

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – MOLDOVA

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 NQF snapshot

Moldova adopted an NQF concept in 2010 covering all levels of education, but only the NQF for higher education was implemented. In 2017 an eight-level NQF, based on the EQF structure, was approved.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is the lead organisation for the NQF's development. Coordination mechanisms to ensure that qualifications are developed in line with the labour market have been established.

Moldova has been a member of the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process, since 2005, but has not yet self-certified against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The country has developed tools and approaches to create new qualifications and now needs to move towards implementation and delivery. It is at the activation stage of NQF development.

1.2 Policy context

Moldova's development path in recent years has been guided by the Association Agreement it signed with the European Union in 2014. Cooperation in the field of education and training aims to promote lifelong learning and encourage cooperation and transparency at all levels of education and training, with a special focus on higher education. That cooperation focuses on modernising education and training systems; enhancing quality, relevance and access; establishing a national qualifications framework to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences; and promoting the aims set in the Copenhagen Process on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training¹.

In June 2020, the Moldovan parliament approved the National Development Strategy 2030, known as Moldova 2030. The main policy objective of "Moldova 2030"² is to significantly improve the quality of life of its citizens. It focuses on four development priorities: a sustainable and inclusive economy; strong human and social capital; honest and efficient institutions; and a healthy environment. One of its long-term objectives is to ensure quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities. To develop these areas up to 2030, ten long-term goals for sustainable development have been set.

No strategic document has yet been developed to follow up the Education Strategy 2014–2020. For the time being, while a specific action plan for education is still under development, Moldova 2030 will remain the overarching policy document for education and training.

The National Employment Strategy 2017-2021 aims to increase formal employment based on economic competitiveness and the appropriate level of skills and qualifications, in conditions of sustainable and inclusive development³. It establishes four priorities: creating formal, non-

¹ Art. 122, 123 of the Association Agreement. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2014.260.01.0004.01.ENG

² <http://www.parlament.md/LegislationDocument.aspx?id=def72782-3e6a-49d8-adfe-13d0fdc2c190>

³ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=98639&lang=ro

discriminatory and productive employment opportunities; developing human capital for increased employment opportunities; improving labour market governance; and capitalising on the potential of migration to support sustainable development. The human capital development priority aims to increase the attractiveness, relevance and inclusiveness of the VET system and promote participation of adults in lifelong learning.

VET is well represented at the upper secondary level of Moldova's system, and enrolment in vocational programmes is increasing, reaching 46.6% in 2018, up from 37.1% in 2013.

Moldova's NQF and VET system must be seen against its generally low economic growth, high levels of outward migration and dependence on remittances from those migrants, which account for circa 23% of GDP. As migrants are overwhelmingly young, heavy migration both reduces and ages the population.

Fluctuation between significant growth followed by contraction has been a recent characteristic of the economy. GDP expanded by 4.7% in 2017, followed by a further 4.0% in 2018. But even before the Covid-19 shock of 2020, the economy had slowed sharply in the last quarter of 2019. The unfolding economic crisis will have resulted in a contraction of Moldova's economy in 2020. A fall in remittances from the country's people abroad will have further depressed private consumption.

In 2019, the employment rate for the 15 plus age group was 40%; unemployment was 5%. NEETs account for 17% of the 15-24 group.

The COVID pandemic forced the closure of all schools in March 2020 and a shift to distance and online teaching. As elsewhere, schools found it difficult to maintain the practical aspects of VET learning under such conditions. Initial plans for online graduation exams and assessment were cancelled when the Ministry of Education concluded that online assessment could undermine confidence in diplomas both in Moldova and abroad, where many Moldovans work. Instead, grades were awarded based on coursework.

1.3 NQF legal basis

In 2010, an NQF concept was adopted, covering all levels of education, but only the NQF for higher education was implemented⁴. In 2017 the National Qualifications Framework was approved by government decision⁵.

The legal framework for the development of NQF includes the following laws and main regulations:

- Education Code, in particular Articles 66 and 97 (2014);
- Law on Sectoral Committees (2017);
- Government Decision on the National Register of Qualifications (2018);
- Government Decisions on the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (2018) and on the approval of the External Quality Assurance Methodology (2016);
- Methodology for the development of occupational standards (2014);
- Regulation on the organisation of the qualification examination (2018);
- Methodology for the development, revision and validation of qualification standards (2019);

⁴ <https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/cadrul-national-al-calificarilor-0>

⁵ Government Decision no. 1016 of 23.11.2017

<http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=372759&lang=1>

- Methodology for implementing qualification standards by VET and higher education institutions (2020);
- Methodology for establishing the correspondence of the level of training of qualifications obtained until the approval of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Moldova (2019);
- Framework Regulation on validation of non-formal and informal education (2019);
- Framework Regulation on the organisation of post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET studies based on the Credit Transfer System (2016);
- Nomenclature of secondary VET training fields and trades/occupations (2015);
- Nomenclature of post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET training fields, specialities and qualifications (2015);
- Nomenclature of higher education fields of study and specialities (2017); Classifier of occupations in the Republic of Moldova (2014).

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

2.1 Education and training reforms

VET policy reform is guided by the VET Development Strategy 2013–2020⁶, developed in line with the National Development Strategy “Moldova 2020”. (As indicated above, “Moldova 2030” has replaced “Moldova 2020”, and an accompanying action plan for education, including VET, is now being developed).

The VET Strategy aims to modernise VET to enhance the competitiveness of the national economy. The main objective is to increase the attractiveness, quality, affordability and flexibility of VET and its relevance to the labour market needs. Specific objectives of the VET Strategy include:

1. restructuring of the VET system and optimization of the VET network, including establishing Centres of Excellence;
2. ensuring VET delivery based on labour market skills needs, including through strengthening social partnership in VET, labour market skills analyses, establishing Sector Skills Committees, developing occupational standards, and introduction of a VNFIL system;
3. enhancing VET quality through the development of new VET standards, the QA system, NQF, and improving the efficiency of VET funding;
4. improving VET curricula, including by introducing a modular approach, a credit system for VET, and an entrepreneurship component;
5. increasing teaching staff quality through modernisation of teacher training and a continuous development system based on lifelong learning principles;
6. increasing VET attractiveness.

In 2014, Moldova adopted a new Education Code to create the regulatory basis for the reforms. The Code structures the education system into levels and cycles in accordance with ISCED 2011,

⁶ <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&la-ng=1&id=346695>

restructures the VET system into secondary VET (VET schools), and post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET (colleges), and provides the basis for the implementation of the NQF.

2.2. Aims of NQF

The NQF aims to establish an integrated, open and flexible national qualification system covering all levels and forms of professional education, oriented to meet the needs of the labour market, promoting lifelong learning and the country's economic development, and support national policies and strategies in the field of education and vocational training, in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

The National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education is intended to ensure transparency in higher education, academic mobility and recognition of diplomas internationally⁷.

3. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

3.1 NQF scope and structure

Moldova's NQF has eight levels and follows the EQF structure and level descriptor categories: knowledge, skills and competences. It also presents a correspondence between the NQF qualification levels with the EQF and QF-EHEA levels. The NQF for higher education is designed to accommodate each cycle of higher education by fields of study (professional training)⁸.

3.2 Types of qualifications

The NQF allocates types of education and training programmes, leading to formal education qualifications, to NQF levels, describing as well access and assessment requirements. General secondary education programmes correspond to NQF levels 1-3. VET programmes correspond to NQF level 3 (secondary VET), NQF level 4 (post-secondary VET) and NQF level 5 (post-secondary non-tertiary VET). Higher education programmes are allocated to NQF levels 6-8.

3.3 Quality assurance of qualifications

Qualifications of all NQF levels are defined in the qualification standards⁹. The development, revision and approval of qualification standards is carried out according to the methodology adopted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR)¹⁰. Qualification standards are developed by the MECR working groups with the involvement of representatives of social partners and educational institutions. They must meet the requirements of the relevant NQF level descriptors, be validated by

⁷ Art. 97, Education Code (2014) https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=112493&lang=ro

⁸ Art. 97 (3), Education Code (2014) https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=112493&lang=ro

⁹ <https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/cadrul-national-al-calificarilor-2>

¹⁰ Methodology for the development, revision and validation of qualification standards, Order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research No. 1617 of 10.12.2019

https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/metodologia_de_elaborare_revizuire_si_validare_a_standardelor_de_calificare.pdf

the corresponding Sectoral Committee and line ministry, and approved by MECR based on the decision of the National Council for Qualifications. VET qualifications are developed on the basis of occupational standards¹¹.

Occupational standards must be developed for the occupations included in the Classifier of Occupations. Sectoral Committees develop the occupational standards, which are then validated and approved by the relevant line ministry or central administrative authority¹².

Qualification standards define also the requirements for assessment and award of qualifications in line with the NQF. Qualifications are awarded by accredited education institutions. Both the institutional and programme accreditation are mandatory. The external evaluation shall be carried out by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) or a quality assurance agency listed in EQAR. Accreditation standards require that education programmes correspond with the relevant NQF level.

3.4 Use of learning outcomes and standards

Qualification standards define qualifications in learning outcomes. They should relate to professional and general/key competences specified in the occupational standards or occupational profiles (for VET qualifications), or competence standards (for higher education qualifications). Learning outcomes should also correspond with the relevant NQF qualification level descriptors.

The qualification standard is the basis for curriculum development, assessment and VNFIL.

3.5 Credit systems

In higher education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used. One academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS credits. First cycle (NQF level 6) programmes shall have 180-240 ECTS credits; second cycle (NQF level 7) programmes – 90-120 ECTS, or 300-360 ECTS for the integrated programmes (in medicine, veterinary medicine, architecture).

In post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET, the credit system based on ECVET is applied¹³. Higher education institutions may recognise up to 30 VET credits.

¹¹ Art. 66, Education Code

¹² Methodology for the development of occupational standards, Government Decision no. 863 of 08.10.2014
https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=95616&lang=ro

¹³ Framework Regulation on the organization of post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET studies based on the Credit Transfer System approved by MESR order 234 of 25.03.2016.
https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ome_nr_234_din_25_martie_2016.pdf

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The development of the NQF is coordinated by MECR in collaboration with other line ministries, sectoral committees, education institutions, and social partners. MECR is responsible for the development and approval of qualification standards; review of the nomenclatures of VET training fields and specialities, and of higher education fields of study and specialities; development and maintenance of the national register of qualifications; approval of the methodologies for applying the credit transfer and accumulation system; regulations on VNFIL; recognition of foreign qualifications; monitoring of implementation of the NQF; and monitoring of implementation of the VNFIL system.

In 2018, the National Council for Qualifications, a consultative body of MECR, was set up to facilitate the development of the NQF. It includes representatives of the relevant ministries, the National Employment Agency, ANACIP, sectoral committees, social partners and educational institutions. Its main functions include the endorsement of qualifications standards, considering legislative acts and supporting dialogue on the NQF's implementation.

4.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection (MHLSP) coordinates, monitors and ensures the funding of occupational standards development, while the line Ministries and central administrative authorities are responsible for their validation and approval. MHLSP is the main actor for the development of labour market policies and anticipating and matching skills demand and supply. It carries out a mid-term forecast of the labour market, and also reviews the occupations classifier.

The National Employment Agency (NEA), responsible to the MHLSP, produces annual short-term labour market forecasts, and develops employer surveys, to identify workforce requirements and labour shortages.

Sectoral Committees have been established to promote social partnership in VET at the sectoral level. They are associations with the status of a legal entity, established on a voluntary basis by employers and trade unions associations in the respective economic sector¹⁴. Their main functions and responsibilities include:

1. improving communication and cooperation between social partners, and between social partners and public authorities; and contributing to the development of the VET regulatory framework, including assessment and certification of competences;
2. initiating, coordinating and participating in the development and revision of occupational standards;
3. participating in the development and updating of qualifications;
4. participating in the NQF's development;

¹⁴ Law on Sectoral Committees (2017)
<http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=373349&lang=1>

5. supporting and promoting the implementation of competence-based training and assessment;
6. delegating representatives to participate in the qualification examinations, certification of competences acquired in formal, non-formal or informal contexts;
7. making proposals for updating the occupations classifier;
8. engaging in skills needs analyses and anticipation;
9. endorsing modular or subject-based VET curricula.

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC)¹⁵ is responsible for the external evaluation and accreditation of education institutions and programmes at all levels of education, including continuing education. It develops and periodically reviews evaluation methodologies, accreditation standards, national reference standards and performance indicators used in quality assurance and evaluation. The governing board of the agency includes representatives of higher education and VET institutions, a student representative and a business representative.

5. RECOGNISING AND VALIDATING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

5.1 VNFIL arrangements

The regulatory framework for VNFIL was established by MECR in 2019. According to the MECR Regulation on validation of non-formal and informal education, 16 validation is carried out by VET institutions and only against their accredited programmes. The regulation establishes requirements for the VNFIL process, assessment commission and assessors. The assessment commission shall comprise at least 3 members and may include representatives of the VET institution, experts delegated by the relevant ministry, Sectoral Committee, or Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The VNFIL process must meet the requirements of the relevant occupational standard.

A particular need is validation of skills acquired while abroad by returning migrants. The ongoing EU Twinning project has addressed this dimension.

¹⁵ <http://www.anacip.md/index.php/en/>

¹⁶ Approved by MECR Decision No. 65/2019

https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/regulament_privind_educatia_nonformala.pdf

6. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

6.1 Key achievements and main findings

The adoption of the NQF in 2017 enabled the resumption of qualifications reform in the country, including approval of key legislative/administrative decisions, among them the government decision on the National Register of Qualifications and its technical concept, a methodology for the development of qualifications and the Framework Regulation on validation of non-formal and informal education.

Necessary legislation and regulations are in place to ensure institutionalised participation of all key stakeholders in the NQF policy dialogue, including social partners and other non-government stakeholders. The National Council for Qualifications has been created to ensure coordinated action for NQF implementation, while the Law on Sectoral Committees has formalized roles and responsibilities of social partners among the sectors.

Qualification standards define qualifications in learning outcomes. However, the development of new, and updating of existing, qualifications is still a challenge. Until now, only a few qualifications developed have been based on occupational standards¹⁷.

6.2 Qualifications registers and databases

VET qualifications together with occupational standards, curricula and training providers (VET schools, colleges, the Centres of Excellence) are published on the National VET portal www.ipt.md. The database is structured according to the Classifier of Occupations based on ISCO-08, and the Nomenclatures of VET training fields and specialities. The ANACEC website¹⁸ includes the lists of accredited or authorized higher education programmes.

To date, there are 51 qualification standards published on the Ministry's website, 26 VET, 25 HE.

The National Register of Qualifications¹⁹ is under development. It will include qualifications of all levels and related information, including learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and qualification providers.

6.3 Qualification documents

Two types of VET document are issued: qualification certificates to certify secondary VET (NQF level 3) and qualification diplomas to certify post-secondary (NQF level 4) or post-secondary non-tertiary VET (NQF level 5). For the supplements, the Europass format is used²⁰.

Qualification titles are indicated according to the nomenclatures of VET training fields (NQF level 3) or training fields, specialities and qualifications (NQF levels 4 and 5); or the nomenclature of higher education fields of study and specialities.

¹⁷ only 33 occupational standards have been developed so far (NRF 2020, p.73).

¹⁸ <http://www.anacip.md>

¹⁹ approved by Government Decision no.1199 of 5.12.2018
https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=111365&lang=ro

²⁰ https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ome_nr_1204_din_16.12.2015_cu_modificarile_si_completarile_ulterioare.pdf

6.4 Career information and guidance

The portal www.ipt.md informs students about occupations linking them to VET qualifications providers. The National Employment Agency's (NEA) portal www.cariera.anofm.md provides description of occupations, including information on the related skills, trends in the labour market and average salaries, and links them to the available vacancies published on the NEA job search portal www.angajat.md.

6.5 Recognition of foreign qualifications

Moldova ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1999. MECR hosts the National Information Centre, which is a member of the ENIC-NARIC network. The country concludes bilateral and multilateral agreements on mutual recognition of qualifications.

6.6 Tools to use the NQF

Guidelines for the implementation of qualification standards to support curriculum development, assessment, and formulation of learning outcomes were developed, including:

- a methodology for implementing qualification standards by VET and higher education institutions (2020)²¹;
- methodological guidelines for translating professional competences into learning outcomes (2020)²²;
- methodological guidelines for developing the qualification assessment procedure (2019)²³.

7. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORK/ OTHER FRAMEWORKS

7.1 Referencing to regional frameworks

Moldova has been a member of the Bologna Process since 2005. It has not yet certified its NQF against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

7.2 International cooperation

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) is an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and a full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA).

²¹https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/metodologia_de_implementare_a_standardelor_de_calificare_de_catre_institutiile_de_invatamant_profesional_tehnic_si_superior.pdf

²²https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ghidul_metodologic_pentru_transpunerea_competentelor_profesionale_in_rezultate_ale_invatarii.pdf

²³https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ghid_metodologic_de_elaborare_a_procedurii_de_evaluare_a_calificarilor.pdf

7.3. International donor support

The EU-funded Twinning project “Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system” was launched in 2019. The main aims of the project are:

- to strengthen the institutional and operational capacities and staff competences of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC);
- to continue the implementation of the NQF in Moldova;
- to build capacities for effective cooperation between VET providers and the private sector;
- to encourage VET teachers in centres of excellence to become multipliers through pedagogical training.

8. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Moldova has developed tools and approaches to create new qualifications and now needs to move towards implementation and delivery.

Coordination mechanisms to ensure that qualifications are developed in line with the labour market have been established. Currently, there are eight sectoral committees²⁴, but they are facing several challenges in the implementation of their ambitious mandate. Development of the sectoral committees’ capacities and competences is needed to ensure their effective operationalisation, including execution of one of their priority tasks, the development of sectoral qualification standards.

The education and training system needs to better respond to current labour market demands through the development of relevant outcomes-based qualifications. In order to develop qualification standards - which are the normative basis for training programmes - occupational standards are needed. These should capture labour market requirements in professional skills.

The legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning has been adopted only recently. The system is at the piloting stage and only four VET providers (colleges and centres of excellence) have been authorised so far by MECR as validation centres. A functioning and sustainable mechanism for VNFIL is still to be developed and established.

The improvement of a quality assurance system for VET is an issue of ongoing importance. Relative progress has been achieved in this field. Until now, only some universities have been accredited, and the accreditation procedure of VET institutions commenced in 2019²⁵. To strengthen quality assurance processes in the VET system, ANACEC’s capacities need to be raised.

Donor support plays an important role. The current EU Twinning project (begun in 2019) provides capacity-building support to MECR and ANACEC to ensure an effective implementation of quality assurance mechanisms for VET and LLL provision, support the creation of the national register of qualifications and collaboration with the private sector.

²⁴ in construction sector; agriculture and food processing sector; ICT sector; transport and road services sector; trade sector; non-food industry sector; water distribution, waste management and decontamination sector; and energy sector <http://ipt.md/ro/piata-muncii#Comitete>

²⁵ NRF (2020), p. 8

9. MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Ministry of Education, Culture and Research: www.mecc.gov.md

National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research: www.anacip.md

National VET portal: www.ipt.md

ABBREVIATIONS

ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ISCED	International standard classification of education
ISCO	International standard classification of occupations
MECR	Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Moldova
NEA	National Employment Agency
NCQ	National Council for Qualifications
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Where to find out more

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