



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP  
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE



# DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

## Brief overview of progress

Report to 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ACQF Advisory Group  
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## Table of contents

ACRONYMS.....	2
1 CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK .....	3
2 QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN AFRICA .....	6
3 VISION OF THE ACQF .....	7
4 ACQF PROJECT: OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS 2021 .....	10
5 ACQF PROJECT: OVERVIEW OF MAIN OUTPUTS AND MILESTONES 2022 .....	13

## Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PAQAF	Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework
REC	Regional Economic Community
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework

# 1 Context and rationale of the African Continental Qualifications Framework

## Paving the way to the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)

Education, skills and work will determine the improvement to livelihoods of the more than 1.3 billion people on the African continent, and drive growth and development for the generations to come.

The call for the establishment of a continental qualifications framework for Africa was formulated in key policy documents and strategic initiatives geared towards integration and prosperity on the continent. The ACQF responds to objectives set by the African Union's Agenda 2063 and its First Ten Year Implementation Plan (2023). The main AU policies and political initiatives underpinning development of the ACQF are as follows:

- Agenda 2063<sup>1</sup> and its First Ten Year Implementation Plan (2023)<sup>2</sup>
- Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)<sup>3</sup>
- African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)<sup>4</sup>
- Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment<sup>5</sup>
- Another initiative mentioning the ACQF is the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF).

With a median age of 19.7 in 2020, Africa's population is the youngest in the world. In 2020, Africa's population under 35 represents almost a billion people (22.7 per cent of the world's total youth population). Africa's young demographic could provide a powerful opportunity for development, innovation, decent jobs and beyond. But despite the economic growth of the last decade, African countries struggle to create jobs and to equip young people with the skills and qualifications required to service their economies and societies. This lack of economic opportunity is often combined with disenfranchisement, thus creating a potential cause of instability.<sup>6</sup>

The accomplishment of the potentialities of the African demographic dividend in post-Covid-19-pandemic economic recovery will depend on the development of the right mix of skills within the population and the quality and comparability of qualifications of all levels and sectors of education and training systems across countries. Learning must be lifelong and life-wide, to enable transitions to new jobs, especially in high productivity and innovation sectors, and adaptation to new skills requirements in the green and digital economies. Moreover, access to learning and qualifications should support inclusion in decent work and in the formal economy of small artisans, rural producers and the self-employed, and of the population with limited formal schooling but with practical professional and life experience, especially women and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> African Union, Agenda 2063, at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063>

<sup>2</sup> Agenda 2063, First Ten Year Implementation Plan 2023, at: <https://www.nepad.org/agenda-2063/publication/agenda-2063-first-ten-year-implementation-plan-2014-2023-0>

<sup>3</sup> CESA 2016–2025, at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa\\_-\\_english-v9.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf); CESA Journal, at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33863-doc-cesa\\_journal\\_vol2\\_final.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33863-doc-cesa_journal_vol2_final.pdf)

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

<sup>5</sup> Text of the Protocol, at: <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>

<sup>6</sup> Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Africa's Youth (2021): Action needed how to support the continent's greatest asset, at: <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-08/international-youth-day-research-brief.pdf>

At a continental level, the mobility of learners and workers is essential to achieve the benefits of economic integration, on the one hand, and improved matching of the supply of skills and qualifications with existing demand (job vacancies) across different countries, on the other hand. Easier movement of persons on the continent would make African labour markets more efficient, enabling companies to bridge skills shortages and gaps, and allowing the society to gain from brain circulation. Information-sharing between countries on qualifications levels and standards, and on the supply of skills is fundamental to support fair and effective labour mobility between countries.

Among its policy recommendations, the 'African Economic Outlook 2020'<sup>7</sup> emphasises the need to address obstacles to labour mobility to enhance growth's inclusiveness and cross-sector labour reallocations to reduce poverty in Africa. Merely by allowing labour to move freely across sectors, African countries could increase incomes and reduce poverty and inequality. Policies should contribute to increasing the transferability of skills and qualifications across sectors or the acquisition of sets of new skills and qualifications to meet the requirements of receiving sectors.

### Challenges of the socio-economic context

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, despite persisting and multiple challenges, economic growth in Africa was high for over a decade. In 2019 economic growth was 3.4%. Compared with the rest of the world, Africa's GDP growth was above the world average of 3% for 2019 and well above the average for advanced economies at 1.7%. There were six African countries among the ten fastest-growing economies in the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit all countries across the continent hard, albeit at different scale by regions and countries. The African Economic Outlook 2021<sup>8</sup> reports that Africa is projected to recover in 2021 from its worst economic recession in half a century. Real gross domestic product (GDP) in Africa is projected to grow by 3.4% in 2021, after contracting by 2.1% in 2020. This projected recovery will be underpinned by a resumption of tourism, a rebound in commodity prices, and the rollback of pandemic-induced restrictions. The outlook is, however, subject to great uncertainty from both external and domestic risks.

Africa's growth trajectory over the last two decades had raised hopes that its economies would join the ranks of middle- and high-income countries and lift its people from poverty. But growth has not been inclusive, and job creation in high-productivity sectors lagged behind demographic growth. Large shares of the population remain employed in low-productivity jobs in traditional agriculture and informal sector.

African countries have much to gain from improving education to achieve inclusive growth. But many education indicators have stagnated and even deteriorated, and without a rapid acceleration of progress, the continent will be unable to achieve key education commitments by 2030. Dropout and out-of-school rates are higher in Africa than in other world regions. And, if current trends continue, Africa will fail to bring all children to school by 2030. Among African children of primary school age (typically 6–11 years), on average 14.7% were out of school during 2015–18, as were 31.9% of adolescents of lower secondary school age (12–14 years) and 50.2% of youth of upper secondary school age (15–17 years).

The contribution of education to increasing labour productivity growth is limited because of the weak complementarity between human and physical capital. Existing skills and qualifications are not adequately utilised in the labour market. Large shares of employed youth consider their skills mismatched with their

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<sup>7</sup> African Development Bank (AFDB). 2020. African Economic Outlook 2020 – developing Africa's Workforce for the Future. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-economic-outlook-2020>

<sup>8</sup> AFDB. 2021a. African Economic Outlook 2021: From Debt Resolution to Growth: the road ahead for Africa. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-economic-outlook-2021>

jobs, and their education inadequate for work readiness. Employers identify inadequately skilled workforces as a major constraint to their businesses, and to recruitment of the right profiles.

## Development of the ACQF

The African continent is marked by a wide diversity of education and qualifications systems, with different structures and typology of qualifications and limited updated information on qualifications in the public domain. International qualifications related to dynamic professional sectors, technologies and global companies gain ground, but often are not linked with qualifications frameworks and systems. A range of new transversal, digital and green skills are required for people to adapt and be employable in the context of the transformation of work and learning, digitalisation of public and private organisations and demands for a greener and sustainable economy. Migrants and refugees carry potentialities, skills, hope for safer life and work – but often no qualifications documents. Furthermore, continental free trade has started operations in a range of sectors, a process likely to trigger demand for new skills and qualifications and more efficient recognition. The informal sector of the economy shows no signs of abating and there is a vast need for good quality programmes of recognition of prior learning and access to modular skills development opportunities with certification.

The ACQF and the Qualifications Platform (database) will provide a contribution of continental scope to address these issues, complementing and enhancing national policies and systems and regional cooperation on these matters.

The development of the ACQF was launched at an official event held in September 2019 at the headquarters of the AU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This process is steered by the African Union Commission's (AUC) Education Science and Technology (AUC ESTI) directorate, Division for Education, and is technically supported by the European Union's (EU's) 'Skills for Youth Employability Programme', a contribution to the wider AU's Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA).<sup>9</sup>

The activities of the ACQF component run from 2019 to 2022, and aim to:

1. Develop the ACQF policy document, accompanied by an action plan and technical guidelines and supported by a feasibility study;
2. Set an evidence base on qualifications frameworks and systems on the continent, based on research and continuous updates;
3. Support networking of qualifications frameworks institutions and stakeholders; and
4. Development of capacities at national, regional and continental levels, supported by high-quality thematic materials, and instruments including a website and e-learning platform.

The EU has committed to supporting the development of the ACQF, as defined in Action 4 of the Communication – '[Africa-Europe Alliance on Sustainable Investment and Jobs](#)', adopted on 12 September 2018 by the European Commission. This communication was endorsed by all heads of state of the EU, at the [European Council meeting](#) on 18 October 2018.

The ACQF will be the largest of the regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs), as it cooperates with 55 countries and 8 regional economic communities (RECs). It is in fact the only RQF in the world interacting simultaneously with two different levels – national and regional!

Enablers and opportunities of the ACQF relate to the demographic dividend of the continent, projected advances in human development, the significant flagship policies and strategies for continental integration

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<sup>9</sup> SIFA is an initiative of the AU and is implemented through a partnership comprising the EU and Germany (BMZ, the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development), as co-funding partners. In the programme component responsible for development of the ACQF, GIZ partners with the EU Agency European Training Foundation (ETF). The ETF assures thematic and technical steering and coordination of the ACQF component.

related to the African Union's Agenda 2063, but also those strategies promoting green recovery and digital transformation. Most importantly, there is a growing number of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in development and consultation and NQFs approved and advancing in implementation. But the continent is facing important challenges, and the education crisis is one of the most pressing priorities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and brought to light existing distortions and inequalities in all dimensions of human and economic development. As countries and regions are taking measures to begin post-pandemic recovery, wider access to retraining and reskilling will be indispensable to support people's transitions to different jobs and adaptation to new skills requirements. The post-pandemic recovery and "build back better" must bring the world (and Africa) to a better place, in terms of equitable, safe and democratic societies, greener economies, in which participation in the benefits of technology, new learning and work is a commitment of leaders and citizens across the continent and around the world. This is the main agenda wherein the future ACQF should contribute.

## 2 Qualifications and qualifications frameworks in Africa

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in Africa are at different stages of development and implementation. Considering a total of 41 countries included in the data collected by the [ACQF Mapping Study](#), the continent has a higher number of qualifications frameworks (approved, implementation started or implementation advanced) than other larger regions had when they enacted their overarching RQFs. Although thirteen years separate the advent of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the development of the ACQF, it is very useful to note that when the legal base of the EQF was approved (2008), only three countries had NQFs in place and operational (France, Ireland and the United Kingdom).

The African continent has a diverse panorama of qualifications frameworks (national and regional), marked by some dynamism, manifested by starting development of NQFs in some countries, or by the approval of NQF legal basis in other countries and review and renewal of certain aspects of the NQF or the RQF in a range of other countries. The summary overview below should be seen as dynamic; updates from the NQF institutions and ministries will contribute to maintain this information to be accurate and useful for reference.

- Three NQFs at the stage of advanced implementation (and were already reviewed); other NQFs can be included in this category, given their recent developments and review of certain aspects - this is the case of Botswana, Namibia, Seychelles and Zambia.
- Nineteen qualifications frameworks at the stage where the relevant legal base had been approved and implementation had started. A number of these nineteen qualifications frameworks have substantial experience and could be considered to be part of the advanced implementation group
- In seven of these nineteen countries, the existing qualifications frameworks are sectoral, not integrated and inclusive. The majority of such cases are TVET qualifications frameworks (countries highlighted in Table 1). Some of these countries have advanced in elaborating an integrated / comprehensive national qualifications framework, inclusive of all levels of qualifications from all sub-sectors (e.g.: The Gambia, Malawi and Mozambique).
- Eight countries are developing their NQFs, engaging stakeholders and different ministries in the consultation process. Several countries currently at this stage have entered the approval/adoption process.
- Eight countries are undertaking early steps towards the development of an NQF;
- One regional qualifications framework, the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) started implementation, and in 2021 has initiated a process of implementation review.
- One regional qualification framework, the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), had been adopted, though implementation was limited to higher education

qualifications. In 2021 the same region has advanced in developing a regional TVET qualifications framework.

**Table 1:** Qualifications frameworks in Africa by stage of development and implementation - overview (end 2021). Highlighted: countries with qualifications framework of sectoral scope (mostly focused on qualifications of TVET systems)

Stage of NQF development and implementation	Countries
NQF development to be started	Chad, Republic of Congo, São Tomé e Príncipe
NQF in early thinking	Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Union of Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Togo
NQF in development and consultation	Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Madagascar, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Somalia
NQF legal act approved, implementation started	Botswana, Eswatini, Ethiopia, <b>The Gambia</b> , <b>Ghana</b> , Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, <b>Mozambique</b> , <b>Namibia</b> , Nigeria, Rwanda, <b>Senegal</b> , Seychelles, <b>Tanzania</b> , Tunisia, Uganda <b>Zambia</b> , Zimbabwe
NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed	Cape Verde, Mauritius, South Africa Some countries can be added to this category, given their recent developments, e.g.: Botswana, Namibia, Seychelles and Zambia.

Source: Dataset of ACQF Mapping Study

The interplay between emerging RQFs, the various NQFs across Africa and the proposed ACQF will be a critical factor for future work in this area. While NQFs are quite distinct in their orientation and purpose, the potential cooperation and complementarity between the RQFs and the ACQF needs a foundation based on a shared vision, acknowledgement of specific key regional interests and goals, and consideration of economies of scale. Dialogue, consultation and trust-building are essential in shaping the priority functions and operational modes of the ACQF towards NQFs and RQFs in Africa.

### 3 Vision of the ACQF

The ACQF is strongly anchored on key strategies and policies of the African Union (AU), spanning from education to free trade and free movement of people. Stakeholders, NQFs and the African Union Commission (AUC) have high expectations about the expected contribution of the ACQF towards transparency, trust and portability of skills and qualifications. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) becomes operational, stakeholders agree that free trade and free movement will be hampered if the continent does not enact a common framework for comparability of qualifications, facilitating recognition and validation of learning.

#### Vision of the ACQF

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

- *inclusiveness*: across all levels and types of qualifications, all forms and stages of learning and modalities of certification;
- *innovation*: support new developments related to emerging skills, roles and occupations, new technologies and societal demands; and
- *openness*: to participation of all stakeholders and AU member countries, to experience and good practice from Africa and other regions and continents.

To achieve the wider objectives:

- to support comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning;

- to facilitate recognition of learning from different contexts, diplomas and certificates and support mobility (of learners, workers, services);
- to work in cooperation and complementarity with national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and systems and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs), support NQF development and the creation of a common African education and qualifications space; and
- to promote cooperation and mutual understanding, by means of referencing with qualifications frameworks (or systems) in Africa and worldwide.

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

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

The ACQF will cooperate and interact with NQFs, with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the respective RQFs.

### **ACQF in the context of change and transformation**

The ACQF will emerge, develop and evolve in an environment marked by the post-Covid-19 recovery efforts, intertwined with the multiple transitions of our time. The emerging ACQF will face the challenges of economic slowdown and recession triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the significant learning losses as a result of widespread school closures.

The future of work arrived ahead of schedule. At least four mega drivers of change are boosting the dynamics of this transformation and adaptation: digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence; Covid-19; greening of the economy and society; and societal movements. In this context of transformation of work, reskilling and upskilling become urgent, as more workers transition to jobs that are based on a changing mix of tasks and skills. New types of qualifications and of modalities of recognition of learning emerge and the concepts of micro-credentials and digital certificates are becoming part of policies and practices of qualifications systems.

The role of qualifications frameworks in the context of transformation accelerated by the Covid-19 might usefully be unpacked under these three headings:

- recognition (individual learning achievements and newer forms of certification);
- accessibility (NQFs could do more to insist on access as a principle for qualifications to be included); and
- quality assurance of NQFs and constituent qualifications, so that Covid-19 does not present a threat to the quality, reputation or recognition status.

Principles underpinning NQFs may come to be just as important as technical features – fairness, transparency, quality, equality and relevance. Most important is that NQFs, or rather their design, implementation and use by stakeholders, don't make things worse for citizens. NQFs as policy instruments are only one of many that policymakers will need to employ in a coherent response to these wide issues.

### **Scenarios and feasibility of the ACQF**



From the point of view of the ACQF, as an overarching referencing qualifications framework for the whole continent, the landscape found by the Mapping Study of national qualifications frameworks in different stages of development and implementation is favourable for activities geared to cooperation, comparison and eventually referencing between countries' qualifications frameworks and the ACQF. Over twenty countries can be considered for preparatory actions leading to future referencing with the ACQF, and another group of less than ten countries can be candidates, once their NQFs reach the point of starting implementation.

The ACQF, as connector of NQFs and a promoter of trust and of new horizons for African integration and international transparency of skills and qualifications, benefits from a conjunction of opportunities on which to build. The expectations of African countries and citizens are high. The ACQF must respond through its ability to embrace the twin transition (green and digital), to foster inclusion by valuing all forms of learning, to be a catalyst for better qualifications systems and frameworks across the continent and to contribute to transparency and credibility of African education and qualifications in the world.

The scenarios of ACQF were presented to ACQF Advisory Group at two meetings (8 April and 28 July 2021). The proposed titles of each scenario underline its distinctive value:

1. **Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects'** (horizon: 2023)– underscores support to effective networking, experience and knowledge sharing, capacity development and communication. The ACQF website is fundamental to this scenario, and the ACQF is a platform for all countries and RECs on the continent.
2. **Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust'** (horizon: 2026)– beyond the sharing of experiences and communication, this scenario focuses on the referencing of NQFs/RQFs to the ACQF, and eventually use of ACQF levels and label on qualifications of the linked NQF/RQFs.
3. **Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons'** (horizon 2030) – besides being a meta-framework for referencing, the ACQF promotes new qualifications (standards, profiles) of a continental nature, contributes with automatic mutual recognition of qualifications (based on quality assurance and other considerations) and supports digital certificates.

The construction and implementation of the ACQF occurs in a context marked by opportunities and challenges. The design of the ACQF and its supporting Action Plan should carefully consider and enable the virtuous interplay of strengths and weaknesses to leverage opportunities while mitigating challenges.

The proposed broad plan of ten outputs (2022–26) covers the critical aspects and components of the ACQF, from governance to technical foundations, capacity development and cooperation and partnerships with other frameworks globally. This output plan is wider than development, comparison and referencing of qualifications frameworks, as it is oriented to a perspective of impact on transparency, validation and recognition of learning, and its contribution to mobility – the essence of qualifications frameworks working in their eco-system.

The broad output plan includes 2022-2026:

1. ACQF governance setting established and operational
2. ACQF policy and technical document and Action Plan implemented and monitored
3. ACQF Database of qualifications designed / launched, and operations started with pilot countries
4. Skills and qualifications: analysis, intelligence, development
5. NQFs referenced to ACQF, in accordance with ACQF Guidelines
6. Increased number of NQFs at stage 4-5 (approved, implementation started and advanced) in African countries

7. Improved learning validation practices through application of high quality Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credit accumulation and transfer systems, and cooperation with Recognition agencies (bodies)
8. ACQF contributes to better mobility and quality of qualifications in the context of the AfCFTA
9. ACQF Capacity development and awareness raising activities expanded to all countries
10. Dialogue, comparison and cooperation with other regional and national qualifications frameworks in the world

## 4 ACQF Project: overview of progress 2021

The ACQF development process is underway (2019–2022) and is based on evidence and analysis, stakeholders’ participation, political lead of the AUC, awareness-raising, networking and capacity development.

### This process is organised into two phases:

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

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

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

- The process moves from evidence creation to the reflection on options and scenarios for the ACQF as a sustainable policy instrument;
- The draft ACQF policy and technical document reflects the orientations from the discussion with AUC and the ACQF Advisory Group of the scenarios and options for the ACQF.
- Guidelines will accompany the ACQF policy and technical document. ACQF Guidelines will support further implementation of the ACQF and assist countries and REC stakeholders (institutions and practitioners) interacting with ACQF.
- The ACQF capacity development programme will build on a mix of delivery and networking modalities to disseminate information, coach national / regional teams, support a network of trained experts and conduct some research activities.

### Main outputs and progress by end 2021

1. **Baseline analysis and evidence:** ACQF Mapping Study. Completed and pre-publication: November 2020. Final publication: March 2021. Four country reports<sup>10</sup> updated (October 2021).

The full collection of ACQF Mapping reports is composed of 13 national, 3 regional and a comprehensive mapping report – on the state-of-play and perspectives of qualifications frameworks in Africa. The full collection, including 4 national reports updated in 2021 are accessible in the [ACQF website](#).

2. **ACQF Feasibility report** – accessible in 3 languages at the Policy and Guidelines page of the [ACQF website](#). Completed: end June 2021.

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<sup>10</sup> These updated country reports are: Cape Verde, Egypt, Morocco and Mozambique.

This report was presented and discussed at ACQF Advisory Group meeting of 28 July 2021. On the basis of the three scenarios of the ACQF, the feasibility study deepens the analysis of critical dimensions of feasibility, presents a plan of outputs (horizon 2026) and outlines initial reflections on the options for ACQF governance.

**3. ACQF policy document: first draft completed and submitted to ACQF Advisory Group meeting (13/01/2022).**

The first draft was completed in December 2021 and shared with ACQF Advisory Group for discussion, comments, and validation during the upcoming 4th meeting (13 January 2022).

The initial concept and approach to develop the ACQF Policy document was discussed with ACQF Advisory Group at the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of 28 July 2021.

**4. ACQF Guidelines: first draft completed and submitted to ACQF Advisory Group meeting (13/01/2022). Two Guidelines are in early draft status. A team of specialist experts is developing the Guidelines.**

The concept paper on ACQF Guidelines and the themes they address was presented at the ACQF Advisory Group meeting of 28 July 2021.

The set of 10 ACQF Guidelines are the technical foundations accompanying the ACQF policy document. The Guidelines address the ten themes, considered in the context of ACQF:

1. Guideline 1: Learning outcomes
2. Guideline 2: Level descriptors
3. Guideline 3: Referencing of NQF or system to ACQF
4. Guideline 4: Validation and recognition of learning
5. Guideline 5: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF
6. Guideline 6: Registration and databases of qualifications
7. Guideline 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQFs and ACQF
8. Guideline 8: Communication and outreach
9. Guideline 9: Innovation and technology in the context of qualifications, qualifications frameworks and ACQF
10. Guideline 10: qualifications and qualifications frameworks – a systemic view.

Each Guideline is a trio of documents: (1) a synthesis guideline, (2) a technical guideline (this document) and (3) a training module:

- Technical in-depth guideline: This document forms the core of the trio of documents. It will present as a short handbook: for clarification and technical support. This will be used by implementers, practitioners, and other groups
- Synthesis version: This version is a shortened version for policy purposes. It will be used primarily by policy institutions, and other groups, and has a key purpose to provide policy orientation
- Training module: This version will form part of the knowledge base and used for the ACQF Training programme and ACQF e-learning platform.

As instruments of the ACQF, each Guideline:

- Clarifies and deepens key concepts, principles and practices related to the 10 themes;

- Provides a technical orientation for national implementing bodies and stakeholders, especially the lead institutions managing the NQF or system and interacting with the (future) ACQF governing structure and implementation unit;
  - Is oriented to be a reference at both country (NQF or system) and continental (ACQF) levels, and addresses the perspectives and needs of both levels
  - Works in synergy with, and complements, other ACQF guidelines and will be used as a digital tool;
  - Refers to the relevant existing (or planned) African Union policies, instruments, guidelines and other conventions applicable in the domain of qualifications frameworks or systems;
  - Contributes to an AU area of education and qualifications, based on converging elements and recommendations that eventually contribute to continental integration and mutual understanding while respecting the diversity of the national and regional context; and
  - Will evolve and be updated and enriched to reflect new developments, experiences and needs related with the transformation of learning and other drivers.
5. **ACQF governance options – feasibility report.** Started in October, completed and discussed the inception report and discussed the roadmap with AUC Division for Education. Presentation on the roadmap – on the agenda of the ACQF Advisory Group, 4<sup>th</sup> meeting (13/01/2022).
6. **Capacity development programme** – composed of a combination of modalities of learning, notably peer **learning** webinars, support to countries and regions, training programmes, conferences.
- **Peer Learning Webinars (PLWs):** 12 PLWs conducted in 2020-2021. Shared 24 country cases and experiences (NQFs, quality assurance, recognition), and three regional cases - from Africa, Asia, Europe and Middle East. All learning materials, presentations, video learning materials are well organised in the dedicated [webpage](#) of ACQF website. A special library of [video learning materials](#) covering all real NQF cases presented at the PLWs has been created to ease access to this useful resource.
  - **Thematic briefs:** to support self-learning of key issues and topics on the domain of qualifications frameworks. Seven thematic briefs are available at [ACQF website](#).
  - **Support to countries and RECs:** upon demand and building on the ACQF networking, which was established through peer learning webinars and research (ACQF Mapping Study), the ACQF project provides some technical / expert support, differentiated to meet the specific needs and in accordance with the level of development and implementation of the qualifications framework. This line of work has grown in 2021 and these are the main examples of cooperation:
    - **Angola: support to EU project RETFOP (2021):** ACQF developed, upon demand, a reference report on two themes: i) **TVET quality assurance;** ii) **Monitoring and evaluation of NQF / NQS / TVET.** This substantive reference report (in English and Portuguese) takes stock of global experiences and instruments and provides recommendations oriented to country application. The report was presented for a wide audience, at a webinar organised by RETFOP on 8 October 2021, and was uploaded in Capacity4Dev platform of the European Commission at: [Presentation](#) and [Report](#).
    - **Guiné-Bissau:** following the initial dialogue with the EU project RESEN, webinars were held with the working group facilitated by RESEN coordination to define needs, the approach and milestones. In October 2021 ACQF delivered the Baseline Mapping Report (unpublished) supporting the initial reflections and outlining a roadmap towards the NQF. This report was presented by RESEN at the regular donors’ coordination meeting on 11 November 2021.

- **Cameroun:** based on the dialogue and analysis of the ACQF Mapping report, started reflection with two ministries (Secondary Education and Higher Education) and the World Bank project on possibilities of cooperation with ACQF.
- **SADC Qualifications Framework:** high level of interest to cooperate with ACQF on capacity development for all SADC countries and a review of the state-of-play of implementation of SADCQF and recommendations for improvements going forward. In 2020 ACQF delivered the “Mapping Study report” (3 languages) and in 2021 the Report of “Review of implementation and Way Forward”. The latter was discussed at the meeting of SADCQF Technical Committee for Certification and Accreditation (TCCA), on 25/11/2021. Follow-up steps are planned for 2022.

## 7. Networking

- **With African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN):** partnership for AQVN programme of knowledge-sharing webinars (five events conducted between July and November 2021. Presented and discussed 16 experiences and cases – from Africa and Europe).
  - **With African Curriculum Association (ACA) and CESA Curriculum Cluster:** partnership in the development and conduction of the African School Curriculum Mapping Study. Report completed on 14/12/2021. Synthesis-infographic and dissemination webinar with stakeholders – indicatively in February 2022.
8. [ACQF Website](#) – launched **early** October and officially presented at the “Africa Creates Jobs Conference” (AUC-AUDA) on 3 November 2021.

## 5 ACQF Project: overview of main outputs and milestones 2022

In 2022 the ACQF project will complete the planned activities and deliver the main outputs, listed below:

1. **ACQF policy document.** Milestone: June 2022
2. **ACQF Guidelines: full set (synthesis, technical and training modules).** Milestone: July 2022.  
**Testing of some Guidelines with pilot countries** – this applies especially to Guidelines 2 and 3.
3. **Feasibility Study on ACQF governance options.** Milestone: June 2022
4. **Study on complementarities ACQF-AfCFTA.** Milestone: July 2022
5. **SADC Qualifications Framework:** completion of study and follow-up cooperation. Milestone: June.
6. **Handbook on competency-based training.** Milestone: November 2022.
7. **Capacity development programme:**
  - ACQF Peer Learning Webinars: thematic focus on Recognition of Prior Learning (three webinars). Period: February-March.
  - ACQF in-depth training programme: two 5-days programmes. April and July
  - ACQF Conferences: May and September (to be confirmed)
  - Learning Management System (e-learning): February
  - Development of thematic briefs on new themes (e.g.: RPL, common profiles of qualifications, involvement of stakeholders from the world of work in NQFs and ACQF)