



African Continental
Qualifications Framework

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

TECHNICAL CLUSTER 1 – REFERENCING TO ACQF AND FACILITATION OF RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

SURVEY ANALYSIS REPORT ON REFERENCING TO ACQF AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NQFS



December 2025

Secretariat Cluster 1

CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Member States surveyed	4
2. Awareness of ACQF Referencing Process & Benefits.....	5
Table 1: Awareness of the process and benefits of Referencing NQF to ACQF Referencing....	5
3. Awareness of ACQF Guidelines & Support Materials.....	5
Table 2: Awareness of ACQF Referencing Guideline 3, Training Module 3, and Support Materials on the website.....	6
4. National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) Implementation Status	6
Table 3: Member States NQFs Implementation Status.....	7
5. Member States Interest and Commitment to Referencing	7
Table 4: Member States Interest in Referencing NQF to ACQF	8
Chart 1: Number of Member States by Alignment Stage	8
6. Current Status of National Referencing Processes	9
Table 5: Status of Member States Referencing Process	9
7. Projected Timelines for Report Submission	10
Table 6: Plans for Submitting Full Draft Referencing Report to Cluster for Initial Review....	10
8. Post-Referencing Plans: Integration of ACQF Levels	11
Table 7: Plans for Using ACQF Levels on Newly Issued Qualifications After Referencing Completion	11
9. Main Needs for Technical Assistance in National Referencing Process	11
Table 8: Aggregated Demand for Technical Assistance	12
9.1 Analysis of Aggregated Demand for Technical Assistance/Support by Member States.....	13
10. Member States Views, Ideas, and Suggestions to Enhance Cluster Activities and NQF Referencing.....	14
Chart 2: Main Feedback Topics from Member States	14
10.1 Analysis of Member States' Views, Ideas, and Suggestions to Enhance Cluster Activities and NQF Referencing	15
11. Conclusion and Forward Outlook.....	16

1. Introduction

This report synthesizes the findings from a comprehensive survey conducted across 22 Member States, providing a granular, evidence-based snapshot of the current state of NQF implementation and the progress towards ACQF referencing. The data collected offers an unprecedented opportunity to move from broad policy objectives to targeted, actionable strategies.

The primary objective of this report is to transform raw survey data into a decisive, forward-looking strategic analysis.

The analysis is based on a survey questionnaire distributed to all 22 participating Member States.

The survey collected data on **9 key thematic areas**:

1. Awareness of the ACQF referencing process and its benefits.
2. Awareness of ACQF support materials (Guideline 3, Training Module 3).
3. Country interest in referencing to the ACQF.
4. Main needs for technical assistance.
5. Status of the country's referencing process.
6. Plans for submitting draft referencing reports.
7. Status of NQF implementation.
8. Plans for using ACQF levels on new qualifications post-referencing.
9. Member State Recommendations for Enhanced Collaboration

The report presents the synthesized findings, with every conclusion and recommendation firmly rooted in the evidence provided by the Member States themselves.

1.1 Member States surveyed

- **Angola**
- **Botswana**
- **Cabo Verde**
- **Cameroon**
- **Eswatini**
- **Guinea-Bissau**
- **Ethiopia**
- **Kenya**
- **Lesotho**
- **Malawi**
- **Democratic Republic of Congo**
- **Senegal**
- **Seychelles**
- **Mauritius**
- **Tunisia**
- **Zambia**
- **Zimbabwe**
- **Moçambique**
- **Sierra Leone**
- **Burundi**
- **South Sudan**
- **South Africa**

2. Awareness of ACQF Referencing Process & Benefits

Effective referencing is impossible without a clear understanding of its purpose, processes, and benefits. The survey gauged the level of awareness among national stakeholders, revealing a significant information and support gap.

Table 1: Awareness of the process and benefits of Referencing NQF to ACQF Referencing

Fully informed	Informed, but need more information and support	Informed, but NQF is not yet approved in legislation
Cabo Verde	Angola	Cameroon
Eswatini	Botswana	Guinea-Bissau
Ethiopia	Lesotho	DR Congo
Kenya	Seychelles	Senegal
Malawi	Mauritius	
South Africa	Zambia	
	Zimbabwe	
	Moçambique	
	Burundi	
	South Sudan	

- The Informed Cohort:** Only 6 out of 22 countries (27%) report being "fully informed". Notably, this group includes most of the countries that have made the most progress in the pilot referencing process (Kenya, South Africa, Eswatini, Cabo Verde). This establishes a strong correlation between high awareness and advanced progress.
- The “Aware but Needing Support” Majority:** A significant majority of 10 countries (45%) fall into this category. This is a critical finding: while there is baseline awareness, it is insufficient for independent action. This group represents the most immediate and impactful target for capacity-building interventions, as they are primed to move forward with the right support.

Four countries link their lack of progress directly to the unapproved status of their NQF. For them, awareness campaigns must be coupled with advocacy and technical assistance for NQF legislation

3. Awareness of ACQF Guidelines & Support Materials

Beyond general awareness, familiarity with specific technical tools like the ACQF Referencing Guideline 3 and its associated training modules is crucial for the practical work of referencing. The data here shows an even more pronounced need for information dissemination and training.

Table 2: Awareness of ACQF Referencing Guideline 3, Training Module 3, and Support Materials on the website

Fully informed	Informed, but need more information and support	Not informed
Cabo Verde, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Seychelles, Zambia, Sierra Leone, South Africa	Angola, Cameroon, Malawi, DR Congo, Mauritius, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Sudan	Botswana, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal

- **A Wider "Informed" Group:** Nine countries report being "fully informed" about the technical guidelines, a slightly larger group than those aware of the general benefits. This suggests that technical dissemination efforts have had some success, particularly with countries already engaged in the process.
- **Persistent Need for Support:** The "need more information" group remains large (9 countries), reinforcing the message from the previous section. Even with access to materials, countries require guided support to interpret and apply them effectively.
- **The Uninformed:** Four countries report being "Not informed" at all. This is an urgent issue that requires immediate, targeted outreach to ensure these countries are not left behind.

The most prominent pattern is the identical count for the first two categories. Exactly 9 countries report being "fully informed," and an equal number (9) report being aware but needing "more information and support."

A significant majority of the countries surveyed (18 out of 22, or approximately 82%) have at least some levels of awareness of the ACQF materials.

4. National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) Implementation Status

The existence and maturity of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is the single most important precondition for a successful referencing process. The survey reveals a wide spectrum of NQF development across the 22 Member States, which can be grouped into several distinct categories.

Table 3: Member States NQFs Implementation Status

NQF implementation Status	Countries
NQF in Active Development	Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Zimbabwe
NQF Well Established and Reviewed	Seychelles
NQF Currently Being Implemented	Senegal
NQF Under Revision to Address Gaps	Zambia
Needs Approval by Council of Ministers	Guinea-Bissau
No Current Plans	DR Congo
Initial Discussions Underway	South Sudan

A large cohort of 16 countries report their NQFs are in "Active Development". This indicates a strong continental momentum towards establishing formal qualifications systems. These countries form the primary target group for near-term referencing activities.

Seychelles stands out with a "Well Established and Reviewed" NQF, positioning it as a potential mentor and model of good practice within the cluster.

Senegal and Zambia are in the implementation and revision phases, respectively. Their experiences offer valuable lessons on the practical challenges of operationalizing and refining an NQF.

A critical group of countries, including Guinea-Bissau, DR Congo, and South Sudan, are at the pre-implementation stage. Their journey towards referencing will be longer and requires foundational support focused on policy development, legislative processes, and stakeholder consensus-building. The case of DR Congo, reporting "No current plans," signals a need for high-level advocacy and engagement to bring them into the continental process.

5. Member States Interest and Commitment to Referencing

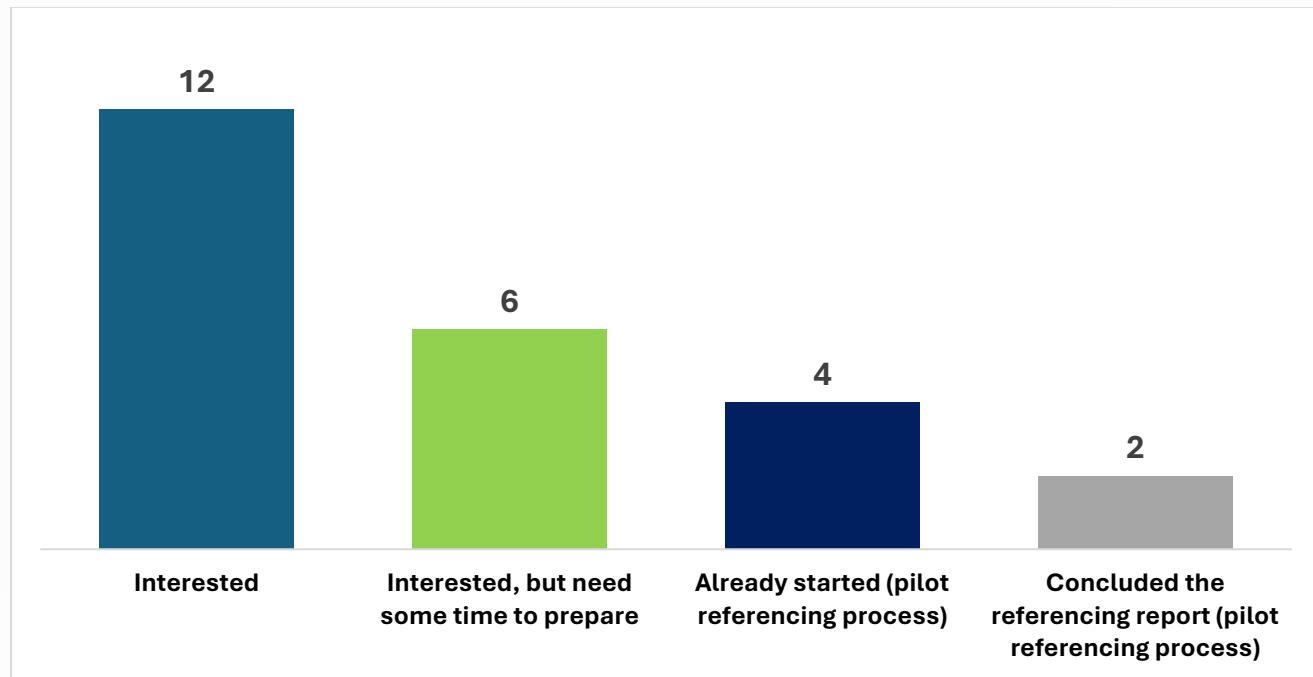
Despite the challenges, the survey reveals a powerful and near-unanimous political will to engage with the ACQF.

Table 4: Member States Interest in Referencing NQF to ACQF

Interested	Interested, but need some time to prepare	Already started (pilot referencing process)	Concluded the referencing report (pilot referencing process)
Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mauritius, Tunisia, Zambia, Sierra Leone	Lesotho, DR Congo, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Sudan	Seychelles, Botswana, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal	Kenya, South Africa

The journey towards continental alignment shows a clear progression, with widespread initial interest funnelling down to a select few who have completed the pilot process. The chart below illustrates the number of countries at each distinct stage.

Chart 1: Number of Member States by Alignment Stage



A large group of 12 countries explicitly state they are "Interested". This forms a pipeline of nations ready to begin the referencing journey once preconditions are met and support is available.

Six countries express interest but realistically note they "need some time to prepare". This pragmatism is constructive, as it signals an understanding of the preparatory work required. This group needs a clear roadmap and milestones to guide their preparation phase.

The four countries that have "Already started" or "Concluded" their pilot reports (Eswatini, Seychelles, Kenya, South Africa) are the source of the good practices and peer-learning that other Member States are calling for.

6. Current Status of National Referencing Processes

This is the most detailed indicator of progress, breaking down the referencing journey into nine distinct stages, from a complete lack of a team to a finalized report. The data on the [Table 5](#) below reveals a clear clustering of countries at different points along this spectrum.

Table 5: Status of Member States Referencing Process

Status Category	Countries
Report completed, taking account of all comments	Cabo Verde
Report Completed Pending Finalization/Validation	Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa
Full referencing process Near Completion	Eswatini
Drafting Essential Chapters – Full Text in Progress	Lesotho
Drafting Started – Progress Delayed by Technical/Organizational Issues	Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Burundi
National Referencing Team Not Yet Fully Organized	Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, DR Congo, Senegal, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan
Needs Technical Support to Establish Referencing Team	Guinea-Bissau
NQF Not Yet Operational	Malawi
Not Started – Requires Capacity Building and Technical Support	Botswana

This table shows that countries like Cabo Verde, Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa, and Eswatini are at the most advanced stages. They have moved beyond drafting and are in the final phases of completion, validation, and review. These countries are on the cusp of demonstrating the full referencing cycle.

Lesotho, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Burundi are actively engaged in the technical work of writing their reports. However, the majority of this group (4 out of 5) report delays due to technical or organizational issues, highlighting a critical point for intervention. Providing targeted support to this group could significantly accelerate their progress.

The largest single group of countries is stuck at the very first step: organizing a functional National Referencing Team. This is a major bottleneck. Countries like Angola, Ethiopia, and Mauritius, despite expressing high interest, have not been able to translate that will into an operational structure. This points to a critical need for hands-on organizational support and guidance on establishing roles, responsibilities, and work plans.

Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, and Botswana are at the absolute beginning, needing support to even form a team, waiting for their NQF to become operational, or requiring foundational capacity building before they can start. Their needs are the most comprehensive.

7. Projected Timelines for Report Submission

Countries' self-reported timelines for submitting their draft referencing reports provide a forecast of continental progress and help identify which nations have a concrete action plan.

Table 6: Plans for Submitting Full Draft Referencing Report to Cluster for Initial Review

By the end of 2025	By the end of 2026	Not Started – Needs Capacity Building and Technical Support
Angola Burundi Cabo Verde Eswatini Guinea-Bissau Kenya Lesotho Mauritius Seychelles South Africa Zimbabwe	Cameroon DR Congo Ethiopia Malawi Mozambique Senegal Sierra Leone South Sudan Tunisia Zambia	Botswana

- **The 2025 Cohort (11 countries):** This group shows a high level of ambition. However, cross-referencing with [Table 5](#) reveals a potential disconnect between ambition and reality. For instance, Angola, Mauritius, and Guinea-Bissau plan for a 2025 submission but have not yet fully organized their referencing teams. This suggests their timelines may be overly optimistic and require a reality check and intensive support. In contrast, countries like Cabo Verde, Kenya, and South Africa have timelines consistent with their advanced progress.
- **The 2026 Cohort (10 countries):** This group has a more realistic timeframe, giving them a full year to organize, draft, and review. This is the primary target group for the "Scaling Up" phase of the proposed roadmap. The Cluster should proactively plan a structured program of support for these countries throughout 2026.

- **Botswana's** honest assessment that it cannot commit to a timeline without foundational support is valuable. It reinforces the need for the "Foundation Building" track in the strategic roadmap.

8. Post-Referencing Plans: Integration of ACQF Levels

Referencing is not an end in itself. Its ultimate value lies in the use of the ACQF as a common currency for qualifications. This part of the survey assessed the extent to which countries have planned for this final, crucial step.

Table 7: Plans for Using ACQF Levels on Newly Issued Qualifications After Referencing Completion

Will Use ACQF Levels on All Qualification Types	Will Use ACQF Levels on Pilot/Sample Basis	Institutional Discussion Started at National Level	No National Reflection Started Yet	Prefer to Learn from Good Practices of Other Countries
Eswatini, Kenya, South Africa	Burundi, Lesotho, Tunisia, Mauritius	Botswana, Cameroon, Senegal, Mozambique, Seychelles	Angola, Cabo Verde, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Sierra Leone, South Sudan

Only 3 countries (Eswatini, Kenya, and South Africa) have committed to use ACQF levels on all qualifications. This demonstrates a deep, strategic commitment to the ACQF and positions them as leaders in the practical implementation of the framework.

A second group plans to start with a pilot or sample-based approach. A significant number of countries are in the discussion phase.

A large group of 8 countries, including some that are otherwise advanced, admit that "No national reflection has started yet".

Sierra Leone and South Sudan's desire to learn from others is a call for the very peer-learning mechanisms that the Cluster aims to facilitate.

9. Main Needs for Technical Assistance in National Referencing Process

The survey provided a granular view of the specific technical assistance required by Member States. The demand is extensive and highlights the critical need for a well-resourced support program. The following table aggregates the requests across all countries, revealing the most common areas of need.

Table 8: Aggregated Demand for Technical Assistance

Main needs for Technical Assistance	Countries requesting support	Countries	% of Respondents
a. Support in the organisation of the referencing process (roadmap, roles and responsibilities)	Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Malawi, RD Congo, Mauritius, Tunisia, Zambia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Burundi, South Sudan	14	63,6%
b. Support in organizing the National Referencing Team	Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, RD Congo, Zambia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan	9	40,9%
c. Full training programme on all aspects of the referencing process	Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Malawi, RD Congo, Senegal, Mauritius, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan	14	63,6%
d. Training on the main referencing criteria: understanding, drafting, evidence	Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, RD Congo, Senegal, Mauritius, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan	15	68,2%
e. Support in drafting the referencing report	Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, RD Congo, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan	12	54,5%
f. Support in finalising the referencing report and presenting it successfully	Angola, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Eswatini, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, RD Congo, Tunisia, Zambia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan	14	63,6%
g. Finding adequate peers for the review and validation of the referencing report	Angola, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Lesotho, Malawi, RD Congo, Tunisia, Zambia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone	11	50,0%
h. No assistance needed	Seychelles, South Africa	2	9,1%

What Support Is Needed Most?

An analysis of requests across seven categories shows a clear top priority: specific, technical training on referencing criteria is the most common gap, indicating where capacity building should focus.

9.1 Analysis of Aggregated Demand for Technical Assistance/Support by Member States

The survey results show a strong and consistent demand for technical assistance across all core dimensions of the ACQF referencing process. Most countries are willing to advance but lack the institutional capacity, technical skills, or methodological clarity required to conduct a complete and credible referencing exercise.

The highest demand concerns training on the referencing criteria (68.2%), followed by requests for support in organising the overall referencing process, implementing full training programmes, and finalising the referencing report (each at 63.6%). These results suggest that foundational knowledge on referencing methodology remains limited and that countries require structured, continuous capacity-building to progress.

More than half of the respondents also requested assistance in drafting the referencing report (54.5%) and in identifying suitable peers for review and validation (50%). This indicates both technical and network-related constraints, reflecting the complexity of producing a robust report aligned with ACQF standards and international comparability principles.

Support for establishing or strengthening National Referencing Teams (40.9%) points to institutional challenges that may affect governance, coordination, and flow of evidence within countries. Although this percentage is lower than other categories, it remains significant and aligns with the need for clearer organisational structures.

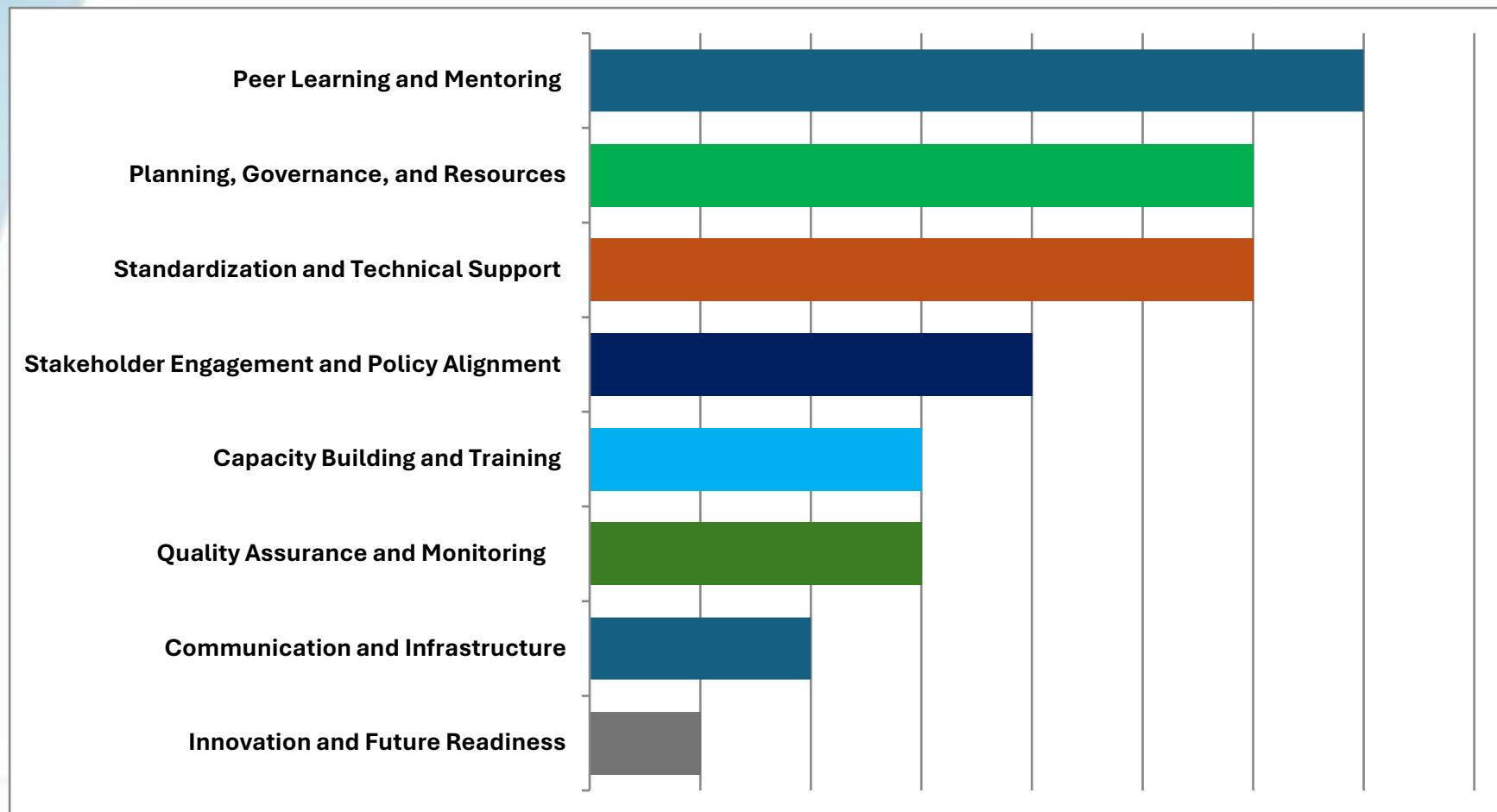
Only two countries (9.1%) reported no need for technical assistance, both of which already have mature qualifications systems. This confirms that, for the vast majority, technical support is not optional but essential for progressing with referencing.

Overall, the aggregated data highlights the need for a coordinated ACQF support strategy that prioritises capacity-building, technical guidance, and peer-learning mechanisms. The convergence of needs across countries suggests that regional, cluster-based interventions can be both efficient and impactful, strengthening national capacities and promoting coherent progress across the continent.

10. Member States Views, Ideas, and Suggestions to Enhance Cluster Activities and NQF Referencing

The countries' suggestions were grouped into eight thematic areas. The chart below shows the frequency of each theme, highlighting the areas of highest priority for Member States.

Chart 2: Main Feedback Topics from Member States



10.1 Analysis of Member States' Views, Ideas, and Suggestions to Enhance Cluster Activities and NQF Referencing

The contributions from Member States reveal a convergent message: countries want the Cluster to move from general guidance to more structured, practical, and hands-on support. The diversity of suggestions reflects different levels of NQF maturity, but the underlying needs are consistent across regions. Three major themes emerge:

a. Demand for Standardization, Harmonization, and Clear Procedures

- Several countries, notably Cabo Verde, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique and Tunisia, call for clearer, standardized processes. This includes templates, guidelines, minimum steps, and model referencing reports.
- This indicates that countries are struggling with methodological fragmentation and expect the Cluster to provide a unified, authoritative framework to reduce ambiguity and ensure consistent referencing quality.
- Cabo Verde's proposal for a consolidated repository of lessons learned and templates echoes this need for harmonization.
- Kenya and Lesotho reinforce the point: without standard steps and a reference template, countries cannot guarantee coherence or comparability.
- Tunisia goes further by stressing the need for tailor-made follow-up aligned with each NQF system's specificities.

b. Strong Call for Peer Learning, Experience Exchange, and Mentorship

- A recurring suggestion, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Burundi, is to strengthen peer exchanges. Countries want practical, hands-on learning from those who have already advanced.
- South Africa and Mauritius explicitly push for **peer-to-peer mentoring**, sharing of good practices, and structured support adapted to each country.
- Burundi highlights the limitations of remote exchanges, asking for in-person learning opportunities.
- Zimbabwe, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola all point to peer collaboration as a mechanism to accelerate referencing.

c. Need for High-Level Engagement, Awareness, and Political Coordination

Some countries emphasize political or institutional dimensions:

- DR Congo calls for stronger cooperation with Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and involvement of Ministers.
- Ethiopia asks for mechanisms to create awareness among top leaders.

- Eswatini wants referencing used as a tool for system improvement, backed by action plans.
- Malawi links referencing progress to NQF operationalization.

This shows that **technical capacity alone is insufficient**. Many obstacles are political or institutional: lack of prioritization, weak inter-ministerial coordination, and low awareness among decision-makers.

11. Conclusion and Forward Outlook

The survey completed by 22 Member States offers the most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of progress on ACQF referencing and NQF implementation. The results confirm a strong political commitment across the continent, while also highlighting important capacity gaps that continue to limit the pace of progress. The data shows that countries are advancing at different stages, which calls for a more tailored and supportive approach from Cluster 1.

The analysis reveals three broad groups of Member States. A small group of pioneers, such as **Cabo Verde, Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa** and **Eswatini**, are nearing completion of their referencing reports and are well positioned to serve as sources of experience and good practices. A **second, larger group** is actively developing or updating their NQFs yet faces operational challenges such as delays in setting up National Referencing Teams or technical constraints that slow down the referencing process. A **third group** remains at the foundational stage, where the priority is still the approval, establishment, or initial implementation of their NQFs.

Across all groups, the survey shows a clear gap between political will and technical or organizational capacity. Several countries intend to reference soon, but lack the structures or skills required to begin or advance the process. Technical assistance needs are precise and consistent, particularly regarding training on the ACQF referencing criteria, support to organize national teams, and practical guidance for drafting and finalising referencing reports. Member States also express a strong demand for clearer templates, model reports, and a standardised approach that strengthens coherence across the continent.

Another important finding is the limited level of planning for the post-referencing phase. Several countries have not yet initiated discussions on integrating ACQF levels into national qualifications.

Ensuring that referencing leads to meaningful system-level benefits will require early preparation and targeted guidance.

Looking ahead, the next 12 to 24 months should focus on practical and differentiated support. Cluster 1 could adopt a three-track strategy: facilitating mentorship from pioneer countries; providing targeted technical support to those ready to accelerate; and offering policy-level guidance to countries still building the foundations of their NQF systems. The development of standardised tools, model templates, and a consolidated repository of lessons learned will also be essential. Strengthening peer learning and structured exchanges will help address the concrete challenges Member States face in progressing with referencing.

Finally, the regional perspective emerging from the data deserves special attention. The experience with the National Qualifications and Certifications Framework shows a more advanced level of development, both on the Southern African countries like Seychelles, and in Kenya. Furthermore, it appears from this experience that the SADC regional community's Commission is highly involved in partnership relations with the European Training Foundation (ETF) Agency of the European Union.

In this regard, Cluster 1 may also explore strategic partnerships aimed at strengthening political and institutional commitment to ACQF referencing. As emphasised by the **Vice-Deputy Chairperson, Mr. Laurent Ndaywel Mbossele**, he proposes that, starting Monday, 19 January 2026, we initiate a formal partnership with the new Commissioner for Gender Promotion, Human and Social Development of the Economic Community of Central African States Commission (ECCAS-CEEAC).

According to Mr. Ndaywel Mbossele, this regional institution is well positioned to support and motivate the sectoral ministries of the Central African sub-region to deepen their engagement with the ACQF agenda. He further expressed his willingness to lead this initiative, noting that he maintains strong working relations with ECCAS and can pursue high-level discussions with the President of the Commission.

Mr. Ndaywel Mbossele also suggested that this collaboration could later be expanded to other regional community organisations, thereby reinforcing the continental momentum toward referencing. He remains convinced that this approach represents a solid opportunity to advance the national frameworks referencing strategy and to mobilise stronger political backing across regions.

With sustained collaboration and focused technical support, Cluster 1 is well positioned to help countries advance referencing efforts and prepare for the effective use of ACQF levels in their national qualification systems. The survey provides a strong evidence base to guide this next phase of work and reinforces the collective commitment of Member States to moving the ACQF agenda forward.