Higher Education outputs; • IGAD should assess the differences between National Qualificatiosn Frameworks in Member States and support the development of NQF in South Sudan and Somalia as well as harmonize standards in the IGAD region;

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[53] https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/implementing-djibouti-declaration-education-refugees-returnees-host-communities#?

10. MCAP - MARCO DE CUALIFICACIONES ALIANZA DEL PACÍFICO

Title of RQF + acronym	**Marco de cualificaciones Alianza del Pacífico (MCAP)**
Short description of RQF	A working group of the Pacific Alliance ('REMCAP') is currently working on a proposal for an RQF for the Pacific Alliance region, with support from CICan, as part of a two-year project.
Region/countries covered	Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru (i.e. the four full members of the Pacific Alliance)
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	https://alianzapacifico.net/grupo-tecnico-de-educacion/#1518787358385-8 (To date does not include any specific information about the RQF.)
0: Context	The Pacific Alliance (Alianza del Pacífico – AP) is an initiative of regional integration comprised by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, officially established in 2011.

The Alianza Pacífico (Pacific Alliance) is a Latin American trade bloc, formed by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru (i.e. four full members), which all border the Pacific Ocean. These countries have come together to form an area of integration with the purpose of ensuring complete freedom in the movement of goods, services, capital, and people. Together, these four countries have a combined population of 210 million people and about 35% of the region's GDP. In addition to its four full members, there are several candidate/associate members, as well as 59 countries participating as observes.

In 2018, the AP issued the 'Declaración de Puerto Vallarta' in which the Presidents of the four full members put in charge the REMCAP group (la Red de Especialistas de Marcos de Cualificaciones de la Alianza del Pacífico - group of qualifications framework specialists of the Pacific Alliance) with the objective of advancing educational and labour mobility between countries, and facilitating the recognition of learning obtained by citizens.

The driving force behind the intention to develop an RQF for the Pacific Alliance region is labour mobility. In the region, there is currently still a lack of formal mechanisms to support student and labour mobility. |
| **1: Ownership/ commitment** | According to its official mandate, the REMCAP working group shall be made up of the leaders of the NQF in the four countries of the AP.
REMCAP has a Technical Secretariat that is led by Colombia. The Ministry of Education of Colombia reports on the progress of REMCAP to the Education Working Group (Grupo Técnico de Educación - GTE) and other Working Groups of the AP. There is no information available yet on the governance structure of the prospective RQF. |
| **2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests** | **Objectives:** The official mandate of the REMCAP group describes the key objective as follows: establishment of a common reference framework for the generation of **synergies between qualifications frameworks of the Pacific Alliance countries and thus facilitate the student and labour mobility among the member countries of the AP** (XIII Cumbre de la Alianza del Pacífico Delcaración de Puerto Vallarta, 24 de julio de 2018)**.**

The driving force behind the intention to develop an RQF for the Pacific Alliance region is labour mobility. In the region, there is currently still a lack of formal mechanisms to support student and labour mobility.

Mutual interests:
There is great interest in a dialogue with the EQF.
The EQF has served as inspiration in the NQF developments in the region so far. |

	At national level, Chile has undertaken its own comparison between the MCTP and the EQF, the SCQF and the Irish NQF, and also the Australian NQF (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2017).
3: Progress in implementation	This initiative is currently in an exploratory stage.
	At national level, all Pacific Alliance countries have engaged in NQF development, with Chile and Colombia clearly showing most progress. These started as national initiatives, not originally directly related to the Pacific Alliance. Among the AP countries, Chile is most advanced in terms of NQF development, followed by Colombia. The Chilean MCTP (Marco de cualificaciones técnico-profesional) is a TVET-only framework, including sectoral sub-frameworks. Peru has quite recently made first steps towards developing an NQF.
	Cinterfor has recently finalised a project for capacity building for the Peruvian NQF (2019-2020; https://www.oitcinterfor.org/node/7718).
	Technical criteria: n/a
	RQF-NQF relationship: n/a
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	The REMCAP working group is currently working on a proposal and work plan for an RQF. The AP has recently sought international support from Colleges and Institutes Canada54 (CICan) for the four countries that allow the consolidation of the educational and labour mobility strategy in the region. Financial support is being provided for a two-year project which is currently ongoing.
	At the end of this two-year support, the aim is to have a proposal for an RQF on the table. Furthermore, one sector should be selected for a pilot run.
	In the case of the MCAP, due to COVID-19, the work of the REMCAP group that is currently working on a work plan for an RQF has been delayed and led to some rescheduling. The extent of the delay cannot yet be determined.

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[54] Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) is the organisation representing publicly supported colleges, institutes, cegep colleges and polytechnics in Canada.

11. MCESCA – MARCO DE CUALIFICACIONES PARA LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR CENTROAMERICANA

Title of RQF + acronym	MCESCA – Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior Centroamericana (Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Central America)
Short description of RQF	The MCESCA is a qualifications framework initiative led be higher education institutions in the region, as a tool that can be used for innovation, quality assurance and recognition of studies between countries. The development was kick-started within the framework of two projects co-funded by the EU: Alfa Puentes (2011-2014) and HICA (2015-2018)
Region/countries covered	Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua y Panamá, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Belize[55]
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	http://hica.csuca.org/
Part	**Information**
0: Context	The development of MCESCA started with European support for the project 'Alfa Puentes', which initiated collaboration of CSUCA, the European University Association (EUA) and the Bologna Process. A sub-project to construct an RQF in Central America and to harmonise study programmes was initiated (2011-14). Each country's national councils of universities nominated one person to represent national stakeholders. The product of this project was the Qualifications Framework document. The wish to put the document 'into action' lead to the follow-up project HICA (2015-2018). As governments were not in charge to implement it, an EU-funded capacity building project was initiated to get the qualifications framework started in real life. A new technical group was established, to further work on the qualifications framework initiatives. It was important to further define qualifications and descriptors for TVET sector were added. Work was also done on credits and learning outcomes. All university partners chose study programmes to align to the MCESCA (21 Bachelor programmes, 6 Master programmes and 1 Doctorate). 18 universities (17 belonging to CSUCA and one private university from El Salvador) from the region were involved in the HICA project. In all MCESCA countries, universities act very independently of public authorities. Even though ministries formed part of the European-funded projects to develop the framework, they do not have authority in university matters. Universities are self-organised regarding qualifications and quality assurance. The idea of MCESCA was to start a process not top down but bottom up, by the region and its members, with European support – the validity and sustainability of the results depends on the actors and the dynamics.
1: Ownership/ commitment	The CSUCA (Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano – Central American Regional University Association) is the guardian of this framework and the driver of the process. CSUCA has as its main mission to promote regional integration, and particularly the integration and strengthening of public higher education in the societies of Central America and the Dominican Republic. Currently, there are very few resources available to take the initiative further, and thus no active processes with sub-groups or political representation ongoing. The initiative needs to rely on project funding: new project proposals are being submitted, but no additional funding has been granted so far.

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[55] Dominican Republic and Belize did not participate in the EU projects but are part of the MCESCA initiative.

2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The initiative has been endorsed by the CSUCA and by National Councils of Rectors from countries in the region. Further development of study programmes aligned to the RQF would be needed to make sure the MCESCA is not just a political document but something 'real' and helpful to have a reference and to give an impulse for innovation. **Objectives:** - support the reform, innovation and harmonisation of HE curricula - Reference tool - Improved Quality assurance processes **Mutual interests:** For the development of MCESCA, most recently as part of the HICA project, European partners shared practice on curricula innovation in support of this, via a training programme that entailed three workshops, webinars and visits of European experts to CA countries. There is a great wish to further cooperate with the EQF, as 'nowhere else is there such a successful framework', thus for MCESCA it would be fantastic to have collaboration and to learn from experiences from other places in the world. They would be most interested in how to implement it, what are the mechanisms used to implement a QF, we know we have different starting points, but there is definitely something to learn, eventually the countries will have their own NQFs, some already go into this direction, so they feel they could learn a lot also from how to align NQFs and RQFs, if they could get involved in transfer of knowledge / trainings etc., they would be more than interested.
3: Progress in implementation	Development stage - First pilot study programmes have been aligned to the Framework.
	Technical criteria: The MCESCA is an 8-level framework, of which currently only levels 5 to 8 are populated. It starts with level 5. Level 8: Doctorate Level 7: Master's or professional degree Level 6a: Bachelor's degree Level 6b Level 5: 'Technico Universitario' Specialisations are not included yet – but are planned to be included in the long run. Currently there is collaboration with the medical association of the region, but the process is not completed yet. The MCESCA defines what a student should know, understand and be able to do after each HE cycle, in a Central American social and political context. Learning outcomes are defined for pre-bachelor, short-cycle programmes. This was done through national focus groups and consultations with academics, students and other social partners in the different CA countries, guided by a Technical Team that was appointed by national university associations. The HICA project also examined time/credits required for the different HE cycles, with the objective of defining credit ranges to achieve the learning outcomes of the MCESCA. CA partner universities selected at least one study programme to revise and reform, defining work-load based learning outcomes that correlate to the MCESCA.

	Descriptors: • Disciplinary knowledge and professional application of knowledge • information analysis, problem solving and innovation • Autonomy and personal, professional and social responsibility • Communication • Professional cultural and social interaction
	RQF-NQF relationship: Costa Rica has developed an NQF which is aligned to the MCESCA, some other countries are currently developing theirs. Further aligned development in this area is a future goal.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	The current plan is to develop follow-up projects to expand the implementation of the RQF and to receive funding for them.

12. PQF PACIFIC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Title of RQF + acronym	**Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)**
Short description of RQF	The PQF is a 10-level transposition device to facilitate the comparability and recognition of Pacific qualifications. Countries without their own NQF can also adopt the PQF.
Region/countries covered	**States of the Pacific Island Forum:** Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Tokelau; Australia, New Zealand.
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	http://prqs.spc.int/Default.aspx#
0: Context	The PQF was developed in response to the Pacific Forum Education Ministers' determination in 2001 to 'consider the setting up of a regional qualifications framework covering basic, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education benchmarked against appropriate international standards and qualifications'.
	In 2004, the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment, SPBEA (now referred to as the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme - EQAP) was appointed to coordinate the development of the Pacific Qualifications Framework as was consistent with its mandate on educational assessment. SPBEA subsequently amended its constitution to accommodate the development of the framework, and the Accreditation and Standards Unit was formally established and became operational in 2014 as a result of the 2013 Review of SPBEA.
	The Australian Aid Programme agreed to fund two key activities. One was a scoping study conducted in three clusters in 2007, which reported unanimous support from representatives of Pacific Island countries on the value and importance of a Pacific qualifications register. The second was financial support for a five-year project (November 2008 to January 2013, later extended to 30 June 2016) for the development of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards.
	The years from 2009 to 2016 were the developmental years of researching similar regional developments to learn from, and engaging key stakeholders through in-country and regional consultations and workshops to ensure alignment of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards with developments of national qualifications frameworks.
1: Ownership/ commitment	SPC: Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Community Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) EQAP is committed to continue support of national developments of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance strategies of PIC member countries.
	The Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) is responsible for addressing Pacific regional educational matters as a program of the Pacific Community (SPC).
	Accreditation is awarded by the Board – a subcommittee of the governing body of SPC, which is formed by the heads of the education systems of the different countries who are members of EQAP.
	Committed resources and capacities:

	The process for developing the PQF was started through Australian funding: it was fully funded for the first 5 years, then an extension of funding was agreed. After a review in 2015 the funding was not renewed.
	Funding is now done by programme funding of EQAP, there is no specific funding towards the PQF as before; funding takes place according to the work plan / business plan of EQAP. New Zealand is also funding EQAP.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	There is currently no formal agreement, but discussions ongoing on whether this would be needed to give the PQF more mandate.
	The PQF was set up as a mutual agreement between the countries, but nothing is signed, it is more of a 'gentlemen agreement' between the countries, and more about that they will get a benefit out of it.
	Referencing undertaken with 4 countries: In terms of referencing: EQAP took the initiative to do the referencing from their side, submitted reports to national agencies and requested their response and comments to our referencing reports. In terms of the other way round that has not happened.
	Objectives:
	The PQF addresses a range of important regional issues:
	▪ It establishes a clear set of criteria for levels of learning achieved to effectively prepare people for the world of work and life as responsible citizens.
	▪ It establishes flexible pathways to staircase careers and promote social inclusion and opportunities for lifelong learning.
	▪ It reforms the education and training sector, as knowledge and skills are the engines of economic growth and social development.
	▪ It enhances international comparability and recognition of Pacific qualifications to facilitate portability of learning and integration of labour mobility into the international labour market.
	▪ It is a platform for stakeholder communication and strengthening multi-sectoral cooperation.
	▪ As a strategy to alleviate poverty and pave the way for personal, social and professional development, the PQF promotes Pacific peoples' access to good quality education and training, and employment in any form.
	▪ It promotes and creates a culture of quality within agencies and institutions, and also in the design, delivery, assessment, and resourcing of education and training activities.
	▪ It may be adopted as a national qualifications framework by Pacific countries that do not have the capacity to develop a national qualifications framework
	Scope:
	10 levels. The PQF plans to include all educational sectors, but the current focus lies on TVET and HE.
	Mutual interests:
	It is a goal to have the PQF referenced against other regional qualification frameworks (e.g. EQF which is very advanced), there is a lot to be learned, e.g. scope of implementation, the referencing process. They are also looking at CQF (CARICOM Qualifications Framework), hoping to go there in the future.
	The PQF is referenced to the TQF, but the TQF has not referenced to the PQF.
3: Progress in implementation	At the moment qualifications reach from level 1 to level 9. These are qualifications that have been accredited by member countries by their NAs and are submitted to EQAP

for recording in the register. Some smaller countries include mostly qualifications at lower level – such as training by community and rural training centres. There are currently 242 full qualifications in different areas linked to the PQF via NQFs. Regional qualifications can currently be found at levels 1 to 4.

Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu have started or completed development of their NQFs. Cook Islands and Niue have access to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

The institutions (and programmes) in the northern Pacific – Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Marshal Islands – are accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges of the United States of America. Nauru has determined to align with the Queensland State (Australia) system;
Kiribati and Tuvalu have adopted the Pacific Qualifications Framework and the Pacific Quality Assurance Frameworks for their systems.

Countries' commitment to the PQF has been hampered by the parallel operation of bilateral relations between some member NQFs e.g. with AUS, NZ. NZ currently bilaterally funds some of the countries. This is considered part of the reason why full commitmentto the PQF is not there.

Technical criteria:
The PQF has ten levels:
- Level 10: Doctoral degree
- Level 9: Master's degree
- Level 8: Bachelor with honours; post-graduate diploma and post-graduate certificate
- Level 7: Bachelor's degree; graduate diploma; graduate certificate
- Level 6: Advanced diploma; associate degree; diploma
- Level 5: Diploma
- Levels 1 to 4: Certificate

If another framework referenced against the PQF has the same number of levels and the qualification types for each level, the referencing is considered fairly straightforward. If there is a difference in the number of levels and the qualification types at each level, then an initial technical levelling is carried out to determine possible alignment before referencing is conducted.

Level descriptors:
Are outcomes-based, each level describes in broad terms the knowledge, skills and competencies learners are expected to have achieved after completing a programme or course of study at that level. These descriptors are progressive from one level to the next. The analysis of level descriptors of two frameworks determines how the outcomes for each level are defined.

RQF-NQF relationship:
The **referencing processes undertaken so far were of a more informal nature** - by taking a look at the qualifications framework and the system around, and doing a comparison on how the country implements the framework. There are no clear referencing guidelines, these would still need to be developed.
Only 6 countries have NQFs, many others are too small for an NQF.

Relation PQF-PRQS: The main purpose of the PRQS is to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards. This purpose is achieved through the use of the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) as a translation device. Qualifications from Pacific Island countries and territories will be referenced against the PQF and a level for registration on the PRQS will be confirmed. The PQF will also be

the instrument that will establish comparability of Pacific qualifications with other international education and training systems.

The process of referencing national qualifications frameworks against the PQF identifies the level by-level relationship between national qualifications frameworks and the PQF. This results in identifying the level of the PRQS where qualifications from countries are registered. Confirming the relationship between the levels of a national qualifications framework and the PQF facilitates the registration of qualifications from a country onto the PRQS.

Recently, regional qualifications and micro-qualifications using PQF as reference point, were identified as one of the needs regional organisations had had recently: especially the accreditation short courses lacked a national system, so **a regional system was developed in order to accredit short courses as micro-credentials in the PQF.** Thus, they have put in place standards and criteria for the accreditation of short courses. The process includes an accreditation committee set up by EQAP, but made up of independent people (independent of the SPC and EQAP), including external evaluators and experts in the field. Accreditation is awarded by the board – the subcommittee of the governing body of SPC, which is formed by the heads of the education systems of the different countries who are members of EQAP. The registration fee covers the cost of the external evaluators. So far, 11 courses have been accredited (starting in 2020).

4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	It is being discussed whether there is need to have a **formal agreement** in place to give the PQF more mandate. Has been discussed but no firm commitment so far. There are 3 priorities for the coming years: 1. A review of the PQF – there is a need, as a number of NQFs have been reviewed and there have been some significant changes. The PQF also needs to be looked at in the light of the changes in the countries. This is currently halted due to funding issues. 2. Reference the PQF against other regional qualification frameworks (such as the EQF or CARICOM). 3. Some PQF countries offer some of their qualifications to learners from other countries. Participating countries need to agree procedures.

13. SADCQF - SOUTH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK[56]

Title of RQF + acronym	South African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)
Short description of RQF	The SADCQF is an inclusive **ten-level** reference framework, with level descriptors based on learning outcomes with three domains of learning: **knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility**. SADCQF encompasses all forms, types, levels and categories of education and training, and is supported by quality assurance guidelines. It was established in 2011 and launched in 2017. SADCQF aims to facilitate comparability and recognition of qualifications, harmonisation of qualifications, credit transfer - for easier movement of people (learners and workers).
Region/countries covered	Angola, Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	Southern African Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). 2017. https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20booklet.pdf https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/7103
0: Context	The Southern African Development Community (SADC), consisting of 16 Member States is a Regional Economic Community (REC) with a population structure that is predominantly young estimated at 76.4% of age groups younger than 35 years. SADC's aim is to improve sustainable development, alleviate poverty to enhance the quality of life of its people by industrialization and deeper regional integration, leveraging on its comparative advantage of abundant human and natural resources. A ten-level SADC Regional Qualifications Framework, was established in 2011 and launched in 2017. In 2016 it was renamed 'SADCQF'.
1: Ownership/ commitment	**Governance:** The SADC Council of Ministers, 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. **Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA)** was given the task of implementing the SADCQF. The TCCA is a group of experts from the 16 SADC Member States and is supported by the SADC Secretariat. **TCCA: implementers of the SADCQF** ▪ In 2000 the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) was established. They were tasked with overseeing co-ordination and implementation the SADCQF. Since 2016, the TCCA revised its Terms of Reference and meets twice a year to implement recommendations made by the SADC Ministers, and also to follow up on progress and provide inputs into SADC Ministers' meetings. ▪ In 2016, a two-year action plan (2016-2018) for accelerating implementation was developed by the TCCA. ▪ The TCCA have set up a TCCA Executive Committee (EXCO) to ensure that implementation actions are carried out and followed up between TCCA meetings, and that SADCQF implementation work continues.

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[56] Please note. Information about this RQF initiative is largely based on the Mapping study undertaken for the African Continental Qualifications Framework in 2020, and supplemented by an interview with a representative of TCCA. ACQF Mapping reports: https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study

- In 2017, the SADCQF was officially launched with its implementation model. The SADCQF implementation model has expanded into the current model with the six implementation programmes[57].
    - Development and alignment of NQFs (South Africa)
    - Quality assurance (Botswana)
    - Verification (Eswatini)
    - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and Articulation (Namibia)
    - Advocacy and Communication (Zambia)
    - Governance (SADC Secretariat, TCCA and TCCA EXCO)
- The TCCA mobilised Member States to take on the responsibility to drive the six programmes of SADCQF implementation. This is a temporary arrangement to ensure that work continues while the SADCQF Implementation Unit is not operational yet

Role of SADC Secretariat:
- Secretariat of the TCCA: The SADC programme responsible for Education and Skills Training serves as the Secretariat of the TCCA and performs the following duties:
  a) Convening, recording and distributing minutes of meetings (TCCA meetings) including all translations in the three SADC languages. The SADC Secretariat cover the costs of the conferencing (venue, lunch and teas), ground transport and simultaneous interpretation services. The SADC Secretariat covers the costs for the participation of experts who have been invited to perform a specific task or assignment during a TCCA meeting;
  b) Mobilising resources;
  c) Sharing of information with Member States.
- SADC Member States volunteer, on a rotational basis, to provide support to the SADC Secretariat to assist in the convening of meetings, minutes and collating and sharing information. This is also a temporary arrangement to ensure that work continues **while the SADCQF Implementation Unit is not operational yet.**

Planned Implementation Unit:
- The TCCA developed a draft funding proposal in October 2018 for a **SADCQF Implementation Unit** that will drive the six programmes at a regional level and provide assistance to the 16 countries at a national level. The funding proposal covers a period of five years, and sets out the plans, activities and budgets required to run each of the six programmes over a five-year period.
- The SADCQF Implementation Unit falls within the Governance programme of implementation.
- The temporary arrangements (country support as mentioned earlier) are in place until the Implementation Unit is operational.
- The funding proposal has gone through a number of iterations since October 2018.

Capacities and resources:
Regional level (limited resources)
- The SADC programme responsible for Education and Skills Training convenes two meetings per year (they only cover the costs of the venue, and interpretation. This SADC Programme also services a number of other programmes so their resources are limited.
- Member Sates volunteer to provide support to the SADC Secretariat. In the past, the SADC Secretariat has made resources available for a Member State to provide implementation support but this funding is very limited and not guaranteed.
National level (self-funded):

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[57] More detailed information on these six implementation programmes is provided in chapter 2.7 of this report.

	▪ Member States self-fund their participation/ operationalisation of SADCQF implementation; ▪ Member States use their own resources to implement action items Member States finance the TCCA participation of their national representatives including travel and accommodation expenses; partners who participate on an invitation basis are expected to finance their own participation as well.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	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. The overarching legal instrument that guides the development and implementation of the SADCQF is the Protocol on Education and Training (1997-2020). The Protocol promotes the comparability of standards, mobility and portability of qualifications across the region in order to ease mobility of learners, workers and educational services. Other SADC policies underpinning the SADCQF: SADC Treaty 1992; 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); SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025). The SADCQF was largely developed by government stakeholders with less involvement of stakeholders from the private sector, training institutions and employees. 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: Regional Indicative Strategic Development Programme (RISDP) 2020-2030 and the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025). RISDP 2020-2030 has a comprehensive set of measures shaped for social and human capital development (Pillar 3). Enhanced implementation of SADCQF, and skills development for regional industrialization are part of these priorities, under the umbrella of '*access to quality and relevant education and skills development, including in science and technology, by SADC citizens'* (Strategic objective 2). In its third outcome ('*Enhance participation of migrant workers in socio-economic development processes in countries of origin and destination'*) the Labour Migration Action Plan 2020-2025 specifies actions to promote and implement the SADCQF. **Mutual interests:** There is interest in a dialogue with the EQF, while it was also pointed out that the SADCQF has, in the first place a strong orientation to ownership and African values. Amongst others, one of the SADCQF principles state that it is *'important and fundamental that the development of the SADCQF is 'home- grown' and guided by the demands of education and training in the region and driven by the local experts'.* Regional co-operation is essential for benchmarking and learning good practice and consider what is suitable for the local agenda. For example: when setting up structures for the SADCQF implementation, a SADC delegation (comprising representatives from Botswana, Eswatini, South Africa and UNESCO ROSA) was invited to UNESCO and the ETF and participated as observer in an EQF Advisory Group meeting. There were many positive experiences emanating from those inter-regional experiences. At the same time, there is emphasis on being mindful that an African agenda is being promoted, I.e. refrain from taking an initiative that works well in a European context and apply it in SADC without critical engagement. The SADC region has relations with the African Union, ILO and UNESCO guided by Memoranda of Understanding and Action Plans. However, it has no relationships with respect to qualifications with other regional economic communities on the African continent.

	The SADCQF is currently not referenced to any continental or other regional qualifications frameworks. However, the SADCQF has benchmarked with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in terms of the level descriptors, coordination and implementation mechanisms of these regional qualifications frameworks.
	Objectives:
	The purposes of the SADCQF are: 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. Eventually these benefits enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally.
3: Progress in implementation	Implementation of the SADCQF was initiated with six programmes: a) alignment of NQFs to SADCQF; 2) quality assurance; 3) verification; 4) articulation, recognition of prior leaning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS); 5) advocacy and communication; 6) governance. The TCCA mobilised Member States to oversee the development of the six programmes. Implementation is at various stages, and is supported by national capacities (human, technical, financial) and regionally coordinated government funding to strengthen capacity for its coordination and implementation.
	All six programmes of the SADCQF are advancing, albeit not at the same pace. In this sense, the SADCQF can be considered operational, i.e. it is working and countries are implementing. The pace of implementation differs, as SADC countries are at different stages in development of theirs NQFs but the regional solidarity and co-operation is evident.
	SADCQF is supported by a set of guidelines, notably on Quality Assurance (annex 2 of the SADCQF policy document). Moreover, the TCCA meeting of October 2020 presented the new revised SADC 'Guidelines on Credit Accumulation and Transfer', and the new ´Guidelines on Recognition of Qualifications´.
	A SADCQF Communication strategy, Communication tools and Marketing materials have been developed. SADCQF information is published on SADC social media, and SAQA website. Currently, there is no database or register for the SADCQF. A **SADCQF portal** was started in 2009 and was initially populated with qualifications until 2011. Work on the portal discontinued due to financial constraints. Any attempts to initiate a new portal would require significant resources not only to initiate but to ensure that the portal can be maintained.
	English-speaking countries are more advanced in their NQF developments than French and Portuguese speaking countries. Language differences have hampered information-sharing, but SADC Secretariat has improved dissemination of technical and policy documentation, guidelines and reports of TCCA meetings in the three SADC languages.
	E-certificate is being piloted to speed up delivery to clients, reducing waiting periods for evaluation of qualifications to enable quicker application outcomes for further learning or for visas, and to reduce misrepresented and fraudulent qualifications. To date, four countries (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia) are piloting the E-certificate. South Africa and Zambia have made progress in implementing the E-certificate.
	State of NQF development in the countries that form part of the community: Source: ACQF Mapping: SADCQF (2020).
	Over 50% of SADC member states have comprehensive NQFs: (i) three countries have NQFs in place (legal act approved, implementation started): Eswatini, Lesotho, Zimbabwe; (ii) six countries have NQFs operational for some time and

even reviewed: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia. Four other countries are at stage of development and consultation of their NQFs, with visible progress in 2020 (Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania). Three countries are at early thinking stage of NQF development. Some countries have sectoral qualifications frameworks in place and operational (VET and higher education), and at the same time started developing integrated / comprehensive NQFs.

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). Lesotho and Eswatini have the most recent NQFs (approved in 2019 and 2020, respectively, with guidelines and tools). Other countries, i.e., Angola, Malawi and Mozambique are in the process of adopting comprehensive NQFs. The ten-level structure is used by all NQFs in SADC. To date, four countries are piloting a regional E-certificate initiative.

Technical criteria:

SADCQF's main policy and technical document as revised in 2017[58] defines purpose, scope, design features, underlying principles underpinning the SADCQF, and governance structure. Annex 1 specifies the SADCQF level descriptors and Annex 2 – the SADCQF quality assurance guidelines.

The SADCQF is a **ten-level, learning outcomes-based structure**. It is underpinned by level descriptors for each of the ten levels, underlying principles, and regional quality assurance guidelines. The level descriptors indicate the learning outcomes i.e. what a learner knows, understands and is able to do at a particular level of the SADCQF. In order to get to this ten-level structure, an extensive mapping exercise was undertaken across the SADC countries. The ten-level structure was approved by the SADC Ministers in 2011.

A **trend of ten- level comprehensive NQFs** in the countries of the region is evident albeit at different stages of development and implementation. Some countries have started development of comprehensive NQFs (Angola), while others are designing integrated NQFs building on the experience of their existing and operational sectoral frameworks (Malawi, Mozambique).

To support implementation, SADCQF developed a set of 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 (10/2020).

The SADCQF is supported by **regional quality assurance guidelines**, which set principles and standards for both internal and external QA systems and mechanisms. Alignment of SADC countries' internal and external QA systems with the SADC QA guidelines is ongoing.

A regional platform has been established, (SADC Qualifications Verification Network [SADCQVN]), to enable experts, responsible for **verification of qualifications**, to communicate and co-operate on verification matters, to ensure trust and credibility of qualifications in the region.

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

Furthermore, an **E-certificate** is being piloted to speed up delivery to clients, reducing waiting periods for evaluation of qualifications to enable quicker application outcomes for further learning or for visas, and to reduce misrepresented and fraudulent qualifications. To date, four countries (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia) are piloting the E-certificate.

Status of NQF implementation:

Over 50% of SADC member states have comprehensive NQFs: (i) three countries have NQFs in place (legal act approved, implementation started): Eswatini, Lesotho, Zimbabwe; (ii) six countries have NQFs operational for some time and even reviewed: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia. Four other countries are at stage of development and consultation of their NQFs, and some with visible progress in 2020 (Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania). Three countries are at early thinking stage of NQF development. Some countries have sectoral qualifications frameworks in place and operational (VET and higher education), and at the same time started developing integrated / comprehensive NQFs.

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). Lesotho and Eswatini have the most recent NQFs (approved in 2019 and 2020, respectively, with guidelines and tools). Other countries, i.e., Angola, Malawi and Mozambique are in the process of adopting comprehensive NQFs. The ten-level structure is used by all NQFs in SADC. To date, four countries are piloting a regional E-certificate initiative.

RQF-NQF relationship:

Member States are encouraged to align their qualifications and QA mechanisms with the SADCQF. Alignment will be enabled by mutual trust and recognition of achievement at a regional level. 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.

SADCQF Alignment Criteria
1. Responsibilities of relevant national bodies involved in the alignment process are determined ar the relevant competent authorities;
2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between qualification levels in the NQF/ National Qualific (NQS) and level descriptors of the SADCQF;
3. The NQF/ NQS is based on learning outcomes and links to non-formal and informal learning an (where these exist);
4. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or describing the place of qualifications in the transparent;
5. The National Quality Assurance System for education and training refers to the NQF or NQS ar with quality assurance guidelines of the SADCQF;
6. There is a clear indication of the relevant national authorities responsible for the verification of t 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 co 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
10. Clear plans have been made to make changes to legislation and policy supporting alignment t levels on new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent autho

	TCCA agreed and published a guidance for Member States on the alignment process and roadmap. Visual materials are available (see figure 7 of this report).
	Eight countries (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia) agreed to be part of the pilot phase of alignment in 2017, while additional countries have since declared their interest for alignment.
	Two countries have completed the alignment process in 2019 (South Africa[59] and Seychelles[60]), and Mauritius[61] has adjudicated its alignment report to SADC Secretariat for validation in 2020.
	Experience from the alignment process with the South African Qualifications Framework: Enabling factors: the existence of SADCQF's clear guidelines on the alignment process, and a central driving mechanism (Secretariat) to co-ordinate and ensure implementation of the process (this was provided by SAQA).
	In South Africa, the alignment process was undertaken by the National Alignment Committee (NAC) composed of representatives from the DHET, DBE, SAQA and the three Quality Councils: CHE, QCTO and Umalusi. Invitations were sent to the Directors-Generals of DHET and DBE, and to the CEOs of the three QCs and they appointed their Sector representatives to serve on the NAC.
	SAQA also provided the Secretariat, drove the process, developed a roadmap with milestones that were closely followed, and co-ordinated all drafts of the alignment report and associated processes, assured implementation of the relevant actions.
	The draft report served at the SAQA Board meeting (after recommendation by the NAC) and was approved for public comment. The report was in public comment for one month. All the public comments were collated and considered in the final version of the report, which had to be approved by the SAQA Board.
	After Board approval the report served at the TCCA EXCO meeting and those comments were collated and considered in an updated version of the report. The final version was approved by the TCCA and is available on the SAQA website.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	There are temporary mechanisms in place while the **SADCQF Implementation Unit is not operational yet**. It is currently not possible to put a timeline to the development of the Unit, as there are many constraints in resourcing and capacity at national and regional level.
	SADC has the most advanced regional qualifications framework in Africa, and support to enhanced implementation (at regional and national levels) is planned in the SADC development strategy 2030 (RISDP). The large majority of African NQFs in operational stage are in this region, and three of them have aligned with SADCQF. The number of countries referencing to SADCQF is expected to grow in the coming years, as a result of new support measures.
	Cooperation with other RQFs:
	From the launch of implementation in 2017 SADCQF sought cooperation and peer learning with other regional frameworks. In 2017 TCCA undertook a benchmarking of SADCQF with EQF and ASEAN QRF. The 10 alignment / referencing criteria of SADCQF and EQF are very similar.

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[59] 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

[60] **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

[61] 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

14. SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC) QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Title of RQF + acronym	**South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Qualifications Framework**
Short description of RQF	There has been a growing initiative towards developing a SAARC Qualifications Referencing Framework in recent years. This has resulted in a draft concept and roadmap for RQF development developed by a consultant that has been based on a survey and interviews with stakeholders from different countries and additional consultations on draft texts.[62] An eight level framework is proposed with descriptors on Knowledge and Skills, Context and Application to support secondary education, VET, Skills Acquisition and Higher Eduaction.

There is a five year roadmap designed to bring implementation towards the first referencing of national frameworks. Quality Assurance is an important part of the RQF which should support the welfare of citizens through fulfilment of their potential, more collaboration and mutual assistance. Both the harmonisation of skills qualifications and enhanced recognition in destination countries and improvement of learning outcomes, education quality and opportunities for lifelong learning are at the basis of the RQF. |
Region/countries covered	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Bhutan has not yet been consulted.
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	
0: Context	The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), founded in 1985, is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of states in South Asia. Its Member States are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The SAARC comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 4.21% of the global economy, as of 2019.
There has been a growing initiative towards developing a SAARC Qualifications Referencing Framework in recent years.

The rationale for an RQF for this region is derived from the Kathmandu Declaration of November 2014, when the SAARC Heads of State or Government agreed to promote regional cooperation in the field of vocational education and training.

The SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration (May 2016) calls for the development of a framework for skills qualification: *'Member States would work towards recognition of their skills/qualifications by the destination countries. At the same time, they should strive towards arriving at a regional skills qualification framework which could be used as a reference for bilateral agreements, wherever possible, with destination countries or at regional and international consultative fora.[63]'* While the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 (September 2016) identified 12 priorities, which included at least five that are relevant for the RQF, including a focus on learning outcomes and quality, lifelong learning and strengthened partnerships and governance. Recognition of qualifications is high on the agenda for the RQF |

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[62] Bateman and Giles, Feasibility study on the establishment of a Regional Qualifications Framework (TQF) in SAARC: Final report, December 2020, kindly shared by ILO, unpublished
[63] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/presentation/wcms_566509.pdf

1: Ownership/ commitment	SAARC policies are at the basis of the RQF. The RQF is a logilcal consequence of these policies. Stakeholders from all countries apart from Bhutan have been surveyed, interviewed and consulted on outputs. However, it is stressed that more consultation is needed with key actors from the education and training sector and Bhutan to refine the proposals and to ensure the common vision is clear and shared. There is donor support. The current development work is part of a three-year project funded by the SDC and supported by the ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia. Further support will be needed to develop and implement the RQF
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	**Objectives:** The prospective RQF would be intended as a tool to enable comparison of qualifications across SAARC Member States, and also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in countries of destination, i.e. in particular also the Gulf (GCC) region. In this regard, this RQF could in particular contribute to - enabling employers in countries of destination to compare workers' qualifications across several countries of origin, and selecting workers that best suit their needs. - contributing to a more level playing field across countries of origin, by fostering a fair competition based on the competency of the workers. According to the proposed concept, the main purpose of the SAARC QRF is to enable the referencing of national qualifications frameworks or systems, and therefore enable comparisons of all types and levels of qualifications within participating Member States' national qualifications framework or systems; focussing on referencing their qualification levels to the levels of the SAARC QRF. These comparisons of qualifications across the SAARC Member States aim to: - Improve the recognition of qualifications - Improve student and labour mobility - Improve transparency of qualifications, qualification systems and quality assurance arrangements - Improve recognition of learning achieved outside formal education - Support national qualifications frameworks that facilitate lifelong learning - Strengthen regional identity and support other regional initiatives - Provide a link to other regional qualifications framework internationally. **Scope:** Recent experience from the region has shown that South Asian countries are increasingly working towards unified national qualifications frameworks (instead of separate frameworks for HE and TVET). As a result, current plans for the RQF also suggest that it should be a comprehensive qualifications framework and address secondary education, TVET, Skills Acquisition, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning. **Mutual interests:** A dialogue with the EQF would be considered very valuable and a priority. In addition, a dialogue with ASEAN (AQRF) and the GCC would be requested, on the topic of skills development of the migrant workforce. EQF and AQRF are mentioned as benchmarks for referencing. Taking India as an example, the country is both country of origin and transit, as well as a popular destination, for workers across international borders. Official figures suggest that there were over 30 million Indians overseas in 2018, with over 9 million of the Indian diaspora concentrated in the GCC region. Over 90% of Indian migrant workers, most of whom are low- and semi-skilled workers, work in the Gulf region and South-East Asia. While exact numbers are not known, several studies point to the presence of larger outflows of labour migration and the presence of large numbers of undocumented migrants in the GCC region (ILO, 2018).

3: Progress in implementation	Feasibility study completed 2020.
	While this initiative is still in its infancy stage and the RQF as such to date does not exist yet. An eight level framework is proposed with three domain descriptors. A Technical Committee is proposed to manage the RQF. A Roadmap is also proposed.
	According the current plans for the prospective RQF, it could be modelled after the AQRF. The RQF should start out as a neutral voluntary framework, that does not override existing national arrangements but does emphasise quality assurance and harmonisation.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook	After the feasibility study wider consultation has been recommended as well as continued donor support during the development of the RQF. The RQF should be inclusive. Consultation should first of all be widened to Bhutan and within all the countries address specifically key actors in the Education and Training Sectors. Donor Support for follow up needs to be ensured. The roadmap foresees than in a five year framework the RQF could be at a level to pilot referencing of NQFs from two of the eight countries. However, it warns that it might take longer. The diversity of existing qualification systems, with some countries only having either HE or TVET frameworks and the state of development of quality assurance systems in different countries are seen as challenges. A common, clear vision for the future, awareness raising and communication including a RQF portal are seen as important as well as regular meetings at regional level to make progress.

15. TQF VUSSC - THE TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Title of RQF + acronym	**The Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF VUSSC)**
Short description of RQF	The TQF is a 10-level translation device for qualifications frameworks that includes flexible quality assurance guidelines and promotes the transfer of courses, qualifications and qualified learners between countries. It is defined as a translation instrument for the classification of qualifications between countries participating in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), according to set criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, to improve credit transfer and promote common accreditation mechanisms between VUSSC member countries. The purpose of the TQF is to facilitate the development and effective delivery of relevant and quality-assured VUSSC qualifications.
Region/countries covered	The VUSSC is an initiative of the education ministers of the **32 small Commonwealth Member States** (sovereign countries with a population of 1.5 million people or fewer), and some larger member countries (Botswana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia and Papua New Guinea) designated as small States because they share many of the characteristics. All participating VUSSC countries are small States that share at least some common challenges in the face of globalisation and the increased mobility of highly skilled professionals. These countries are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Dominica, Fiji, Gambia, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The Cayman Islands and Montserrat are also part of the network, even though they are not members of the Commonwealth.
Link to further information (e.g. RQF website)	https://vussc.col.org/
0: Context	On request of Commonwealth Heads of State, the Commonwealth of Learning initiated the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) in 2003, based on a virtual model of distance education. The aim was to create a mechanism allowing participants to strengthen and develop tertiary education by recording and sharing qualifications. After approval of the VUSSC concept by the education ministers of the countries concerned, the Commonwealth of Learning was asked to help them to collaborate and strengthen the capacity of their national education institutions through VUSSC. There followed a period of four years of course development through the VUSSC 'boot camps'. This resulted in a proposal for small States to create a transnational qualifications framework (TQF) that would support the development, international recognition, comparability and understanding of the VUSSC courses and to harmonise the different approaches present in the participating States, and to facilitate mobility among the states. It was developed and implemented in the different regions by a committee of experts.

1: Ownership/ commitment	The TQF is run by a 'virtual' **TQF Management Committee**, as a sub-committee of the VUSSC Interlocutors who are responsible for the Initiative. The Committee is supported by an Education Specialist, VUSSC, at Commonwealth Of Learning (COL), based in Vancouver.
	To date 86 institutions have participated in VUSSC activities and more than 53 000 individuals have been trained. Ten institutions in eight countries have started to offer VUSSC courses and programmes through a variety of means, but mainly through conventional, online or blended modes. However, some Member States have been reluctant to share their courses, and the uptake of some courses is not very high, even though more open courses are now available. These courses are shared as open educational resources.
	Governance structure: The body to oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of the TQF is the TQF Management Committee (TQFMC). The first **TQF management committee** was appointed in October 2008, comprising two representatives from each of the three main regions (Africa, Pacific, Caribbean) in which the 32 countries participating in VUSSC are located. In 2016 the second TQF management committee was elected. Currently (2020) not all regions have appointed two representatives.
	Committed resources and capacities: Resources and capacities are very limited. The TQF MC is working on a voluntary basis. There is one paid employee, funded by the COL. The network of 32 countries has potential, but it needs success stories in order to grow.
2: Policy framework, objectives, scope and mutual interests	The TQF is first and foremost an instrument for transposing qualifications. It is not intended to replace any existing sectoral, national or regional qualifications frameworks or quality assurance systems. The TQF is not formally part of legislative frameworks in the Member States.
	One of the roles of the TQF is to provide a portal/database for qualifications, where MS institutions and QAAs can go to and see what is available;
	First role of the COL in collaboration with the TQF MC is to develop and maintain the TQF. The intent is to have it independent rather than being run by COL.
	The Board of directors of the TQF develop and maintain, review and revise the TQF periodically: the intent was to revise the TQF every 3 years but since 2009 there has only been one revision in 2015; now another review is being planned.
	So far, the TQF did not fully achieve the objectives. There is some reluctancy on the side of some Member States, and a lack of enthusiasm on the one hand, and a lack of information on the other.
	Objectives: The TQF's major initial intent was to be a registration tool to enable VUSSC countries to register their courses onto the framework, and make them available to other small states.
	Other objectives include: ▪ comparative judgement (mutual recognition of qualifications) ▪ to ensure student mobility among Member States as well as workers mobility ▪ to level qualifications by assigning credit values ▪ to explain the required levels of skills knowledge and competencies that were expected for a particular course – to make them 'understood' by different institutions and

	• to promote lifelong learning, and establish new educational pathways • to establish a database of available qualifications in the Commonwealth countries (not yet available) **Scope:** The TQF is a unified qualifications framework that includes higher education qualifications and postsecondary technical and vocational qualifications offered through nationally approved institutions in participating VUSSC countries. It is not known how many qualifications are actually currently included in the Framework. In the past years, one institution asked to reference one qualification directly to the TQF. Participating countries agreed that the TQF should not infringe in any way on national and regional developments, yet should still be able to provide mechanisms for coordination, credit transfer and common accreditation. It offers a means to compare different qualification systems in multiple countries without having to do this on a bilateral basis. It will also be able to provide a forum to encourage peer review where participating institutions and Ministries of Education find it necessary. **Mutual interests:** The TQF has links with CQF and the Pacific Register. A possible comparison with the EQF would be about alignment and comparing information and it might help to overcome the divide VET and HE, especially since it can be translated into something that everyone can understand. We are all in the business of quality, so this could be very useful. Need identified for a dialogue on overcoming regional blocks.
3: Progress in implementation	**Currently only 50 % of VUSSC countries are interested in working with the TQF, others are reluctant. The referencing document will be reviewed.** The TQF was officially launched in 2010 in Namibia. In 2011 work was initiated to register the first qualifications on the TQF. Standards for VUSSC courses have subsequently been developed in tourism, agriculture and ICT through consultative workshops held since 2010 in the Bahamas and Samoa, and in 2012 in the Seychelles. In 2015, the TQF management committee approved the registration of six VUSSC programmes. In 2015, the open University of Malaysia held a meeting to finalise the review of the TQF and the referencing of NQFs against the TQF, and to approve the registration of six VUSSC programmes on the TQF. The completed TQF provides small States with more up-to-date procedures and guidelines and a referencing tool for alignment of qualifications to the TQF. The TQF was revised by the management committee in 2016. This is significant because the Commonwealth of Learning initially sought the help of the South African Qualifications Authority to develop the TQF. The small States have since taken the lead in implementation of VUSSC, with the support of the COL. Currently COL and the TQF MC facilitate training through workshop and trainings; the management team is supposed to evaluate programmes to be placed on the TQF, this may not be done by members themselves, as expertise and tools are needed, and then tell COL whether to add it to the framework.
	Technical criteria: The proposed 10-level architecture of the TQF includes a set of level descriptors that include three domains: knowledge and understanding; skills; and wider personal and professional competences. **Example: TQF level descriptors for levels 8 to 10:**

Table 1: Overview of the TQF

	Levels and descriptors	Minimum credit	Qualification types
10	• Acquire and possess a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice. • Be able to create and interpret new knowledge at a most advanced frontier of a field of work or study through original and advanced research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication. • Possess the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques to be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge or to solve critical problems or to refute or redefine existing knowledge. • Demonstrate authority, innovation, autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility for the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice.	360	Doctoral Degree
9	• Have a logical understanding of a body of highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, as a basis for original thought and/or the conduct of research and/or enquiry. • Have a comprehensive understanding of the research skills and/or relevant established techniques applicable to their own research or to advanced scholarship that can be used to create and interpret knowledge. • Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge to solve problems, together with a practical understanding of how knowledge can be managed to transform work or study. • Possess a conceptual understanding of how to analyse and critically evaluate current research in their academic discipline, field of study or work and to apply where appropriate to solve problems.	240	Master's Degree
8	• Have systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge of the key aspects of their academic discipline, field of study or work. • Possess an ability to deploy accurately established analytical tools and/or techniques and enquiry within their academic discipline, field of study or work. • Be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills of a wide range of concepts, ideas and information to devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems. • Display a critical understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge and how it is developed. • Possess the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. referred research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).	120	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma; Bachelor Degree with Honours

TQF qualification types:

Table 2: Qualification types in the TQF

TQF level	Qualification type	Minimum credits
10	Doctoral Degree	360
9	Master's Degree	240
8	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma Bachelor Degree with Honours	120
7	Bachelor Degree Graduate Certificate and Diploma	360
6	Advanced/Higher Diploma Associate Degree/Foundation Degree	240
5	Diploma	240
4	Advanced Certificate	120
3	Certificate III	40
2	Certificate II	40
1	Certificate I	40

Source: COL 2015: 32

RQF-NQF relationship:
The TQF is aligned with the CQF (CARICOM).

	For quality assurance, the TQF relies entirely on the quality assurance mechanisms in countries where courses originate and/or are offered. The TQF design excludes the accreditation of providers, which is done at national and regional levels, but includes the registration of qualifications: a qualification that meets the transnational qualifications criteria will be registered on the TQF and is referred to as a 'TQF registered qualification'. Any education and training provider within a participating VUSSC country that meets the broad quality-assurance criteria, and is accredited on a sectoral, national and/or regional level, will be able to offer such a registered qualification. Guidelines have been approved for higher education institutions, regional bodies, external quality assurance bodies, and students. The TQF can provide guidance on national quality assurance processes, based on existing international guidelines. In 2016 the referencing of the TQF against national and regional qualifications frameworks, which included the European qualifications framework, was approved. A qualification emanating from any VUSSC participating country can now be recognised throughout the Commonwealth, provided it has met all the quality assurance criteria of the national, regional and transnational qualifications frameworks. Development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) among the small States involved in the TQF varies greatly, but is mostly still at an early stage. Only Malta, Mauritius, Namibia and Samoa have moved ahead more rapidly. Also Guyana, Granada, Barbados, Jamaica are working on NQFs or have done so in the past; they draw from the UK and the European systems (e.g. Scotland), as well as Australia and New Zealand.
4: Priorities, milestones & outlook[64]	As take-up of the TQF is not as high as intended, a review will take place in the coming months (2020), in order to modernise the framework. External consultants will analyse what is needed to improve usability and how to better promote the TQF. In this respect, also blockchain is likely to be an issue, as is overcoming the divide between VET and HE. All 3 regions of the TQF will look up all current needs and answer questions such as 'Where do graduates end up, where do they access courses?' Regarding the COVID-19 crisis, current needs are met by offering blended learning and online learning.

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[64] In 2020, COL, in partnership with the University of Seychelles, has started to offer a series of four MOOCs on 'Blue Economy: Sustainability, Innovation and our Ocean' that are free of charge. It has already attracted thousands of learners from across the globe, and teachers come from several different countries – leading to an ambiance of cross-fertilisation. Learners completing all four MOOCs will receive a certificate of achievement. https://www.colvee.org/course/vussc/introduction-blue-economy

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

	Organisation	Date
AQF (ANQAHE model)		
Tariq Al-Sindi	Education & Training Quality Authority of Bahrain; Secretary General of ANQAHE	20 August 2020
AQRF		
Megawati Santoso	AQRF Committee, Chairperson	10 September 2020
CQF		
Ruby Alleyne	University of Trinidad and Tobago	25 August 2020
Laurette Bristol	CARICOM Secretariat	
EAQFHE		
James Otieno Jowi	East African Community, Principal Education Officer	1 October 2020
MCAP		
Paola Ibañez Cantillana	Ministry of Education, Chile	27 August 2020
Fernando Vargas	OIT Cinterfor, Uruguay	21 August 2020
MCESCA		
Elizabeth Colucci	EUA	21 August 2020
Francisco Alcarón Alba	Regional Coordinator CSUCA (Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano)	
Noemi Navas	CSUCA, Technical Team for developing RQF	
PQF		
Selai Waqainabete - Nainoca	Educational Assessment Officer, South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment, Secretariat of the Pacific Community	3 September 2020
SAARC		
Gabriel Bordado	ILO New Delhi	25 August 2020
SADCQF		
Coleen Jaftha	South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)	27 August 2020
TQF		
Mairette Newman	Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Education Specialist: VUSSC	19 August 2020
Michael Bradshaw	University of the West Indies; COL TQF Management Committee	2 September 2020

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Web resources:

Mobility partnerships: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies_en?policy=468
Treaties and Agreements database: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/treaties-agreements/

RQFs:

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ACQF. 2021. S*napshot of the Mapping Study Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework.* AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: J. Keevy, E. Castel-Branco. https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study

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2 Arab Qualifications Framework For Higher Education (ANQHE Model)
ANQAHE (2012): Qualfications Framework – ANQAHE Model (Strategic Document 2012).
http://www.anqahe.org/uploads/7/3/3/4/73345067/anqahe_aqf_.pdf

3 ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)
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EU support for QF in HE
https://www.share-asean.eu/activities/qualifications-reference-frameworks

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