

# NQFs Extend Beyond the National Borders of Individual Countries

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One greatly desired benefit of modern National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) is the ability to develop common learning outcomes that can relate to each other. The aim is to allow for portability and recognition of qualifications and mobility of learners.

To achieve this there has to be national efforts to develop frameworks with qualifications that represent the learning outcomes from school, work, higher education and other adult learning.



Qualification frameworks can be a tool to remove barriers between countries and qualifications by classifying them based on shared "learning outcomes"—what a learner knows and can do. This provides a transparent, universal standard that allows different countries to compare certificates, making it easier

for workers and students to cross international borders.

More and more qualification frameworks are aimed at the integration and coordination of qualifications and the improvement of transparency, access, progression and quality of qualification in relation to the needs of national and international labour market and civil society.

The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is an African Union initiative launched in 2019 to create a continental qualifications meta-framework that complements national and regional frameworks.

The ACQF plays a pivotal role in extending NQFs beyond national borders by harmonising education and training systems across Africa. It enables comparability, recognition, and mobility of skills and qualifications. Acting as a continental "translation device," the ACQF aligns diverse national education and skill systems to a common 10-level reference framework. This alignment strengthens regional integration, supports worker mobility, and promotes lifelong learning.

## How effectively are African countries aligning to the ACQF?

Because the alignment is a voluntary process, the speed at which countries are aligning to the ACQF across the continent varies. Currently South Africa, Seychelles, Kenya, Cabo Verde, and Zimbabwe are in the lead, having started the pilot referencing in 2024. Seychelles has also benefited from the previous alignment exercise to the SADCQF and this has made aligning to the ACQF a smoother process.

This exercise has allowed us to see where gaps still exist, and will enhance the transparency, enable comparison and portability of qualifications between Seychelles and other countries across the continent. It will help to ensure that qualifications are recognized and valued uniformly, facilitating mobility and recognition of skills and qualifications between member states.

All countries in the African region are encouraged to develop an NQF to enhance the recognition of competencies and to align education with the skills needs of the workforce. According to a survey in 2024 by the ACQF, a total of 22 countries currently have an approved NQF and 8 others are in the process of developing one.

### **Some benefits of NQFs as they extend beyond national borders:**

**Student exchange:** NQFs make it easier for universities to recognize credits and qualifications from abroad, encouraging international study opportunities.

**Workforce migration:** skilled professionals benefit from NQFs when their qualifications are recognised internationally, reducing barriers to employment in foreign markets

**Policy harmonisation:** countries use NQFs as a foundation to harmonise education and training policies, fostering cooperation in curriculum development and quality assurance.

**Global standards:** by referencing international frameworks, NQFs contribute to the creation of shared benchmarks for skills and competencies worldwide.

## **Economic and Social Impact**

**Trade and investment:** internationally recognised qualifications boost investor confidence in workforce capabilities.

**Social inclusion:** migrants and refugees benefit when their prior learning and qualifications are validated across borders, supporting integration into new societies.

In essence, NQFs are evolving from national tools into global bridges, connecting education systems, labour markets, and societies. They embody the idea that learning and skills should be portable, recognised, and valued everywhere.

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