

ACQF

African Continental
Qualifications Framework



Session 7: ACQF-II Inventory of NQFs, RPL and micro-credentials in Africa: preliminary insights

ACQF-II Training workshop in Maputo, 5-6/December 2023

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Inventories of the ACQF

- **The NQF inventory includes the stage of development, main institutions and legislation, technical design, national registers of qualifications, level descriptors and RPL policies and practices.** The current survey is a continuation of the initial mapping study that took place from October 2019 to March 2020.
- **Micro-credentials and RPL are new areas of the surveys,** although some initiatives have been taking place since 2022, including development activities and thematic briefs.

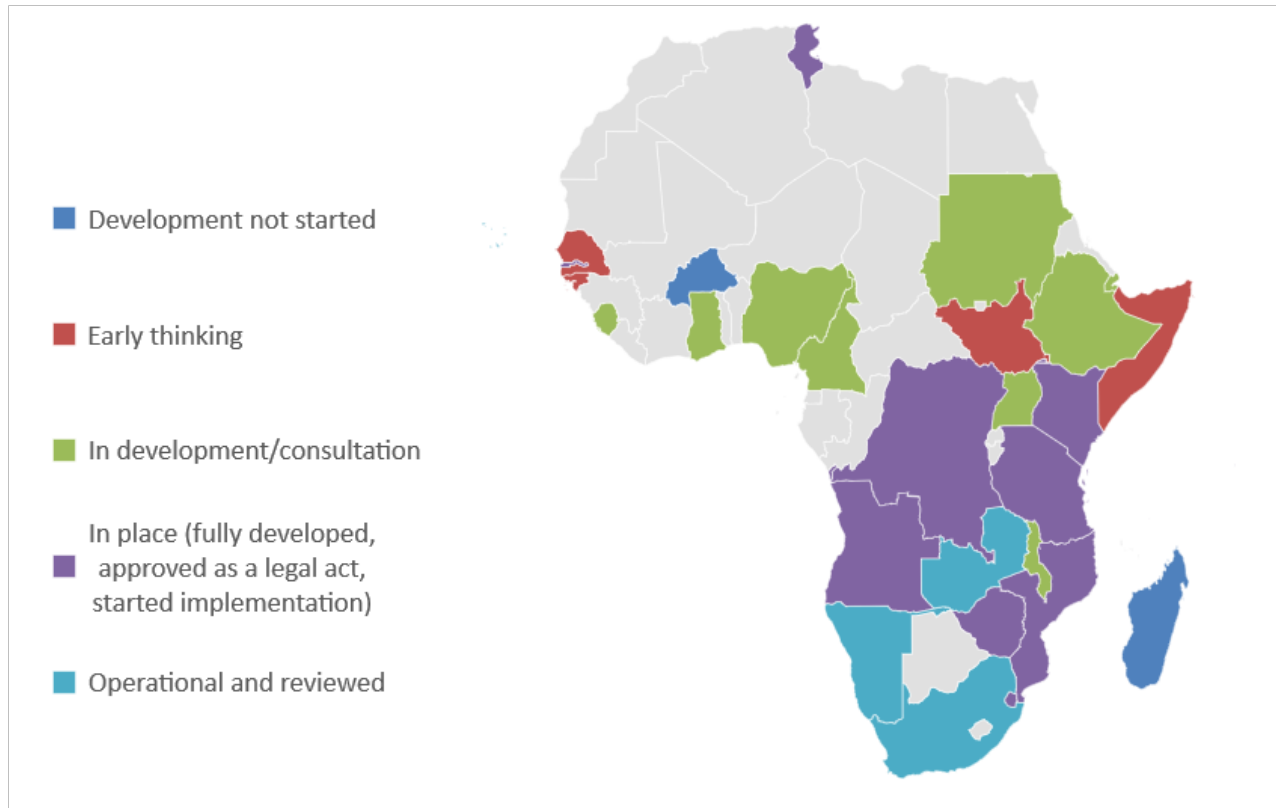
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National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) survey

Key details about the survey

- **Objective:** to provide a broad overview of the landscape of qualifications and areas related to qualifications frameworks.
- The survey was open from **September 13th to October 30th, 2023**.
- **Total number of completed survey questionnaires:** 45, completed responses were received from **29** countries. The most responses from the same country (**3**) were received from Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone and South Sudan.
- The NQF survey reports data by countries. Where possible, duplicate and congruent answers from the same countries were deleted.
- In **30** cases out of 45 the survey was completed in English, 8 times in French and 7 times in Portuguese.
- Most of the respondents were representatives from the branches of national government ministries (**22**), less from national qualifications bodies (10) or quality assurance agencies (8).

Level of the NQF development*



- Most countries have only started the development (9) or have adopted and NQF legal act (10). In **six** other countries, development has not started yet or it is in phase of early thinking. **Four** countries are reported to have an NQF that is operational or reviewed.

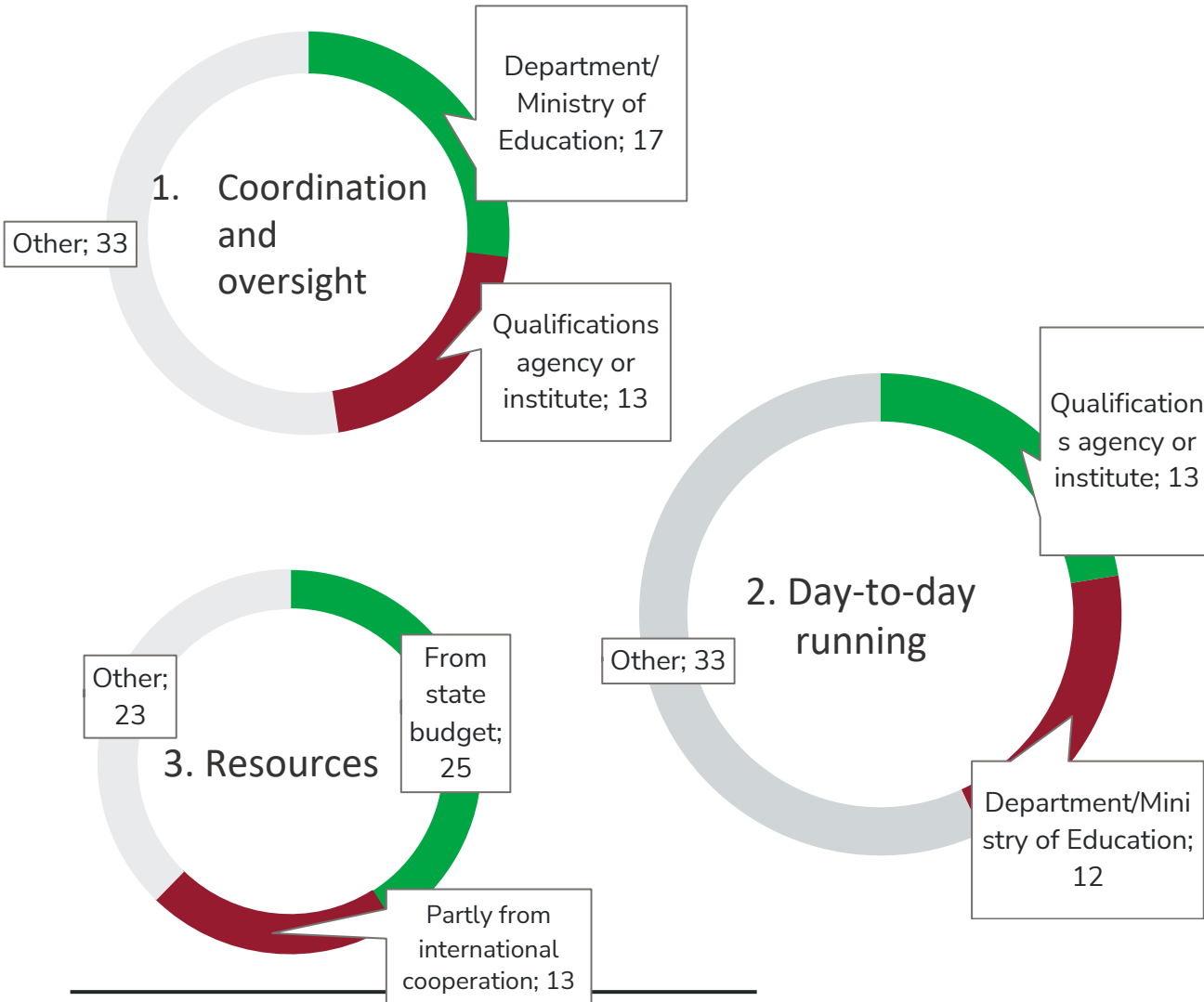
Note 1: One response was submitted from Cape Verde (NQF is operational or reviewed) and Seychelles (NQF is in place) respectively.

Note 2: Self-assessed stages of development may not always be correct and will be triangulated later on with other information.

Level of the NQF development by country

Stage of NQF development and implementation	Number of NQFs in Africa	Countries
STAGE 1: NQF DEVELOPMENT NOT STARTED	2	BURKINA FASO, MADAGASCAR
STAGE 2: NQF IN EARLY THINKING	4	GUINEA-BISSAU, SENEGAL, SOMALIA, SOUTH SUDAN
STAGE 3: NQF IN DEVELOPMENT OR CONSULTATION	9	CAMEROON, DJIBOUTI, ETHIOPIA, GHANA, MALAWI, NIGERIA, SIERRA LEONE, SUDAN, UGANDA
STAGE 4: NQF IN PLACE (FULLY DEVELOPED, APPROVED AS A LEGAL ACT, STARTED IMPLEMENTATION)	10	ANGOLA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, ESWATINI, GAMBIA, KENYA, MOZAMBIQUE, SEYCHELLES, TANZANIA, TUNISIA, ZIMBABWE
STAGE 5: NQF OPERATIONAL AND REVIEWED	4	CABO VERDE, NAMIBIA, SOUTH AFRICA, ZAMBIA

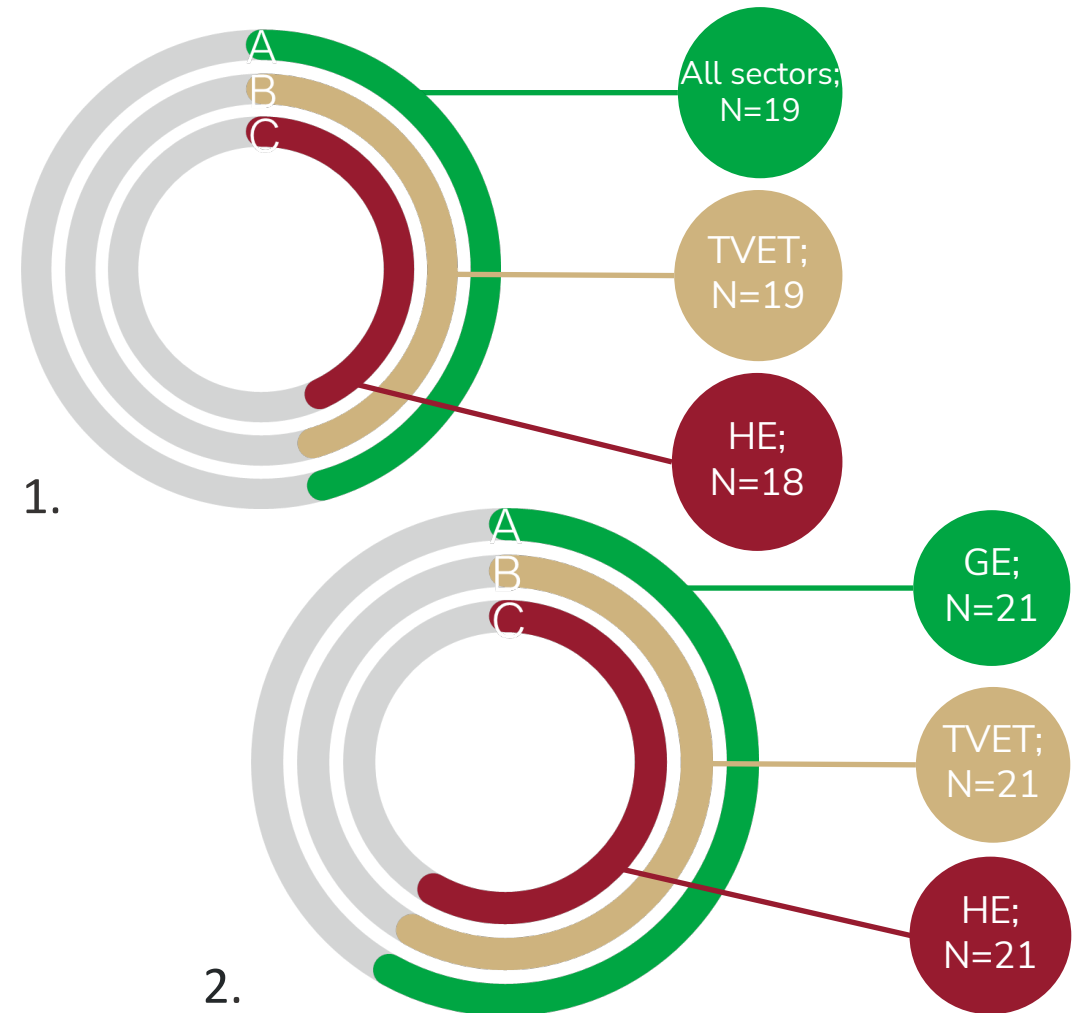
Supervision and funding of the NQF



1. Most times **Departments of Ministries of Education** are the main organisations responsible for coordination and oversight of the NQF (**17**). **Qualifications agencies and institutes** are also often identified as being responsible (**13**).
2. Day-to-day running of the system is usually trusted upon **qualifications agencies** (**13**), however, in a lot of cases **Departments of Ministries of Education** also have this responsibility (**12**).
3. Resources for operation are mostly funded **by the state from its budget** (**25**). In 13 cases of 45 resources were partly provided as a **part of international cooperation**.

NQF characteristics

1. Most NQFs were reported to have wide coverage, including **all stages of learning and development (19)**. Among those who responded that the NQF doesn't cover all sectors, **TVET (19)** and **higher education (HE) (18)** are covered most frequently.
2. **33** indicated that their NQF is composed of **different sub-frameworks**. Most respondents answered that all **general education (GE), higher education and TVET** have sub-frameworks (**21**).



Levels of NQF, classifications and level descriptors

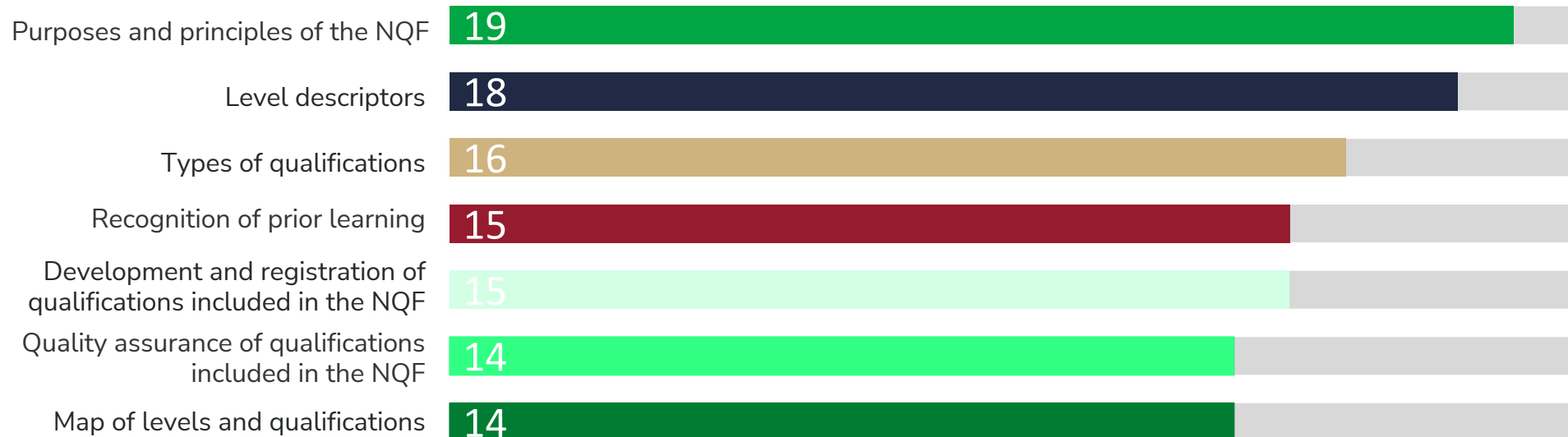
- Most of the respondents indicated that their countries' NQFs have **10 levels (18)**, **5** stakeholders reported that their NQFs have **8 levels**, followed by the frameworks with **more than 10 levels (3)** and **9 levels (2)**. There were almost no responses indicating less than 8 levels of NQF: 3 and 7 levels of NQF were identified each by one respondent.
- The most frequently mentioned classifications of the NQF are **national education and UNESCO classifications (16)**, **national occupational classification** was mentioned slightly less (**13**). A considerable share of respondents couldn't answer the question.

Domains of level descriptions used in NQFs	Frequency
Knowledge	21
Skills	19
Competence	17
Autonomy and responsibility	15
Attitudes	11
Knowledge and understanding	7
Personal attributes	6
Work competence	7
Other	4
Cannot answer / I don't know	3

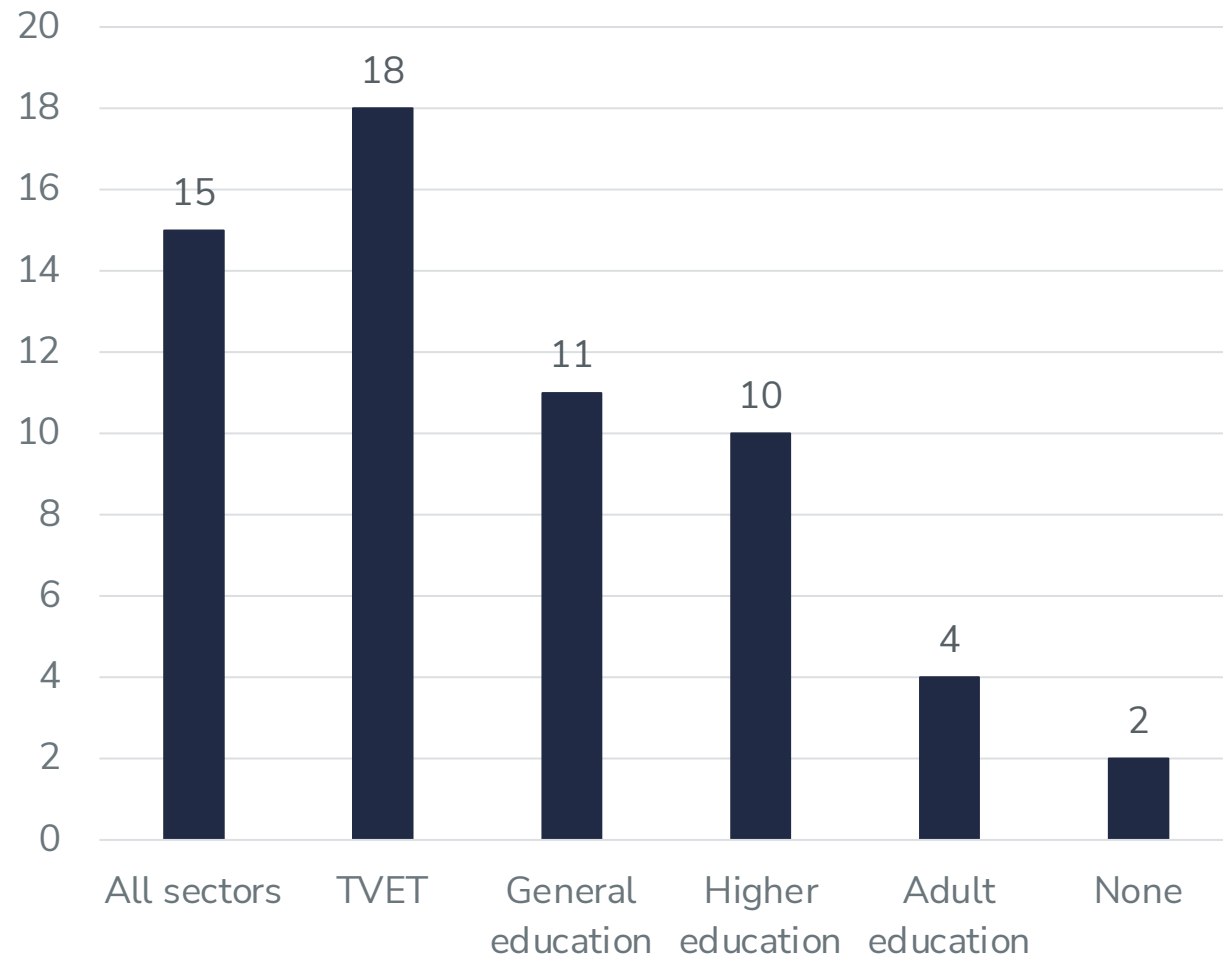
Legal basis and areas covered

The main legal regulations of the NQFs are **laws or acts on the NQF authority (8)** or a **decree on the NQF (5)**. Only one respondent reported that there are guidelines or registration of qualifications.

Most of the specific areas of the NQF are included in at least half of the cases. The areas below are regulated the most:



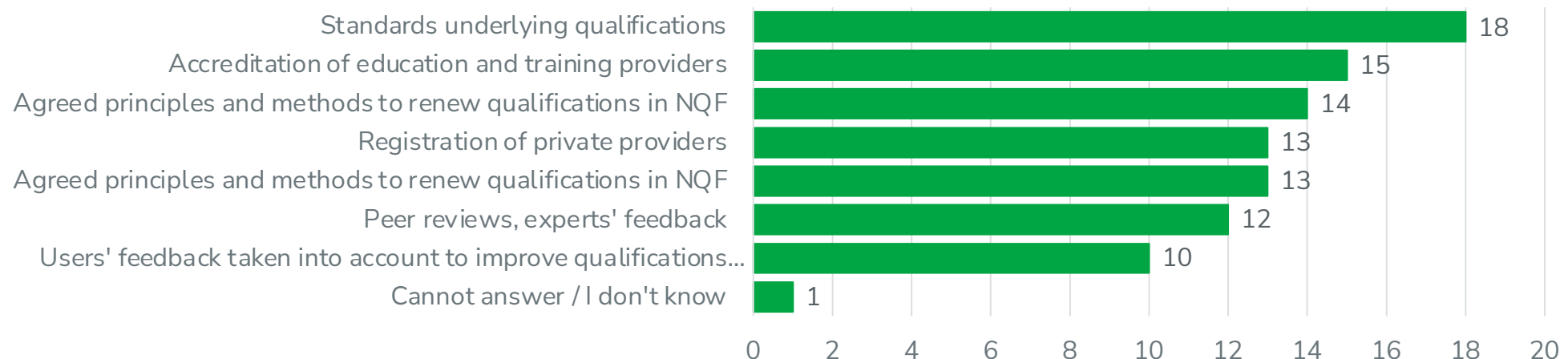
Objectives of the NQF and learning outcomes



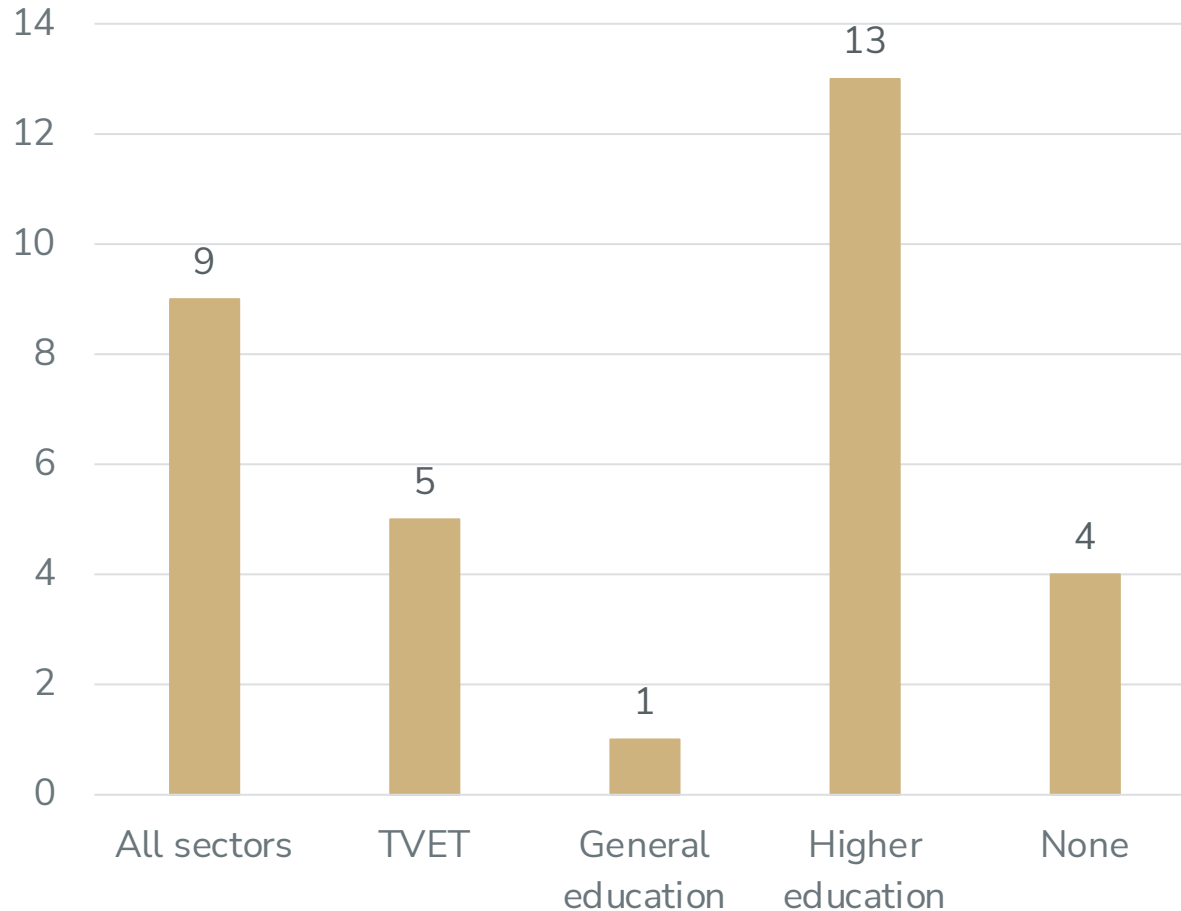
- **Harmonisation and integration of national qualifications systems and international comparability and transparency of qualifications and mobility** were the objectives mentioned most frequently and assessed as **important or very important** by the majority (90%) of respondents.
- The least chosen objectives were **readdressing past injustices** and **joint development of qualifications** with other countries, receiving an importance rating of below 70%.
- Nonformal and informal learning is part of the NQF system. Usually, these forms of learning are included through **the recognition of prior learning (11)**, in some cases, they're included in **all forms of learning (8)**. In most cases, qualification frameworks are based on **learning outcomes (26)**, and according to **15** respondents, they are used **in all relevant sectors**. Where they're used not in all sectors, **TVET** is mentioned the most (**18**), less frequently in general (**11**) and higher (**10**) education.

Quality assurance and national databases

- **Standards underlying qualifications (18), accreditation of education and training providers (15) and agreed principles and methods to include qualifications in NQFs (14)** are the most frequent quality assurance mechanisms.
- Around a third of respondents from countries with developed NQF systems claimed that these **countries have a database or registry of qualifications (9)**. The same number of respondents indicated that such **databases are being developed**, while **7** admitted that **their countries don't have databases or registries**.
- In cases where databases or registries exist, they either cover all sectors (5) or include **higher education and TVET (6)** most frequently.



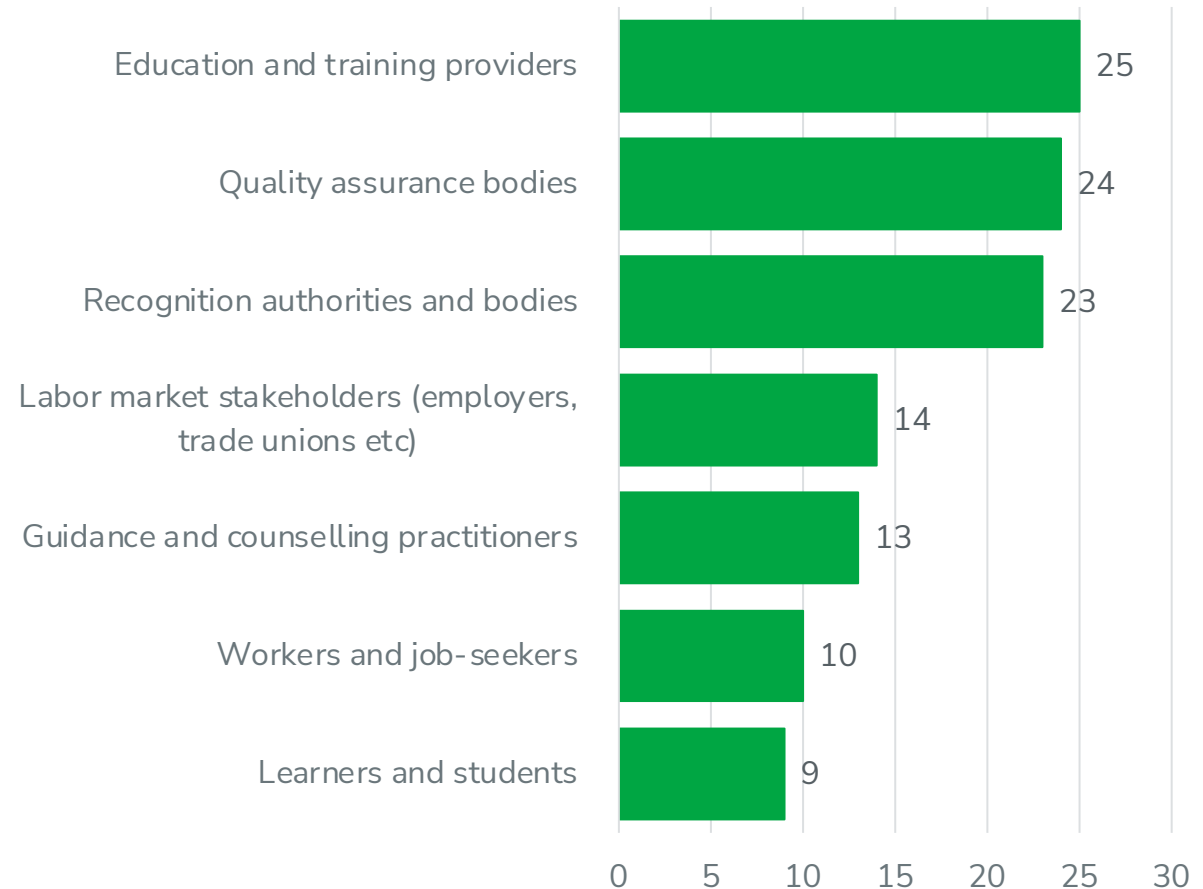
NQF credit systems



- While **Credit Accumulation and Transfer systems (CATs)** are **not integrated in most of the cases (17)**, significant share of respondents (13) reported that **there is a unified legislation or policy**.
- In **9 cases** where CATs are applied, they are applied **in all sectors**. Where CATs aren't applied in all sectors, **13** respondents claimed that they're applied in **higher education**, and considerably less in TVET (5).
- Usually, **credit** is defined as a measure of **the volume of learning required for a qualification (21)**. For those, one credit usually equates to **10 hours** of notional or study hours (**13**). For two respondents, it equals **15 credits**, while one indicated that one credit means 25 hours.

NQF: impacts, needs and lessons

- Respondents rated **quality assurance bodies** (24) and relevant recognition authorities, as well as **education and training providers** (25) to be **aware of the NQF and use it to a very large and large extent**. Only around one-fifth of students and learners (9) were seen as aware of and using the NQF to a very large or large extent.
- Open answers on primary needs indicated **a need for training, support in development and technical assistance. A lack of financial resources and human capacity** appeared 4 times when indicating challenges in developing and implementing of the NQF. Monitoring the impact of the NQF where it's relevant is usually done through **stakeholder feedback** or through **studies and performance indicators**.
- As for the **Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs)**, it is **established in 19** cases. In **11** of those **NQFs are referenced to RQFs**.



**Preliminary results of the
Recognition of Prior Learning and
Micro-credentials surveys**

Key details about the surveys

- **Objective:** to overview the developing space of micro-credentials and recognition of prior learning in Africa
- The survey data collection started **from October 23rd**, 2023. Current results are **preliminary** and may change as further data collection is underway. The surveys on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and micro-credentials were disseminated together.
- **Total number of completed survey questionnaires:** 49, completed responses were received from **24** countries. The most responses were received from Zambia (6), Seychelles (4) and Eswatini (4). The preliminary results are shown without recoding and exclusion of duplicate responses from the same country.
- In **30** cases out of 49 the survey was completed in English, 12 times in French and 7 times in Portuguese.
- Most of the **respondents** were **representatives from national institution responsible for the national qualifications frameworks (15)**, national government institutions (11). Other organisations included public education and training providers (6), quality assurance agencies (5), RECs (4), private education and training providers (3), among others.

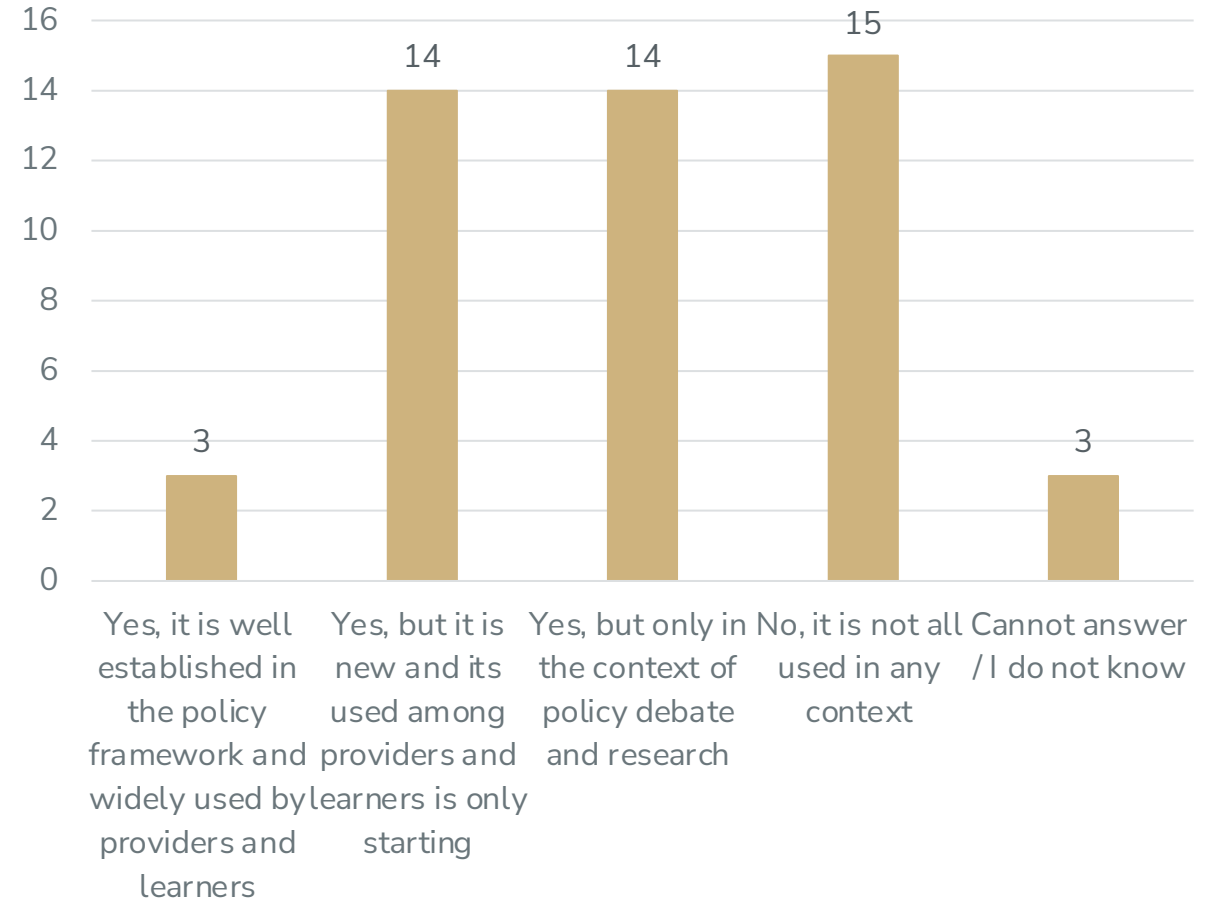
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Micro-credentials survey

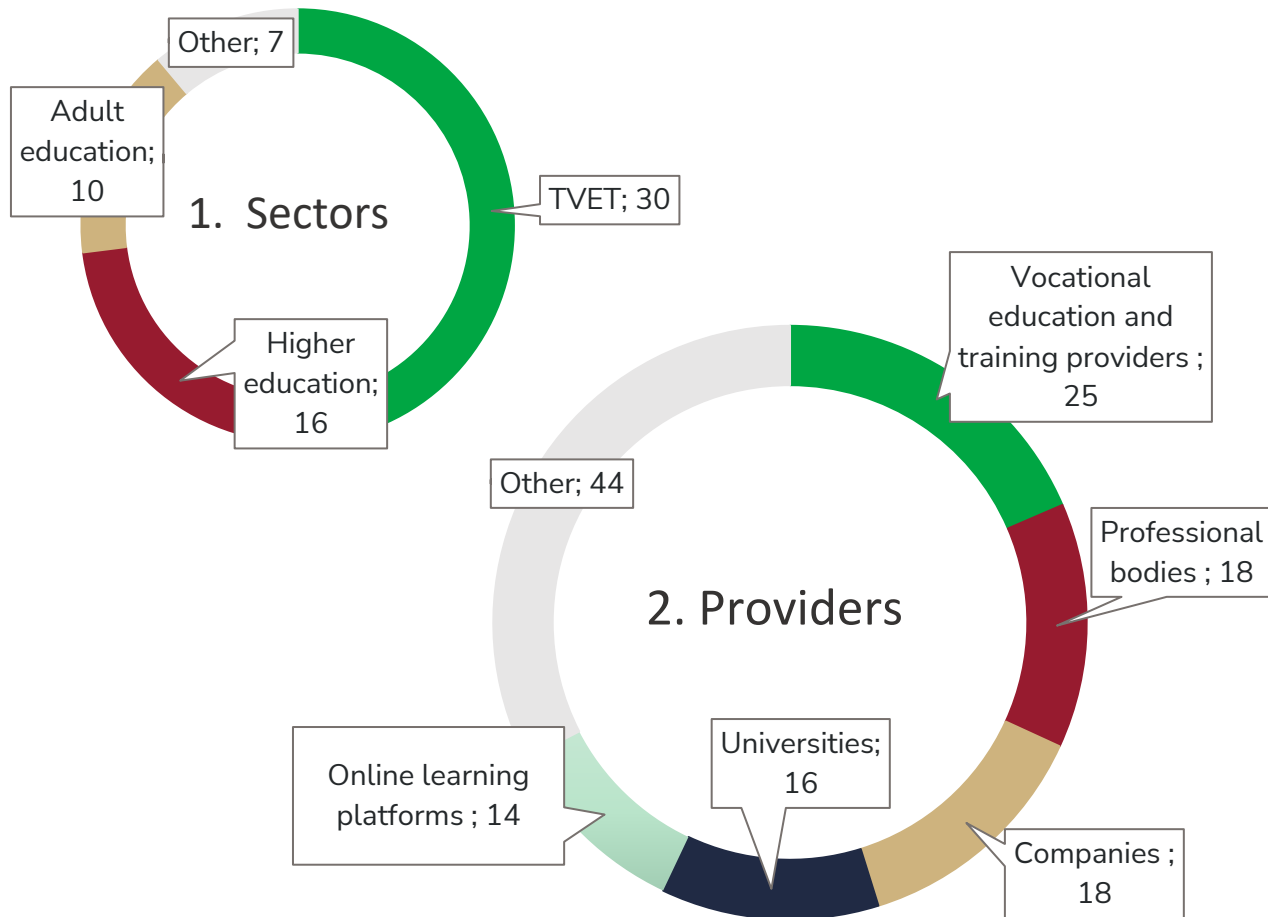
Preliminary results

Conceptual approaches to micro-credentials

- Micro-credentials is still a **developing area**. Most respondents indicated that **micro-credentials are used** (31) but **are not established in policy frameworks** or widely used by providers. An equal share report that micro-credentials are used in the context of policy debates and research (14) and among providers and learners (14). 15 do not use it in any context.
- Micro-credentials **definitions are being developed in most cases** (16). Formal definitions were reported in 3 cases (from Sudan and Zambia). A sizeable share do not have a definition (11) as of yet.
- 7 respondents signaled that there are approximate terms used to micro-credentials.



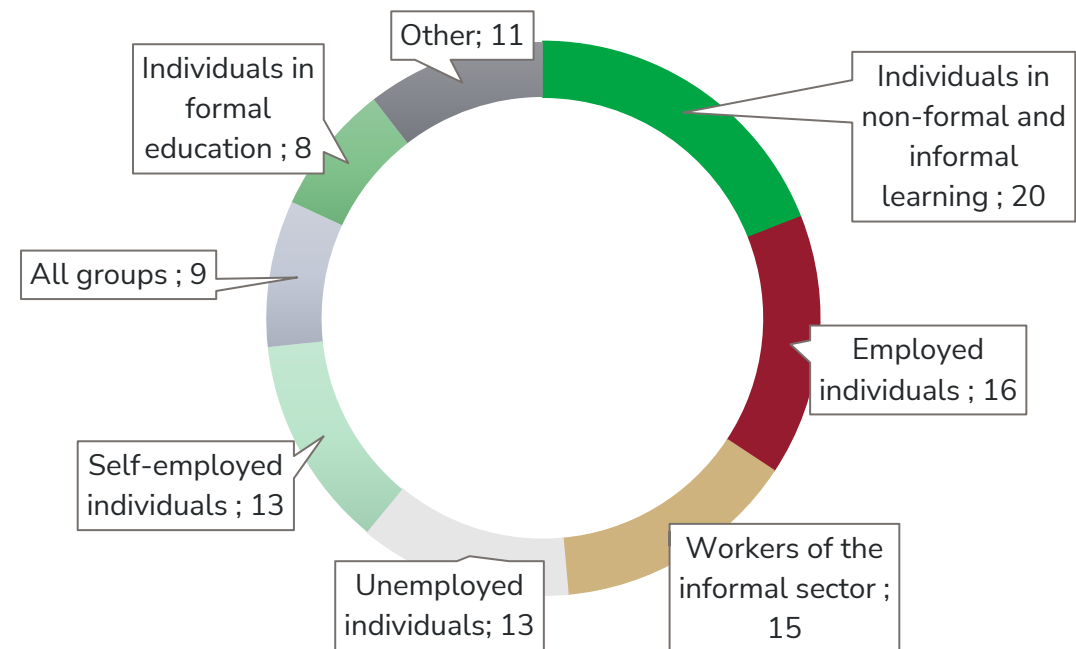
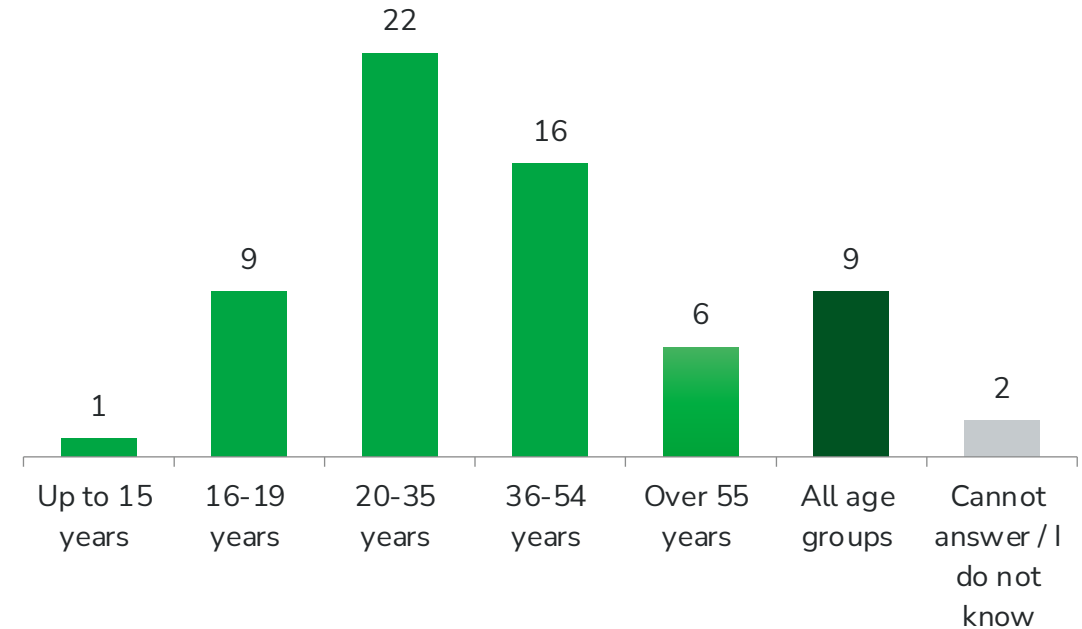
Current provision of micro-credentials



1. **TVET is the primary sector for micro-credentials**, 30 respondents indicated that micro-credentials are offered in this sector. Higher education (16) and adult education (10) are other notable sectors.
2. Accordingly, the main providers are: **vocational education and training providers** (25), professional bodies (18), companies (18), universities (16), online learning platforms (14). Other groups include: adult education providers (13), employers' organisations (11) and public employment services (10).

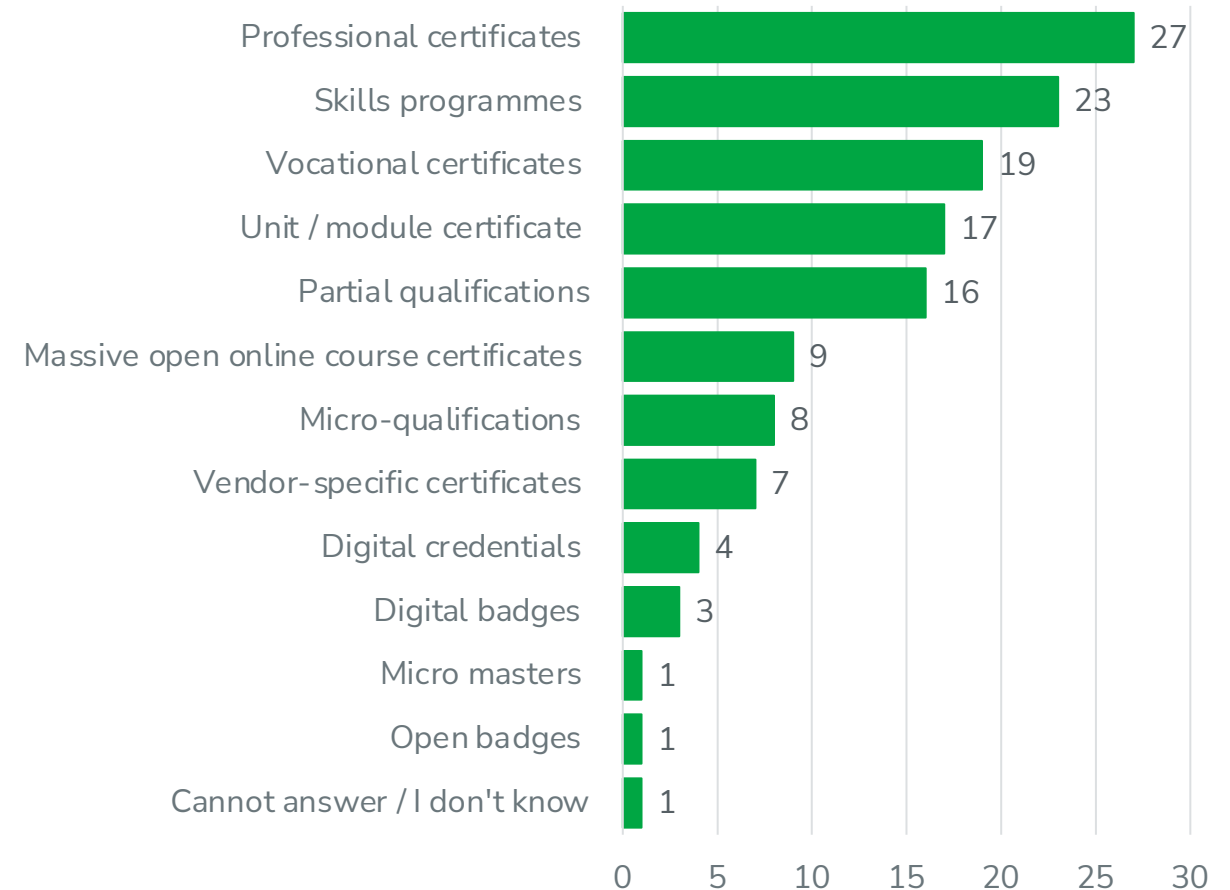
Recipients groups

- **Younger cohorts are the main recipients**, especially the 20–35-year-old segment (22). 16-19-year-olds are less likely to be recipients (9).
- **A wide variety of individuals are taking use of micro-credentials.** Individuals in non-formal and informal learning environments (20), employed persons (16) and workers of the informal sector (15) are the most regular recipients of micro-credentials.
- The general expectation is that **micro-credential offers will grow to a large extent (18) or to a very large extent (14)**. Thus, the significance of micro-credentials policies will grow in the future much more.



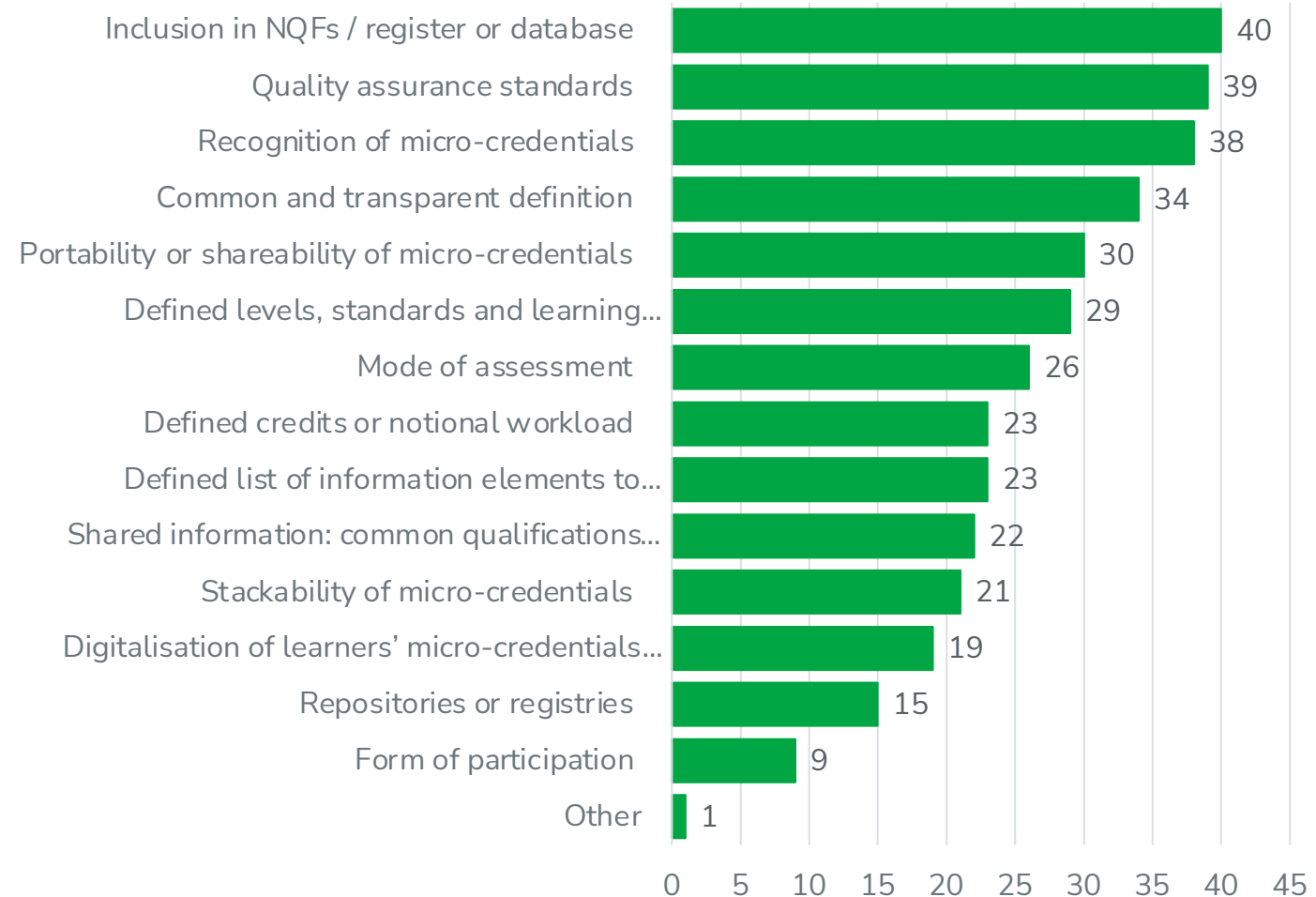
Other characteristics of micro-credentials

- **Professional certificates (27), skills programmes (23), vocational certificates (19), unit/module certificates (17) and partial qualifications (16) are the most common forms of micro-credentials.**
- **Micro-credentials tend to have various kinds of elements including** date of issuing (6), issuing authority (6), title of micro-credential (5) and identification of the holder (5), results and type of assessment (4) are the most common items. Relationship to existing qualifications (1), forms of participation (2) and quality assurance status (2) are the least common elements.
- Micro-credentials were stackable in 4 cases, 2 reported that it is not possible to stack.



Micro-credentials: challenges, priorities and a common approach

- A **common African approach to micro-credentials sees large support: 36** respondents think that it is very important.
- Initial results show that **the common approach should focus on** inclusion of NQFs, registers or databases (40), quality assurance standards (39), recognition of micro-credentials (38) and common, transparent definitions (34).
- **Agreed quality assurance standards (28), the awareness on micro-credentials (26), support from national policies and authorities (23) and the confusion from the multiple names (22) were most important challenged to a wider uptake of micro-credentials.**
- Providing reskilling and upskilling opportunities (32), responding to changing labour needs (31), increasing the flexibility of learning opportunities (30) are the **priority purposes of micro-credentials.**



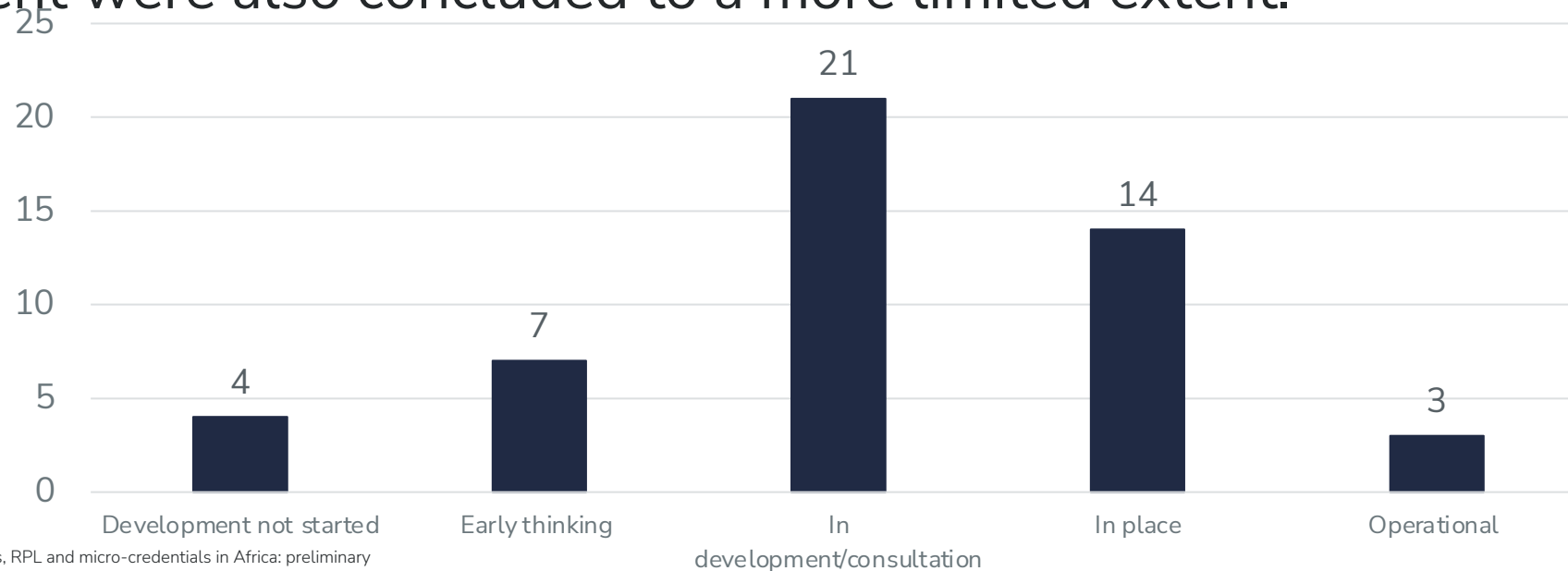
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Recognition of prior learning survey

Preliminary results

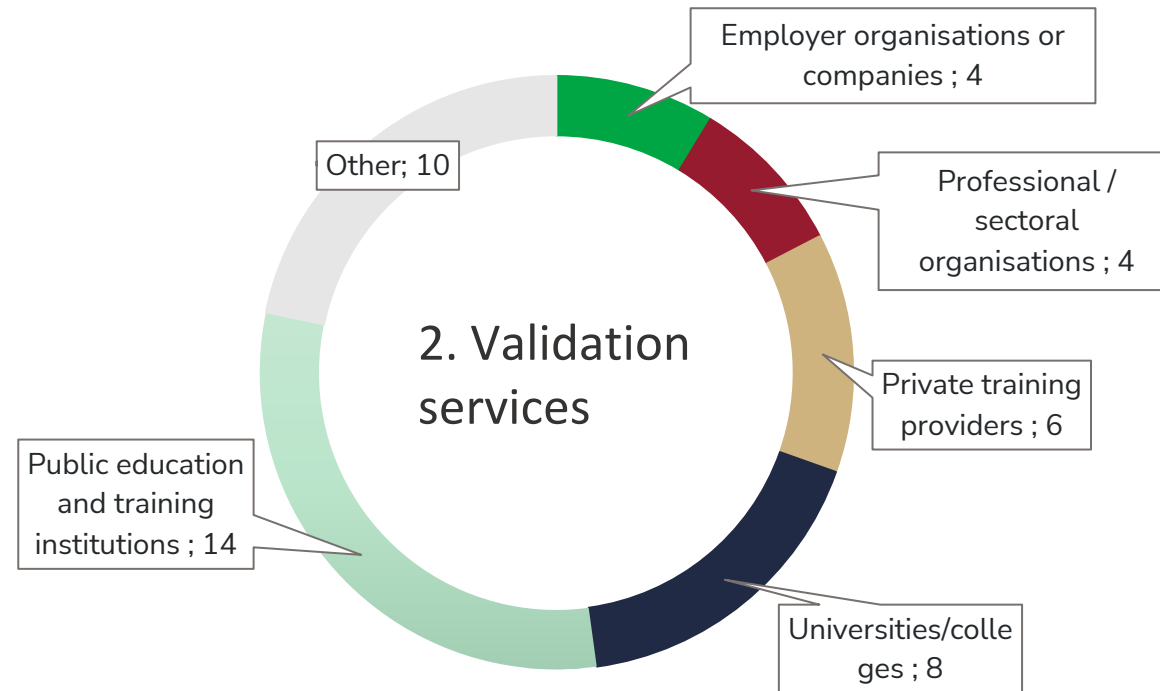
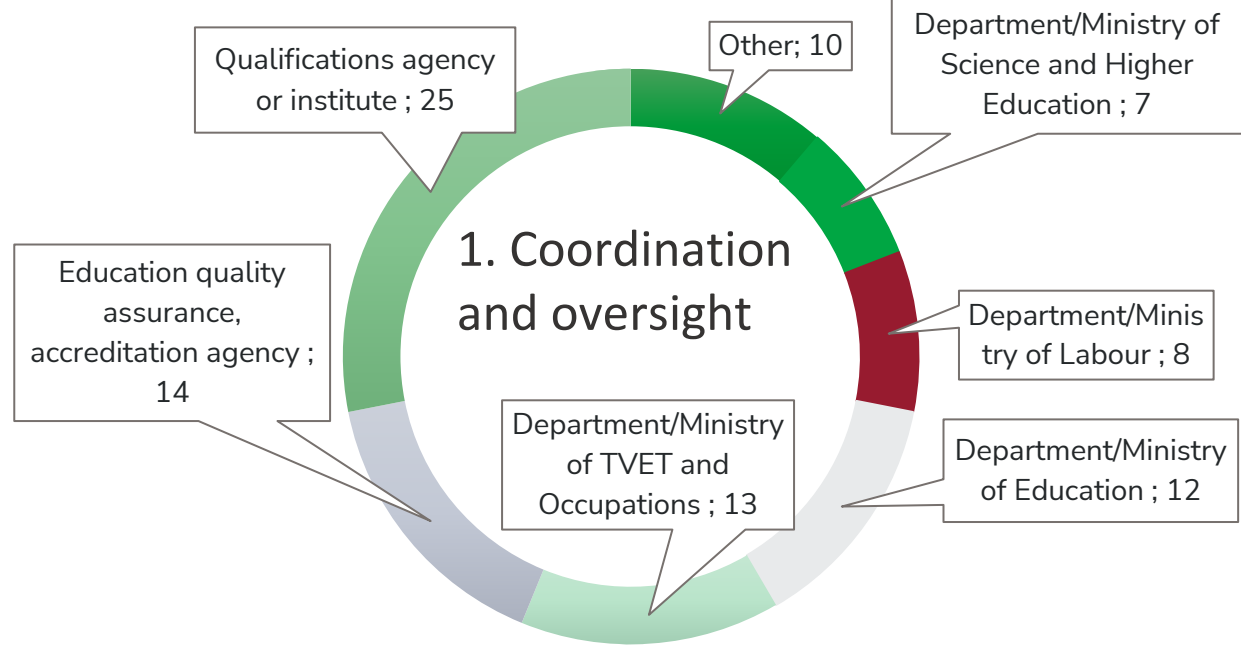
Stage of RPL policies

- In most of the cases, **RPL policies are not in place yet**. The majority (21) reported that RPL is currently under development or consultation. 17 respondents indicated that an RPL policy is fully developed or operational.
- As part of **preparatory work**, stakeholder consultation (36) and review of best practices (26) were implemented most often. Pilot programmes, needs assessment were also concluded to a more limited extent.

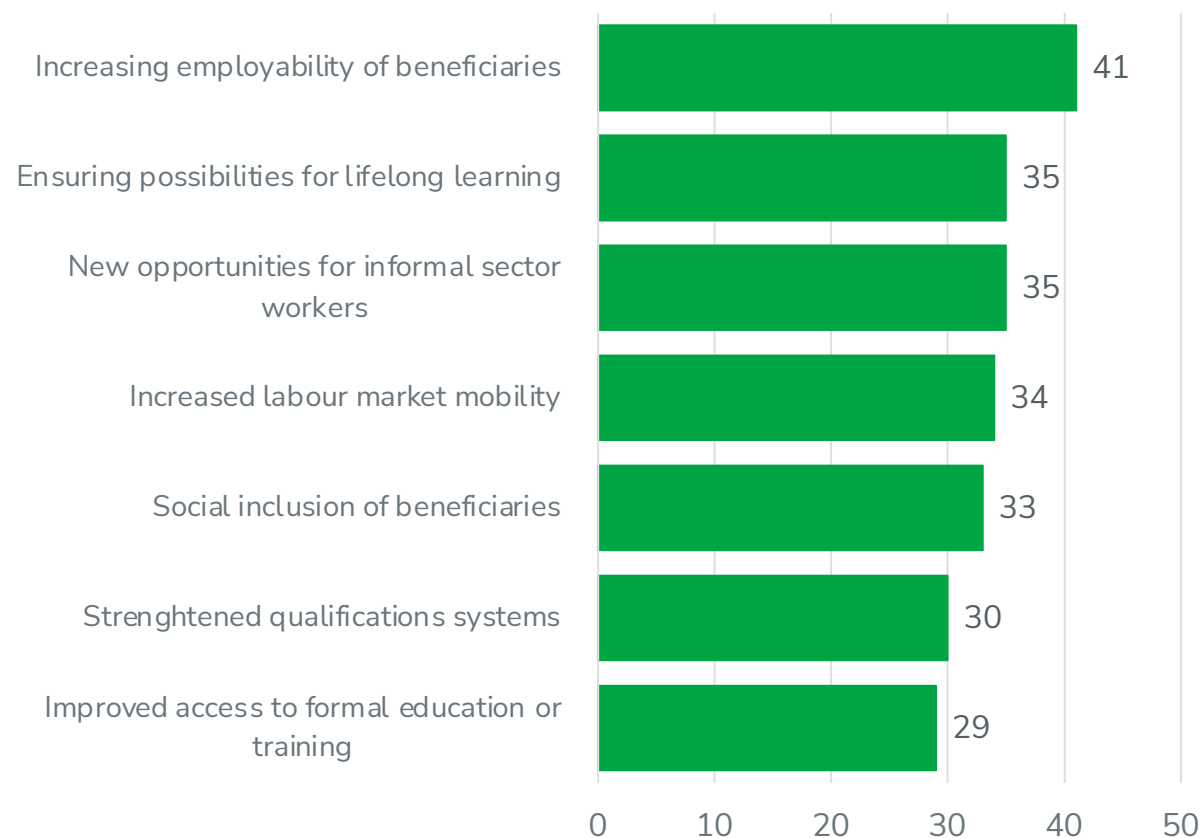


RPL governance

1. The overall coordination and oversight of RPL development and implementation is supervised by **qualifications agencies or institutes** most often (25). Education quality assurance and accreditation agencies, relevant departments and ministries are also often responsible for overall coordination.
2. **Validation services** are delivered by public education and training institutions (14), universities/colleges (8), private training providers (6) in most of the cases.

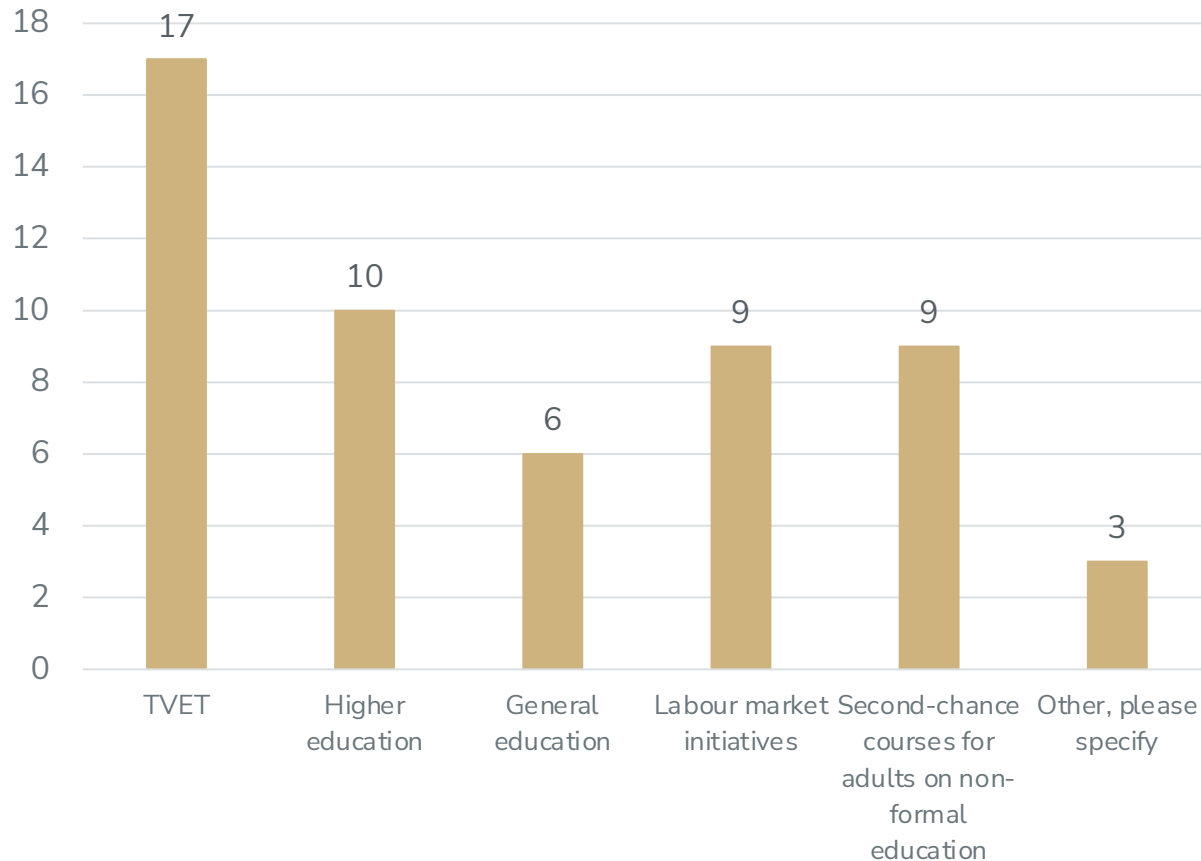


Main priorities for RPL policies



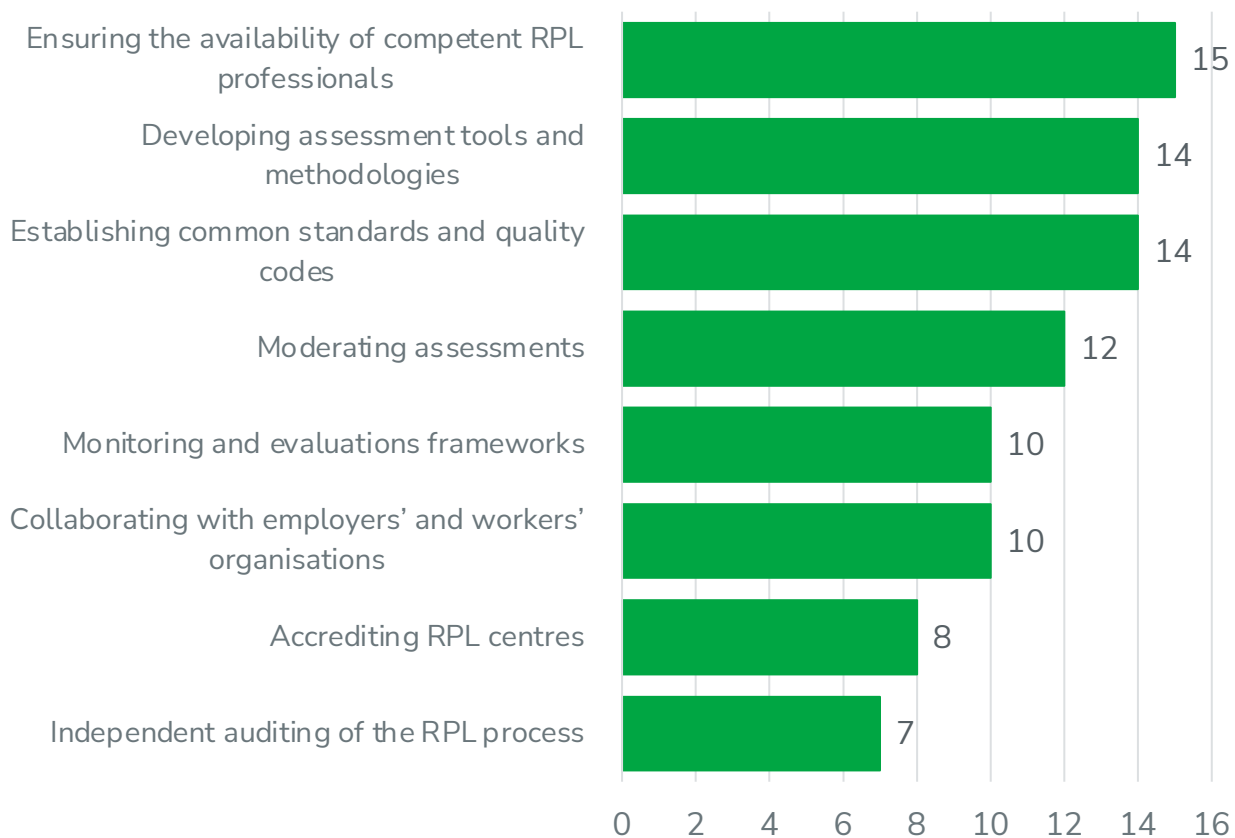
- Stakeholders were surveyed on the **most important priorities of RPL policies**. Accordingly, **increasing employability (41)** think that it is very important), ensuring possibilities for lifelong learning (35) and providing new opportunities for informal sector workers (35) were seen as most important priorities of RPL.

RPL: sectors and accepted learning outcomes



- **TVET (17 responses), higher education (10), second-chance courses for adults (9) and other labour market initiatives (9) are sectors most often targeted by RPL policies.**
- **A variety of learning outcomes are accepted during RPL assessments: non-formal learning experiences (17), acquired occupational skills or competences (17) as well as portfolios, prior work experiences and formal education from other institutions.**

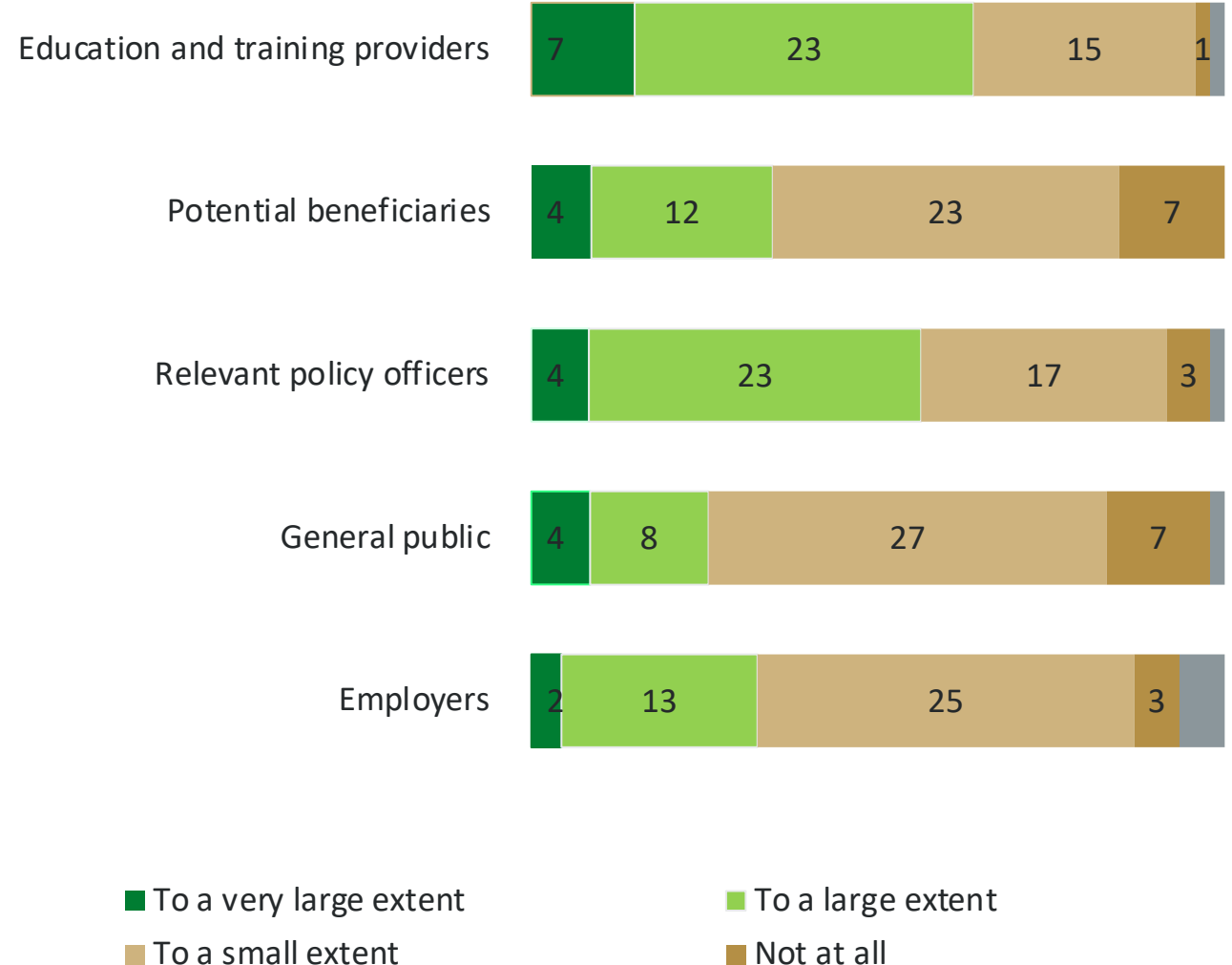
Further characteristics: assessment tools, quality assurance, financing



- **Assessment tools**, similarly, **vary widely** from tests and examinations (16), portfolios of previous works (14), workplace demonstrations (13), interviews (13) as well as other methods.
- Preliminary results show that **some quality assurance tools are more used**: ensuring competent RPL professionals (15), assessment tools and methodologies (14), common standards and quality codes (14) are frequently applied, while independents auditing and accreditation are least often employed.
- In most cases, **RPL is not free for participants**, fees are being charged to applicants (14). In other cases, RPL is financed through public funding (8), international donors (6) or by private funding (4).

Stakeholder expectations and awareness

- Respondents think that **low-qualified people (26), migrants or refugees (20) and unemployed or economically inactive people (20)** should be the **primary target of RPL**.
- **Stakeholders' awareness of RPL's possibilities is lower** in general. Education and training providers have the highest level of awareness (30 reported at least a 'large extent' of awareness), followed by policy officers (27). Employers, potential beneficiaries and the general public is much less aware.
- Stakeholders expect that RPL applications will grow to at least a large extent (13) in the future. While much less think it will grow to a small extent (2). Thus, **RPL's significance is expected to grow even more in the future.**



04

**Future steps for ACQF-II
Inventories**

Future steps for ACQF-II Inventories

Two immediate steps:

- Finalisation of the NQF Inventory report.
 - Closure of the Micro-credentials and RPL survey. Preparation of data and the final report.
- Publication of the results of the qualifications mapping as well as the mapping of policies on micro-credentials and RPL
- Establishment of a NQF, MC and RPL databases, to be updated yearly

Thank you for your attention!