NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – TÜRKİYE

1. INTRODUCTION

Türkiye adopted its NQF, the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF), in 2015. It has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certificates. The Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), collectively designated the Responsible Bodies, jointly coordinate and implement the framework. Türkiye is a member of the EQF Advisory Group and participates in the European Higher Education Area, often called the Bologna process. It referenced its framework to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and self-certified to the framework of qualifications for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2017. The TQF has reached the operational stage.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 Policy context

Türkiye signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 1964 and a customs union was established in 1995. The European Council granted Türkiye candidate country status in 1999, leading to the opening of accession negotiations in 2005, although these are currently paused. In recent times, Turkey's economy has experienced significant swings between booms and slumps. GDP grew by 8.5% in 2010 and 6% in 2015, then fell to 0.9% in 2019, recovering to 5.2% growth in 2022. Inflation has been very high over the past two years. The employment rate is significantly lower than for most EU member states at 51% in 2021 (EUROSTAT). It decreased slightly between 2020 and 2022, compared to the recovery seen in most EU countries. Unemployment remains relatively high, at 10% in 2023, according to Labour Force Survey but has improved since the COVID pandemic which struck in 2020.

Türkiye's Economic Reform Programme 2020–2022 specifies measures for VET reform, notably updating curricula, including digital content. The Education Vision 2030 strategy aims to raise the VET sector's performance by measures including establishing new centres of excellence, enhance VET's responsiveness to support innovation, modernising teacher training, and increasing access and inclusiveness.

The Ministry of National Education's Strategic Plan (2015–19), the Vocational and Technical Education Strategy Paper and Action Plan (2014–18), the National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014–18) and the National Employment Strategy of Türkiye (2014–23) comprise the framework within which Türkiye pursues VET reform, including the implementation of the TQF.

The Employment Strategy and its Action Plan[1] attribute a core role to the Turkish Qualifications Framework in strengthening the link between education and employment and the quality of the VET system.

Türkiye's lifelong learning strategy and Action Plan (2014-2018) paid particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond the formal education system and promoted Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL). In 2022, the Procedures and Principles on Recognition of Prior Learning and Quality Assurance (Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA) were published[2].They reflect the principles of the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, including the four stages of identification, documentation, assessment, and validation.

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[1] http://www.uis.gov.tr/Media/Books/UIS-en.pdf
[2] December 2021 the procedural basis was accepted by the TQF Council.
https://uluslararasi.yok.gov.tr/Documents/avrupa-yuksekogretim-alani-ile-uyumlasma-projesi/documents/onceki-ogrenmelerin-taninmasi-kalite-guvencesinin-saglanmasina-usul-esaslar.pdf

The TQF Strategic Document of 2021[3] defines the priorities that are focused on strengthening the impact of the TQF. Key messages include:

- only when qualifications are finally and firmly placed within the framework can the benefits of TQF begin to be realised. The more qualifications that are brought into the framework, the greater the credibility of those qualifications and the framework as an instrument, and the greater the incentive for other qualifications to be included in the framework.
- the potential for increasing access to programmes, for the recognition and certification of learning regardless of its context, as well as for improving retention and completion rates of learners, are some of the most important intended benefits of the TQF. Access, progression, and recognition of all forms of learning are shared priorities of the coordinating authorities i.e., the CoHE, MoNE and VQA, and are also reflected in national policies and strategies.
- the implementation of learning outcomes approaches, and more generally of a comprehensive NQF such as the Turkish Qualifications Framework, is often described as a 'paradigm shift'. Such reforms are comprehensive and fundamental and not only require significant time and effort to implement, but they also require significant on the ground support in terms of guidance and training for the individuals and bodies responsible for their implementation.
- like the most successful NQFs, the TQF needs to be adopted and embraced not just by the Responsible Bodies, but by their stakeholders and ultimately by society more generally, including learners, employers, trades unions, professional associations.

The CoHE, MoNE, and VQA have prepared secondary legislation on their qualifications to support their inclusion in the TQF. The CoHE has evaluated the use of the TQF logo on university diplomas and has developed procedures and principles for using the TQF logo on documents such as transcripts and diploma supplements. MoNE has been developing a key document for quality assuring qualifications. The TQF Strategic Document was developed to raise stakeholder awareness of the TQF and to encourage them to use it.

The most important function of the TQF is to compare and classify qualifications within its eight levels, based on learning outcomes, regardless of the learning environment where they have been obtained. The TQF focuses on the creation of progression opportunities between different types of qualifications. Like other qualification frameworks, the TQF thus helps to establish equivalence between qualifications acquired both through formal education and via prior learning. Thus, the TQF supports lifelong learning policies and recognition of new learning models emerging in the post-COVID era, and facilitates the certification of individuals, including refugees, to become part of the qualified labour force.

2.2   NQF legal basis

The TQF was formally established by the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles on the Implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework, adopted by the Council of Ministers via Decision 2015/8213, and published in the Official Journal of 19 November 2015.

A second key legal act is the Regulation on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to be included in the TQF, adopted in 2018. Some institutional arrangements predate the TQF legislation. The Vocational Qualifications Authority Law no 5544 (2006) was amended in 2011 to adapt it to NQF developments, notably designating VQA the responsible body for developing and maintaining the NQF.

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[3] https://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tqf-strategy-paper-i114.html

Quality assurance of qualifications and consistency in the use of the TQF and the implementation of qualifications in the framework are key objectives of recent legislation[4].

Legislation includes:[5]

- Principles and Procedures for the Identification of the Existing Qualification Types, Determining New Qualification Types and Updating and Cancellation of Qualification Types.

- Principles and Procedures for Updating, Modification and Cancellation of Qualifications.

- Principles and Procedures Regarding the Publication of Qualifications and Their Use by Training or Certification Bodies.

- Principles and Procedures for the Creation, Implementation, and Updating of the Qualifications Database.

- Principles and Procedures for the Update of the Turkish Qualifications Framework.

- Principles and Procedures on Recognition and Quality Assurance of Prior Learning.

3. NQF OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS

3.1 NQF objectives

The TQF has been designed as a single integrated structure for the classification of qualifications. It includes all quality-assured qualifications achieved through all education and training programmes including primary, secondary, and higher education, special needs education and continuing training. It also recognises outcomes achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal and informal environments.

The TQF's objectives are to:

- provide a clear and consistent means of describing, classifying, and comparing qualifications.
- provide one integrated framework which includes all quality-assured qualifications (achieved in general, vocational, and academic education and training programmes and in other learning environments).
- improve qualifications continuously so that the system can provide appropriate recognition of qualifications achieved in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts.
- contribute to training so that individuals are employable and equipped with defined and measurable qualifications, and so help reduce unemployment.
- strengthen institutional cooperation among all parties, primarily awarding bodies, industry, and social partners.
- provide a benchmark for recognition in Türkiye of foreign qualifications and for recognition of Turkish

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[4] Regulation on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to Be Included in the Turkish Qualifications Framework has been published in the Official Journal on 25 March 2018 http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/the-regulation-on-the-quality-assurance-of-qualifications-to-be-included-in-the-turkish-qualifications-framework-i18.html;
The Principles and Procedures for the Inclusion of Qualifications into the Turkish Qualifications Framework has been approved on 28 November 2019; http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/the-principles-and-procedures-for-the-inclusion-of-qualifications-into-the-turkish-qualifications-framework-i80.html ;
The Principles and Procedures for objections to decisions relating to TQF http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/turkiye-yeterlilikler-cercevesinin-uygulanmasina-iliskin-verilen-kararlar-hakkinda-yapilacak-itirazlarda-izlenecek-usul-ve-esaslar-i66.html
Procedures and Principles for Use of TQF Logo http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/turkiye-yeterlilikler-cercevesi-logosunun-kullanimina-iliskin-usul-ve-esaslar-i65.html
Procedures and Principles Regarding Recognition of Prior Learning and Providing Quality Assurance önceki öğrenmelerin taninmasi ve kalite güvencesinin sağlanmasina ilişkin usul ve esaslar (yok.gov.tr)

[5] All the legislation can be found at https://www.tyc.gov.tr/yayinlar?kategoriId=3a44289d-519a-4745-b9fd-2e27da2813ad

qualifications abroad and serve as an instrument of comparison.

3.2   NQF functions

Main functions of the TQF are to strengthen trust and improve access to qualifications through formal, non-formal and informal learning in Türkiye; integrate the qualifications system better and improve the recognition of Turkish Qualifications and use the TQF to recognize foreign qualifications. This should be seen in the context of Türkiye's efforts to raise the participation in education and lifelong learning and attainment of the population.

The broad infrastructure of the TQF is in place, notably enabling regulations, policies, and procedures such as the Qualification Type Specifications of the Responsible Bodies, the quality assurance requirements of TQF and the Quality Assurance Papers of the Responsible Bodies.

One of the key stages in the implementation process of the TQF is the inclusion of quality-assured qualifications in the framework. In accordance with the TQF Regulation and the EQF Recommendation, the process of placing qualifications in the framework should be carried out through transparent procedures. "Procedures and Principles for Including Qualifications in the Turkish Qualifications Framework" were developed in February 2020 to establish the basic criteria for qualifications to be included in the NQF and ensure transparent execution of the process. Within these Procedures and Principles, three criteria must be met for a qualification to be placed in the TQF:

- the qualification must be listed in the Turkish Qualifications Database (TYVT).

- the qualification form must be compatible with the relevant qualification type specification.

- the qualification must have undergone quality assurance.

Based on these criteria, the application for the TQF placement of the Vocational Qualification Certificate for Steel Welders by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (MYK) was evaluated in line with the Procedures and Principles during a meeting of the TQF Board on 19 November 2020. Unanimously, the decision was made to place the qualification at Level 3 of the NQF. The Vocational Qualification Certificate for Steel Welders became the first qualification to be placed in the TQF. The goal of the 10-year-long efforts has been to place quality-assured qualifications in the TQF. Therefore, the initiation of the placement of qualifications in the TQF is a significant milestone in the TQF process.

During the reporting period, qualifications that were evaluated and deemed suitable during the TQF Board meetings were placed in the framework. At the time of writing, 500 qualifications have now been placed in the TQF, 358 of which are VQA qualifications, while 142 are higher education qualifications. In accordance with the TQF Regulation, all qualifications in Türkiye (such as diplomas, certificates, Craftsmanship Certificates, Vocational Qualification Certificates, etc.) and general information about these qualifications are provided in both Turkish and English on the Turkish Qualifications Database (portal.tyc.gov.tr) and are regularly updated.

The Database has been established to identify qualifications under the responsibility of different institutions, prepare and record information about qualifications, and share it with the public. Currently, there are a total of 30,327 qualifications in the Database, with 611 under the responsibility of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), 930 under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoNE), and 28,786 under the responsibility of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE). Access to qualifications from 204 higher education institutions is also available through the Database.

4.   LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

4.1   NQF structure and level descriptors

The TQF has 8 levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. Its level descriptors are described in terms of learning outcomes and use the domains Knowledge, Skills, and Competence.

Knowledge is defined as theoretical and/or factual knowledge requiring comprehension of facts, principles, theories, and practices related to an area of work or learning.

Skills is defined as "utilisation of knowledge" and "problem solving", which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive, and creative thinking and dexterity, methods, materials, tools, and instruments acquired in an area of work or learning.

Competence is defined as use of knowledge and skills in an area of work or learning by taking responsibility and/or displaying autonomy, determination, and satisfaction of learning requirements.

4.2   NQF scope and coverage

The TQF primarily includes:

- qualifications awarded under the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), spanning its respective Directorates for Basic Education, Special Education and Guidance Services, Secondary Education, Vocational and Technical Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Education.
- qualifications awarded under the mandate of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) by the 274 authorised certification bodies (frequently called by their acronym ACBs).
- higher education qualifications awarded under the coordination and supervision of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

In July 2023, 500 qualifications were registered in the TQF, under the responsibility of CoHE and VQA. MoNE has not yet proposed any qualifications for placement in the TQF.

Qualification types enable the categorisation of different qualifications which are placed at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations.

An example of a qualification type is the Level 5 Associate Diploma, offered in post-secondary or higher VET, where Türkiye has significant provision. Universities and colleges (MYOs) offer Level 5 Associate Degrees, which can be either general or more vocational in orientation. These fall within the remit of the Council of Higher Education.

Another qualification type at Level 5 is the Vocational Qualification Certificate, awarded by the industry-linked Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs).

A type at Level 4 is the High School Diploma, usually awarded to students on successful completion performance of four years' upper secondary vocational or technical high school, or sometimes at vocational education centres, multi-programme high schools and private vocational schools.

The Master Certificate is awarded to those successfully completing an apprenticeship programme. There are several qualification types in the TQF which have been updated recently after discussions with the responsible bodies. Types have been identified with qualification type descriptors[6.] The CoHE type descriptor was updated in 2022.

In time, the TQF will include other qualifications awarded under the mandate of certain responsible bodies. Currently, the TQF database includes 51 other qualifications types which are not yet formally included in the TQF

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[6] https://tyc.gov.tr/yayinlar?kategoriId=17ea6ce7-8885-4f2d-aaa4-174a0833a09c&search=

i.e., many qualifications are developed and used but not yet formally part of the TQF. Currently, this figure of qualifications in the database but not in the TQF approaches 30,150.

Micro-credentials exist in Türkiye, in the form of some VQA qualifications or course completion certificates. They are also being developed in higher education. Further, there is a huge set of modules used to support non-formal learning licensed by the Lifelong Learning Department of the Ministry of National Education. A few of these smaller VQA qualifications are already in the TQF, but most are not yet in the framework. The term micro-credential is not used as a qualifications type or overarching name for several types and is not seen as necessary.

Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF)

4.3   Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards

Learning outcomes underpin the TQF. The TQF regulation specifies that qualifications that will be included in the framework must be designed in learning outcomes so that qualifications are transparent and comparable.

Outcomes provide a common language for describing learning independently of context. They are also central to achieving improved understanding by employers, advisers, and learners of the value and relevance of learning.

Modules within MONE's VET programmes are all defined in learning outcomes. However, MoNE VET programmes do not have yet separate qualification specifications defined by learning outcomes. This situation has created a challenge in populating the qualifications database.

VQA is the competent authority for preparing national occupational standards and national qualifications. Qualifications under VQA's mandate are based on occupational standards and learning outcomes.

General education qualifications developed under MoNE's mandate are not always defined by learning outcomes.

In higher education, all qualifications are based on learning outcomes. There are precise outcome statements for specific programme types by level and academic or professional orientation in the Turkish Qualifications Database.

4.4   Quality assurance arrangements

All qualifications that are part of the TQF must be quality-assured. A general requirement, already mentioned, is that any qualification proposed for inclusion must be written in learning outcomes.

In 2018, a regulation specifying the criteria for placing a qualification in the TQF was adopted[7]. It stipulates the following conditions:

a) a qualification form is prepared and approved.
b) valid and reliable assessment and evaluation processes are conducted.
c) certification processes are conducted in a transparent and impartial way.
d) the processes related to the qualifications are subject to self-assessment and external evaluation.
e) units, teams, or bodies conducting the external evaluation are subject to regular review.
f) improvement activities are carried out in the light of the findings of self-assessment and external evaluation.
g) stakeholder involvement.
h) processes related to qualifications are implemented based on explicit and measurable objectives, criteria, and guidelines.
i) allocation of sufficient and appropriate resources for all processes are maintained.
j) feedback mechanisms are established and implemented.
k) electronic access to the outcomes of all processes is maintained.

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for development of qualifications under its mandate. MoNE has launched a curriculum reform in secondary education, for both general and vocational and technical schools. Vocational curricula are modularised, and MoNE has a database of more than 3,500 modules that are also used for the licensing and certification of adult learning.

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[7] https://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/the-regulation-on-the-quality-assurance-of-qualifications-to-be-included-in-the-turkish-qualifications-framework-i18.html

Although curricula are advanced, most initial vocational qualifications are not yet utilised and fully learning outcomes-based. Modules based on learning outcomes are used for learning, but they are not separately assessed and often lack an assessment component.

VQA accredits the Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs), which conduct assessment, evaluation, and certification of candidates for the Vocational Qualification Certificate type mentioned above. These ACBs are first accredited by Türkak, the Turkish accreditation agency which deals with accrediting conformity with international industry and service standards, using the ISO 17024 standard on personnel certification.

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) coordinates and supervises development of higher education qualifications awarded by Higher Education institutes. The higher education qualifications framework is a sub-framework within the TQF and is already functioning. National working groups for different fields of learning define common outcomes as a guideline for qualification and curriculum developers. Additionally, the Higher Education Quality Council was established within the framework of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation, published in the Official Gazette on 23 July 2015. It evaluates the quality levels of higher education institutions' educational and research activities, as well as their administrative services, based on national and international quality standards. It carries out the processes of internal and external quality assurance, accreditation, and authorization of independent external evaluation agencies. The primary responsibilities of the Higher Education Quality Council include:

- conducting external evaluations of higher education institutions.
- managing the processes of accreditation agency authorization and recognition.
- ensuring the internalisation and dissemination of a quality assurance culture in higher education institutions.

5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The Ministry of National Education initiated the TQF's development in 2005. Since the VQA was established, it has managed and coordinated the framework, cooperating most closely with the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education.

Each of these three entities is responsible for the quality assurance of the qualifications under its authority.

For higher education, the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council of Türkiye (THEQC) was founded in 2015 as a public legal entity with administrative and financial autonomy, with the aim of evaluating the quality levels of higher education institutions' education and research activities and administrative services in accordance with the national and international quality standards. THEQC uses the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in HE. TQF Quality Assurance Criteria are fully compatible with the ESG and EQF Quality Assurance Principles.

Quality assurance for qualifications outside the scope of MoNE, CoHE, higher education institutions and the VQA will be ensured by the respective institutions and organizations specified in related legislation.

There are two bodies which oversee and determine implementation of the TQF, the TQF Coordination Council and the TQF Council. VQA houses the TQF Secretariat that supports both councils.

The TQF *Coordination* Council is the highest decision-making body. It consists of the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of National Education, the President of the Council of Higher Education, and the Director of the Vocational Qualifications Authority.

The TQF Council is a technical body which consists of twenty-two members, composed of:

- 5 members from MoNE, all of whom are heads of the Ministry's Directorates.
- 4 members assigned from CoHE, plus 1 Executive Board member, 1 university dean by rotation, 2 THEQC board members, and 1 member representing the National Student Council (9 total).
- 3 members from VQA, one of whom is the vice president.
- 1 member from the Union of Chambers and Exchange Commodities of Türkiye.
- 1 member from the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen.
- 1 member each from the three largest confederations of trades unions.
- 1 member each from the education unions within the trade union confederations.
- 1 member from the largest employers' confederation.

The TQF Strategic Document further lists 56 organisations, consulted as secondary stakeholders.[8]

According to the TQF Regulation, a TQF Consultation Committee with broad participation of relevant stakeholders should convene annually as a negotiation platform to evaluate TQF progress and to enable stakeholders to present their views. The members of the TQF Consultation Committee are identified and invited by the TQF Council.

The TQF Strategic Document states that efforts need to be made to involve learner representatives in the TQF structures.

5.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The TQF Council prepares the action plans for TQF implementation and a communication strategy to raise awareness about the TQF. It prepares principles, procedures, and criteria for issues such as quality assurance of the TQF, the Qualifications Database, progress routes, credit accumulation and transfer, validation of non-formal and informal learning, updating, modification and withdrawal of qualifications.

The TQF Coordination Council evaluates and approves proposals for procedures, principles, and decisions submitted by the TQF Council.

The Turkish Qualifications Framework Department within the VQA has acted as the TQF Secretariat since 2016, in line with the Vocational Qualifications Authority Act. The Secretariat comprises the head of unit, four experts and a secretary, who are VQA staff. The staff of the Secretariat is supported by temporary national and international experts, where and when needed.

The Secretariat:

- assists the technical and administrative tasks of the Coordination Council and TQF Council.
- drafts action plans, annual work plans and activity reports under the management of the Council.
- ensures the implementation of the communication strategy.
- develops and maintains the qualifications database.
- prepares or performs background research, draft procedures.
- carries out other tasks requested by the Chairman of the Council

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[8] Annex B TQF Stakeholders of the TQF Strategic Document p 26-27 https://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tqf-strategy-paper-i114.html

Labour market stakeholders - employers, trade unions, and employment services - have a strong representation in TQF management structures. They play an active role in all TQF activities and participate in all decision-making processes and have contributed to setting the criteria for the inclusion of qualifications in the TQF and other quality assurance criteria.

However, the use of the TQF by labour market stakeholders could be strengthened further, particularly at grassroots level. Türkiye has a system of sectoral committees[9] that play an important role in the national vocational qualifications system run by the VQA. Sectoral committees are tripartite structures with state, employer, and trades unions representation.

In Türkiye, occupational standards are developed on demand. If an organisation recognises the need for an occupational standard, it can propose to develop a standard, and after approval can receive methodological support from VQA. The Sector Committees are responsible for checking the validity of the occupational standards and vocational qualifications for public bodies, workers and employers and prepare advisory notes.[10]

Education and training institutions and providers develop or update their quality assurance mechanisms in line with the TQF Quality Assurance criteria. They also update existing curricula based on the TQF Level Descriptors and TQF Qualification Type Specifications. Moreover, they are developing mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with the TQF.

The TQF Strategic Document concludes that if the TQF is really going to act as the country's national framework for lifelong learning, it needs to become all-pervasive. Like the most successful NQFs, it needs to be adopted and embraced not just by the responsible national authorities, but also by their stakeholders and ultimately by society more generally, including learners, employers, trades unions, professional associations, and so on.

The TQF Strategic Document identifies several actions to support this 'internalisation of the TQF". Such actions use the TQF both strategically in high level policy making and more practically through thematic and expert work, including representatives from relevant organisations, beyond the current members of the TQF Council.

Thought should be given to how the TQF Database can be deployed more effectively to support professionals in guidance and counselling, curriculum developers, and to reach the public.

6. RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

6.1 Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The TQF Regulation includes provision for validation of non-formal and informal Learning (VNFIL), stipulating that all qualifications included in the TQF can be obtained through VNFIL. Learners should be able to use validation to access programmes, sit exams or take other assessments, secure exemptions, obtain certification of units, and accumulate and transfer credits.

Validation legislation has been updated, notably the October 2017 regulation on principles and implementation of VNFIL, regarding accreditation, measurement and evaluation, and the March 2018 revisions to the regulation on secondary education, which allows for use of validation in the sector.

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[9] http://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/sektor-komiteleri

[10] See VQA booklet: https://www.myk.gov.tr/images/articles/UYEP/MYK_Kitapcigi/vqa_booklet.pdf

The 2014-2018 Lifelong Learning Strategy Document promoted extensive use of VNFIL, including via EU projects. Piloting is also advancing through Erasmus projects such as the EQF-oriented assessment tools for prior learning in adult education, coordinated by the Çorum Public Education Centre.

In January 2019, VQA published a Turkish version of the European Guidelines on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning[11]. The TQF Council developed a procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with the TQF regulation by the end of 2021[12]. It follows the logic of the European Guidelines. The responsible bodies - VQA, MoNE and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) - will be responsible for applying these general principles and procedures for the qualifications within their respective remits.

VQA has organised and supported the implementation of a VNFIL system to award national vocational qualifications to adults; the Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs) conduct the assessment, evaluation, and certification of such candidates. The involvement in VNFIL of stakeholders such as employer organisations, through their presence in the ACBs, has created visibility and trust in the VQA qualifications and the validation process.

Validation has been given a huge quantitative boost by the law *requiring* certification for 204 designated occupations. More than 2.3 million certificates have been issued so far, of which 1.9 million have been awarded for qualifications in occupations defined hazardous[13]. This use of validation as a compulsory measure to meet legal requirements differentiates Turkish practice from the generally voluntary European approach to VNFIL, in which it is the learner who initiates the process and seeks certification or other validation.[14]

Despite the huge number of people certified so far, female participation in validation is only 6%, albeit this represents a small rise since 2020[15]. This is because most validation has been of workers employed in the 204 occupations defined in the regulation, which tend to be male-dominated. Steps to improve access for women, and other categories such as migrants, are being taken by VQA, the ACBs and MONE, which are developing new validation arrangements.

As indicated above, the MoNE Department of Lifelong Learning has established a database of modular programmes to support non-formal learning, which are also used for the certification of adult learning[16]. Ensuring that these modularised programmes are obtainable through validation will widen the possibilities for lifelong learning, as it will allow for recognition of part qualifications.

VNFIL was legally introduced to the Turkish higher education system in 2011 but there has been only slow progress in that sector. To realise a fully national system for VNFIL, CoHE is expected to align with the initiatives pursued by the VQA and MoNE. Five universities have become ACBs.

The focus has been in past years to establish a functioning system of validation and it is time to change the focus from the system to the individuals who would benefit from validation. This requires more investment in guidance, identification, and documentation, and financial support for applicants from disadvantaged groups. A challenge for the coming years will be to make validation equally accessible to other groups such as women, migrants, and unemployed people. Steps in this direction are being taken, both by VQA and the ACBs, and through the new validation arrangements developed by MoNE.

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[11] http://tyc.gov.tr/indir/yaygin-ve-serbest-ogrenmelerin-dogrulanmasi-rehberi-i22.html

[12] https://uluslararasi.yok.gov.tr/Documents/avrupa-yuksekogretim-alani-ile-uyumlasma-projesi/documents/onceki-ogrenmelerin-taninmasi-kalite-guvencesinin-saglanmasina-usul-esaslar.pdf

[13] https://portal.myk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_istatistik

[14] Common European Principles 2004
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/etv/Information_resources/EuropeanInventory/publications/EC_common_principles_validation_20040303.pdf

[15] Draft VNFIL inventory report, ETF 2023 not yet published

[16] Kurs Programları (meb.gov.tr)

The importance of working together to achieve a well-developed system of validation and on the ground implementation is pivotal. It needs to be embraced not just by the responsible bodies, but by their stakeholders and ultimately by society in general, including learners, employers, trades unions, and professional associations.

6.2   Credit systems

One of the main goals of the TQF is to enhance the opportunities for transition between different types of qualification and create a system more easily accessible to individuals. To achieve this goal, the authorities aim to establish transparent credit values that serve as indicators of learning outcomes for each qualification placed in the TQF, and to establish a single credit transfer system for horizontal and vertical progression among qualifications based on credit.

Accordingly, guiding documents on credits have been prepared within the TQF, training sessions have been organised for the NQF management structures, and a procedure and principle for the accreditation of qualifications have been developed and brought to the approval stage.

Currently, diverse arrangements apply to the different qualifications types. For qualifications falling within its remit, the Ministry of Education uses a credit system based on ECVET. In higher education, both CoHE and the universities use ECTS. VQA is looking into developing a credit system for the vocational qualifications it regulates. There is a difficulty here, however, as so far these qualifications are only based on assessment so there are no real nominal learning hours.

The TQF Council proposes an evaluation and credit system associated with workload that will allow credit accumulation and transfer. The proposed metric for the qualifications to be included in the TQF is 60 credits as the value ascribed to a learning period of 1500 - 1800 hours. This approach complies with both ECTS and ECVET. The regulating bodies will determine the credit range of the qualification types and the credit values of the qualifications.

6.3   Promoting lifelong learning

There is a broad policy and social imperative to encourage and support lifelong learning in Türkiye, to fulfil the needs of individuals and society. The TQF is widely seen as central to enabling lifelong learning.

Türkiye's lifelong learning strategy and Action Plan (2014-2018) paid particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond the formal education system and promoted VNFIL. However, there is not yet a new strategy for lifelong learning. The 2023 Education Vision to increase the quality of, and access to, lifelong learning programmes includes these measures:

■   updated lifelong learning programmes for vocational, social, and cultural skills; examination of how societal awareness of lifelong learning processes can be improved.
■   a National Lifelong Learning Monitoring System, which contains data from institutions and organizations operating in the field of lifelong learning, will be established.
■   recognition of certificates awarded for participation in lifelong learning and non-formal education will be widened.

A growing number of qualifications in adult learning have been brought into the TQF portal, in particular course completion certificates and VQA certificates. They will become part of the TQF in the coming years. Here we see that Turkey is part of an international trend of going beyond qualifications for formal education.

The wider debate on including micro-credentials, such as the 3,743 modular programmes offered by the Lifelong Learning Department of MoNE or those that are outside the scope of the Responsible Bodies is still open.

However, the existing TQF legislation addresses concerns regarding the inclusion of qualifications of different types and characteristics in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). For example, the TQF Quality

Assurance Regulation sets minimum criteria for all qualifications to be included in the TQF. This allows the framework to incorporate different types of qualifications, such as micro-qualifications, regardless of the respective awarding body's status, where the learning took place, or the method of delivery. The priority is that quality assurance criteria are always met, enabling the TQF to accommodate various types of qualifications.

7. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

7.1. Stage of implementation

Principal features of the TQF such as its structure, level descriptors and domains are long-established. Key functions, notably learning outcomes and quality assurance approaches, are already functioning and accepted and applied by stakeholders. Governance structures, and the principal working methods and instruments such as databases, are established.

The TQF is a reference point for the design of new, and revision and renewal of existing, qualifications, and the allocation of qualifications to levels. There are nearly 30,702 qualifications, the great majority outcomes-based, already published in the TQF Database[17]. Inclusion of qualifications in the TQF itself started in November 2021. Currently, 500 qualifications have been allocated to the levels, 142 under the responsibility of higher education institutions and 358 under the responsibility of the VQA.

The implementation of the TQF is progressing at different speeds in the different subsectors of the qualifications system. Overall, though, the TQF is in the operational stage.

7.2 Indicating RQF/NQF levels

Qualifications integrated into the TQF are entitled to have the TQF logo and TQF level displayed on their diplomas or certificates. To determine the rules for the use of the TQF logo, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has prepared legislation, which has been shared with higher education institutions. Additionally, to inform the public about this matter, a major launch event was organised in 2023, featuring the use of the TQF logo on graduation certificates, transcripts, and diploma supplements for higher education qualifications integrated into the TQF. A promotional film has also been prepared and distributed.

7.3 NQF dissemination

A communication strategy for the TQF was adopted in 2017. It aims to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are equipped with the knowledge and awareness necessary to support implementation of the TQF, so that they can develop the requisite ownership, advocacy, social mobilization, and commitment to achieve long-term results in the recognition and implementation of the framework. In the document, internal and external target groups are defined, key messages developed, and communication means and actions defined.

The TQF website contains promotional materials and has an active news section that is updated often. Events are organised and publicised throughout the country to raise awareness of the TQF.

Various events were organised domestically and abroad in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, TQF promotional events were organised in 7 Turkish cities. Further, a major conference on the TQF was held in Istanbul in October 2022. Its participants spanned the country's key education and training and labour market actors and stakeholders. Experts from 17 other countries provided international experiences and viewpoints.

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[17] Turkish Qualifications Database https://portal.tyc.gov.tr/

A TQF National Conference was organised in January 2023. It evaluated the framework's overall progress while also guiding technical work on RPL, levelling of qualifications, quality assurance etc.

Training in credit systems was organised for TQF Board members and broader stakeholders during 2023.

An event to promote use of the TQF logo was held in Ankara in June 2023. Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Council of Higher Education, Higher Education Quality Board, TQF Management Structures, and higher education institutions participated.

A manual has been prepared to provide detailed information to stakeholders about developing qualifications.

The TQF website itself has been improved, and all essential publications related to the TQF and EQF are published there.

It is evident from these activities that the Responsible Bodies place a high priority on communicating the TQF. A target must be to embed the TQF in the daily practices and language of jobs, vacancies, information, guidance and counselling and education and training provision.

7.4   Qualifications databases and registers

The TQF database http://portal.tyc.gov.tr aims to bring together in one site all qualifications and to ensure that these qualifications are comparable with each other and with their national and international counterparts on the digital platform. The portal is for use by all TQF stakeholders, including intended beneficiaries such as students, teachers, guidance professionals and employers.

As reported earlier, the TQF database contains, at the time of publication, 30,702 entries of which 500 have also been placed in the TQF. Of those placed in the TQF since November 2021, they are distributed as follows:

- 10 L2 VQA Vocational Qualifications
- 154 L3 VQA Vocational Qualifications
- 139 L4 VQA Vocational Qualifications
- 46 L5 VQA Vocational Qualifications
- 117 Bachelor Degrees /Undergraduate Diplomas at L6
- 9 L6 VQA Vocational Qualifications

Most of the qualifications in the database are from Higher Education. Higher Education Institutions are autonomous awarding bodies, and so can issue their own qualifications.

931 qualifications awarded under the MoNE have been registered in the database, but these have not yet been brought into the TQF. All qualifications included in the Turkish qualifications database are recorded in the database with the predicted TQF and EQF levels. Therefore, there is no qualification that is not levelled.

There are no strict rules concerning the updating of qualifications data.

The database already offers plenty of information on qualifications to end users, while individuals can contact VQA directly with queries. The database is fully compatible with Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation, as it has been developed using EU grants. All the fields in Annex VI have been covered and are compulsory for registering qualifications. The database can be searched in Turkish or English.

Learning outcomes descriptions are recorded in full. Diploma supplement information is included for relevant qualifications.

The database is linked to the Europass portal, but the data is not yet accessible on Europass itself. The introduction of European Learning Model (ELM) version 3 to update the software of the portal in order to re-establish links with QDR and Europass is planned. This will also allow widening of the database and make it more

useful for supporting curricula development and career guidance and counselling. This may also open opportunities for developing new user interfaces.

7.5 Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications

Türkiye has a functioning system for the assessment and recognition of foreign academic qualifications at associate degree, and bachelor's and master's levels, which is supported by legislation and in line with the Lisbon Convention. The Equivalence Office of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) deals with recognition and equivalence requests for these degrees. The TQF is used for the recognition of foreign qualifications by the responsible bodies such as ENIC-NARIC Türkiye and MoNE.

Pursuing a craft profession in Türkiye requires a Master certificate or equivalent. Foreigners can establish a business or work as an employee if the equivalence of their certificate is recognised by the Ministry of Education[18]. VQA is responsible for the confirmation of the authenticity of vocational qualifications held by foreigners who are seeking to work in Türkiye.

Many professions in Türkiye are regulated, including the 204 VQA qualifications for hazardous occupation mentioned earlier. Requirements to pursue a regulated profession are defined in different laws.

The Turkish Council of Higher Education adopted a Regulation on the Harmonisation of the Minimum Training Requirements for the seven regulated professions stipulated by the EU-Directive 2013/55. The General System under the European Directive 2013/55 may be important as well for other regulated professions that are regulated in the EU member states and those that require a VQA certificate to practise. This issue has not been addressed yet.

7.6 Career guidance and counselling

Use of guidance and counselling to support learners and jobseekers in navigating curricula and qualifications available is one aspect to be strengthened in the education and employment sectors. There is a clear role here for the TQF and the use of the TQF register.

7.7 Awareness and use of the NQF

Bodies exercising functions relevant to TQF implementation are generally well-informed about the TQF. Likewise, education and training providers; NGOs that represent sectors and branches, occupations and professions; employers' organisations and trade unions; and institutional stakeholders are usually aware of the framework.

Learners who hold qualifications on which the TQF levels are indicated clearly have some exposure to the framework. But those already established in the labour market, or those possessing older qualifications, usually have less awareness of the TQF. The same applies to individual employers and training providers who have not yet been come across the TQF.

Information materials have been developed for a larger audience and the TQF website also contains information of a less technical nature.

7.8 Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

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[18] See Law N° 3308 on vocational training (as amended by Law No 4702).

In the activities detailed in section 7.3, surveys were conducted with participants and stakeholders, and feedback and opinions regarding the TQF were collected. These surveys identified progress made by the TQF and remaining challenges.

Queries from individuals received through the TQF website are regularly answered throughout the year.

7.9   Impact of the NQF

The TQF Strategic Document of 2021 [19]defines four priority areas that are focused on strengthening the impact of the TQF. These are:

- completing the placement of qualifications of all qualification types in the TQF.

- increasing access to programmes of learning, for the recognition and certification of learning regardless of its context.

- provide guidance, training, and other forms of support for the individuals and bodies responsible for the use of learning outcomes in the widest sense.

- ensure stakeholders and ultimately society more generally, including learners, employers, trades unions, professional associations area aware and committed to the aims of the TQF.

8.   REFERENCING TO THE EQF

8.1   Referencing to the EQF

Türkiye is an EU Candidate Country, a member of the EQF Advisory Group and participates in the Bologna process in higher education. It simultaneously referenced the TQF to the EQF and self-certified against the Bologna framework in 2017. It will present an updated referencing report in 2023 to reflect progress in the TQF's implementation.

Türkiye is at an advanced stage in implementing the Bologna Process.

8.2   International cooperation

Türkiye participates in the Riga Process of cooperation in VET among EU, EEA, and Candidate Countries. It has progressed since 2015 on the Riga medium-term deliverables (MTDs) in the priority areas of work-based learning, quality assurance, access to VET, qualifications, key competences, and teacher professional development.

In quality assurance, the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council of Türkiye joined ENQA in 2020. The Council of Higher Education represents Türkiye in ENIC-NARIC networks.

9.   REFLECTIONS AND PLANS

In November 2021 the first qualification on the TQF portal was brought into the TQF. This was the start of the TQF implementation. During the past two years the TQF has become operational.

Although the TQF does not yet contain any MoNE qualifications, many are already in the register and are expected to be placed in the framework in 2023 and onwards. This will mean millions of people will soon hold

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[19] https://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tqf-strategy-paper-i114.html

qualifications that are part of the TQF. They will start a new journey with their qualifications, enabling them to access new jobs and learning opportunities.

The TQF Strategic Document clearly sets a path for the TQF to become a truly lifelong learning framework. One of the challenges is to mobilise more stakeholders and wider society, including learners, employers, trade unions, professional associations, teachers, trainers, assessors, guidance counsellors, in addition to the many stakeholders already involved. One suggestion made in the TQF Strategic Document is to involve learners in the TQF governing structures.

The TQF is promoted via a well-designed communication strategy. But to mobilise the framework's many and diverse actors and stakeholders, extensive capacity building and awareness raising efforts are required, including new ways of communicating with stakeholders and ensuring that the TQF becomes a daily reality for Turkish citizens, through its inclusion in job descriptions and vacancies, course descriptions and certificates.

The TQF needs to be well integrated with Türkiye's lifelong career guidance and counselling systems and tools, making it easy for individuals to navigate qualifications, and learning and employment opportunities.

Most TQF qualifications are awarded to candidates successfully completing formal qualifications. However, 2.3 million certificates have also been awarded by the VQA, largely through the compulsory scheme to qualify people working in the defined hazardous occupations.

At the same time, there is a need to widen validation to reach groups or categories so far under-represented. This includes women, who tend not work in the hazardous occupations. Then there the millions of refugees in Turkey, who can also benefit from these qualifications. VQA has in fact made many of its qualifications accessible to refugees by adapting and translating its procedures, and more than 15,000 refugees have obtained a VQA certificate. However, this success has been largely due to financial support from donors, and sustainable solutions are needed to ensure that refugees can access further learning or training and jobs through these qualifications.

As in many other European countries, adult learning needs to be better integrated in the TQF to support lifelong learning.

For now, national vocational qualifications issued by VQA can only be obtained through assessment – no related programmes preparing people for those assessments is available. This is because ISO Standard 17024 - which is used to accredit the authorised certification bodies - is about personnel certification and emphasises the need to avoid a conflict of interest between the training and assessment functions of assessment bodies. However, there is now an ongoing debate that there *should* be training offered to prepare people to take the assessments, and, therefore, to accredit appropriate training providers. These new arrangements would have the advantage of very likely increasing the success rate of candidates preparing to take the national vocational qualifications.

In addition, the 3,743 modular programmes that are licensed by MoNE offer an important reservoir for lifelong learning courses and possibly for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Universities have started to develop micro-credentials.

Outside the control of the Responsible Bodies, there are many other forms of training in companies, or by private providers using vendor certificates, or by NGOs, the voluntary sector or community initiatives. The question is whether these could be one day part of the TQF to make a truly lifelong framework.

ABBREVIATIONS

abbreviation	full name
ACBs	Authorised Certification Bodies
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
ISCED	International standard classification of education
ISCO	International standard classification of occupations
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
RBs	Responsible bodies (CoHE, MoNE, VQA)
THEQC	Turkish Higher Education Quality Council of Türkiye
TQF	Turkish Qualifications Framework
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority

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- The TQF and EQF website: https://www.tyc.gov.tr/
- TQF database: https://portal.tyc.gov.tr/
- EQF referencing report: https://tyc.gov.tr/trr.pdf
- Qualifications framework for higher education, information about programmes:
- http://www.tyyc.yok.gov.tr/
- Guideline on learning outcomes http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-ogrenme-kazanimlari-rehberi-i85.html
- Turkish version of EQF Note 4 on learning outcomes http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/ogrenme-kazanimlari-yaklasimi-i20.html
- Quality Assurance Handbook http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tqf-quality-assurance-handbook-i83.html
- Guideline on validation of non-formal and informal learning http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/yaygin-ve-serbest-ogrenmelerin-dogrulanmasi-rehberi-i22.html
- TQF Communication Strategy http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-iletisim-stratejisi-i33.html
- TQF Glossary http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-terimler-sozlugu-i1.html
- TQF Strategic Document https://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tqf-strategy-paper-i114.html
- Turkish versions of EQF Brochure and Infographic: http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/ayc-10-yil-infografigi-i73.html ; and http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/ayc-10-yil-kitapcigi-i24.html
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