

| ROADMAP  |   |                 |            |
|--|---|-----------------|------------|
| TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE  | Revision of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)   |                 |            |
| LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT – AP NUMBER   | EMPL.E2   | DATE OF ROADMAP | 07/04/2016 |
| LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE  | Revision of EQF Recommendation  |                 |            |
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| ADDITIONAL INFORMATION   |   |                 |            |
| <b>This indicative roadmap is provided for information purposes only and can be subject to change. It does not prejudge the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content and structure.</b> |   |                 |            |

## A. Context, Subsidiarity Check and Objectives

### Context

The initiative is linked to the first of the ten priorities outlined in the European COM's political guidelines, "A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment"<sup>1</sup>. The Commission Work Programme 2016 announced that the **new skills agenda** will promote life-long investment in people, from vocational training and higher education through to digital and high-tech expertise and the life skills needed for citizens' active engagement in changing workplaces and societies. President Juncker and First Vice-President Timmermans also announced in their letter of intent to the EP actions to "strengthen the inclusiveness of the labour market and social investment", including the development of a **new skills agenda for Europe**. The initiative will contribute to the overarching policy objective of moving Europe towards upward social convergence. The initiative is equally about working together with Member States and relevant stakeholders towards a common vision of the need to invest in people and modernise our economies and concrete action to realise this.

The European Council (26/27 June 2014) and the European Parliament<sup>2</sup> have previously focused on promoting relevant skills for a modern economy and life-long learning and on the transparency and recognition of qualifications within the Union.

The proposal herewith will contribute to implementing the political objectives to be set in the Skills Agenda through enhanced mobility due to more visible and trusted skills and qualifications. It relates first and foremost to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF Recommendation)<sup>3</sup>.

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The EQF was created in 2008 to enhance the transparency and comparability of qualifications in the European Union and to improve their portability and transfer across countries, systems and sectors, both for study and working purposes. According to the Recommendation the EQF should contribute to the wider objectives of lifelong learning, employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners.

The EQF promotes comparability and transparency of qualifications through the comparison of national qualifications systems and frameworks. The EQF is a translation grid, organised with eight common European levels of learning to which each national framework can relate or "reference"<sup>4</sup>. Given the diversity of education and training systems across Europe, each level is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences ("learning outcomes") that need to be acquired to reach each level. Each level can be attainable by a variety of educational or career pathways and qualifications. This means that all types and levels of qualifications are covered by the EQF, including qualifications awarded through validation of non-formal and informal learning. As a reference framework, no individual qualifications are referenced to the EQF or directly given an EQF level. All qualifications are first included in the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and then, through comparability of the NQFs, their levels are compared at EU level.

The Recommendation includes two main operational milestones and invites the Member States to:

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/about/juncker-COM/docs/pg\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/about/juncker-COM/docs/pg_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2014-0010+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>

<sup>3</sup> 2008/C 111/01, [EUR-Lex - 32008H0506\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

<sup>4</sup> Referencing is the process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the EQF levels and national qualifications frameworks or systems. National authorities responsible for qualifications systems, in cooperation with stakeholders responsible for developing and using qualifications, define the correspondence between the national qualifications system and the 8 levels of the EQF, which are also referred to as "referencing" levels.

- i. relate their qualification systems and levels to the eight levels of the EQF by 2010. So far 30 countries have presented a referencing report to the EQF AG (25 Member States and 5 non Member States).
- ii. indicate EQF levels on newly issued certificates/diplomas and or certificate/diploma supplements<sup>5</sup>, once the NQF is referenced. To date 15 countries are putting EQF levels on certificates and diplomas and it is expected that by the end of 2016 a large majority of countries involved in the EQF will have done so.

The EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG), with representatives from Member States and education and labour market stakeholders at European level, has been entrusted to support the COM in the process of referencing. To this purpose, it has developed 10 referencing criteria establishing a quality assurance mechanism for the referencing process. The criteria aim at ensuring trust and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the referencing process. They have also become a base of dialogue between the countries. At national level, EQF National Coordination points (NCPs) have been created and entrusted the task to implement all necessary activities necessary for referencing. The activities of the NCPs have been financially supported via Erasmus+.

A total of 39 countries participate in the EQF process: Member States, EEA countries (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), the candidate countries (Albania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey), the potential candidate countries (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo) and Switzerland. Since its creation in 2008, the EQF has become widely accepted as a reference point and source of inspiration for developing qualifications frameworks, not only within Europe, but also globally.

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**The EQF is at the core of the EU transparency tools and relates to all other European transparency and recognition tools that have been created over recent decades**, both in the context of EU processes and in the context of the European Higher Education Area (developed through the "Bologna process"<sup>6</sup>). The EQF objectives are closely related the European tools in the area of Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET<sup>7</sup> and ECVET<sup>8</sup>), the European tools in the area of Higher Education (QF-EHEA, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education<sup>9</sup> and ECTS<sup>10</sup>), the Europass framework<sup>11</sup>, the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), the Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>12</sup>, and Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications amended by Directive 2013/55/EU<sup>13</sup> of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013<sup>14</sup>.

**The EQF is a useful tool informing recognition decisions and thus can contribute to the objectives of initiatives in the area of the academic recognition of higher education qualifications** such as the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region<sup>15</sup> (the Lisbon Recognition Convention), the "Recommendation on the use of Qualifications Framework in the recognition of foreign qualifications"<sup>16</sup>, adopted as a subsidiary text under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the network of ENIC-NARIC centres<sup>17</sup>.

The initiative is further related to a number of **other existing initiatives in the areas of career progression**, documentation of skills, relations between education/training and the labour market such as EURES<sup>18</sup>, Youthpass<sup>19</sup>, Euroguidance<sup>20</sup>, European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)<sup>21</sup>, European Skills Panorama<sup>22</sup> and Sector Skills Alliances<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information: <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home>

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en.htm)

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

<sup>9</sup> [http://issuu.com/revisionesg/docs/esg\\_-\\_draft\\_endoresed\\_by\\_bfug](http://issuu.com/revisionesg/docs/esg_-_draft_endoresed_by_bfug)

<sup>10</sup> European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/1\\_2015/125002.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/1_2015/125002.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home>

<sup>12</sup> OJ C 398, 22.12.2012.

<sup>13</sup> OJ L 255, 30.9.2005

<sup>14</sup> OJ L 354, 28.12.2013

<sup>15</sup> <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm>: Convention concluded under UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/DGIIEDUHE\(2012\)14%20Rev09%20FINAL%20-%20LRC%20Supplementary%20Text%20on%20the%20Use%20of%20QFs%20ENGLISH.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/DGIIEDUHE(2012)14%20Rev09%20FINAL%20-%20LRC%20Supplementary%20Text%20on%20the%20Use%20of%20QFs%20ENGLISH.asp#TopOfPage).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.enic-naric.net/>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/en/homepage>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://euroguidance.eu/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.elgpn.eu/>

Independent evaluations of the EQF Recommendation were carried out on behalf of the European Parliament<sup>24</sup> and on behalf of the COM<sup>25</sup>. Their main findings and recommendations were taken up in the COM's report to the European Parliament and the Council of 19 December 2013<sup>26</sup> and included:

- Transparent and coherent EQF referencing should be enhanced, in light of the changing nature of qualifications systems.
- The link between qualifications frameworks and quality assurance systems should be strengthened.
- The role of the EQF in relation to international qualifications and third country qualifications should be clarified.

### The initiative is not part of the REFIT-Agenda

#### Issue

A proper understanding and valuing of skills available and those in need in the labour market is fundamental to support a better match between supply and demand and support individuals to acquire and update skills throughout their life, moving between different types and levels of education, between education and employment and across countries. However in many cases, skills exist in the labour market but are not identified, exploited or rewarded. Skills and qualifications acquired in a given country and in a specific education or economic sector might not be properly understood, valued or recognised by prospective education providers, employers of other countries or other sectors, despite the tools and services already available to this end at EU level.

The general problem addressed is the lack of trust, understanding and recognition of qualifications of workers and learners, which undermines the European Union's capacity to use available skills and solve skills mismatches and waste. The lack of trust relates to a lack of understanding of what a person who holds a qualification from another country might know or might be capable of doing, that is, what knowledge, skills and competences the person has acquired through the learning process which granted him/her the qualification. Such lack of understanding stems from the large diversity of education and training systems in the EU, leading to a large diversity of qualifications systems and individual qualifications. Some Member States even have several education/training sub-systems and several qualifications sub-systems, not always comparable among each other despite being developed in the same geographical territory.

Transparency regarding the knowledge, skills and competences ('learning outcomes') acquired through a qualification is therefore key to ensure that individuals and employers give the appropriate economic, social and academic value to qualifications from another country or educational sub-system and thus do not create obstacles to mobility, whether geographical (between European countries), and sectoral (between occupational and sectors on the labour market and between education and training sectors). Transparency is also useful to support formal recognition practices in cases where a formal recognition decision of qualifications is necessary (i.e to access a regulated profession or to progress further in studies – academic recognition).

Despite important progress achieved by EQF in the comparability of national qualification systems, a Eurobarometer carried out in Spring 2014 showed that only 56% of EU citizens thought that their qualifications would be recognised in other EU Member States and it further revealed that individuals do not have sufficient information on whether qualifications obtained in one Member State are recognised in another Member State. Lack of trust and understanding also relates to skills and qualifications of non-European migrants (including refugees).

#### This general problem is driven by several specific problems:

**1. Insufficient transparency of individual national qualifications:** Important progress has been achieved in the development and comparison of national qualification frameworks and effort is put into describing new qualifications in terms of learning outcomes (instead of inputs such number of hours) allowing to reference to a European level. However, attention has been insufficient to make the content (learning outcomes) of individual qualifications transparent, whether in the paper format of diplomas and certificates or in electronic forms, including databases and registers. No common European format exists for the description of learning outcomes, hindering their comparability. Even if the milestones of the EQF are technically within reach, its overall goal of transparency and comparability of qualifications will remain

<sup>22</sup> <http://euskillsparorama.cedefop.europa.eu/>

<sup>23</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/sector-skills\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/sector-skills_en.htm)

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/cult/dv/esstudyeurqualifframewimplem/esstudyeurqualifframewimplemen.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/cult/dv/esstudyeurqualifframewimplem/esstudyeurqualifframewimplemen.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/DG%20EAC%20-%20Evaluation%20EQF%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20Final%20Version.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> COM(2013) 897 final, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0897&from=EN>.

limited and cumbersome for learners, workers and employers.

**2. Insufficient comparability of national qualification systems:** the qualifications frameworks referenced to the EQF have so far been mainly targeted towards referencing (thus comparing) national publicly awarded qualifications and less so (albeit with exceptions) towards qualifications from the private sector. Qualification systems and hence the elements addressed in the EQF referencing process also change over time. However the current Recommendation does not provide any means to guarantee that all types of qualifications (including those from the private sector) are part of national qualification systems nor to keep the referencing of national frameworks to the EQF updated.

**3. A lack of permeability of education and training systems:** Although the EQF aims at promoting flexible learning pathways and focuses on learning outcomes independently of where the qualification has been acquired (any sector from formal education or through validation of non-formal and informal learning), there is no common guidance on what quality assurance is required to all qualifications that are part of the national qualification framework referenced to EQF. The current Recommendation only refers to common quality assurance principles for VET and higher education qualifications. It does not address general education, private education or the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This prevents trust between Member States across the full spectrum of qualifications. Furthermore no common principles exist for credit transfer and accumulation under the EQF. It is therefore difficult to move from one learning setting to another both within and between Member States even if the individual holds a qualification that is part of a referenced NQF. Such transitions are however fundamental for individuals who experience several transitions through their learning and employment careers. The two existing European-wide credit systems, ECTS for higher education - fully operational - and ECVET for VET - partly operational - are not based on the same underlying principles and therefore accumulation and transfer of credits across the sub-sectors is not possible.

**4. Lack of transparency and comparability of international qualifications:** The number of qualifications awarded and held by learners and workers within the EU is much larger than the qualifications awarded nationally: it includes qualifications awarded by international sectoral organisations and qualifications awarded by multinational companies. The current Recommendation stipulates that international sectoral organisations should be able to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems. Today, awarding bodies wishing to give a European level to international (sectoral) qualifications have to be part of national qualifications frameworks and comply with diverse national quality assurance practices. This entails at least 28 different procedures for the awarding body with high risks of inconsistencies between countries: i) risk that the same qualification is given different EQF levels and ii) fragmentation in case a qualification is part of some NQFs and not of others.

**5. Lack of comparability of qualifications awarded in the EU with third country qualifications:** today there are no mechanisms of comparability between qualifications awarded in the EU and those awarded by third countries despite the growing inflows and outflows of learners and workers in and from the EU. The EQF has been a growing source of inspiration to develop national qualification frameworks or meta-frameworks for a world region and several third countries have expressed interest to reference or align their systems to the EQF to allow comparability of their qualifications with those of the EU. However the EQF recommendation has no provision allowing for any formal alignment with third country frameworks, preventing de facto a formal comparison of third country qualifications with qualifications awarded in the EU. This lack of comparability hinders the trust in foreign qualifications, puts foreign-qualified migrants (including refugees) at a hiring disadvantage as compared to natives (whether they are holders of third country qualifications coming to the EU or holders of EU qualifications going to third countries), and hampers their opportunities of professional development and promotion. At a more institutional level, association agreements between the EU and third countries like Morocco, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova foresee cooperation in relation to referencing to the EQF but no governance mechanisms have been put in place to ensure the implementation of such provisions.

**6. Lack of use of information on comparability of qualifications for recognition decisions:** Information on qualifications and their comparability, even if sufficiently transparent, is not always taken into account by recognition authorities, often leading to lengthy and costly procedures, discouraging learners and workers to work or study in another Member State. The EHEA Pathfinder Group reported that it is often far from certain if the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, including the use of EQF information, are

correctly applied by credential evaluators in higher education institutions. A survey conducted by the Erasmus Students Network concluded that fear of not getting recognition was a barrier to degree-mobility and that 9% of (degree-) mobile students had problems with recognition.

**7. Absence of coordination and information on recognition decisions at European level.** In some countries information on recognition decisions exists at national level but is not shared at EU level. This forces other national recognition authorities to take similar steps to understand the value of the qualification before recognising it in their country, with clear risk of duplication of costs and burdensome procedures. The ENIC-NARIC network operates a system of coordination going beyond European borders and including as well Australia and New Zealand, but its remit is limited to advising on the recognition of qualifications in the area of higher education. No similar sharing of information exists for any other type of recognition decisions.

**8. Absence of European cooperation mechanisms of recognition of qualifications.** Currently there are only arrangements for recognition in the context of regulated professions (Directive 2005/36/EC) and for academic recognition of higher education qualifications (Lisbon Recognition convention).

**This initiative will affect the following stakeholders:**

- Individuals: learners, workers, job seekers, young people not in education, employment or training, whether EU citizens, legal migrants or refugees, if their skills and qualifications are not properly recognised;
- Employers (large companies, SMEs, public employers) when they do not receive a complete picture of the skills and qualifications of individuals and when they are not well supported in recognition decisions;
- Social partners: federations of employers and trade unions as labour market actors;
- Public authorities, in particular ministries in charge of education and training, employment and skills;
- Recognition bodies, qualification authorities, bodies in charge of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance and accreditation organisations, certification bodies;
- Awarding bodies of qualifications: education and training providers, ministries, chambers of skilled crafts, independent bodies etc, depending on the country concerned;
- Providers of education and training of all levels, including non-formal providers and providers for digital learning;
- Public and private employment services, job-matching portals;
- Professional organisations of non-regulated professions

**Subsidiarity check**

**Article 165** provides that the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action. EU action shall be aimed, inter alia, to the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study and at developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States.

**Article 166** provides that the Union shall implement a vocational training policy to support and supplement the action of the Member States. Article 166 (3) provides that the Union and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of vocational training.

A lack of transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications is a hindrance to geographical and occupational mobility of workers and learners affecting the EU as a whole. It is a major cause for the underuse of available skills, both from EU nationals and from third country nationals and as such an important cause for skills mismatches.

The current tools on European level have clear limits and without further policy action there will be no change to that situation. Because of the cross border mobility, transparency and recognition agreements need to be made at EU level while respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems. The same actions are not possible at the national level. The initiative does not interfere with the responsibility of Member States for defining their qualifications systems and qualifications frameworks. The initiative conforms therefore to the principle of subsidiarity as it supports and supplements Member States' activities.

**Main policy objectives**

**General objective:** Remove obstacles to mobility of learners and workers related to the understanding and trust of their skills and qualifications regardless of whether they are EU citizens or third country nationals and whether it concerns qualifications obtained in the EU or in a third country. The initiative should thus contribute to a better use of available skills and qualifications for the benefit of individuals, the labour market and the economy.

The **specific objectives** of this initiative are:

1. **Improving transparency and comparability** of national, international and third country skills and qualifications:
  - a) Strengthening the trust, understanding and comparability of national qualifications, both at the system level and at the level of individual qualifications (addressing specific problems 1 and 2)
  - b) Improved permeability of education and training systems allowing flexible learning pathways and seamless transitions across different education sub-systems (addressing specific problem 3)
  - c) Improved understanding of international (sectorial) qualifications and sectorial qualifications frameworks with labour market relevance across the EU (addressing specific problem 4)
  - d) Improved comparability of third country qualifications with qualifications awarded in the EU (addressing specific problem 5)
2. **Improving recognition** of skills and qualifications for purposes of further study and employment:
  - a) A better recognition of EU and third country qualifications going beyond regulated professions and qualifications in the area of higher education (addressing specific problems 6 and 7)
  - b) A better exchange of information between Member States on recognition decisions taken (addressing specific problem 8)

## **B. Option Mapping**

The possibilities for action at EU level to address skills related problems are limited by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). In particular, on education and training policies the EU can only intervene to support, coordinate or complement the action of Member States.

### **Baseline: no new action but improving implementation of existing activities and measures**

The implementation of the EQF, based on the 2008 Recommendation, and following the EQF-acquis adopted by the EQF Advisory Group such as the 10 referencing criteria, would be pursued in its current terms. Existing work on the implementation of the learning outcome approach, on the referencing of national qualifications frameworks to the EQF and updates of these and of the development of national qualifications databases, to be interconnected at European level, would continue and be further intensified through additional guidance and mutual learning. The same will probably hold for the indication of EQF levels on degrees, certificates and supplements. Under this scenario the comparability of individual qualifications and their transparency to learners, workers and employers will emerge slowly.

Under the baseline scenario no specific measure would be conducted to increase the level of permeability of education and training systems. The possibility to link international qualifications to the EQF could only be achieved via each NQF. There will be no provisions on cooperation with third countries (seeking comparability between the EQF and third country qualifications frameworks). Furthermore the baseline scenario does not address the problem of recognition of skills and qualifications explicitly. However the EQF and NQFs can be used as an information source on the level of qualifications to make their recognition easier.

### **Option 1: Strengthening comparability of qualifications through reinforced referencing**

#### **Objective 1a**

The EQF will be reinforced with invitations to Member States and the COM to ensure that referencing is carried out in a coherent way both on the system level and in relation to individual qualifications, with explicit acknowledgement of the referencing criteria. It will become explicit that referencing is not a one-off process with a single deadline (currently 2010) but a continuous process requiring Member States to ensure that published information on referencing is up to date and in correspondence with national developments.

Furthermore the basic information on each individual qualification will be defined, including through the use of a common format for describing learning outcomes, to be provided in the national qualifications databases/registers and their interlink to the European level portal(s).

A mechanism through which EQF levels are attributed to Common Training Frameworks will be established and thus mirror article 49 of Directive 2005/36/EC by which Common Training Frameworks (minimum sets

of learning outcomes for regulated professions) based on levels of the EQF can be set up by a delegating act leading to automatic recognition across the EU of the qualifications concerned.

#### **Objective 1b**

The EQF will establish:

- common quality assurance principles for all types and levels of qualifications that are to be referenced to the EQF and not only to VET and Higher Education as currently.
- common principles for credit accumulation and transfer based on learning outcomes for all types and levels of education and training referenced to EQF

#### **Objective 1c**

Establishing mechanism to allow referencing of international qualifications and international sectorial qualifications frameworks to EQF

A revision of the current Recommendation would be done on the basis of Articles 165 and 166 TFEU.

### **Option 2: Enhancing comparability of European and third country qualifications**

This option entails the following action:

#### **Objective 1.d**

Establishing mechanisms by which comparability of qualifications awarded in the EU and third country qualifications is enhanced, including four different cases:

- structured dialogues with EU Neighbourhood countries with an association agreement with the EU, possible resulting in referencing of the NQFs concerned to the EQF
- alignment of the EQF with mature national qualifications frameworks including level-to-level comparisons
- alignment of the EQF with mature, regional qualifications frameworks in the world, including level-to-level comparisons
- EU support (e.g. through development aid) to countries for developing NQFs

Option 1 and option 2 are not mutually exclusive.

A revision of the current Recommendation would be done on the basis of Articles 165 and 166 TFEU.

### **Option 3: Enhancing recognition of all types of qualifications**

This option would be incremental to option 1 and entails the following actions:

#### **Objective 2.a**

Setting up, with all countries participating in the EQF process, an international recognition convention, covering all types and levels of qualifications (excluding those covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its instruments and Directive 2005/36/EC). All 39 countries participating in the EQF are invited to join the convention.

#### **Objective 2.b**

Setting up a European IT platform for information on recognition of qualifications, as part of European services for skills and qualifications to which national information sources and databases should be connected in order to share recognition information at the EU level.

These actions would be addressed outside the revision of the current EQF recommendation.

### **Option comparison**

Options 1, 2 and 3 are not substitutes of each other, but complementary. Both options 2 and 3 can be seen as incremental incremental to option 1. The preferred way forward could be a combination of the three options.

#### **Objective 1: Improving transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications**

Option 1:

- Compared to the baseline scenario option 1 will be more effective in strengthening the trust, understanding and comparability of national and international qualifications. The use of standard formats for learning outcomes in databases on national and European level will make individual

qualifications, whether of a national or international character, better comparable and thus better understandable and easier to access by employers and education and training providers. The increased transparency created by it will increase trust in the qualifications.

- The common principles on quality assurance and on credit systems that are part of option 1 will be effective for easier transitions between education and training systems and between education/training and the labour market and thus all together improve the permeability of education and training systems. The more flexible learning pathways thus created will reduce duplication of effort for the students which is a clear improvement of efficiency compared to the baseline scenario. Easier transitions will also motivate people to engage in further learning with increased chances to enhance their employability.
- The increased transparency and comparability of skills and national and international will have a direct positive impact on individuals in search of possible studies; individuals in need to present their qualification for access to further study or employment; education-, training providers and employers who need to understand qualifications presented by individuals; employers who need to decide what qualifications are relevant to ask for in job vacancies. A broader group of stakeholders will also benefit from enhanced transparency of individual national and international qualifications.

Option 2: This option includes all actions of Option 1 and it does therefore have the same effectiveness and efficiency increase as option 1 as far as national and international qualifications are concerned. Compared to option 1, it in addition contains mechanisms by which the comparability of qualifications awarded in the EU and third country qualifications is enhanced. The main target groups addressed are individuals with third country qualifications, which either legally reside in Europe (whether non EU migrants or EU citizens) or who have recently moved or intend to move to Europe on a temporary or more permanent base for study or work. Also refugees are a target group.

Option 3: This option is not as such effective in improving transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications, as it directly addresses objective 2 on improving recognition.

**Objective 2: improving recognition of skills and qualifications for purposes of further study and employment:**

Option 1: Compared to the baseline scenario the actions under option 1 lead to improved transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications and improved trust. These actions do not directly create better recognition of skills and qualifications, but they make recognition easier by providing more accurate information on skills and national and international qualifications.

Option 2: In addition to option 1 the better use of available skills on the labour market possessed by migrants (including refugees) and better and quicker recruitment decisions for holders of third country qualifications. It will lead to a better position on the labour market of holders of these qualifications. Citizens holding qualifications awarded in the EU will face easier recognition and recruitment procedures in third countries

**Option 3**

- This option is effective in improving recognition: its included actions directly target an improvement of recognition. The international convention on recognition addressing all types all types and levels of qualifications excluding those covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its instruments and Directive 2005/36/EC, is expected to have impact on how recognition outside the domains of higher education and professional qualifications takes place.
- Member States are invited to share information on their recognition decisions through use of the IT platform. The IT platform for sharing information on recognition decisions can however clearly improve efficiency as it avoids double work when evaluating credentials of individuals. By sharing information, recognition can become less burdensome, quicker and requiring less resources.
- This option directly addresses recognition bodies and education and training institutions who take recognition decisions giving access to further studies. In addition both individuals (for access to study or work) and employers (for recruitment) benefit from smoother recognition.

**Proportionality check**

The actions proposed under the four options are proportional to reaching the objectives. The choice of instrument for options 1 and 2 - a Council Recommendation - is proportionate and builds on an existing recommendation that needs some improvements to fully reach its objectives.



The international convention on the recognition of qualifications and the IT Platform on recognition (instruments for option 3) are proportional in relation to the expected improvement it will bring in terms of recognition of all types and levels of qualifications..

## C. Data collection and Better Regulation instruments

### Data collection

Besides the evaluation referred above (see section “context”), a large number of relevant studies exist:

- COM Report on progress report on quality assurance in higher education<sup>27</sup>
- ECTS Users' Guide 2015<sup>28</sup>
- European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>29</sup>,
- Cedefop: International qualifications, 2012<sup>30</sup>
- Study on a possible framework to facilitate transnational mobility for placements in enterprises, 2011<sup>31</sup>
- Study on mobility patterns and career paths of EU researchers, 2010<sup>32</sup>
- Study evaluating the Professional Qualifications Directive against recent educational reforms in EU Member States, 2011<sup>33</sup>
- Eurydice: Towards a mobility scoreboard: Conditions for learning abroad in Europe, November 2013<sup>34</sup>
- OECD/European COM: Matching migration with labour market needs, 2014<sup>35</sup>
- Migration Policy Institute: Recognizing Foreign Qualifications: Emerging Global Trends, 2013<sup>36</sup>

A study quantifying obstacles to the recognition of skills and qualifications and preventing mobility is ongoing and preliminary results are expected in February 2016. A study on the referencing of sectoral qualifications frameworks to the EQF will be carried out between December 2015 and April 2016. Finally, a feasibility study for potential institutional arrangements for the performance of the tasks related to international qualifications and third country qualifications frameworks will be carried out between December 2015 and April 2016.

### Consultation approach

The COM has already consulted broadly with interested stakeholders and reached out to the general public through:

- ongoing dialogue with member states and social partners;
- public consultation, Eurobarometer and conference on a European Area of Skills and Qualifications in 2014

The revision is and will be further discussed in the meetings of the EQF Advisory Group, composed by Member States, Council of Europe, European Social Partners and further stakeholders. It will also be discussed by Member States representatives at different technical levels in the context of existing structures and groups in the areas of education and training and employment, as well as by relevant bodies under the European Higher Education Area such as the Bologna Follow Up Group.

Specific discussions will be organised with social partners and other relevant stakeholders and the EQF revision will be proposed for discussion to the Presidencies of the Education Committee and Social Questions Working Group as well as to the Employment Committee.

The launch of stakeholder consultations related to this initiative will be announced in the consultation planning that can be found at [http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/docs/planned-consultations\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/docs/planned-consultations_en.pdf).

### Will an Implementation plan be established?

The EQF Recommendation will be implemented by Member States making use of existing structures (EQF Advisory Group and EQF national coordination points in Member States (to be integrated with the current

<sup>27</sup> COM(2014) 29 final, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/doc/quality\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/doc/quality_en.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/1\\_2015/125002.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/1_2015/125002.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4116>.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu/UserFiles/File/dossier-news/mobilityineurope-placements-en.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/MORE\\_HEI\\_report\\_final\\_version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/MORE_HEI_report_final_version.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/docs/policy\\_developments/final\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/docs/policy_developments/final_report_en.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/162EN\\_Learner\\_Mobility.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/162EN_Learner_Mobility.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/matching-economic-migration-with-labour-market-needs\\_9789264216501-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/matching-economic-migration-with-labour-market-needs_9789264216501-en).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/recognizing-foreign-qualifications-emerging-global-trends>.

national Euroguidance and Europass Centres).

The implementation plan will further explore the way in which an international convention on recognition of qualifications could be set up. The European IT platform for sharing information of qualification recognition of the European services for skills and qualifications will be addressed in a separate initiative.

**Will an impact assessment be carried out for this initiative and/or possible follow-up initiatives?**

No. Both options 1 and 2 imply a technical improvement of the EQF recommendation, without significant impacts.

The actions under Option 3 are situated outside the EQF Recommendation: the setting up of an IT platform for sharing information on qualification recognition shall be part of the European services for skills and qualifications for which no impact assessment will be carried out; the international convention is also not expected to have significant budgetary impacts.