



**African Continental Qualifications Framework
(ACQF)**

ACQF Policy Document

**Submitted for African Union Member State Validation
Exercise**

Version: 17 November 2022

Preamble

This draft document was elaborated in 2022 within the project AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability/Skills Initiative for Africa, Technical Cooperation – Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

We acknowledge all contributors, national institutions, regional organisations, and experts who shared views, comments, and recommendations during the consultation process, and supported the authors' team in the accomplishment of this mission.

This draft document was technically reviewed and validated by the ACQF Advisory Group in a consultation process conducted between 8 and 21 June 2022.

The present version incorporates the comments and suggestions received through this consultation process. Moreover, it includes the comments and recommendations formulated by the African Union Commission, ESTI department.

Authors and reviewers of this *Policy Document*:

- Eduarda Castel-Branco, Coleen Jaftha, Eusebius J. Mukhwana, Kaylash Allgoo, Jeffy Mukora
- Contributors: all members of the ACQF Advisory Group

Authors and reviewers of the *ACQF Guidelines* supporting this policy document:

- Eduarda Castel-Branco, Coleen Jaftha, Mirriam Chiyaba, James Mwewa, Fidelis Cheelo, Modest Hamalabbi, James Keevy, Eleonor Hazell, Kelly Shiohira, Andrea Bateman, Kaylash Allgoo, Deodonne Kunwufine, and Jeffy Mukora.
- Contributors: all members of the ACQF Advisory Group

Version control:

- **Version 1:** 13 December 2021 – submitted to the 4th meeting of ACQF Advisory Group (13/01/2022)
- **Version 2:** working draft in development
- **Version 3:** 15 May 2022 submitted to the 5th meeting of ACQF Advisory Group (26/05/2022) and to consultation of the same Advisory Group between 8 and 21 June 2022
- **Version 4:** 18 June 2022: revised upon consultation with ACQF Advisory Group, submitted to African Union Commission
- **Version 5:** 11 October 2022: reviewed upon consultation with the AU Commissioner for Education Science Technology and Innovation
- **Version 6:** 17 November 2022: final version upon meeting with AU Commissioner for Education Science Technology and Innovation.

Table of contents

ACRONYMS.....	4
<i>DECISION ON DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)</i>	5
1 INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ACQF POLICY DOCUMENT	6
2 POLITICAL AND LEGAL BASIS	7
2.1 THE ACQF IS UNDERPINNED BY AGENDA 2063: THE AFRICA WE WANT	7
2.2 THE ACQF IS UNDERPINNED BY CESA 16–25	8
2.3 THE ACQF IS UNDERPINNED BY AFCFTA	9
2.4 THE ACQF IS UNDERPINNED BY THE AU FREE MOVEMENT PROTOCOL	9
3 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ACQF	9
3.1 THE ACQF: OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES.....	12
3.2 SCOPE OF THE ACQF	12
3.3 CONCEPTUAL-TECHNICAL DESIGN	12
3.4 MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY OF THE ACQF.....	14
3.5 REFERENCING NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND SYSTEMS TO THE ACQF.....	15
3.6 ACQF QUALIFICATIONS PLATFORM (DATABASE).....	16
3.7 KEY ELEMENTS OF GOVERNANCE	18
3.8 COMPLEMENTARITY WITH NATIONAL/REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND SYSTEMS	18
3.9 LEVELS AND LEVEL DESCRIPTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF ACQF	19
3.10 QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS – THE SYSTEMIC VIEW.....	21
3.11 SYNTHESIS GUIDELINES SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACQF	22
4 SOURCES.....	22
5 ANNEXES.....	26
5.1 ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY	26
5.2 ANNEX 2: ACQF REFERENCING CRITERIA.....	28
5.3 ANNEX 3: RECOMMENDATION ON MINIMUM ELEMENTS IN QUALIFICATIONS DESIGN AND STRUCTURE	30
5.4 ANNEX 4: OTHER REFERENCE DOCUMENTS SUPPORTING ACQF IMPLEMENTATION	31
5.5 ACTION PLAN.....	32

Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ACTS	African Credit and Transfer System
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
EAC	East African Community
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NQF	National qualifications framework
NQS	National qualifications system
QA	Quality assurance
REC	Regional economic communities
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
RQF	Regional qualifications framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TVET	Technical vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Decision on development and implementation of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)

Access to quality education and lifelong learning, and acquisition of skills and qualifications are at the heart of the African Renaissance. This is reflected in the first aspiration of African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 with the call for *"Well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society (...)"*. In addition, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025) emphasises that *"harmonized education and training systems are essential for the realization of intra-Africa mobility and academic integration through regional cooperation"*.

Against this backdrop, an African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is a key policy initiative to achieve these objectives.

The African Union Commission, the African Union member states and the regional economic communities (REC) have developed and validate this ACQF Policy document, and pledge to jointly implement and nurture the ACQF with support of the relevant African stakeholders and the international partners in the period 2023-2026 and beyond.

- ACQF is a policy and instrument of continental scope to deliver on the objectives of enhanced transparency and comparability of qualifications and mutual trust between qualifications frameworks and systems for lifelong learning in Africa. The ACQF is inclusive, open to innovation to address new demands from the digital and green transformation, enables stakeholder participation and learning from relevant national, regional and global experiences.
- The ACQF is defined as an overarching reference qualifications framework of ten levels, serving as a connector and translation device between different qualifications frameworks or systems and their levels. The ACQF will deliver on the areas of activity defined in this policy document, namely:
a) referencing between qualifications frameworks; b) recognition of prior learning campaign; c) digital qualifications database; d) common profiles of qualifications; e) capacity development and support to national qualifications frameworks; f) networking, communication, and advocacy; g) analysis, monitoring, and evaluation.
- The ACQF is underpinned by strategic commitments and policies of the AU, as mentioned in this document. The ACQF is designed to work in coordination and complementarity with these and other relevant policies, with African standards and guidelines and UNESCO conventions listed in Annex 4, and with national and regional policies related with qualifications and certification.

This ACQF Policy document is validated by the AU and its member states.

Addis Ababa, 11 July 2023

1 Introduction: Scope and objectives of the ACQF policy document

This ACQF Policy Document defines the vision, policy objectives and main technical features of the ACQF, outlines the set of ACQF implementation modalities and instruments, and is accompanied by technical annexes, which form an integral part of the document. The ten ACQF Guidelines¹ and related Training Modules² support this policy document by defining technical and methodological foundations for implementation and dissemination by the competent entities. A synthesised version of the ten Guidelines is accessible as a separate document in form of a short ACQF Handbook³.

The ACQF policy document builds on analysis and evidence regarding African qualifications frameworks and systems and takes into consideration lessons and experiences from other meta-qualifications frameworks/regional qualifications frameworks in Africa and globally. The ACQF Mapping Study⁴ and the Feasibility Study (ACQF 2021f)⁵ provide an updated overview of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) in Africa at different stages of development and implementation. The Feasibility study developed the scenarios of the ACQF, analysed their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, elaborated on the initial reflections concerning the governance set-up of the ACQF and proposed ten key outputs for the ACQF action plan at horizon 2026.

The ACQF has been developed through a participative process, including a systematic process of consultation and dialogue with national and regional authorities and stakeholders, organised in form of the ACQF Advisory Group. The ACQF development process involved 44 African countries in the different types of activities, from the mapping study to the programme of capacity development and knowledge-sharing, and support to countries.

The programme of twenty ACQF peer learning webinars (2020-2022) and two Training Weeks gathered hundreds of participants from over 40 AU member states to strengthen knowledge on development of qualifications and systems across the continent, to foster cooperation and networking among African qualifications institutions and stakeholders and exchanges with advanced qualifications frameworks globally.

In the last two years development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks in Africa shows signals of renewed dynamism, as new countries have adopted relevant policy and legal acts, established operational NQF institutions and capacities, increasingly use digital tools such as qualifications databases, while other countries progressed with design of the NQF with stakeholders' engagement. Among the countries with NQFs in advanced implementation stage, processes of review and adaptation of the NQF to new demands are taking place, opening new perspectives for policy learning and experience sharing with all countries and regions across the continent. But challenges exist, notably scarce information from a few countries, and limited action to firmly engage with establishment of national policies and instruments related with qualifications management in some countries.

This ACQF Policy document supports this renewed NQF dynamism in Africa. The ACQF instruments are disposed to create bridges for the cooperation, referencing, trust, comparability, and mobility Africa wants.

¹ ACQF Guidelines. At: <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines>

² ACQF Training Modules. At: <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules>

³ Brief ACQF Handbook. At: <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/brief-acqf-handbook>

⁴ ACQF Mapping study was based on a continental survey, desk research, country technical visits and over ten peer learning webinars. At: <https://acqf.africa/resources/mapping-study>

⁵ ACQF feasibility study was presented and discussed with ACQF Advisory Group on 28/07/2021. At: <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/feasibility-study/acqf-feasibility-study>

2 Political and legal basis

The ACQF responds to objectives set by the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and its First Ten Year Implementation Plan (2023). The main AU policies and political initiatives underpinning development of the ACQF are as follows:

- Agenda 2063⁶ and its First Ten Year Implementation Plan (2023)⁷
- Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)⁸
- African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)⁹
- Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment¹⁰

Another initiative mentioning the ACQF is the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF).

Sectoral development strategies, such as the African Tourism Strategic Framework (2019–2028) provide a framework to which the ACQF can contribute.

Moreover, the ACQF responds to [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, which provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. ACQF is especially relevant for Goals 4 and 8 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, which target respectively: quality education and decent work and economic growth.¹¹

Most importantly, the ACQF is coherent with the *Declaration on Transforming Education in Africa: Past, Present and Future*, adopted on 20th September 2022 at the High-Level Side Event on Transforming Education in Africa in the Margins of Transforming Education Summit in New York, especially on the points related with partnerships, synergies between education and labour market data and matching skills with job opportunities.

Lastly, the ACQF is attuned with the Call for Action by the SD4 High-level Steering Committee “*Following up on the transformative commitments made at the Transforming Education Summit*” (United Nations, September 2022), namely on the initiatives related with greening education to get every learner climate-ready, connecting to digital solutions, addressing foundational learning, and supporting inclusive learning opportunities.

2.1 The ACQF is underpinned by Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want

As a long-term continental strategy, Agenda 2063 articulates seven aspirations, which together address the vision of ‘building an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena’.

⁶ African Union, Agenda 2063, at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf

⁷ Agenda 2063, First Ten Year Implementation Plan 2023, at: <https://www.nepad.org/agenda-2063/publication/agenda-2063-first-ten-year-implementation-plan-2014-2023-0>

⁸ CESA 2016–2025, at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf; CESA Journal, at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33863-doc-cesa_journal_vol2_final.pdf

⁹ AfCFTA, at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf; Factsheet on the AfCFTA, at: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/faqs/2377-african-continental-free-trade-area-faqs-june-2018-update/file.html>

¹⁰ Text of the Protocol, at: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/1965-protocol-to-the-abuja-treaty-free-movement-of-persons-right-of-residence-and-establishment-adopted-29-january-2018/file.html>

¹¹ United Nations, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The seven aspirations of Agenda 2063 encompass: i) prosperity based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, ii) integration of the continent, politically united and based on the ideals of pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance, iii) good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and rule of law, iv) peace and security, v) cultural identity, common heritage shared values and ethics, vi) people-driven development and vi) Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global partner and player.

The goals relating to education and skills in Agenda 2063 are defined in the first aspiration: 'A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development', which addresses a wide range of policies domains.

Further to the adoption of Agenda 2063, mandated by the AU summit in January 2015, the AUC developed the *First Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 (2013–2023)*. This plan is the basis for the elaboration of national development plans of AU member states, of the regional economic communities and the AU organs. The targets, actions and milestones related to education and skills are addressed in Goal 2 of the first aspiration: "Well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation". This goal includes a specific target for 2023, which underpins the ACQF initiative and states: "*Common continental education qualification system is in place*".

2.2 The ACQF is underpinned by CESA 16–25

The AU is deploying efforts to advance the strategic objectives defined by the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25) and the Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to Foster Youth Employment.¹²

CESA 16–25 pursues twelve strategic objectives, which address a wide range of dimensions and drivers of change. The twelve strategic objectives cover: i) revitalisation of the teaching profession, ii) development of infrastructure, iii) harnessing information and communication technology, iv) acquisition of requisite skills and knowledge, v) accelerate gender parity and equity; vi) comprehensive literacy campaigns, vii) strength science and mathematics curricula; viii) expansion of TVET at secondary and higher levels and better linkages with the world of work, ix) revitalisation and expansion of tertiary education and research, x) promotion of peace education and conflict prevention and resolution, xi) improvement of education management system and data analysis, xii) creation of coalition of all education stakeholders to support CESA 16–25.

The African Continental Qualifications Framework is mentioned in strategic objective 4. (African Union. CESA 16-25: 23).

Strategic objective 4 c) and d) explicitly refer to the establishment of qualifications frameworks, notably a continental qualifications framework linked with national and regional qualifications frameworks:

Strategic objective 4: Ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonization processes across all levels for national and regional integration.

- a) Establish and institutionalize assessment of classroom learning outcomes at various stages
- b) Build the capacity of teachers' informative assessment and its utilization for the improvement [...] of learning outcomes

¹² Continental TVET Strategy to Foster Youth Employment, at: <https://au.int/en/documents/20181022/continental-strategy-technical-and-vocational-educational-and-training-tvet>

- c) **Set up national qualification frameworks (NQFs) and regional qualification frameworks (RQFs) to facilitate the creation of multiple pathways to acquisition of skills and competencies as well as mobility across the sub-sectors**
- d) **Develop continental qualifications framework linked to regional qualifications and national qualification frameworks to facilitate regional integration and mobility of graduates**
- e) Establish and strengthen quality assurance mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation systems.

Two of the guiding principles of CESA, harmonisation of education and training systems and quality and relevant education, training and research, inspire the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF), a wide-ranging policy initiative with ties to ACQF.

2.3 The ACQF is underpinned by AfCFTA

The AfCFTA that entered the operational phase in July 2019 is a key flagship initiative for African integration, to which the ACQF will contribute. Article 10 ('Mutual Recognition') of the Protocol on Trade in Services of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (16 May 2018) mentions recognition of education and harmonisation:

“For the purpose of the fulfilment, in whole or in part, of its standards or criteria for the authorization, licensing or certification of services suppliers, and subject to the requirements of paragraph 3 of this article, a State Party may recognize the education or experience obtained, requirements met, or licenses or certifications granted in another State Party. Such recognition, which may be achieved through harmonization or otherwise, may be based upon an agreement with the State Party concerned or may be accorded autonomously” (pp.40–41).

2.4 The ACQF is underpinned by the AU Free Movement Protocol

Most importantly for the ACQF project, the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, adopted by the 30th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly (20 January 2018), in its Article 18 ('Mutual Recognition of Qualifications'), specifies: 'The States Parties shall establish a continental qualifications framework to encourage and promote the free movement of persons.' The AU Free Movement Protocol has *a number* of ratifications at present, and it will enter into force once ten countries submit their ratification instrument.

3 Establishment of the ACQF

Considering the above-mentioned political and legal basis, the ACQF is established as a policy and instrument of continental scope to deliver on the objectives of enhanced transparency and comparability of qualifications and mutual trust between qualifications frameworks and systems for lifelong learning in Africa.

ACQF – key characteristics

The ACQF is defined as an overarching reference qualifications framework of ten levels, serving as a connector and translation device between different qualifications frameworks or systems and their levels. The ACQF is an action framework, supporting and cooperating with national and regional qualifications institutions and stakeholders. ACQF contributes to quality and recognition of skills and qualifications and supports parity of esteem of all modalities of learning and certification throughout life. ACQF is a holistic and indivisible policy instrument.

Governance of the ACQF builds on the political support and steering of the African Union, the participation of all AU member states and regions, partnerships with stakeholders from the world of education, training, qualifications, and work and is based on competent implementation capacity.

The ACQF is not intended to change or supersede existing national or regional legal-regulatory frameworks, guidelines, and practices, but to complement and contribute to development and implementation of qualifications frameworks; and to support innovation and improvement in the domain of lifelong learning, skills, and qualifications enabling better skills matching and the transformation of work and learning. The [ACQF website](#) supports networking and communication with all countries, regions, and stakeholders¹³.

Wider rationale of the ACQF

Whereas:

1. With a median age of 19.7 in 2020, Africa's population is the youngest in the world. In 2020, Africa's population under 35 represents almost a billion people (22.7 per cent of the world's total youth population).¹⁴ Africa's young demographic could provide a powerful opportunity for development, innovation, decent jobs and beyond. But despite the economic growth of the last decade, African countries struggle to create jobs and to equip young people with the skills and qualifications required to service their economies and societies. This lack of economic opportunity is often combined with disenfranchisement, thus creating a potential cause of instability.
2. The accomplishment of the potentialities of the African demographic dividend in the post-Covid-19-pandemic economic recovery will depend on the development of the right mix of skills within the population and the quality and comparability of qualifications of all levels and sectors of education and training systems across countries. Learning must be lifelong and life-wide, to enable transitions to new jobs, especially in high productivity and innovation sectors, and adaptation to new skills requirements in the green and digital economies. Moreover, access to learning and qualifications should support inclusion in decent work and in the formal economy of small artisans and the self-employed, and of the population with limited formal schooling but with practical professional and life experience, especially women and young people.
3. At a continental level, the mobility of learners and workers is essential to achieve the benefits of economic integration, on the one hand, and improved matching of the supply of skills and qualifications with existing demand (job vacancies) across different countries, on the other hand. Easier movement of persons on the continent would make African labour markets more efficient, enabling companies to bridge skills shortages and gaps, and allowing the society to gain from brain circulation. Information-sharing between countries on qualifications levels and standards, and on the supply of skills is fundamental to support fair and effective labour mobility between countries.
4. The transformation of learning, work and society linked with digitalisation, technology, and innovation, and with the global greening agenda and societal change towards equity and rights calls for future-proof qualifications, skills for resilience and adaptability, responsive qualifications frameworks and systems and mutual learning between countries.
5. A substantial number of African Union member states is developing, consolidating, and implementing NQFs. The lessons and achievements of these experiences can be shared with other members states and regions at the initial stage of NQF development and promote policy learning across the continent. In this propitious context referencing national qualifications frameworks to ACQF has a realistic perspective. The existing methodological and technical basis laid down by the ACQF project will

¹³ ACQF website: <https://acqf.africa/>

¹⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Africa's Youth (2021): Action needed how to support the continent's greatest asset, at: <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-08/international-youth-day-research-brief.pdf>

encourage and support countries and regions to engage with referencing, as the most important function of the ACQF.

6. The African Union is supporting innovation in education to respond, strengthen and build resilience in the post-pandemic and recovery in Africa. Moreover, the AU is developing a digital education strategy for Africa and taking steps to enhance investment in inclusive education and implementation of CESA 16–25.
7. The African Continental Qualifications Framework is emerging, developing, and evolving in an environment marked by the post-pandemic recovery efforts, intertwined with the multiple transitions of our time. The emerging ACQF will face the challenges of economic slowdown and recession triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, and significant learning losses because of widespread school and university closures.

Joint commitment to support, implement and enhance the ACQF

The African Union Commission, the African Union member states and the regional economic communities (REC) pledge to jointly develop and implement the ACQF and to steer and sustain this cooperation in the period 2023-2026 and beyond assuring that:

1. The ACQF will contribute to new horizons for African integration through its continental scope, its function as a connector of Africa's national qualifications frameworks and systems, and as a promoter of pan-African trust and international transparency of skills and qualifications. To this end, the ACQF will promote advocacy and awareness among relevant institutions and stakeholders at national, regional, and continental levels. Advocacy, information, good practice, and capacity are essential to ensure implementation at national and regional levels.
2. The ACQF and the qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to it can facilitate and enhance existing practices of recognition of qualifications, thanks to information-sharing, strengthened trust, clarity, and comparability of qualifications they provide.
3. The ACQF acts as a catalyst for improved qualifications frameworks and systems across the continent, supporting the twin transition (green and digital) in learning and work; fostering parity of all forms of lifelong learning for employability, and social (incl. gender) inclusion; promoting quality assured digital certificates and credentials, innovative and trusted solutions for strategic management of qualifications based on the potential of digitalisation and technology; supporting analysis, and data-sharing with labour market information systems; and contributing to credibility of African education and training and qualifications in the world. These activities will contribute to achieve the objectives of CESA-25 and promote trust of AU Member States and regions towards the ACQF.
4. The context of continental cooperation and partnership between qualifications frameworks or systems delivers multiple advantages for establishment of common goals, shared implementation instruments and a sustainable governance for a holistic skills and lifelong learning agenda that covers all forms and stages of learning and modalities of assessment and certification.
5. The development and implementation of the ACQF is coherent with existing AU policies and relevant international conventions and operates in synergy and complementarity with existing continental standards and guidelines and frameworks in the domain of education and training.
6. As a continental policy instrument, the ACQF promotes and supports qualifications frameworks and systems through relevant policies, levers, and instruments without prejudice to national and regional diversity and policies, and without replacing or superseding national and regional frameworks and systems. The ACQF conforms to the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity to national and regional policies and systems.

3.1 The ACQF: Objectives and principles

The objectives of the ACQF are:

- To support comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and foster lifelong learning.
- To facilitate validation of learning from different contexts, contribute to recognition of diplomas and certificates and support mobility (of learners, workers, services);
- To work in cooperation and complementarity with national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and systems and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs), support NQF development, strengthen human and technical capabilities, and the creation of a common African education and qualifications space; and
- To promote cooperation, trust, and mutual understanding, by means of referencing with qualifications frameworks in Africa and worldwide.

The ACQF is driven by the following principles:

- *Inclusiveness*: encompass all levels and types of qualifications, all forms and stages of learning and modalities of certification;
- *Innovation*: support new developments related to green, digital, and other emerging skills, new roles and occupations, new technologies and societal demands, and digital and micro-credentials for learning; and
- *Openness*: to participation of all stakeholders and AU member states, to learn from experiences and good practice from Africa and other regions and continents.

3.2 Scope of the ACQF

The ACQF is a comprehensive and inclusive meta-referencing qualifications framework, designed to support a holistic and systemic vision of learning, qualifications, and credentials. The ACQF is oriented to lifelong learning and supports parity of esteem of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, and all levels of education and training.

The ACQF is open to cooperate and undertake referencing activities with all countries and qualifications frameworks and systems, and to compare with other regional qualifications frameworks globally, following transparent and fair criteria and processes.

The ACQF will establish a continental platform open for publication and dissemination of information on national qualifications and credentials of NQFs referenced to the ACQF, and on other qualifications, profiles, and standards relevant for AU integration policies, in accordance with guidelines and decisions of the ACQF governing structure. This platform will support data analysis, and sharing with education, labour market, career guidance and skills matching institutions and stakeholders, and with institutions delivering on relevant AU policies (e.g., social affairs, migration, free trade, environment, and agriculture).

ACQF processes will be based on quality-assurance principles and practices, supported by a set of guidelines, and a monitoring and evaluation system.

For more information and technical elaboration, refer to the annexes and ACQF Guidelines 1, 2, 3 and 5.

3.3 Conceptual-technical design

The ACQF is defined as an overarching reference qualifications framework of ten levels, serving as a connector between different qualifications frameworks or systems and their levels.

Level descriptors

The levels of the ACQF are defined by three domains of learning: knowledge, skills and autonomy and responsibility. The full set of level descriptors are presented in chapter 3.9 of this document.

ACQF level descriptors are fundamental in referencing with NQFs and contain useful information and concepts for NQFs at stages of development and review. As a policy instrument open to innovation, ACQF level descriptors contain transformative concepts, such as new skills related with the green and digital transitions.

Learning outcomes orientation

The ACQF levels and learning outcomes-based descriptors contribute to improving transparency and comparability of qualifications of different national systems. ACQF levels support a general application of learning outcomes in different sectors and contexts of education and training systems.

Recognition of prior learning

The learning-outcomes orientation contributes to enhancing the transparency and credibility of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and validation of learning outcomes from experience, for purposes of further study, employment, and acquisition of a full or part qualification. The ACQF supports quality and accessible RPL, as a key component of lifelong learning policies and a mechanism for equity and social inclusion.

Support transparency and relevance of digital certification and micro-credentials

Lifelong learning, portability of skills and qualifications and mobility are in rapid transformation, under the impact of digitisation. ACQF in cooperation with the regional and national qualifications frameworks and stakeholders will support common understanding of the requirements for trusted promotion of the potentialities of new types and technologies of certification and credentials, their quality assurance and recognition.

Credit accumulation and transfer

The learning-outcomes approach supports the application of credit transfer and credit accumulation and transfer systems, which are intended to improve flexible learning pathways. Credit transfer and accumulation and transfer systems support learning progression and contribute to lifelong learning. When designing and developing qualifications, the use of a learning-outcomes approach can facilitate the transfer of components of qualifications and progression in learning. The ACQF supports credit transfer and credit accumulation and transfer systems in different academic and vocational pathways. This will contribute to developing a future African credit accumulation and transfer system (ACTS), working in cooperation with other relevant continental projects and initiatives specifically developing the future ACTS.

Contribution to facilitate recognition of foreign qualifications

The transparency, information-sharing and mutual trust resulting from referencing levels of NQFs to ACQF levels contribute to transparency of recognition of foreign qualifications in the context of Africa and other continents. The ACQF and national information bodies involved in the recognition of qualifications will share information on learning outcomes, levels and other characteristics of qualifications frameworks referenced to the ACQF.

Underpinned by quality assurance

The ACQF as an overarching qualifications framework and a catalyst for NQF development is underpinned by quality assurance. Quality assurance is fundamental for trust in qualifications, and for their currency and mobility.

Quality assurance is the subject of Criterion 4 of referencing to the ACQF, which states that the national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or

system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the ACQF. The referencing to the ACQF of national qualifications frameworks or systems demonstrates the degree to which quality assurance of national qualifications addresses the qualifications quality chain, from design of standards underpinning qualifications to learning, assessment, and certification; addresses the application of the learning outcomes approach; includes feedback instruments and processes supporting continuous quality improvement; addresses internal and external quality assurance, and the regular review of quality assurance agencies; takes account of African Union policy orientations such as African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (for higher education), to which both internal and external quality assurance adhere.

Transparency and trust in qualifications is key in a context of widespread international learner and labour mobility, and rapid transformation of types of qualifications and credentials for different needs and contexts of lifelong learning.

Quality assurance – as part of a range of measures by governments and institutions – increases transparency and should contribute to trust in the relevance and quality of learning outcomes (that is, learners’ knowledge, skills, autonomy, and responsibility, as certified by qualifications). Such trust in learning outcomes is, in turn, based on trust in the quality of the institutions and providers of education and training at all levels and in all subsectors.

International cooperation and continuous improvement

To strengthen its technical capacity, performance, and visibility the ACQF will cooperate and interact with regional qualifications frameworks from parts of the world (e.g.: Europe, America, Asia-Pacific) and with international partners and relevant international specialised organisations. This will eventually contribute to global transparency of skills and qualifications.

For more information and technical elaboration, refer to the annexes and the Guidelines 1, 2, 4, 5 and 10.

3.4 Main areas of activity of the ACQF

By virtue of its objectives, principles, and conceptual-technical design, the ACQF will deliver on the following main areas:¹⁵

1. Referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF, following agreed criteria and procedures. This includes the adequate support – for example, coordination, common instruments to facilitate the process, guidance and technical support to national referencing teams, and review and analysis on the state of play of referencing.
2. Support recognition of prior learning: by means of development of common guidelines and approaches, updated inventory of RPL systems on the continent, a wide information campaign and support to countries, and support to digitalisation of credentials.
3. ACQF Qualifications Platform (database): a set of digital instruments to systematise and disseminate information on national qualifications frameworks and systems, on national and international qualifications and credentials, on recognition of prior learning. The ACQF Qualifications Platform will also provide other services, such as digital certification, data analysis and data-sharing, and monitoring.
4. Qualifications: this area encompasses a range of activities such as research and design of common approaches and methodologies. Development of qualifications profiles adequate for common continental use related to new and emerging occupations, technology skills, and occupations linked

¹⁵ These areas are developed in the ACQF Feasibility Study (ACQF. 2021d), presented to ACQF Advisory Group meeting of 28 July 2021. Implementation will be activated in 2023-2026 with technical and financial support of international partners and involvement of the AU Member States, the RECs, and key stakeholders and steered by the African Union Commission.

with continental integration policies such as AfCFTA; and to continental strategies in specific economic sectors, notably in sustainable agriculture, sustainable transport, sustainable energy, and services which are poised to be major contributors to growth and jobs.

5. Capacity development in the relevant thematic areas, including a range of training programmes in hybrid and digital formats, an e-learning platform, peer-learning activities, and thematic communities of practice. Provision of technical support to countries in developing, implementing, and reviewing their national qualifications frameworks and systems and preparing for referencing with ACQF. Cooperation and mutual learning across African regions, supporting their initiatives related to qualifications frameworks and systems and recognition of prior learning.
6. Advocacy, communication, networking and cooperation with African stakeholders, especially the national and regional entities responsible for qualifications frameworks or systems, organisations delivering international qualifications, recognition bodies and committees, education and training providers, social partners, professional and sector associations, employment sector institutions, job centres and online job vacancies websites, labour market and skills observatories, and students' unions. International networking and cooperation with regional and national qualifications frameworks on other continents, international organisations, and specialised bodies active in certification, recognition, and research in this domain.
7. Analysis, monitoring, and evaluation on ACQF implementation and other policy and technical themes relevant for the continuing improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the ACQF and its instruments.

For more information and technical elaboration, refer to [ACQF Feasibility Study \(2021\)](#).

3.5 Referencing national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF

As a meta- and referencing qualifications framework for the African continent, the ACQF aims at connecting the national (and regional) qualifications frameworks of the community of African Union (AU) member states. This core function is based on the process of referencing national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) or systems to the ACQF, following agreed criteria and procedures and peer review by the member countries. The ACQF implementation unit and the governing structure support, coordinate and assure the quality of the ACQF referencing process.

Referencing is a process aimed at comparing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the ACQF, thereby building on national ownership, collaboration between relevant institutions and stakeholders, provision of evidence for transparency of the analysis and reporting on all referencing criteria and procedures. At national levels, referencing contributes to self-assessment of the status of the national qualifications framework and system to identify areas for reform and improvement and to draw attention to the NQF among national policy institutions and stakeholders. At continental level and between countries, referencing to the ACQF of a significant and increasing number of national qualifications or systems leads to the creation of a common area of trusted qualifications and enables the transformative potential of the ACQF for the continent.

NQFs and their associated quality assurance arrangements are the key instruments for referencing to ACQF. Referencing a NQF provides for greater transparency and understanding of a country's qualifications and the explanation of the level of implementation of quality assurance arrangements strengthen the trust in the outcomes of these qualifications.

Referencing to ACQF is good for the countries, (and regions) and good for the continent, as it is a process of self-assessment contributing to improvement, to renew stakeholders' dialogue, enhance visibility and understanding of the NQF at national level, and to improve mutual trust and transparency between different national and regional qualifications frameworks across the continent.

The referencing process determines correspondence level to level between NQF and the ACQF. By this process, national qualifications included in the referenced NQF are in turn referenced to the ACQF. This is a key outcome of the process.

The ACQF is a framework of national qualifications frameworks. National qualifications are not to be registered in the ACQF because they are quality assured and registered in the respective NQFs. Without prejudice to this attribute, African Union member states are encouraged to make use of the ACQF Qualifications Platform (database) to publish information on their NQF and their national qualifications. Thanks to its scale and international outreach, the ACQF database holds multiple benefits for the national qualifications institutions.

Further to the referencing process, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications framework or system (certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent qualifications authorities should contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level.

The ACQF aims to enhance information sharing on qualifications and NQFs in Africa and globally, building on referencing outcomes, the ACQF website and other transparency tools. The ACQF will cooperate with the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (Addis Convention)¹⁶ and with the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education¹⁷.

For more information and technical elaboration, refer to annex 2 of this document and to the ACQF Guideline 3.

3.6 ACQF Qualifications Platform (database)

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

¹⁶ UNESCO, Addis Convention, at: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49282&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#STATE_PARTIES. Adopted on 12 December 2014 and entered into force on 15 December 2019.

¹⁷ UNESCO, Global Convention, at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/higher-education/global-convention>. Adopted in November 2019.

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

As a transparency instrument for users' information and guidance, the ACQF Qualifications Platform (database) will serve and support the national qualifications authorities and the awarding bodies, end-users (for example, learners, employers, career counsellors, teachers, and trainers) and in wider terms, the countries, regions, and the continent as a whole.

The ACQF Qualifications Platform (database) will be conceived for distinct use cases, each supported by adequate and transparent procedures, to be developed.

The scope of the ACQF Qualifications Platform (database) will notably support the following uses, herewith proposed as an initial concept, to be further supported by a technical and feasibility analysis:

- a) Use by national qualifications frameworks or systems – notably in two ways:
 - Information sharing on national qualifications included in NQFs referenced to the ACQF. The ACQF offers the infrastructure as a free public service for NQFs that have referenced to the ACQF. These NQFs may link their qualifications databases to the ACQF Platform. Having referenced to ACQF levels, the national qualifications of these NQFs and national registers are automatically associated with the ACQF levels. This information is shared publicly.
 - The ACQF Platform can be used at national level – countries may adopt the technology and infrastructure provided by the ACQF Platform as a free service to list and manage their national qualifications. The national qualifications database is managed by the competent national authorities but can be built on the infrastructure provided by the ACQF Qualifications Platform (database), upon the necessary feasibility analysis and agreement on terms and conditions.
- b) International qualifications with high labour market, societal, technological value and currency can contribute to AU policies of economic integration, growth, and innovation. International qualifications are awarded by a legally established international body (association, organisation, professional sector, or company) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body, are used in more than one country and include learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body. Such qualifications may not be included in the NQF and may not have a NQF level. Inclusion of international qualifications in the ACQF Qualifications Platform (database) contributes to transparency and trust, and their listing builds on transparent procedures based on accepted state-of-the-art practice, on relevant aspects of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), and other relevant guidelines and regulations.
- c) Common continental qualifications profiles related to priorities and sectors of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other AU policies. Such qualifications profiles/standards should focus on high labour market, societal, technological value for the continent and be developed by multi-country teams on the basis of agreed methodology and quality assurance to ensure acceptability and endorsement across borders in Africa. These common profiles are free for countries to use to design national courses and programmes in secondary and tertiary education, continuing training, and employment training. The related full qualifications are awarded by the countries' competent bodies.

Other uses of ACQF Qualifications Platform (database) will be proposed as relevant.

The goal of registration and databases of qualifications is to enhance transparency, mutual understanding, acceptability and recognition of qualifications amongst Member States across the African Continent. This

will promote access to reliable information on courses and qualifications, mobility and portability of qualifications hence creating opportunities for access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning among Member States nationals.

Registration of qualifications is an important measure that enhances quality and regulation of qualifications. It provides greater protection for the public and employers as key information required for recognition purposes is made available on the platform/database.

For more information and technical elaboration, refer to annex 3 of this document and to the ACQF Guideline 6.

3.7 Key elements of governance

As a public policy instrument underpinned by AU policies, governance of the ACQF is based on the following principles:

- No country is left behind: All AU member countries are invited to participate in the activities on equal footing. Such ACQF activities notably include referencing to the ACQF, peer reviews, deliberations in the context of the governing structure, capacity-development programmes, dissemination and outreach, and collaboration on the ACQF Qualifications Platform (database).
- The AUC provides political support and steering and participates in the ACQF governing setting. The ACQF Advisory Group will be furthered as main platform for stakeholders' consultation and cooperation.
- Technical implementation is assured by a competent unit responsible for ACQF functions and operations.
- Networking and collaboration between African national qualifications entities, social partners, professional associations, recognition centres, students' unions, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Governance and management are based on accountability and integrity.
- The ACQF process is supported by monitoring and evaluation.

3.8 Complementarity with national/regional frameworks and systems

By virtue of the provisions of strategic objective 4 of CESA (16–25) and in line with African Union cooperation and governance, the ACQF interacts, collaborates with and supports the national competent authorities and stakeholders, without prejudice to the established relationship of countries with regions and regional economic communities.

The ACQF will cooperate with the institutions and stakeholders involved in governance of national qualifications frameworks and systems, and work in coordination with the authorities and stakeholders in charge of Regional Qualifications Frameworks in Africa to advance the common objectives of comparability, transparency and mutual trust between qualifications frameworks or systems in the context of the regions and the continent. The ACQF will support the regional economic communities and relevant regional organisations through adequate and mutually beneficial initiatives and actions.

The Regional Qualifications Frameworks are in development and not yet fully operational in Africa. Currently two RECs have done tangible steps to develop and agree their frameworks: the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has fully developed its regional qualifications framework and completed in 2022 a process of review and improvement based on lessons from the first five years of implementation.

For the countries, referencing to the ACQF is undertaken by the competent bodies coordinating and responsible for national qualifications frameworks or systems. For the regions, referencing to ACQF can be

planned as Regional Qualifications Frameworks will increase in maturity and activity. More information on referencing is available in heading 3.5 of this document.

Planning and monitoring of the implementation of ACQF activities with member countries and with regions will be facilitated by participation in coordination activities and the ACQF governing structure. ACQF representatives will participate in coordination activities and governing structures of the regional qualifications' frameworks.

3.9 Levels and level descriptors in the context of ACQF

Main concepts

Level descriptors are statements describing learning achievement at a particular level of a qualifications framework. Level descriptors provide a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level.

Learning outcomes-based level descriptors are essential to any qualifications framework, whether sectoral, national, or regional. These level descriptors relate to a specific level and signal the learning outcomes orientation of the qualifications framework.

Level descriptors of the African Continental Qualifications Framework

Each of the ten ACQF levels represents learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at that level. The ACQF level descriptors capture how the three domains of knowledge, skills and autonomy and responsibility (A&R) increase in breadth, depth and complexity when moving from lower to higher levels and are supported by a glossary explaining the terms.

ACQF Level descriptors

Level	Domains of learning		
	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and responsibility
Definition of the domains of learning	<i>In the context of ACQF "Knowledge" includes various kinds of knowledge such as facts, principles, and theories in various areas</i>	<i>In the context of ACQF "Skills" refer to the ability to use knowledge to respond to information and address problems. Skills include cognitive, communication, digital, green, innovation, practical and social skills.</i>	<i>In the context of ACQF "Autonomy and responsibility" refers to the context and extent of the application of autonomy and responsibility</i>
<u>Level 1</u> : the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	simple knowledge, literacy and numeracy	simple communication, cognitive and practical skills required to follow simple instructions, and use simple, repetitive solutions to address simple problems	highly structured, repetitive contexts under close supervision and guidance taking minimal responsibility for self
<u>Level 2</u> : the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	basic knowledge incorporating comprehension and recall of factual and operational knowledge in some areas	basic communication, cognitive and practical skills required to use concrete information, ideas and known solutions to address straight forward problems	structured contexts under limited supervision and guidance taking limited responsibility for self and group outcomes
<u>Level 3</u> : the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	factual and operational knowledge incorporating some theoretical aspects in some areas	a range of communication, cognitive, practical and technical skills required to interpret and communicate ideas and detailed information and select and use known solutions to address familiar problems	predictable contexts under routine supervision and guidance, with initiative for self-responsibility and some responsibility for group outcomes

Level	Domains of learning		
	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and responsibility
<u>Level 4:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	mainly factual, operational or technical knowledge incorporating theoretical aspects in one or more areas	well-developed technical skills required to analyse information and new ideas, make informed judgements, communicate outcomes and apply varied solutions to varied (familiar and unfamiliar) problems	varied (predictable and unpredictable) contexts with adaptability and initiative for self-direction under general guidance, taking full responsibility for self, some planning and responsibility for group outcomes and initiative for responsibility for others
<u>Level 5:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	mainly technical or theoretical knowledge with substantial depth in a discipline/ area	a range of well-developed technical skills, with some specialisation, required to analyse information and new ideas, construct and communicate a coherent argument, and apply a range of solutions, often in combination, to address unfamiliar problems	unpredictable contexts with full autonomy and full responsibility for self and group outcomes, and some responsibility for others
<u>Level 6:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	highly technical or theoretical knowledge, with specialisation in a discipline/ area	highly technical and specialised skills required to collate, analyse, synthesise and communicate a range of information and new ideas, and formulate or adapt different solutions to address complex and sometimes abstract problems	highly variable contexts with well-developed autonomy and responsibility for self and group outcomes and responsibility for resources and processes
<u>Level 7:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	advanced analytical and/ or specialised knowledge of a discipline/ area	advanced, specialised skills required to demonstrate advanced analysis and initiative for new insights and ideas in research and/ or innovation, and formulate advanced solutions to address complex and abstract problems	complex and variable contexts with advanced autonomy and responsibility
<u>Level 8:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	highly advanced, complex knowledge of a discipline/ area	highly advanced, complex skills required to demonstrate highly advanced analysis, communicate new insights and ideas in research and/ or innovation, and formulate highly advanced solutions to address highly complex and abstract problems	highly complex contexts with some specialisation demonstrating highly advanced autonomy and responsibility
<u>Level 9:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	mastery of a complex body of knowledge at the forefront of a discipline/ area	skills mastery required to demonstrate originality and new insights in research and/ or innovation and formulate and test theories to show mastery of highly complex, abstract problems	highly specialised contexts demonstrating mastery in autonomy and responsibility
<u>Level 10:</u> the learning outcomes related to formal, non-formal and informal learning at this level include:	substantial and original knowledge contribution that extends the forefront of a discipline/ area and/ or at the interface between disciplines/ areas	expert skills and techniques that demonstrate innovation, interpretation and creation of new ideas required to critically evaluate, formulate, and test theories to address emergent, new and critical problems	emergent new contexts demonstrating expertise in management of new ideas

Definition and scope of the three domains of learning of ACQF level descriptors

Knowledge

Includes various kinds of knowledge such as facts, principles, and theories in various areas. The learning outcomes at all ten ACQF levels relate to formal, non-formal and informal learning. The knowledge domain comprises two sub-domains or elements:

- Type of knowledge
- Scope of knowledge

Skills

Refer to the ability to use knowledge to respond to information and address problems/ issues. Skills include cognitive, communication, digital, green, innovation, practical and social skills. The learning outcomes at all ten ACQF levels relate to formal, non-formal and informal learning. The skills domain comprises three sub-domains:

- Type of skills required
- How the skills are used to respond to information
- How skills are used to address types of problems

Autonomy and responsibility

Refers to the context and extent of the application of autonomy and responsibility. The learning outcomes at all ten ACQF levels relate to formal, non-formal and informal learning. The autonomy and responsibility domain comprises 3 sub-domains:

- the context in which autonomy and responsibility is applied
- the extent to which autonomy is applied
- the extent to which responsibility is applied.

Responsibility as a domain of level descriptors has three elements: self, group outcomes and resources.

3.10 Qualifications and qualifications frameworks – the systemic view

Some recommendations for design, implementation, and review of NQFs

NQFs aim to provide greater transparency of qualifications issued within a country. The coherence of the NQF's objectives, principles, level descriptors, and types and specifications of qualifications determine their value and applicability.

NQFs are the product of, and operate within, complex and everchanging qualifications systems. NQFs are influenced by the domestic historical and current context in which they are designed and are also influenced by regional and international developments.

Qualifications described in terms of learning outcomes will strengthen transparency of learning and trust in qualifications and their outcomes and benefit the country stakeholders as well as those outside the country who are interested in understanding the qualification systems of a given country.

The effectiveness and visibility of NQFs depend on their systemic construction, that is the linkages with the components, initiatives, and strategies, which together form the wider eco-system of education, lifelong learning, and qualifications.

The strength of NQFs is derived from their systemic view, based on linkages with policies and elements such as:

- Quality assurance: of qualifications and standards; and of providers and their programmes leading to a qualification.
- Clear and robust processes, methods and guidelines for development and renewal of qualifications
- Registers/databases of qualifications approved onto the NQF, providing learners and other users with transparent information on courses and qualifications.
- Credit accumulation and transfer systems

- Recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal, informal), outcomes from work and life experience
- Recognition of foreign qualifications, micro-credentials for learning
- Communication and outreach to target users and stakeholders, and capacity development easing understanding and implementation of the NQF.
- Review and continuous improvement of NQFs, based on feedback, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Competent governance and social dialogue.
- Involvement of stakeholders from the world of work, employers, professional bodies and experts.

Design, development, implementation, and review of NQF is a process of successive stages, which requires national ownership, resources, partnerships for governance, and application of the above-mentioned systemic view and linkages.

3.11 Synthesis Guidelines supporting implementation of the ACQF

The ten Synthesis Guidelines support the ACQF Policy Document but are published as a separate document¹⁸. They are the technical foundations of the ACQF, and are conceived to support the development, implementation, review, and improvement of national qualifications frameworks (in a systemic view) and the implementation of the ACQF.

These Guidelines and their supporting Training Modules will provide all African countries, institutions and stakeholders at continental, regional and national levels in Africa with a comprehensive and practical reference and methodological framework. useful for implementation, including the key dimensions, components and instruments listed below.

The ten ACQF Guidelines are:

- Guideline 1: Learning outcomes in the context of NQFs and ACQF
- Guideline 2: Levels and level descriptors in the context of ACQF
- Guideline 3: Referencing to ACQF
- Guideline 4: Validation and recognition of learning
- Guideline 5: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF
- Guideline 6: Registers / databases of qualifications
- Guideline 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Guideline 8: Communication and outreach in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Guideline 9: Innovation and technology in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Guideline 10: Qualifications and Qualifications Frameworks – the systemic view

4 Sources

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021a. Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework – Mapping report. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: J. Keevy, A. Bateman, E. Castel-Branco, L. Mavimbela, J. Adotevi, L. Sutherland, R. Matlala, U. Kyari and T. Sibiyi. <https://acqf.africa/resources/mapping-study/acqf-mapping-report-comprehensive>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021b. Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework – Synthesis. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: J. Keevy, A. Bateman, E. Castel-Branco, L. Mavimbela, J. Adotevi, L. Sutherland, and R. Matlala. <https://acqf.africa/resources/mapping-study/acqf-mapping-report-synthesis>

¹⁸ ACQF. 2022. A Brief Handbook on the ACQF. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021c. Brief overview of progress – 2021. Author: Eduarda Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/webinars/2021-progress-report-acqf-development-project>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021d. Feasibility report. Rationale, scenarios and plan. Authors: E. Castel-Branco, E. Mukhwana, et al. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/feasibility-study>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021e. Thematic Brief 1. Concepts and definitions on qualifications and qualifications frameworks. Author: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-1-concepts-and-definitions>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021f. Thematic Brief 3.1. Level descriptors in qualifications frameworks. Overview from 24 African qualifications frameworks. Author: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-3-1-level-descriptors>

ACQF. (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021g. Thematic Brief 4.1: Regional Qualifications Frameworks. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-4-1-regional-qualifications-frameworks-rqf>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021h. Thematic Brief 6.1. Quality assurance for technical vocational- education and training (TVET). Overview of approaches or regional/ international organisations. Author: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-6-1-tvet-quality-assurance>

ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework). 2021i. Thematic Brief 11. Governance of NQF / NQS. Author: E. J. Mukhwana. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-11-governance-of-nqfs-nqs>

ACQF. 2022a. Guideline 1: Learning outcomes in the context of NQFs and ACQF. Author: C. Jaftha. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-1-learning-outcomes-in-the-context-of-qualifications-frameworks-and-systems>

ACQF. 2022b. Guideline 2: Levels and level descriptors in the context of ACQF. Author: C. Jaftha. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-2-levels-and-level-descriptors-in-the-context-of-acqf>

ACQF. 2022c. Guideline 3: Referencing to ACQF. Authors: C. Jaftha, E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-1-referencing-to-acqf>

ACQF. 2022d. Guideline 4: Validation and recognition of learning. Authors: M. Chiyaba, M. Hamalabbi, F. Cheelo, J. Mwewa. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-3-validation-of-learning>

ACQF. 2022e. Guideline 5: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF. Authors: E. Castel-Branco, K. Allgoo. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-5-quality-assurance-in-the-context-of-qualifications-and-acqf>

ACQF. 2022f. Guideline 6: Registers / databases of qualifications. Authors: M. Chiyaba, M. Hamalabbi, F. Cheelo, J. Mwewa. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-6-registers-and-databases-of-qualifications>

ACQF. 2022g. Guideline 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQF and ACQF. Authors: E. Hazell, Z. MacDonald. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-7-monitoring-and-evaluation-in-the-context-of-national-qualifications-frameworks-and-acqf>

ACQF. 2022h. Guideline 8: Communication and outreach in the context of NQF and ACQF. Author: C. Jaftha. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-8-communication-and-outreach-in-the-context-of-qualifications-frameworks-and-acqf>

ACQF. 2022i. Guideline 9: Innovation and technology in the context of NQF and ACQF. Authors: K. Shiohira, P. Molokwane et al. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-9-innovation-and-technology-in-the-context-of-national-qualifications-frameworks-and-acqf>

ACQF. 2022j. Guideline 10: Qualifications and Qualifications Frameworks – the systemic view. Author: A. Bateman. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-10-qualifications-and-national-qualifications-frameworks-systemic-view-1>

ACQF. 2022k. Training module 1: Learning Outcomes in Qualifications Frameworks and Systems. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: C. Jaftha. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-1-learning-outcomes>

ACQF. 2022l. Training module 2: Levels and level descriptors. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: C. Jaftha. Contributors: A. Bateman, E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-2-levels-and-level-descriptors-in-the-context-of-acqf>

ACQF. 2022m. Training module 3: Referencing to ACQF. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: C. Jaftha, E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-3-referencing-to-acqf>

ACQF. 2022n. Training module 4: Validation and recognition of learning. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: M. Chiyaba, M. Hamalabbi, F. Cheelo and J. Mwewa. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-4-validation-and-recognition-of-learning>

ACQF. 2022o. Training module 5: Quality Assurance in the context of ACQF. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: E. Castel-Branco, K. Allgoo. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-5-quality-assurance-in-the-context-of-the-acqf>

ACQF. 2022p. Training module 6: Registration and databases of qualifications. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: M. Chiyaba, M. Hamalabbi, F. Cheelo and J. Mwewa. Contributor: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-6-registers-databases-of-qualifications>

ACQF. 2022p. Training module 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of qualifications frameworks or systems. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: Eleanor Hazell, Zahraa McDonald et al. Contributor: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-7-monitoring-and-evaluation-the-context-of-nqfs-and-acqf>

ACQF. 2022r. Training module 8: Communication and outreach in the context of NQF and ACQF. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: C. Jaftha. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-8-communication-and-outreach-in-the-context-of-nqf-acqf>

ACQF. 2022s. Training module 9: Innovation and technology in the context of qualifications systems. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Authors: K. Shiohira, P. Molokwane. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-9-innovation-and-technology-in-the-context-of-qualifications-and-nqfs>

ACQF. 2022t. Training module 10: Qualifications and qualifications frameworks: the systemic view. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: A. Bateman. Contributor: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-10-qualifications-and-qualifications-frameworks-a-systemic-view>

ACQF. 2022u. Thematic Brief 8: Qualifications Frameworks in a changing world. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-8-qualifications-frameworks-in-a-changing-world>

ACQF. 2022v. Thematic Brief 9. Competence-based training – a brief overview Author: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-9-competence-based-training-cbt-a-brief-overview>

ACQF. 2022x. Thematic Brief 10. ACQF level descriptors, the story of the development journey. Author: C. Jaftha. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-10-acqf-level-descriptors-the-story-of-the-development-journey>

ACQF. 2022z. 12 NQFs in Africa: key features. <https://acqf.africa/resources/mapping-study/12-nqfs-in-africa-key-features-2022>

ACQF. 2022aa. Progress report ACQF project presented to 5th meeting of Advisory Group ACQF (26/05/2022). <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/webinars/progress-report-of-acqf-development-project-presented-to-acqf-ag-5-meeting-26-05-2022>

ACQF. 2022bb. Rapport d'avancement du projet ACQF présenté à la réunion du Groupe Consultatif ACQF (26/05/2022). <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/webinars/rapport-davancement-du-projet-acqf-presente-a-la-reunion-do-groupe-consultatif-de-lacqf-26-05-2022>

ACQF. 2022cc. Relatório de progresso do projeto ACQF apresentado à reunião do Grupo Consultivo do ACQF (26/05/2022). <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/webinars/relatorio-de-progresso-do-projeto-acqf-ate-17-maio-2022>

ACQF. 2022dd. A Brief Handbook on the ACQF. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines>

ACQF. 2022ee. Final activity report: ACQF development project (2019-2022). <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/webinars/final-activity-report-acqf-development-project-2019-2022>

ACQF. 2023a. Thematic Brief 13. Micro-credentials: concepts, debates, experiences – towards a common understanding in different parts of the world. Author: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-13-micro-credentials-concepts-debates-experiences-2013-towards-a-common-understanding-in-different-parts-of-the-world>

ACQF. 2023b. Inventory of NQFs in the SADC. Author: E. Castel-Branco. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/support-to-countries/southern-african-development-community-sadc/inventory-of-nqfs-sadc-updated-02-05-2023>

African Union. 2019. Plan of Action for the African Decade for Technical, Professional, Entrepreneurial Training and Youth (2019–2028). <https://edu-au.org/resources/category/42-plan-of-action-for-the-african-decade-for-technical-professional-entrepreneurial-training-and-youth-employment>

ASG-QA (African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). <https://haqaa2.obsglob.org/african-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-higher-education-asg-qa/>

African Union. 2013. Agenda 2063. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063>

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

African Union. 2015. CESA 16-25 - Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf

African Union. 2018. Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf

African Union. 2018. Protocol to the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/1965-protocol-to-the-abuja-treaty-free-movement-of-persons-right-of-residence-and-establishment-adopted-29-january-2018/file.html>

[African Union. 2022. Declaration on Transforming Education in Africa: Past, Present and Future.](#) Adopted on 20th September 2022 at the High-Level Side Event on Transforming Education in Africa in the Margins of Transforming Education Summit in New York

Cedefop. National Qualifications Frameworks – online tool. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/nqfs-online-tool>

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

Tuck, R. 2007. An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_103623.pdf

UNESCO. 2014. ISCED Fields of education and training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013). <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/isced-fields-of-education-and-training-2013-en.pdf>

UNESCO. 2014. Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49282&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#STATE_PARTIES

UNESCO. 2019. Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education 2019. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49557&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

United Nations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

[United Nations. 2022](#). Call for Action by the SDC4 High-level Steering Committee "Following up on the transformative commitments made at the Transforming Education Summit" (United Nations, September 2022).

5 Annexes

5.1 Annex 1: Glossary

For the purposes of the ACQF policy and technical document, the following definitions apply. This list of definitions is not exhaustive but is complemented by the specific glossaries annexed to each of the Guidelines and are included in [ACQF Thematic Brief 1. Concepts and definitions](#) (updated in 2022) and in other sources listed in of this document.

Main terms:

Qualification

Means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards

International qualifications

International qualifications are awarded by a legally established international body (association, organisation, professional sector, or company) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body, are used in more than one country and include learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body.

National Qualifications Framework

A policy and instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

National Qualifications System

This includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.

Regional qualifications framework

A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country.

Credit

'Credit' means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes.

'Credit transfer' means the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit in one context to have it valued and recognised in another context.

Learning outcomes

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Level descriptors

A statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the National Qualifications Framework (that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes that are appropriate to a qualification at that level.

Knowledge

In the context of ACQF 'Knowledge' includes various kinds of knowledge such as facts, principles and theories in various areas.

Skills

In the context of ACQF 'Skills' refer to the ability to use knowledge to respond to information and address problems. Skills include cognitive, communication, digital, green, innovation, practical and social skills.

Autonomy and responsibility

In the context of ACQF 'Autonomy and responsibility' refers to the context and extent of the application of autonomy and responsibility.

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities and experiences which is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learners' perspective.

Micro-credentials

Micro-credential means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or stackable / combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.

Non-formal learning

Learning which takes place outside formal education and training through planned activities in terms of learning objectives and learning time and where some form of learning support is present.

Recognition of prior learning

Confirmation by a competent authority that the learning outcomes, that an individual has acquired in all learning settings, including non-formal and informal, has been measured against a relevant standard.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

A formal acknowledgment by a competent recognition authority of the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, of partial studies, or of prior learning for the purpose of providing an applicant with outcomes including, but not limited to: (a) the right to apply for admission to higher education; and/or (b) the possibility to seek employment opportunities.

5.2 Annex 2: ACQF referencing criteria

Purpose, benefits, and scope of referencing

Referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF is the core function of the ACQF and this is encapsulated under the main areas of activity as defined in the ACQF policy document.

Referencing to ACQF is a way of creating a common zone of trusted qualifications by bringing together the African Union member states and key stakeholders to compare qualifications frameworks / systems and systematise and share updated information on qualifications and the referenced NQFs.

The ACQF is a framework of NQFs. Referencing to the ACQF should be done through the NQFs or, where these do not exist, NQFs on condition that their qualifications levels are clearly described and qualifications that are included follow transparent and quality assured processes. The referencing process determines the level-to-level correspondence between the NQF and the ACQF. This is a key outcome of the referencing process.

Following endorsement of referencing, an important aspect is to make visible the benefit of referencing to the ACQF and ensure that qualifications are associated with an ACQF level. The referencing outcomes and implications, in particular the labelling / acknowledgement of ACQF levels on qualifications documents will support mobility for lifelong learning by easing recognition of qualifications as well as the facilitation of learner and worker mobility inside and outside the continent.

While it is important to communicate the purpose and benefit of referencing, it is also important to communicate what it is not.

Results of referencing and the related information-sharing do contribute to facilitate recognition of qualifications, but referencing does not provide automatic recognition of qualifications between countries. ACQF is not an instrument equipped to carry out recognition of qualifications, which is a policy domain under the responsibility of each country. To ascertain the indispensable coherence with existing international Conventions, the ACQF acknowledges and works in complementarity with other relevant policies and conventions related to recognition of qualifications, such as the UNESCO's Addis Recognition Convention (entered into force on 15/12/2019)¹⁹ and the UNESCO's Global Recognition Convention²⁰ (not yet entered into force as of May 2022), and it is not intended to standardise systems and practices, nor to interfere or replace national recognition legislation and mechanisms. Referencing is not intended for competitive ranking between countries.

ACQF referencing criteria

¹⁹ UNESCO, 2014. Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States 2014. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49282&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#STATE_PARTIES

²⁰ UNESCO, 2020. Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373602.locale=en>

Referencing to the ACQF is guided by four Criteria (Table 1) and a set of governance procedures and follow-up steps defined in Table 2. To ensure consistency and transparency in the process, member states are invited to address each of the referencing criteria and to report the national position in a referencing report.

Confidence and trust in the ACQF referencing process requires that the relevant stakeholders work together to consult, review, and agree on the level-to-level linkages between the national qualification levels and the levels of the ACQF. The process will also support member countries to develop, consolidate or review their NQFs.

Table 1: ACQF referencing criteria

Referencing criteria	
1	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF.
2	The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.
3	There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy, and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications.
4	The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

Table 2: ACQF referencing governance, procedures and follow-up

Governance procedures and follow-up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are clearly defined and published by the relevant competent authorities. - The relevant national quality assurance bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report. - People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts. - Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria. - The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website. - Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g.: certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.

Referencing principles

ACQF referencing will be coordinated, managed and quality assured by the ACQF governance structure, acting in full respect for the following principles:

- The ACQF is a public policy and instrument, and enables open information-sharing
- Referencing between NQFs and the ACQF is based on:
 - trust and integrity of the process,
 - coordination, support and continuous improvement of the process and outcomes
 - establishing and maintaining the zone of trust by providing transparency to the process

Support will be provided through dissemination of a full set of support materials where the country is the major beneficiary.

Referencing steps and compiling the referencing report

Referencing of an NQF to ACQF is important as a process of transparency and mutual learning that can last up to approximately 1-1,5 years depending on the maturity of the NQF, existing national capacity and efficiency of the organisation. Many parts of the referencing process can be done via virtual meetings and digital tools. Indicatively, five steps are proposed:

- Step 1: Self-assessment and decision to start process
- Step 2: Referencing roadmap and short training
- Step 3: Referencing report Part 1- State of play presentation via remote meeting to ACQF Governing setting
- Step 4: Referencing report Part 2 – advanced draft
- Step 5: Referencing report Part 3:
 - o Final national consultation meeting (workshop, conference), validation by key institutions.
 - o Final report submitted to ACQF Governing structure.
 - o Presentation via remote meeting to ACQF Governing structure – wider representation of all AU member states
 - o Upon validation and acceptance - publication of report.

Follow-up upon successful referencing:

- Publication of the endorsed referencing report on ACQF website
- Use of ACQF levels on qualifications documents and qualifications databases of the NQF referenced to ACQF.

The structure of the referencing report may be defined by the country's referencing team. However, a few minimum elements of the referencing report are proposed:

- Description of the education and training system
- The NQF (or NQS)
- Country response to the ACQF referencing criteria – sections elaborated by criterion
- Sources

The report should be structured in a comprehensive, and integrated way, refer to examples, and be presented in a user-friendly layout.

The national report of referencing to ACQF provides the argumentation and evidence on the degree to which the agreed referencing criteria are met. For a focused elaboration, it is recommended that the country report presents this argumentation criterion by criterion, and specifies the used conceptual and methodological underpinnings, the main conclusions, and relevant evidence.

Understanding the referencing criteria is therefore an essential premise for effective referencing processes. Therefore, the workflow of ACQF referencing comprises preparatory steps that contribute to self-assess the country's readiness to engage with the process and to raise awareness, train and coach the relevant stakeholders and contributors to the process and write-up of the referencing report.

5.3 Annex 3: Recommendation on minimum elements in qualifications design and structure

Contribution to enhanced transparency, quality and comparability of qualifications is a major objective of the ACQF. Across the continent, the information described in existing qualifications documents and databases varies in terms of structure, data fields and format of the main learning outcomes. The rich diversity of qualifications systems on the continent is not an impediment on the way towards comparability and readability of qualifications, but this recommendation will contribute to harmonise the information

and data fields used by different countries in structuring their qualifications and registers or databases of qualifications. Such harmonisation will contribute to ease recognition of qualifications of all levels, and consequently mobility of learners and workers, and access to employment in jobs matching the acquired qualification.

ACQF countries are invited to consider the following elements in structuring the information on qualifications included in the NQF/NQS referenced to the ACQF, and in the national qualifications registers. The ACQF implementation structure will provide practical guidance to national qualifications institutions on the implementation of this recommendation.

Elements for structuring the information on qualifications

a) Required

1. Title of qualification
2. Field of education and training (according to ISCED-2013, fields of education and training – ISCED-F 2013)²¹
3. Country code
4. NQF level – ACQF level
5. Awarding body or competent authority
6. Description of the qualification: short statements on the learning outcomes – what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do
7. Credit points/notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (if available)
8. Expiry date (if available)
9. Link to qualifications database (if available)

b) Optional

1. External quality assurance/regulatory body
2. Ways to acquire the qualification
3. Relationship to occupations or occupational classification.

5.4 Annex 4: Other reference documents supporting ACQF implementation

Other important policy and technical documents to be considered by national, regional, and continental authorities:

- a) African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) – updated, validated version.²²
- b) Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States 2014. Adopted on 12 December 2014²³ and entered into force on 15 December 2019.
- c) Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. Adopted on 25 November 2019. Not yet entered into force²⁴.

²¹ ISCED-F 2013, at: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/isced-fields-of-education-and-training-2013-en.pdf>

²² African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA), at:

<https://haqaa2.obsglob.org/african-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-higher-education-asg-qa/>

²³ UNESCO, Addis Convention, at: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49282&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#STATE_PARTIES

²⁴ UNESCO, Global Convention. <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/higher-education/global-convention>

5.5 Action Plan

Available in separate document, the Action Plan for the period 2022–2026 is based on the Output Plan developed in the [ACQF Feasibility Study \(2021\)](#)²⁵. The ACQF Action Plan includes all areas of activity defined in this Policy document and will be implemented in 2023-2026 with technical and financial support of international partners, and involvement of all AU Member states, RECs, and stakeholders from the world of education and training, employment and professional sectors. Implementation is steered by the African Union Commission.

²⁵ ACQF. 2021. Feasibility study ACQF. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/feasibility-study>