



CEDEFOP

Building a European qualifications map

Development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) across Europe

POLICY BRIEF



POLICY BACKGROUND



The European qualifications framework (EQF) for lifelong learning was adopted in 2008 and revised in 2017 (Council of the European Union, 2017). The EQF has significantly contributed to increasing transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications across Europe. It has also triggered the development of learning outcomes based national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in most of the 41 countries ⁽¹⁾ participating in the EQF process. 36 countries have referenced their NQFs to the EQF.

This policy brief has been primarily based on information from Cedefop's European inventory of NQFs, updated in 2023. The update was a joint effort of Cedefop, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation (ETF). Data have mainly been collected through the 2022 survey

on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF, working closely with the countries participating in the EQF process. For the analysis, Cedefop has used data from the 38 country-specific reports ⁽²⁾ available at the time this policy brief was produced.

⁽¹⁾ 27 EU Member States, EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland), EU candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine), potential candidate countries (Georgia and Kosovo).

⁽²⁾ The country-specific reports are from the 27 EU Member States (three reports have been developed for the communities of Belgium), EFTA countries, and Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey, and Kosovo.

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EVIDENCE

In this section

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NQF scope

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Impact of NQFs



Overview of NQFs in Europe

How much European NQFs have progressed

NQFs in Europe, when compared to qualifications frameworks from other regions of the world, can be considered as advanced frameworks. [Figure 1](#) shows that 60% of the 38 NQFs analysed are at operational stage ⁽³⁾ and almost 35% are at activation stage ⁽⁴⁾. One of the latest developments was that the Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning was adopted in 2022. Czechia has not yet created an NQF (the country is at the explorative stage) ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽³⁾ NQFs at this stage provide a map of levelled qualifications and a reference point for their development and review; NQF/ EQF levels are indicated on qualifications, NQF databases are functional, and quality assurance mechanisms are in place ([Cedefop, 2021](#)).

⁽⁴⁾ This stage is defined when implementation structures and the procedures for levelling qualifications have been set, and the main instruments are being put in place (e.g. databases, quality assurance arrangements); awareness of end-users is gradually growing ([Cedefop, 2021](#)).

⁽⁵⁾ Czechia's qualifications were referenced to the EQF in 2011; the national register of qualifications (NSK), which functions as a framework for qualifications obtained through further education and as a tool for validation, is at an operational stage.

NQF structure

A clear influence of the EQF is observed in the way European NQFs are structured. The dominant NQF model has an 8-level structure (33 frameworks). However, four frameworks do not include qualifications at level(s) 2 and/or 1. The remaining countries have opted for a 7-, 10- or 13-level structure. Eight countries have introduced sublevels to reflect better the specificities of their system and ease the levelling of different types of qualifications. Three countries also have entry levels below EQF 1. In the Netherlands, the entry level was created to increase motivation to participate in education and training; in Bulgaria it covers pre-school education.

NQF objectives

NQF country-specific reports indicate a variety of objectives to be achieved through NQF implementation. Almost all countries have set their main objective as improving the transparency and comparability of qualifications. Although it is not explicitly stated, this objective often incorporates a more international perspective linked to fostering international comparability of qualifications and mobility of individuals. More than half of the frame-



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works aim to support education progression and lifelong learning. NQF objectives do not always reflect what is happening in practice; although only 11 NQFs aim to support recognition of foreign qualifications, in 24 cases they are used (to some extent) in this strand of work. When it comes to contributing to somehow reforming education and training, NQFs most often aim to promote validation of non-formal and informal learning (Figure 2).

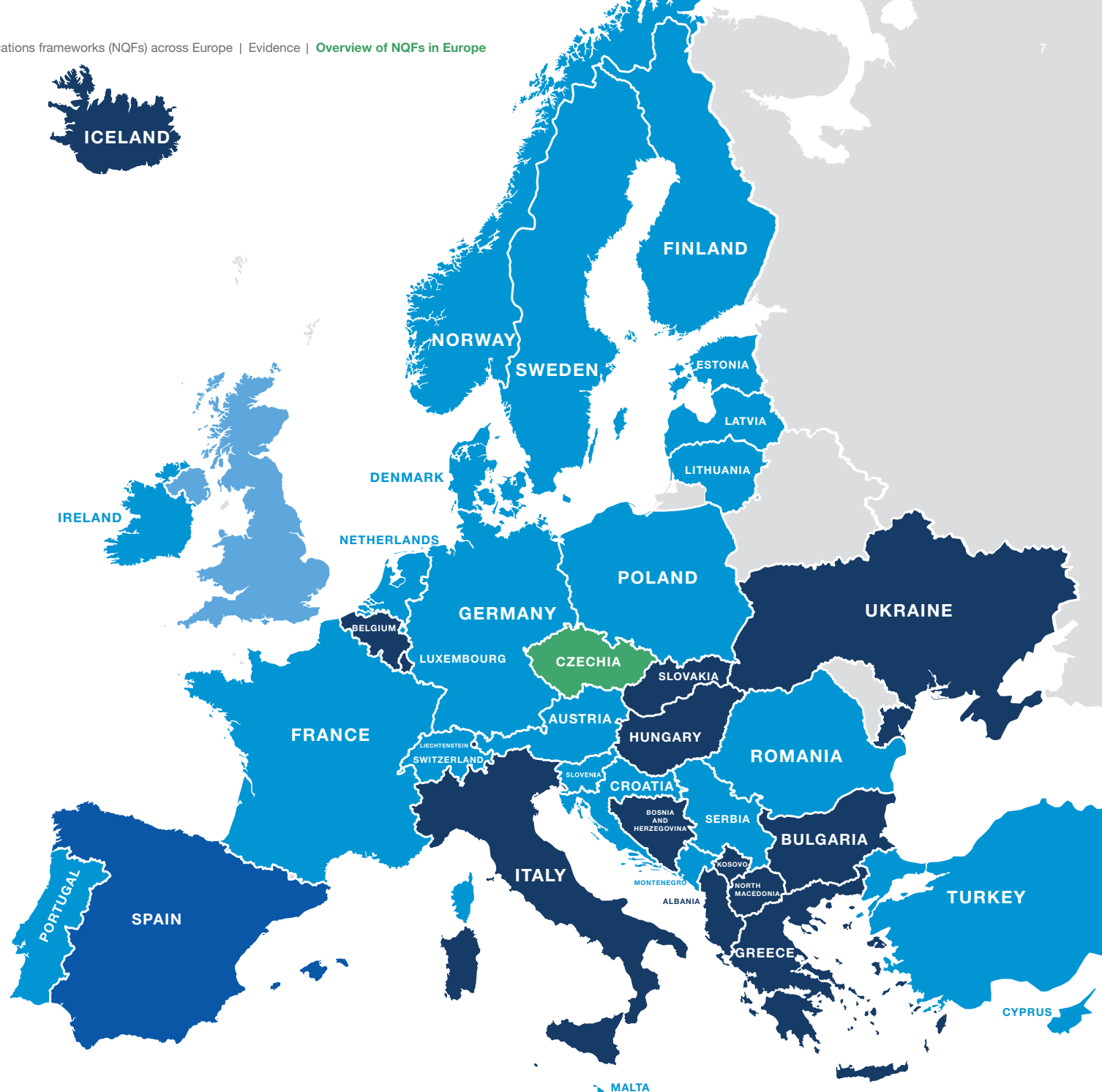
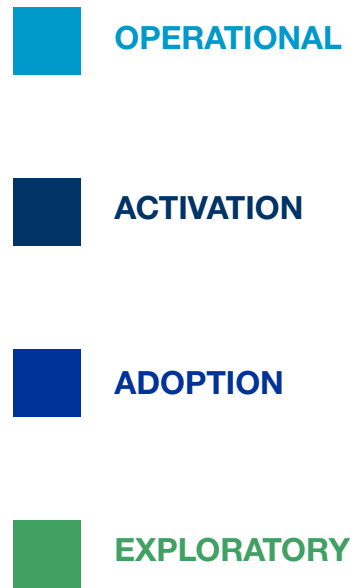
Institutional arrangements

In most countries, overall responsibility for the NQF and its day-to-day implementation lies with the education ministry, an interministerial structure, or an agency/institution. There is a clear trend among countries to assign overall responsibility for NQFs to ministries (24 NQFs), while agencies/institutions are responsible for day-to-day implementation (25 NQFs). Only in seven cases is the same body responsible for both.

Almost all countries have reported that a variety of stakeholders is involved, to different degrees, in NQF implementation. The institution responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the NQF often promotes cooperation with stakeholders. In Latvia, the EQF-NCP ensures that all relevant parties (e.g. policymakers, learners, employer organisations) are involved in discussions, events and research activities. Stakeholder involvement is usually achieved through two formal structures: sector (skills) councils (16 countries) and inter-stakeholder committees or councils (13 countries). Sector councils most often oversee developing or updating qualification and assessment standards, linking them with the labour market needs (as in Czechia, Estonia and Hungary). Inter-stakeholder committees can function as a platform/forum for collaboration between stakeholders, operating as an advisory body (e.g. Germany, Cyprus, Hungary and Poland), and as a body actively involved in day-to-day implementation of the NQFs (e.g. Estonia, France, Croatia and Slovenia).



Figure 1. NQF stage of development



NB: The map refers to the 27 EU Member States, EFTA countries and EU candidate countries.

Belgium: BE-FL: operational stage, BE-FR and BE-DE: activation stage.

Source: Cedefop.

Figure 2. **NQF objectives**



36

IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY
AND COMPARABILITY OF
QUALIFICATIONS



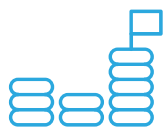
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SUPPORT EDUCATION
PROGRESSION AND LLL



18

FOSTER INTERNATIONAL
COMPARABILITY OF
QUALIFICATIONS AND
MOBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS



17

RAISE QUALITY
OF QUALIFICATIONS



15

ENABLE VALIDATION
OF NON-FORMAL AND
INFORMAL LEARNING



14

PROMOTE PERMEABILITY,
REDUCING BARRIERS
BETWEEN SECTORS AND
INSTITUTIONS



13

SUPPORT INTRODUCTION
TO AND MOBILITY WITHIN
THE LABOUR MARKET



12

STRENGTHEN
COOPERATION BETWEEN
STAKEHOLDERS



11

PROMOTE THE USE OF
LEARNING OUTCOMES



11

SUPPORT RECOGNITION
OF QUALIFICATIONS



9

SUPPORT SOCIOECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

NB: This figure presents the number of countries that have set each objective.

Source: Cedefop.

NQF scope

One major objective of the NQFs is to improve the connection between different learning contexts, supporting the transferability of learning outcomes. For this, EQF countries have made progress in broadening the scope and coverage of their NQFs. In the 2010s, they were mainly working towards including qualifications from all sectors of formal education and training (general education, VET, higher education, or in some cases adult education). Frameworks were usually designed with broad and inclusive level descriptors ⁽⁶⁾ to embrace all education sectors, reflecting a broad range of values, traditions and interests (Cedefop, 2020). At the same time, the first steps were taken towards opening-up frameworks to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training ⁽⁷⁾. Linking NQFs with validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is another way to make frameworks

⁽⁶⁾ Each of the EQF levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level. There is a clear link between the qualification levels in each referenced NQF and the EQF level descriptors (Council of the European Union, 2017).

⁽⁷⁾ Such qualifications can be awarded, for example, by private providers, labour market stakeholders, adult learning providers, and civil society organisations. They can include, microcredentials, non-statutory (market) qualifications, professional/vocational/occupational qualifications and awards (UNESCO et al., 2023).

more inclusive.

Since 2019, there has been a considerable progress in including qualifications awarded outside formal education and training into NQFs. In that year, seven Member States had opened-up their frameworks to such qualifications (Cedefop, 2020). In 2022, more than half of the analysed countries (21 of 38, including 16 member states) had opened their frameworks to them. The trend is stronger among accession and pre-accession countries, all of which have levelled such qualifications to their framework. Countries like Austria and Sweden have accelerated the pace of levelling such qualifications, considering this a major success in NQF implementation.

NQF qualifications awarded outside formal education and training are diverse, varying substantially depending on the national context. They are often described as qualifications non-regulated by the education ministry (e.g. Netherlands) and other ministries responsible for awarding qualifications (e.g. Denmark, Austria and Finland). Another common distinction is between qualifications awarded by public or private providers; the latter are usually awarded outside the formal system. Finland is an interesting case; the NQF includes competence

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...there has been a **considerable progress** in including **qualifications awarded outside formal education** and training **into NQFs...**



...linking **NQFs with validation of non-formal and informal learning** is another way to **make frameworks more inclusive...**



...NQF qualifications **awarded outside formal education and training are diverse**, varying substantially depending on the national context...



modules, awarded outside formal education and training, which are defined in learning outcomes. They can ‘refer to a part of a qualification (an entity), qualification units, further training related to an eligibility, or module of studies that is a requirement for a particular profession’ (Finnish National Agency for Education and Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018).

In contrast to formal/State-regulated qualifications, which tend to be ‘automatically included’ in the NQF (e.g. France), or have their learning outcomes and NQF levels specified in legal acts (e.g. Poland), qualifications awarded outside formal education are levelled as long as they satisfy specific criteria. For a non-formal qualification to be included in the Netherlands NQF it should meet specific criteria: be written in terms of learning outcomes; be concluded with a summative assessment that is independent of the learning path; be of substantial duration (at least 400 hours) or labour market relevant; and be quality assured. Positive decisions on including a qualification awarded outside formal education and training are often effective for a specific period (e.g. Sweden).

Countries also open-up their framework by incorporating a non-formal education and training subsystem (usually as a sub-framework). They may refer to such qualifications using terms like professional, occupational or vocational qualifications (e.g. Belgium-FL, Czechia, Estonia, Cyprus, Slovakia). In most cases, these qualifications can be acquired through validation. In Estonia, professional qualifications (NQF levels 2 to 8) are associated with a trade, occupation or profession, usually resulting from work-based learning, in-service training and adult education. There, the sector skills councils are responsible for levelling professional qualifications and supervising awarding bodies.

The opening-up of NQFs does not only concern qualifications awarded outside formal education, but also types of qualifications different from full formal ones. The most common types are partial qualifications, microcredentials, modules, units and international qualifications. These qualifications are often awarded outside formal education and training.

Partial qualifications are included in 16 NQFs. The situation with microcredentials⁽⁸⁾ is more complex. Our analysis has re-affirmed the findings of Cedefop (2023): although the term is seldom used as such, 13 countries have reported that at least one type of a levelled qualification can be considered as a microcredential. This is the case for partial qualifications (e.g. Bulgaria, Cyprus), awards in Malta, and vocational qualifications in Czechia. A further six countries are currently exploring the possibility of including microcredentials in their frameworks. In Estonia, the pending draft of the adult education act gives the opportunity to formalise regulated narrower qualifications, such as microcredentials; provided they meet the volume and quality requirements, they can be included in the NQF. Six countries have reported that modules or units of learning outcomes are included, or planned to be included in their NQFs.

⁽⁸⁾ ‘[T]he record of the learning outcomes that a learner has achieved following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria’ (Council of the European Union, 2022a).

Figure 3. Developing inclusive NQFs

Source: Cedefop.

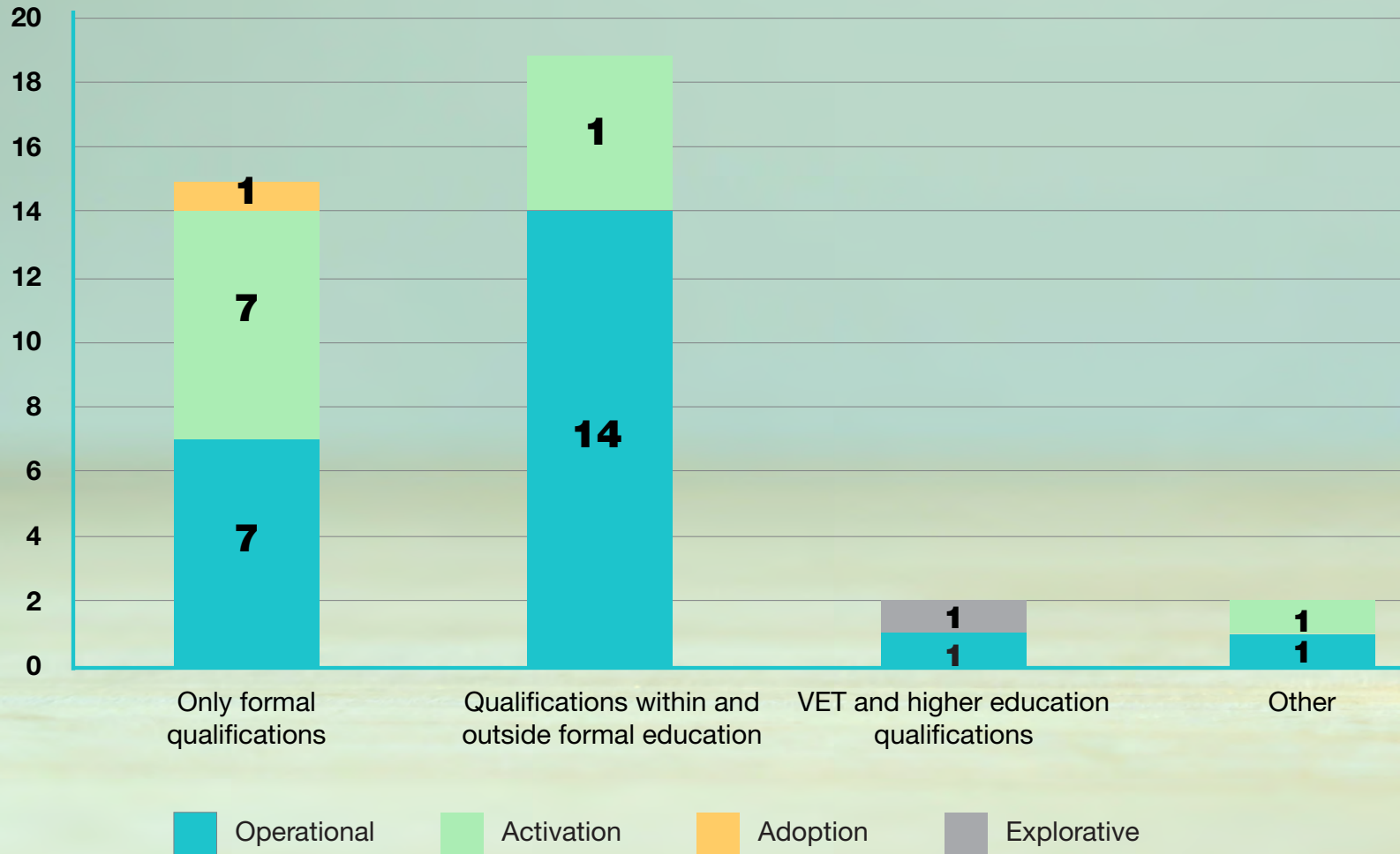
Six additional countries have already included international qualifications ⁽⁹⁾ and five have reported that this is part of their plans. In the Netherlands, a procedure for levelling international qualifications to the NQF has been set up, similar to that for non-formal qualifications.

One of the main ways of categorising NQFs according to their scope is in frameworks that include qualifications from all sectors of formal education (15 countries), and those that also include some type of qualification awarded outside formal education and training (19 countries). NQFs in the second group are usually at operational stage (Figure 4).

Almost half of the countries (7 of 15) that have not yet levelled qualifications awarded outside formal education and training are planning to include them. Germany has carried out and evaluated a pilot project which has designed procedures of levelling such qualifications, defined quality assurance criteria and described the role of evaluators.

⁽⁹⁾ '[A] qualification awarded by a legally established international body (e.g. association) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body that is used in more than one country and that includes learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body.' (Council of the European Union, Annex I, 2017).

Figure 4. **NQF scope and coverage**



NQFs and validation



The EQF recommendations include validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), while the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation made the EQF advisory group responsible for its implementation. The evaluation of the 2012 recommendation showed that implementation of validation in several European countries was linked to the development of NQFs (European Commission, 2020). In many countries (17), NQF and validation policies are explicitly linked. For instance, there are cases, where the NQF legislation (e.g. Belgium-FR and Spain), or broader education policies (e.g. Romania) link the framework with validation. Legislation on validation has also been used to broaden the scope of the NQF by ensuring that validation can lead to a levelled qualification (e.g. Belgium-FL, Sweden). Specific regulations and guidelines often describe how the NQF or curricula and standards included in it are used as a reference point for validation (e.g. Estonia, Italy and Malta). In France, a validation procedure must be in place for all NQF qualifications.

An important element of NQF implementation is the development of learning outcomes approaches, fundamental to validation. Level descriptors act as a reference point for identifying, documenting,

assessing and certifying – validating – non-formal and informal learning. In Malta, occupational standards, used in VNFIL, are being reviewed and updated to ensure that they are in line with the learning outcomes approach and MQF level descriptors, while an overarching principle of the validation system is that it should always involve the use of the MQF in determining the level, volume and depth of evidence. In Lithuania, competence assessment tasks are prepared in line with NQF level descriptors. NQFs are also used to quality assure validation procedures and increase trust in them.

Data from the European inventory on validation (Cedefop et al., forthcoming) show that almost all countries (of the 41 participating in the EQF process) present some connection between validation and NQF qualifications. In 36 systems, at least some NQF qualifications can be awarded (in full) through validation. In 34 systems, it is possible to have exemptions from modules or parts of a study programme based on validating prior learning. Credits can be awarded through validation, in many instances in higher education. Validation procedures also offer to citizens the option to access formal education and training programmes (26 countries) (Figure 5).

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...NQF and validation policies are often explicitly **linked...**



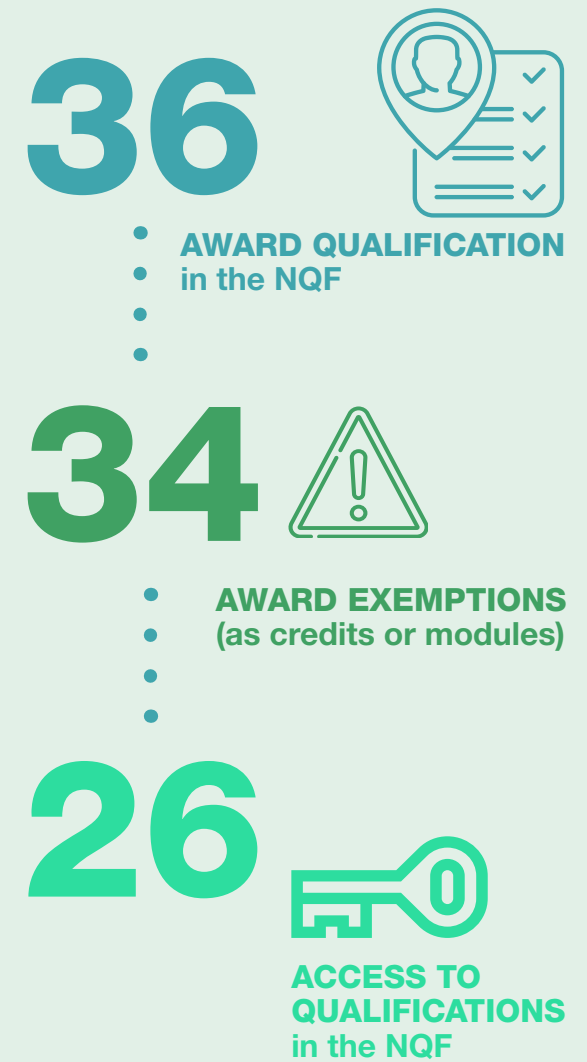
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Figure 5. **Validation and NQF qualifications**



Source: Cedefop.

Awareness and use of NQFs

The Cedefop analysis shows that the awareness and use of the NQFs/EQF has increased. Those using the NQFs/EQF in their daily work (e.g. education practitioners and employees in agencies involved in the day-to-day running of the framework) usually have the highest levels of awareness. According to [Figure 6](#), NQFs are most used in the design and quality assurance of qualifications. A positive development is that countries increasingly report that NQFs are used by labour market actors.

Citizens

Awareness of the NQFs/EQF among citizens (learners, workers and jobseekers) has gradually increased. However, these target groups often have the lowest level of awareness. This is also supported by evaluation studies, as in Latvia, Malta and Slovenia. Countries often report that learners mainly become aware of the NQFs/EQF through the mention of NQF/EQF levels on qualifications/certificates (e.g. Cyprus, Austria, Poland, Slovakia). Citizens most often use NQF/EQF levels to ease their international mobility; in some cases they help to orient themselves when choosing a qualification/study programme (e.g. Germany, Estonia), and to reflect on whether their competences match a job's requirements (e.g.

Estonia). In countries that have a long-standing tradition of using qualifications frameworks (e.g. Ireland, France, Malta) citizens have higher levels of awareness and use them in different ways. In France, for example, for a qualification to be part of an individual's learning account ⁽¹⁰⁾, it must be registered in the National register of vocational and professional qualifications.

Labour market stakeholders

The use of the NQFs/EQF among labour market stakeholders has also increased. Of the 38 NQFs reviewed, 24 are used by labour market stakeholders (employers, employer associations, trade unions, employment services); 15 countries have reported that NQF/EQF levels are used in job ads and/or recruitment procedures. However, usually they are not used extensively (e.g. Belgium-FR, Latvia, Netherlands, Slovenia). Some countries use them for public recruitment procedures (e.g. Belgium-FR, Germany, Lithuania). In Malta, all calls

⁽¹⁰⁾ An individual learning account is a personal account that allows individuals to accumulate and preserve their entitlements over time, for whichever eligible training, guidance or validation opportunity they deem most useful and whenever they want to (Council of the European Union, 2022b).

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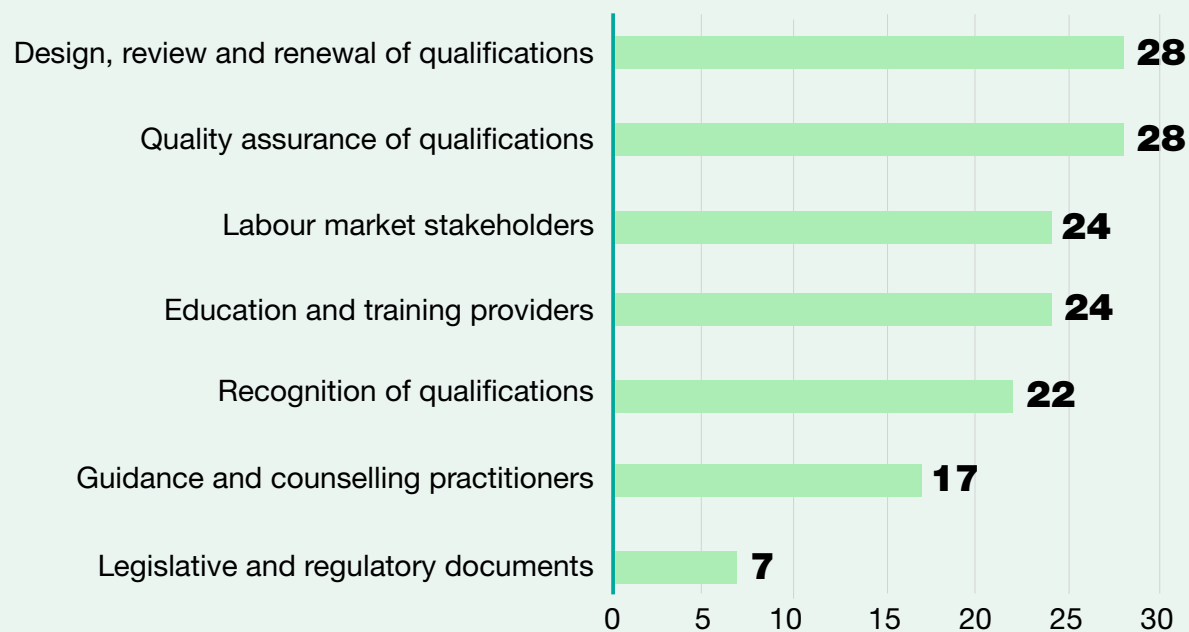
...Cedefop analysis shows that the **awareness and use of the NQFs/EQF** has increased...



...countries should focus more on **increasing the awareness of NQFs among citizens and labour market actors**...



...**labour market stakeholders** have started using **NQF/EQF levels** in **job ads and/or recruitment procedures**...

Figure 6. Main areas of NQF use

Source: Cedefop.

for the public sector indicate the required MQF level. Employers also use NQF/EQF levels to understand better the competences of potential employees and to compare qualifications (e.g. France, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia). In fewer cases, frameworks are used in the context of collective agreements (e.g. Germany, Italy). More steps need to be taken to increase the outreach of NQFs among employers.

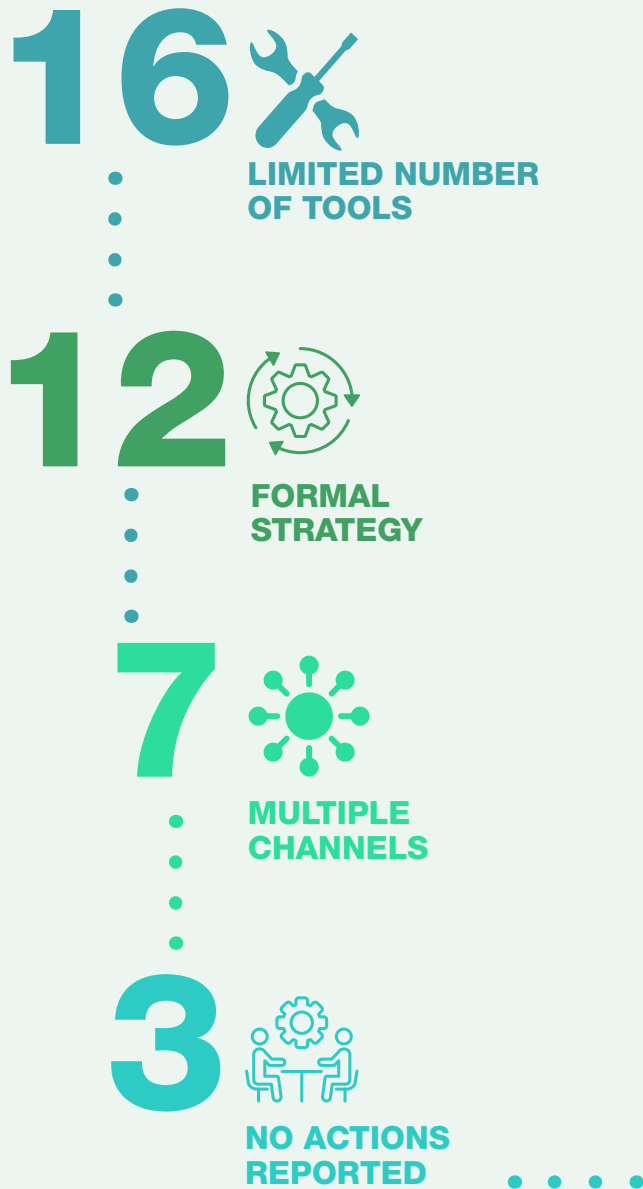
Main areas of NQF use

Frameworks (and their learning outcomes descriptions) used in the design, renewal and review of qualifications and education and training programmes are mentioned by 28 countries. The expected learning outcomes should be in accordance with the NQF level descriptors.

Education and training providers are reported to be aware of and use the NQFs in 24 cases. They often must consider NQF level descriptors when developing their programmes (e.g. Finland, Germany, Norway, Poland). In 5 countries (Estonia, Ireland, Malta, Austria, Portugal) providers use NQF levels when advertising their qualifications and programmes.

NQFs are also commonly used in quality assurance; 28 countries have reported that there is a link between the framework and QA procedures. For example, quality assurance bodies use the framework in their work, considering NQF level descriptors when accrediting higher education qualifications.

Most countries (22) use the NQF level descriptors in recognition of foreign qualifications, though this is done to varying degrees. There are countries where the use of the NQF for recognition of qualifications is introduced by law (e.g. Croatia, Luxembourg). In other cases, NQF/EQF levels are actively used in the process (e.g.

Figure 7. Approaches in NQF dissemination

Lithuania, Netherlands); in Lithuania they are indicated on recognition decisions. In some countries NQFs are only used as a complimentary source of information about qualifications (e.g. Germany). This function of the NQFs is crucial for countries that recruit many international workers (e.g. Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg).

Guidance and counselling practitioners are reported to be aware of the NQF and use it in their work in 17 countries. The use of NQFs in legislative and regulatory documents has also increased. Seven countries have reported extensive use of NQFs, mainly (but not exclusively) in education-related legislation.

Raising awareness of NQFs

As European NQFs mature, countries increasingly focus on communicating their frameworks. They have two main target groups: NQF developers and implementers and end-users. In the initial stages of NQF development, countries were focusing more on the first (e.g. qualification developers and providers). In recent years there is a growing trend also to target end-users (e.g. learners, workers, jobseekers and employers). However, only 20 countries have explicitly reported that they target both groups, while no country has reported exclusively targeting end-users; 11 countries primarily target NQF developers and implementers.

Countries can be broadly split into three groups according to the approach that they adopt in NQF dissemination (Figure 7). In 2022, Ireland implemented a comprehensive communication campaign targeting a very wide audience and involving regular promotion through social media platforms, direct mail, an e-zine, quarterly newsletter, webinars, and the NQF webpage. However, countries most commonly use a limited

number of communication tools.

Countries use the NQF website as their main communication tool. Workshops, conferences and seminars (18 countries), along with technical handbooks (18 countries) are commonly used, mostly targeting NQF developers and implementers. There is increasing use of social media (10) and videos (10) to promote NQFs (Figure 8).

NQF databases can play a significant role in promoting transparency of qualifications and increasing awareness of NQFs. Databases usually offer information on qualifications, such as the expected learning outcomes, the awarding body, credits, internal and/or external quality assurance, and entry requirements. Along with their interconnection to Europass, they improve the 'zoom-in functionality' of the map of qualifications developed through the EQF process. Most countries have developed a single database. However, only 14 countries include all NQF qualifications in a database, leaving margin for improvement (Figure 9).

Countries have continued their effort to increase the number of qualification types that indicate levels. This is common practice, mainly in VET and higher education (Figure 10).



Figure 8. NQF communication channels

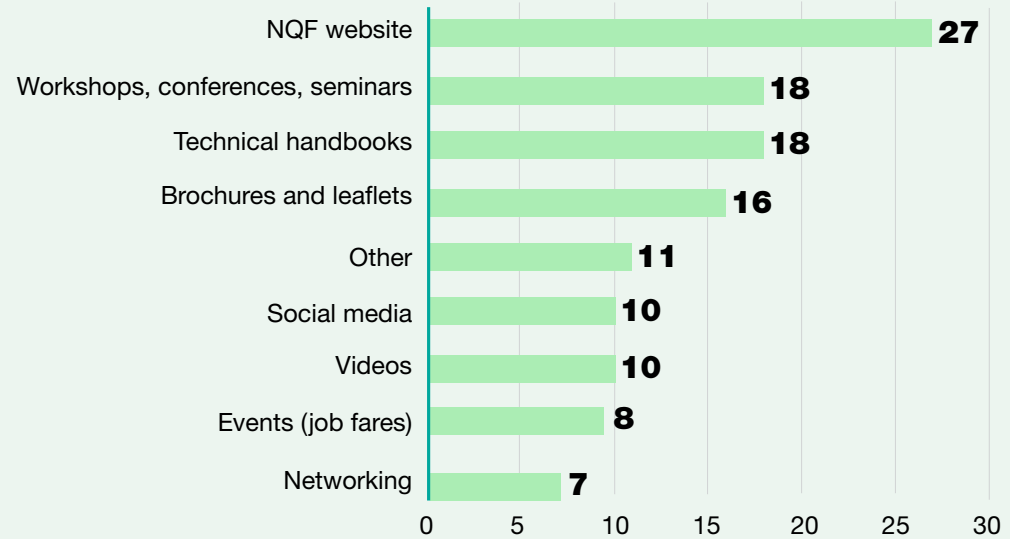
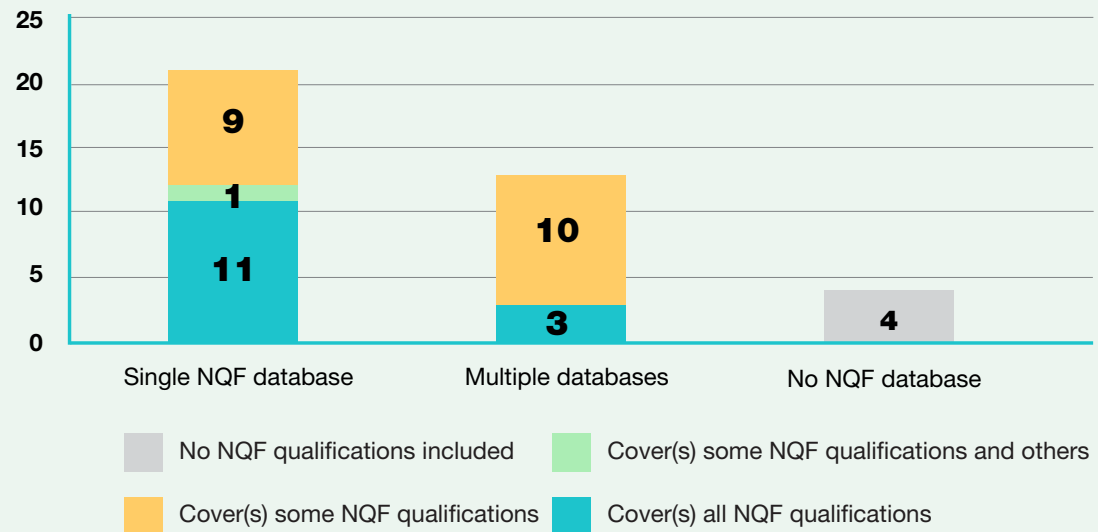
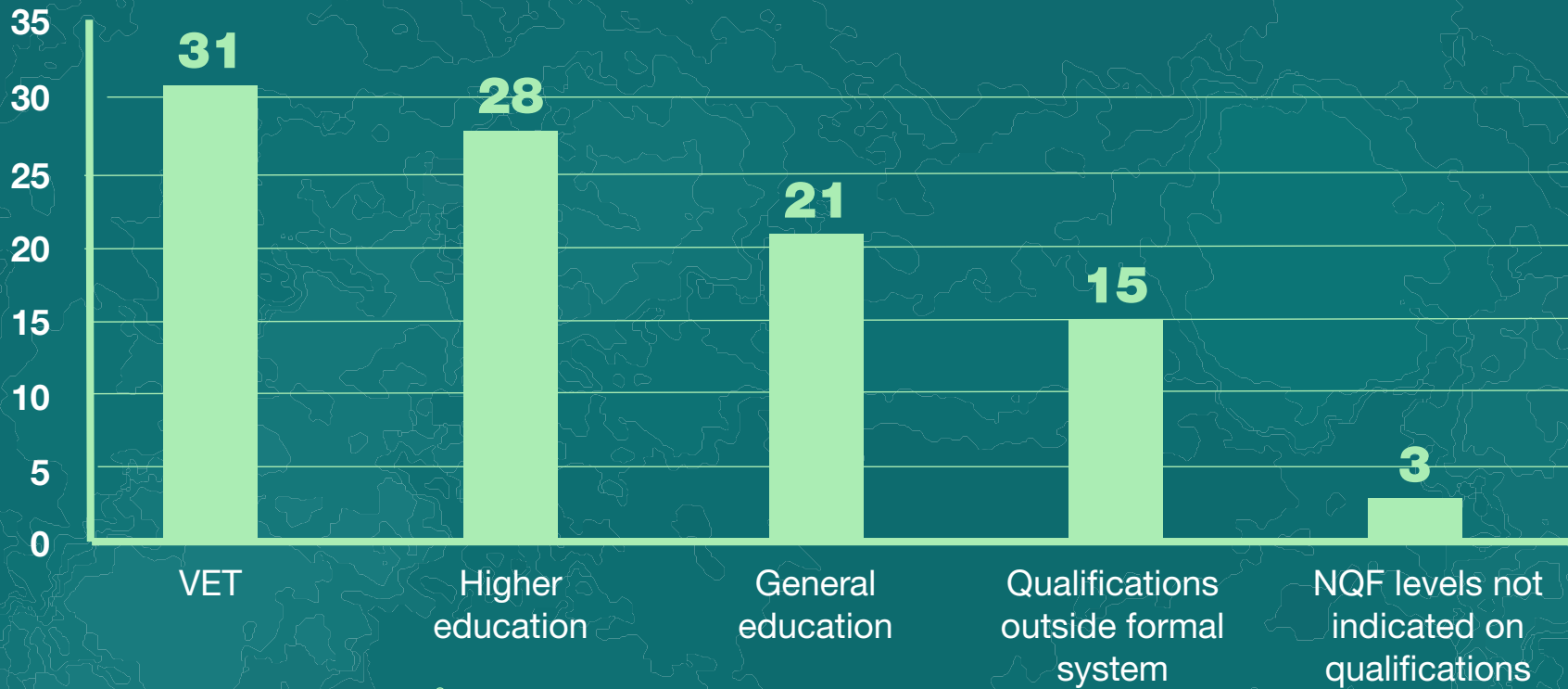


Figure 9. Coverage of NQF databases/registers



Source: Cedefop.

Figure 10. **NQF/EQF levels on qualifications** (by education sector)



Source: Cedefop.

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Impact of NQFs

Capturing and measuring the impact of NQFs can be very challenging; one reason is that frameworks need to be in place for a significant period of time to produce an impact. Data from the NQF country-specific reports show that NQFs primarily make education and training more transparent. They do not act so much as drivers of reforms but more as enablers of changes in education and training.

Most countries have reported that NQFs have increased the transparency and comparability of qualifications. This is mainly achieved as work on levelling qualifications is advancing, the use of level descriptors has expanded, and the public better understands how frameworks function. NQF databases also play a crucial role as they are increasingly including learning outcomes descriptions (25 countries), enabling users to get a clearer picture of included qualifications. At EU level, work continues to develop and agree on common principles for developing short descriptions of learning outcomes to be used in qualifications databases/register.

Cedefop analysis has showed that NQF implementation can often have a positive impact in promoting the use of learning outcomes (23

countries), even if this was explicitly stated as an objective of 11 NQFs only. The third most common area of impact of NQFs is promoting dialogue and cooperation between education and the labour market (including developing formal structures of cooperation, strengthening social dialogue and collaborative decision-making).

Countries have also reported that NQFs have a positive impact on increasing parity of esteem and permeability between different sectors of education and training. Although measuring the impact in these areas is challenging, there are indications pointing towards this direction. Levelling VET qualifications (e.g. master craftsperson) at the same level as higher education qualifications, reflecting the high esteem of this qualification, made parity of esteem visible (e.g. Germany, Austria). Including qualifications awarded outside formal education and training in the frameworks and linking validation with the NQFs have had positive impact in these two areas, increasing opportunities for further learning (Figure 11).

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...data from the **NQF country-specific reports** show that NQFs **have primarily increased the transparency and comparability of qualifications...**

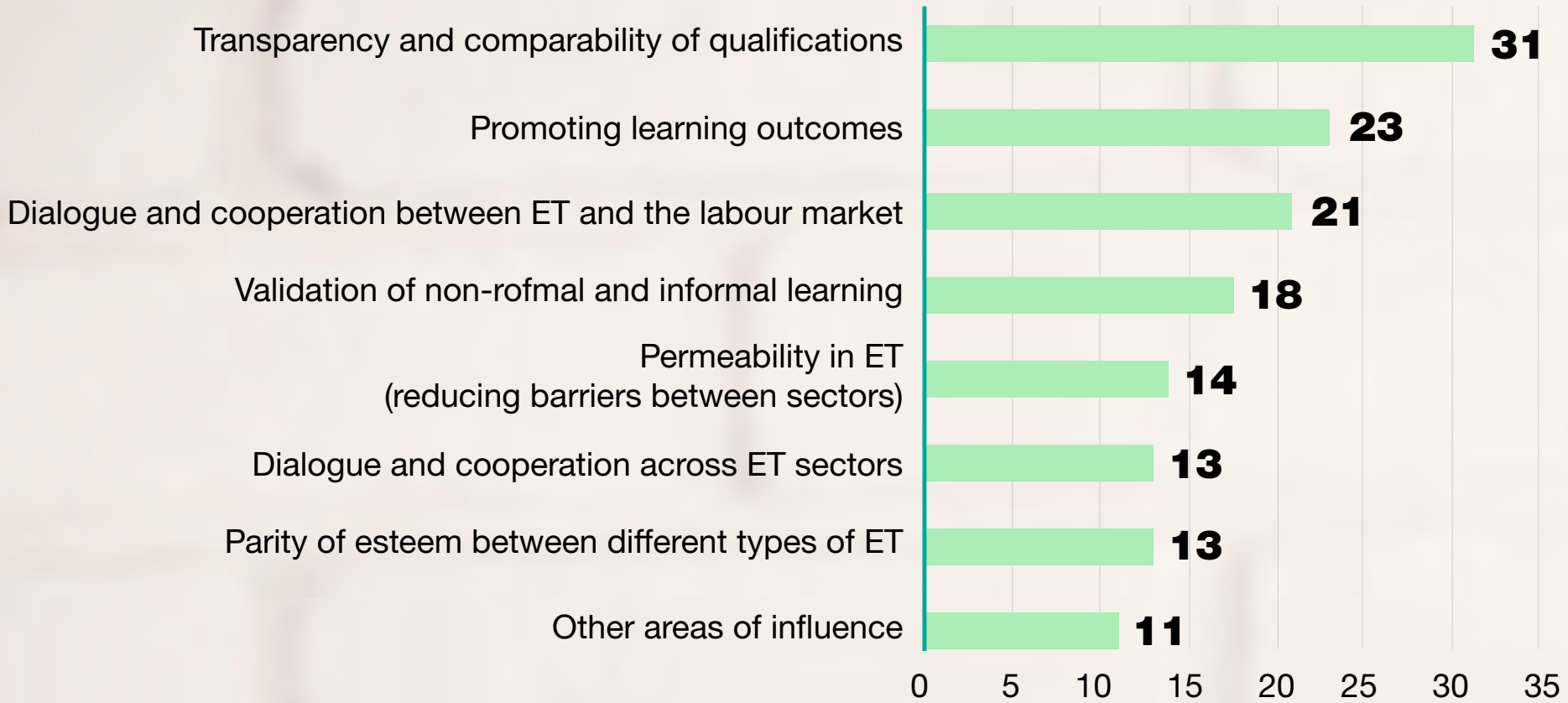


...**NQF implementation** can often have a **positive impact** in **promoting the use of learning outcomes...**



...**NQFs** do not act so much as drivers of reforms but more as **enablers of changes in education and training...**

Figure 11. Main areas of impact of NQFs





CONCLUSIONS

In this section

**Reflections and
future priorities**

The way ahead



Reflections and future priorities



NQFs evolve in diverse national contexts. Success factors often differ among countries, along with the challenges frameworks face, making it difficult to identify clear trends. Both can be influenced by the specific characteristics of the national qualification system and the stage of development of the NQF in each country.

The most common success factor reported by countries is stakeholder engagement (nine countries). NQF implementation has a long history of involving stakeholders, to different extents in each country. A solid legal basis and institutional structures are also often mentioned. However, Cedefop analysis has shown that countries can reach positive outcomes when NQF implementation is in strong coherence with other relevant policies. Poland has adopted a holistic approach, introducing the integrated qualifications system (IQS), which is closely interrelated to the NQF, along with quality assurance and validation arrangements; this approach has been a cornerstone in the implementation of the IQS and the PQF. There are many country-specific success factors. For example, in France connecting the NQF to the funding of training has made it much more visible and considerably increased its use by the public.

Countries continue to face significant challenges, the most common being reaching the broader public. According to [UNESCO et. al. \(2023\)](#), this is a pressing challenge for the more mature frameworks. Countries mention that stakeholder involvement can also be a challenge: while in some cases their participation in NQF implementation should be increased, in others reaching a decision can prove time-consuming. Other challenges include the fragmentation of education and training, indicating NQF/EQF levels on qualifications and further supporting validation.

The two most common future priorities are developing more inclusive frameworks and raising awareness of the NQFs. The latter reflects the indications from countries about challenges, NQF dissemination and the evaluation of NQFs. National authorities also prioritise the capacity building of stakeholders, further supporting validation procedures and developing an NQF database/register. However, the landscape is diverse, as countries often set priorities relating to their national context; they can range from updating the referencing report to using the NQF to combat skills mismatches (e.g. Lithuania).

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...most common **success factor** reported by countries is **stakeholder engagement**...



...**countries** can reach **positive outcomes** when **NQF implementation** is in strong **coherence with other relevant policies**...

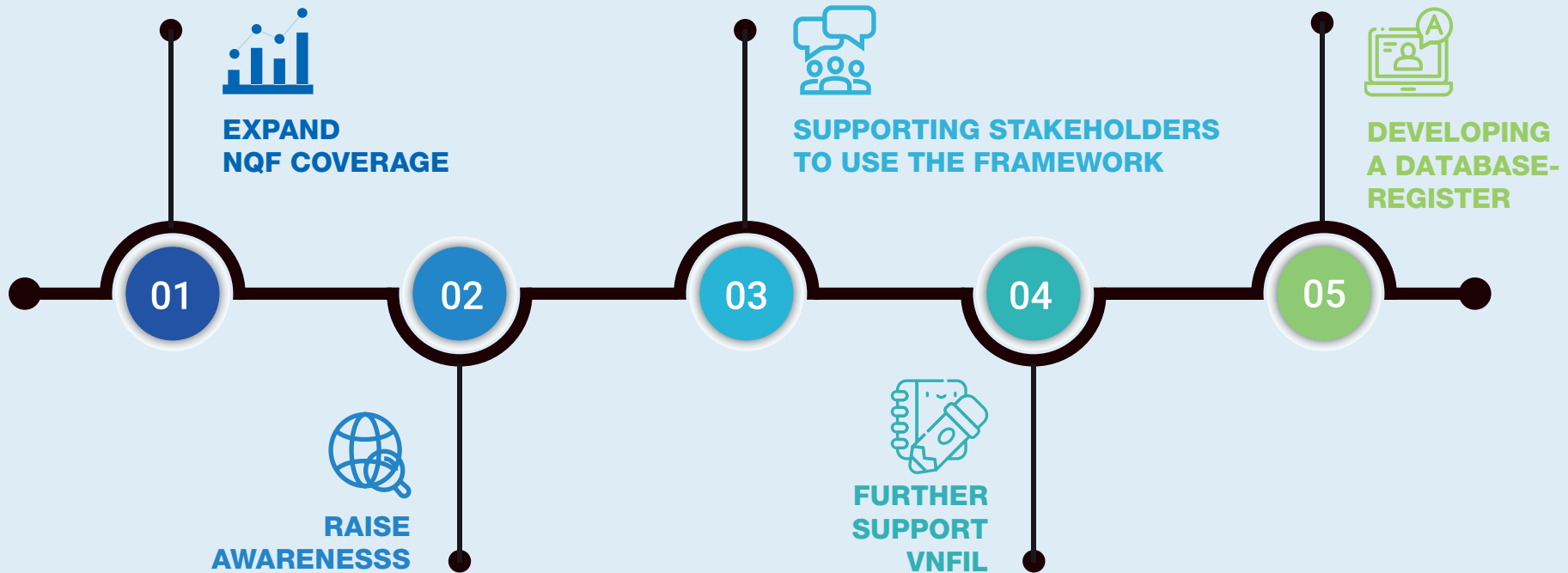


...two most common **future priorities** are developing **more inclusive frameworks** and **raising awareness of the NQFs**...

Figure 12. Main success factors in NQF implementation



Figure 13. Main future priorities



The way ahead

Cedefop analysis shows that countries have achieved considerable progress in NQF implementation, and they keep pushing ahead. A strong indication is that countries continue to update their referencing reports; three countries have done so in 2023, making it a record year after the adoption of the 2017 recommendation, while eight more countries have reported to Cedefop that they are planning an update in the near future. However, depending on the national context, the pace of progress varies. Countries are often working on developing more inclusive frameworks, mainly by opening them to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training; they increasingly use NQFs in recognition of foreign qualifications. Another positive development is that labour market actors have become more aware of the NQFs and have gradually begun using them.

Although the joint effort to develop a European map of qualifications is progressing, more needs to be done. The remarkable diversification of available qualifications has created a changing landscape that the EQF process aims to map. Databases and registers are main instruments enabling citizens to 'zoom in' on specific points of the map. As databases become more interoperable, qualifications

transparency will improve, benefiting citizens. This should be coupled with reinforced communication actions targeting end-users and aiming to make frameworks a useful tool in the everyday life of learners, jobseekers, employers and education and training providers.

Actors involved in the EQF process should focus on further integrating NQFs in national education and training systems, aiming to exploit their full potential. Cedefop, from the very beginning, has strongly supported the process and will keep casting light on areas that still need attention.

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...Cedefop analysis shows that **countries** have achieved **considerable progress in NQF implementation**, and they keep pushing ahead...



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...**actors** involved in the **EQF process** should **focus on further integrating NQFs in national education and training systems**, aiming to exploit their full potential...

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POLICY BRIEF

Building a European qualifications map

Development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) across Europe

This policy brief contributes to better understanding of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in Europe by providing insights into their main characteristics, scope and coverage, along with a discussion on their impact and the extent to which they are used.

The analysis is based primarily on information from Cedefop's European inventory of NQFs, which was updated in cooperation with the European Commission, the ETF and the countries participating in the EQF process.

Project info:

[National qualifications frameworks \(NQFs\)](#)

[NQF online tool](#)

[European inventory of NQFs](#)

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