

FEASIBILITY STUDY ON DEVELOPING REGIONALLY BASED STANDARDS OF QUALIFICATIONS



Feasibility Study on Developing Regionally Based Standards of Qualifications

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
BDBiH	Brčko District, Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CNC	Computer numerical control (automated control of machines by means of a computer)
EBSN	European Basic Skills Network
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer systems
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EEA	European Education Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQACET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQARF	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERI SEE	Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ESG	The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUROPASS	European Union initiative for transparency of qualification and support to mobility of citizens in Europe
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GE	General education
HE	Higher education
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education adopted by EUROSTAT
ISCED-F-13	/ International Standard Classification of Education - Fields of education and training 2013 by UNESCO
LMQIS	Labour Market and Qualifications Information System in Serbia
MCTS	The Montenegrin Credit Transfer System
MoESTD	Albanian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
NORRIC	Nordic National Recognition Information Centres
NQF	National Qualification Framework
RBOS	Regionally based occupation standard
RBSQ	Regionally based standard of qualification
RSBiH	Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina
VET	Vocational education and training
WB	Western Balkans

Introduction

The Feasibility Study on Developing Regionally Based Standards of Qualifications was commissioned within the framework of the Towards regionally based occupational standards - TO REGOS project¹. The TO REGOS project is being implemented by the Education Reform Initiative of the South Eastern Europe - ERI SEE Secretariat² and the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning³ in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*⁴, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. It aims at contributing to the employability and labour-market mobility of young people in the SEE region, by investing in quality and labour-market relevant vocational education and training (VET). More concretely, the project is focused on formulating the methodology for the development of regionally based occupational standards, developing five regionally based occupational standards within tourism and construction sector and developing the corresponding qualification standards on national level. Lastly, the project aims at exploring the possibility of developing regionally based qualification standards in six TO REGOS participating economies. This study was commissioned as the last output to produce a comparative analysis of institutional and legislative framework in the six economies, to provide methodological framework for developing regionally based qualification standards, and recommendations elaborating the potential for development of regionally based qualification standards.

The Study consists of four sections, introduction and conclusion. The first section provides the state of the art in the area of regionally based standards of qualifications (RBSQ) at the EU level, or in other words an overview and discussion on existing policies in RBSQ and is focusing on two examples (Nordic RBSQ and European Qualifications Framework- EQF5), including other related policies such as EU Directives and policies related to regulated professions, recognition of professional qualifications and VET qualifications. Finally, this section looks at the policy context for the Study providing the most recent developments under the European Skills Agenda at the EU level.⁶

The second section gives an overview of existing legal and institutional frameworks in the regional (South Eastern European) context and their cross-country comparison. It further presents an analysis of the capacities already established in terms of developing relevant policies of qualification frameworks, as well as some basic information on the six economies and their possible mutual benefits from RBSQ (in terms of labour and educational migration, regional cooperation, European Union accession processes and other). This section is built upon the outcomes of the TO REGOS Project and in particular, on the Output 5. Translation of adopted standards of occupations into standards of qualifications.

1 The TO REGOS project is funded by the Austrian Development Agency with the funds secured by the Austrian Development Cooperation. More about the project is available on the WBA4WBL Platform on the link <https://wba4wbl.com/about-to-regos-project/> (accessed November 27, 2020).

2 ERISSEE, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.erisee.org/>.

3 WBA4WBL, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://wba4wbl.com>.

4 *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNCSER 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

5 European Union, "EQF", accessed November 27, 2020.

<https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-efq>.

6 European Union, "The European Skills Agenda", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>.

The third section provides survey results on the needs and benefits of RBSQ for the education and the labour market sectors in participating economies. The scope of the survey was to gather information and perception of the key stakeholders on the most relevant sectors, occupations and qualifications for an increased labour mobility and regional cooperation.

The fourth section provides conclusions on the feasibility of developing RBSQ, recommendations based on the analysis of the existing practices as well as the needs and the benefits as stated by stakeholders. In its recommendations, this section elaborates conditions needed for developing RBSQ.

PART 1: Regionally based qualifications standards framework: existing initiatives, needs and benefits

A common European ground

Notable projects and actions implemented in the past that had contributed to our understanding of regionally based qualifications are: European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as a reference point for classifying and cross-country comparing national qualifications in terms of level and type of education; European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) as a reference point for developing, classifying and comparing skills, competences and occupations⁷, and European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training CEDEFOP activities on cross country comparing VET qualifications⁸. European/EU policies related to regulated professions might also be relevant for understanding regionally based qualifications better (if for the purpose of this inquiry we take European Union and European Education Area as a region), particularly as the region in question, South-Eastern Europe, is deeply entrenched in the EU accession processes and socio-economically connected to the EU. Further examples of regionally based qualification standards such as Nordic example, will be presented briefly as it may prove to be useful point of comparison in terms of the size and type of region in question, as well as the overall benefits and prerequisites for regional cooperation. Finally, the TO REGOS project results will be presented and analysed in terms of set context, in order to analyse needs and benefits for regionally based qualifications standards.

For many national policies today, it is crucial to consider a wider geopolitical context and this is particularly so when dealing with qualifications. Not only do qualifications merge two perspectives, that of work and education, but today they necessarily involve an international and transnational context. In the terms of wider regional policies and integration, European region imposes itself with its already established and numerous tools and instruments for comparing and understanding differences between systems, such as the European Qualifications Framework for life-long-learning (EQF), the European Credit Transfer systems (ECTS) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations classification (ESCO), International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), and the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) framework for VET (EQARF).

We believe that the EQF is the most relevant instrument for understanding, comparing and developing VET standards of qualifications nationally, transnationally or regionally. It is a reference tool for describing and comparing qualifications levels from national, international or sectoral perspective. The main components are a set of eight reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes (combination of knowledge, skills and competence) and mechanisms and principles for cooperation. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those proving basic knowledge, skills and competences to those awarded at the highest level of academic as well as professional and vocational education and training. EQF is a translation device for understanding qualifications between countries or different educational systems. It is the only comprehensive translational tool for comparison and recognition. In Europe, different provisions and character-

7 European Union, "ESCO", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal>.

8 CEDEFOP, "About CEDEFOP", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop>.

istics of vocational education and training position it at almost all the levels of EQF. More commonly, VET is situated at levels 2-4 (initial and upskilling/reskilling life-long learning programmes), while levels 5 and higher, so called higher VET, are still rare and there is no consensus as to whether they are considered a part of higher education or not.

The ESCO⁹ (since 2017) as a classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations works as a dictionary, describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations, skills relevant for the EU labour market. It also enables matching jobseekers to jobs on the basis of their skills, suggesting trainings to people who want to reskill or upskill. Recently, it has joined the EUROPASS platform¹⁰ (2020) for this and additional purposes. The ESCO today provides the descriptions of 2942 occupations, 13.485 skills linked to these occupations, translated into 27 languages, potentially serving the entire Europe. According to European Commission (EC) web pages, “the aim of ESCO is to support job mobility across Europe and therefore a more integrated and efficient labour market, by offering a “common language” on occupations and skills that can be used by different stakeholders on employment and education and training topics”.¹¹ It should help stakeholders better identify and formulate what competences (knowledge and skills) are attached to particular occupation, what learning outcomes to particular qualification, and finally which qualifications are attached to certain occupations in different settings. Therefore, the full use of the latest ESCO database is a milestone in the achievement of objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

Complementary to ESCO, in 2016 the EC published The New Skills Agenda for Europe¹², aimed at eliminating skills gaps and mismatch and bridging the difference in perspectives of education providers, employers and learners. Putting VET in the forefront both in terms of learners’ choices and in terms of VET policies, the Agenda recognises the needs of all stakeholders for anticipating skills for future jobs, as well as other social trends such as digitalisation, ageing population and so on. The 2020 European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience¹³ builds upon the ten actions of the 2016 Agenda with even more clear links to digitalisation, industrial and SMEs, recovery from COVID-19 and youth employment strategies. Up-skilling and re-skilling, or “future-proof VET”, remain at the focus of preparing for future jobs. This is to be achieved through: up-to-date information on skills for (future) jobs, national skills, employment and migration strategies (and the role of employment services), institutions providing education and training throughout lifelong learning continuum, focus on digitalisation and sustainability. Besides sustainability and social inclusion as overarching principles, the idea of micro-credentials is freshly presented as a way to deliver flexible, short and life-long training that is properly valued (as a credential).

Finally, the ECVET (since 2009) is a European instrument designed “to support lifelong learning, the mobility of learners and the flexibility of learning pathways to achieve qualifications” in VET.¹⁴

9 European Union, “What is ESCO”, accessed November 27, 2020,

<https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/howtouse/21da6a9a-02d1-4533-8057-dea0a824a17a>.

10 European Union, “Europass”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://europa.eu/europass/en>.

11 European Union, “What is ESCO”, accessed November 27, 2020,

<https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/howtouse/21da6a9a-02d1-4533-8057-dea0a824a17a>.

12 European Union, “The New Skills Agenda for Europe”, accessed November 27, 2020,

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TYT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>.

13 European Union, “European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience”, accessed November 27, 2020,

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=9723>.

14 The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training, “About ECVET”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/what-is-ecvet#:~:text=The%20European%20Credit%20system%20for,learning%20pathways%20to%20achieve%20qualifications>.

ECVET allows learners and trainees to accumulate, transfer and use their learning outcomes in units as these units are achieved cross-nationally. This enables building a qualification at persons' own pace from learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, in their own country or abroad. The system is based on units of learning outcomes as part of qualifications that can be assessed and validated. It offers a framework for making learners more mobile and qualifications more portable. It applies to VET qualifications at all levels of EQF. ECVET complements and builds on concepts and principles shared with the EQF, Europass and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF). The latter, EQARF was "designed to promote better vocational education and training by providing authorities with common tools for the management of quality".¹⁵

Comparing and building cross-country VET qualifications

The benefits of comparing and building cross-country VET qualifications regionally (Europe as a region) are multi-fold: more clarity for the employers, removing obstacles to mobility and recognition, transfer of qualifications, validation for those without formal qualifications, improved process of building curricula and job profiles, mobility towards HE, re-skilling and upskilling (due to transparent and comparable structure of learning outcomes). Past projects on comparing and building cross-country VET qualifications can contribute to our understanding of regionally based qualifications because they provide examples of methodologies for developing core content cross-country. European/EU policies and projects relate to regulated professions may also be relevant for understanding regionally based qualifications better. Here are some useful examples of regional cooperation in comparing and building cross-country qualifications standards.

CEDEFOP project Comparing VET qualifications- Cross Country Comparison (2018-2020) included 10 partner countries¹⁶ that worked together on establishing the methodology for cross-country comparison and comparing 10 VET qualifications profiles.¹⁷ Some of the profiles included were masonry, and hotel assistant/receptionist which can have, to some extent, similarities to the TO REGOS project. The project aimed to "develop reliable and scalable methods to map, analyse and compare the content of vocational education and training qualifications to better understand similarities and differences, strengths and weaknesses across borders".¹⁸ One of the project goals was to improve European reference system for comparing qualifications. Considering the volume of this task, a computer-based methodology has been developed for comparing qualifications, with ESCO as a reference for a system prototype. Therefore, ESCO proved to be optimal reference point for cross-country comparison of skills and knowledge associated to different qualifications, and according to CEDEFOP, it was found to be a common language „to underpin a common understanding and the promotion of qualifications frameworks across Europe to classify them".¹⁹

15 EQAVET, "What is EQAVET", accessed November 27, 2020,

<https://www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/European-Quality-Assurance-Reference-Framework>.

16 Countries involved in CEDEFOP "Comparing VET qualification" project: Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Spain, and United Kingdom-England.

17 CEDEFOP, "Comparing VET qualifications", accessed November 27, 2020,

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/comparing-vet-qualifications>

18 CEDEFOP, "Cross-country comparison of VET qualifications discussed at Cedefop workshop", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/cross-country-comparison-vet-qualifications-discussed-cedefop-workshop>.

19 Ibid.

When discussing methodology of comparison of qualifications, besides ESCO there are other possible reference points for VET comparison such as the Occupational Information Network (O*NET)²⁰, the WorldSkills Standards Specifications (WSSS)²¹, and the Vocational Qualification Transfer System (VQTS)²². Among stated, the VQTS Competence Matrix, developed within the EU project HCEU²³, was the only reference point developed specifically for the comparison of VET qualifications, although for limited number of occupations. All four have their strengths and weaknesses, but according to CEDEFOP project findings, ESCO still presents the most potential²⁴. ESCO is multilingual, broad and regional (with a tendency to be fully inclusive European), and most diverse in representing myriad of particular countries VET profiles. Downside is that the profiles are simple and limited (particularly skills inventory), lack level of proficiency, knowledge is expressed in nouns (and not in verbs as learning outcomes- LOs) and often not applicable. Still, compared to other options, **ESCO presents to be most comprehensive** and the only **reference point** out of four that qualifies for broad, regional-level comparison. ESCO is currently best positioned for this purpose in terms of sectoral and linguistic coverage, although it requires the development of a conceptual model underlying the approach to ensure consistency in the description of knowledge, skills and competences.

Further conclusions of this and similar projects include: a focus on learning outcomes in cross-country comparisons, a balance between broad and comprehensive on one side and detailed enough on the other, weighting (essential and less essential) and distinguishing sectoral/occupational specific from transversal learning outcomes of a qualification, and proficiency levels.

Other European projects in the past have tackled challenges of comparing and recognising qualifications regionally. Some of them are presented here as valuable experience for developing regionally based qualification standards.

HCEU Healthcare (2015-2018) focused on challenges of the healthcare sector as this sector more than others particularly “suffers from regional mismatches of skills all across Europe”.²⁵ Along with the sector of construction, healthcare qualifications include a number of European regulated professions (VET) qualifications, such as different qualifications in nursing, midwifery and dental practitioners. Mobility of professionals holding such VET qualifications is significant both within Europe and globally (as incoming mobility). The project aimed at improving recognition practices for qualifications of nursing and elderly care as well as validation of informally and non-formally attained learning outcomes through practical work experience recognition of prior learning (RPL) but as a result developed a competence matrix tool (transnational). The competence matrix was divided horizontally into (sub-) work processes / competence area and vertically into steps of competence development. According to the level of competence development reached with a certain programme/qualification it proved possible to compare different qualifications. That way

20 ONetonline, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.onetonline.org/>.

21 WorldSkills Occupational Standards, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://worldskills.org/what/projects/wsos/>.

22 VQTS Model, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://vocationalqualification.net/>.

23 „HealthCareEurope” (HCEU) Fostering transparency and recognition of prior learning within geographical mobility of professionals in the healthcare sector, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://project-hceu.eu/index.php?id=4>.

24 See e.g. CEDEFOP, 2019, Exploring and testing a reference point for VET Comparison, accessed November 27, 2020, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/exploring_and_testing_a_reference_point_for_vet_comparison_-_comparing_vet_qualifications_wa_1_draft_final_report_june_2019.pdf.

25 HCEU, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.project-hceu.eu/indey.php?id=3>.

it was possible to identify gaps between qualifications relevant for training and recognition. As a consequence, core competences were identified which then could serve as a standard of a qualification (competence areas, subareas, learning outcomes divided into competences, skills and knowledge, graduated by complexity into three levels). EQF was used in terms of terminology and methodology. The project may prove useful in comparing already established standards of qualifications in different countries in order to achieve a regional comparison or standard.

Similar and successful attempts in comparing qualifications through a developed matrix took place in a SME Master (2007)²⁶ & SME Master Plus (2009-2012) project²⁷, aiming at pilot implementation and development of the ECVET. ECVET as an instrument was piloted in developing comparison and recognition of vocational education and training for master craftsperson (cabinetmaking). The main results were learning outcomes matrices for qualifications and networks of training providers.

Further development of ECVET system of organising learning content and transnational competence matrices were implemented in projects: ECVET Tour, ECVET Tour II and ECMO, within which qualifications of the cook, caterer and hotel and restaurant trade commercial assistants were developed.²⁸ Valbuk project (2014) outcomes furthered the work on competence matrix for VET in cleaning sector²⁹ and TRIFT project developed competence matrix for a number of foreign trade VET qualifications.³⁰

These and other international projects contributed to the endeavour of developing transnational, regional in terms of Europe, matrices of competences for different VET qualifications that TO REGOS project can benefit from. They all have in common the identification of the core competence areas and their more detailed subareas (competences, work tasks, different types of learning outcomes), assigning the steps or levels to these competences, ideally including all levels of education and training for a certain (set of similar) qualification(s). Finally, there is the combination of the two axes (different competences and different levels) in order to provide educational institutions, learners/workers and other users of their qualifications (employers, institutions in recognition and validation) a transparent overview of the core competences transnationally and diversity of competences needed for specific (organisational) profiles.

In the region of South East Europe, three regional projects of a similar kind and with a goal of developing cross-border standards of qualifications in VET were recently initiated. Improving Skills in Vocational Education and Training– ImproVETa (2018- 2020), a project involving Slovenian and Croatian chambers of commerce and other partners (VET agencies, schools) is developing a joint qualification of mechanical engineering technician.³¹ The project results include “Guidelines for the development of Joint Qualifications – Recommendation”.³² The document outlines four stages

26 SME Master, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.sme-master.eu/master.php>.

27 SME Master Plus, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://euromasc.org/project-participation/completed-projects/sme-master-plus/>.

28 ECVET, “Tourism and Hospitality”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/learning-outcomes-sector/tourism-hospitality>.

29 VQNet, “VALBUK: Valuing Learning, Building Qualifications”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://vocationalqualification.net/?p=393>.

30 TRIFT – Transfer of Innovation into the Area of Foreign Trade, “Project”, accessed November 27, 2020, <http://www.trift.eu/project.html>.

31 IMPROVET, “Improving Skills in Vocational Education and Training”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://improvet.hgk.hr/>.

32 IMPROVET, “Guidelines for the development of Joint Qualifications – Recommendation”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://improvet.hgk.hr/results>.

of developing joint international qualification up to their approval. It acknowledges difficulties in comparing descriptions of qualifications across Europe due to variety of approaches regarding definition of learning outcomes. At the same time, as the document states, EQS, ESCO, ECVET and other European tools provide a common ground. Useful recommendations for developing joint cross-border qualifications are:

- to use existing analysis and studies of economic activity of the countries/regions that are involved as the basis for development of joint qualifications;
- to define knowledge and skills of qualification by including stakeholders and based on occupational standards (or list of key work tasks, connecting them to skills and knowledge, defining work conditions and other profession related obligations);
- to reference the qualifications in national QF through a proposed table:

Table 1. Comparing the structure of qualifications between countries' qualification frameworks³³

Description of vocational education and training received (credits)	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3	Country 4
General education				
Practical education at the employer				
Extracurricular activities*				
Open Curriculum*				
Final examination*				

*if applicable

³³ Ibid. p. 6.

- to reference the qualifications to EQF through a proposed table:

Table 2. Functional mapping of the existing qualifications³⁴.

	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3	Country 4
Title of the qualification				
Qualification level				
Credit requirements				
Full or partial qualification				
Nominal study period				
Type of qualification				
Category of qualification				
Type of education				
Duration				
Admission requirements				
ISCED field				
ISCED subfield				
Industry / Sector				
Profile of skills and competences - units				
General/vocational				
Obligatory/optional				

³⁴ Ibid. p. 7.

- to develop a profile of the qualification, including learning outcomes, learning units or modules which will be elaborated in the curricula (with proposed table).

Table 3. Qualifications profile compared between countries and EQF³⁵.

Title of the qualification in national language 1 Title of the qualification in national language 2 Title of the qualification in national language 3 ... (Translated title of the qualification)	The title of the qualification must be classified according to one or more of the following NQF categories				
	EQF	NQF 1	NQF 2	NQF 3	...
Qualification level					
Credits	For full joint qualification*	NQF 1	NQF 2	NQF 3	...
Overall					
General education					
Professional education					
Practical education at the employer					
Extracurricular activities*					
Open curriculum*					
Final examination					
Full or partial qualification					
Duration (nominal study period)					
Type of qualification					
Category of qualification					
Type of education					
Admission requirements					
ISCED field					
ISCED subfield					
Awarding body / Body responsible for the qualification					
Assessment and completion					
Range of occupations accessible to the holder of the certificate					

*if applicable (change the table if necessary)

Therefore, the project findings support the approach that the joint qualifications and curricula should be based upon both national and European Qualification Framework and fit within the framework of the ESCO code aiding to the extent to which the program is comparable. This way both national, regional/cross-border and international European dimensions are included.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 10.

A similar project has been initiated in order to develop cross-border qualifications. *Smart Development of HVET for Highly Skilled and Mobile Workforce* (SHVET, 2019-2021) aims to develop a joint higher VET qualification (level 5 of the EQF) in sustainable construction for regional QF of Emilia Romagna Region in Italy, and NQFs in Slovenia and Croatia.³⁶ WineVet Project- **VET qualification winemaker specialist** (2018-2020) similarly aims to do a joint cross-border VET qualification in wine making (also level 5 EQF) for RQF of Umbria region in Italy and NQF of North Macedonia.³⁷ Both projects follow similar paths as previously described by the ImproVET Guidelines. According to Wine Vet web pages, project was to:

- analyse focused professional/learning field in involved NQF/RQF, and transferable practices for transparency in VET;
- design a detailed qualification profile, outlining expected learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences in clearly identified units;
- establish the joint qualification profile and set up, by ECVET, the cooperation structure to ensure transparency, comparability, quality, mutual recognition;
- design a joint curriculum, clarifying training strategy to reach learning outcomes with strong work-based learning component, and supporting learner mobility;
- define a joint guideline for learning outcomes assessment, listing specific requirements learners have to comply with to be successful;
- support effective integration of joint standards in concerned NQF/RQF.³⁸

These and other projects indicate there is an obvious need for cross-border development of qualifications. This need stems from increasing intensity of labour and educational migrations and regional economic cooperation in general. European international endeavours, policies and projects aiming at testing, developing and improving VET qualification recognition and validation across borders all have in common a goal to support such economic and migration trends. Regional, European and global migration of labour challenges national education and training standards and pushed both national and transnational/regional policy-makers to find solutions for regionally-based qualifications standards. For that purpose, different instruments such as EQF, directives on regulated professions, ESCO and ECVET, provide not only a mutual language and platform for further development of transnational qualifications standards, but a potential for improvement of quality of national qualifications standards. Although national differences will pertain, and the EU policies often restrain from regulating progressively qualifications transnationally, the European-wide initiatives in education and training will also continue to enable the landscape for regionally based initiatives founded on economic and social needs of partner countries.

36 SMART-HVET, accessed November 27, 2020, <http://www.smart-hvet.eu/>.

37 WINEVET, "Project Summary", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://winevet.eu/project-summary>.

38 Ibid.

Nordic VET qualification harmonisation as a road map for Southeast European cooperation

Although regionally-based standards of qualifications are becoming a necessity in economic and social developments with a strong regional dimension, such initiatives are always challenged by the national labour and education systems on one side, and international diversity on the other. In fact, even in regions and countries that have historically and economically been intertwined extensively to the level that qualifications in many sectors already underwent certain synchronisation, there will always be differences as there are differences between national education systems. Furthermore, regional standards are by definition exclusive and limited in their use (to those outside the region). As mentioned before, European context and instruments in comparing VET qualifications can provide some remedies for these challenges.

Nordic VET qualifications system in this context can prove to be an example of good practice. Nord-VET (Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway) project and conference agenda in 2016 stated that although countries of the region are characterized by similar social and political values and a shared history, they still exhibit significant differences in their systems of VET.³⁹ This situation has made the Nordic countries rethink national differences and encourage trans-national policy learning in VET education and training. One of important challenges Nordic countries face in regionally-based VET standardisation is different trajectories for attaining VET upper-secondary qualifications and different occupational standards. A comparative case study within the project was conducted including selected occupations, in health and construction, not only to compare qualifications but to understand how differences in the system of education and (work-based) training contribute (a place of training being school or work, social and gender differences of occupations, work-based learning, mobility to higher education). Some of the conclusions point to the high level of similarities in the core content, which is surely, a result of intensive economic and educational cooperation in the region and has in turn resulted in automatic recognition policies in higher education (Reykjavik Declaration revised 2016). Still differences in standards and processes often create obstacles both for mobile individuals, employers and institutions.

In 2017, the Nordic Council of Ministers (of both labour and education) and recognition agencies laid the foundations for regional standardisation of qualifications. The aim of this political project was not only the automatic recognition of qualifications through establishment of Nordic National Recognition Information Centres (NORRIC), but also a set of policies and initiatives were to render obstacles to cooperation and mobility. The project includes harmonisation of admission criteria (Nordic-Baltic Admission Manual⁴⁰), output instead of input oriented processes of comparing qualifications (ORION project), support to a number of harmonisations projects in educational and work sector (both for qualifications and methodologies) and growing cooperation in general. Although these policies were envisaged for post-secondary education and training, they are now inclusive of VET upper-secondary, post-secondary and adult education and training. Some countries and institutions, such as Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), plan to expand them throughout the educational system.

This politically supported trend of regional cooperation in work and education policies persists. Besides agreements to establish a common labour market (since 1982), the Nordic countries have

39 "Nord-VET Conference 2016 : The future of vocational education – learning from the Nordic countries" (Roskilde University, 2016), 6, accessed November 27, 2020, http://nord-vet.dk/indhold/uploads/conf_publ-13.5.16.pdf

40 NORRIC, "Nordic-Baltic Admission Manual", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://norric.org/nordbalt#:~:text=The%20Nordic%20Baltic%20admission%20manual%20is%20a%20transparency%20and%20recognition,Lithuania%2C%20Norway%2C%20and%20Sweden.>

signed an Agreement on Co-operation on Upper Secondary School Education covering general secondary as well as vocational education. In 2019, the Nordic Co-operation initiative was established by the Nordic Council with the goal to make the region the most integrated and sustainable region in the world⁴¹. Mobility of individuals that can study, travel, work and start businesses in each other's countries is central to this vision of green, competitive, inclusive and interconnected region.

NordPlus (2018-2022) for instance is the largest initiative within the Nordic Council established to strengthen and develop Nordic educational cooperation (in LLL and all types of education) and contribute to the establishment of a Nordic-Baltic educational region.⁴² Nordic Network of Adult Learning was further established within the same initiative with one of the goals to improve joint basic skills and competence development policies regionally.⁴³ Therefore, a regionally-based cooperation initially focused on HE qualifications recognition but pushed further by recent migration and labour market needs, 'spilled' over to variety of other uses, such as harmonisation of qualification terms and outputs, validation, re-skilling and upskilling, making the Nordic region a role model for other regions in Europe. In all this, Nordic region policies remained strongly entrenched in European framework, using European instruments (EQF, EEA and EHEA tools, ESCO and EBSN) and foundations (e.g. Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region). This example, however, points to the necessity of a strong political will for cooperation across sectors and borders.

Inspired by examples of regional cooperation of the Nordic countries, and building on the experiences from the pilot projects where economies in the SEE region have been involved, the authors have drawn several recommendations contained in the final chapter of the Feasibility Study.

TO REGOS project results and needs and benefits of regionally based standards

TO REGOS project (15th March 2019 to 14th May 2021) involves six economies of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia) and aims to develop regionally based standards of occupation and subsequent standards of qualifications. First stage of the project was to develop a methodology for regionally based standards of occupation, after which RBOS were developed for five occupations. Project results of this stage are publicly available on the project [web site](#).

Based on RBOS, each country developed or has initiated the procedures of developing their national occupation standards. In the next stages, the project is to analyse possibilities for regionally based standards of qualification, and the results of the analysis are presented in this Study. The TO REGOS Project overall goals, such as increased cooperation between business and education sector on regional and national level, entail that both labour market and educational sector receive relevant information.

Labour market needs towards the education are at the core of qualifications standardisation processes, no matter how they are being set up and organised at the institutional, national,

41 Nordic Co-operation, "Our Vision", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.norden.org/en/declaration/our-vision-2030>.

42 NordPlus, "Nordic and Baltic Cooperation", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.nordplusonline.org/eng>.

43 NordPlus, "Nordic Network of Adult Learning", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.norden.org/en/information/nordic-network-adult-learning-nvl>.

cross-national, regional or cross-regional level, because the requirements of the labour market, in terms of competences needed to pursue certain occupations and professions, are usually translated into professional or occupational standards that form the basis for developing qualifications (standards)⁴⁴. Nevertheless, educational sector has equally to offer in return to the practitioners and employers, as innovation and development of profession regularly comes from experts in the educational system. Moreover, the education perspective to standardisation of qualifications adds to developing more transversal and interdisciplinary competences, values and attitudes together with individuals' personal development which, in consequence, improves employability, increases individuals' long-term perspectives on the labour market and sets the ground for lifelong learning. Therefore, when designing qualifications standards, it is important to bear in mind this multidimensional character of such standards against which qualifications are being developed.

In the standardisation of the most mobile professions, such as skilled labour in construction, health care and tourism, where large numbers of workers that are needed cannot be found locally, regional cooperation matters even more. The mobility and internationalisation of businesses, workers and learners (and lastly educational institutions too) further point to the needs of both labour and educational sector to develop regional standards of qualifications. Regional standards in education and training for most mobile professions therefore 'makes sense' not only in terms of economic need and regional cooperation effects but also when looked from the perspective of education providers that deal with mobile learners or are mobile themselves.

In this endeavour, national specificities may seem as rendering factor, whereas, if looked at from a different angle, they also might contribute the overall quality of standards. Namely, in the processes of standardisation, the overarching goals should always remain to be the increase of quality. Therefore, the process of developing regionally based standards has value of its own, visible in cross-country learning. Nevertheless, in order to compare develop a joint regionally based standard of qualification (RBSQ) national and comparative regional analysis of the legal and institutional frameworks regarding the qualification standards' development is necessary. Namely, each of the economies will have their own specificities in how they develop standards. This will be presented in the following chapter.

Finally, the needs-and-benefits analysis of the regionally based qualification standards is necessarily based on the needs deriving from increased regional cooperation in some sectors and involving certain professions, including future labour market needs.

Regionally based qualification standards should benefit individuals, business and institutions participating in this cooperation, i.e. they should support the migration of labour, learners, businesses and (educational) institutions in such a way that they assure quality and remove unnecessary obstacles, as well as respond to the anticipated future labour market needs. Therefore, the analy-

44 In this Study, the term qualification is understood as in the Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework that is: Qualifications are the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process by a competent authority and typically take the form of documents such as certificates or diplomas. They determine that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017/C 189/03). However, since for the reasons of subsidiarity over the education and training policies, the reference to standardisation of qualifications is sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit for which reason we sometimes refer here to qualifications and sometimes to qualifications standards.

sis of the needs and benefits must undoubtedly include the opinions of stakeholders. The results of the survey with stakeholders is presented in Part 3.

This often is the case for numerous and increasing number of professions in regions that share socio- economic ties beyond labour market needs (linguistic and cultural similarities for instance). Based on the Nordic example, we may conclude that regional cooperation is better utilized if there is more coherent and consensual regional cooperation policy, such as in the case of Nordic Council of Ministers, that is based on the needs and benefits of each member. In the same manner a strategic orientation towards regional cooperation in education and training, between the economies in the Western Balkans, as set by the SEE 2020 Strategy, provides a solid ground for more actions in the field of developing regionally based qualifications standards.

Finally, when developing RBSQ in economies that participate in the European area of cooperation and strive to become members of the EU, it might be beneficial to utilize from start already established instruments of European Qualifications Framework, ESCO, ECVET, other international qualifications comparisons, as they may assure a more compliant approach to developing policies and instruments in relation to qualifications development and, consequently, to better recognition of qualifications.

PART 2. National and comparative regional analysis of legal and institutional framework regarding qualification framework development

This section provides an overview and a cross-country comparison of existing legal and institutional frameworks for the NQFs in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. It further presents an analysis of the capacities already established in terms of developing regionally based qualifications standards in line with the relevant policies of qualification frameworks, as well as some basic information on the six economies and their possible mutual benefits from RBSQ (in terms of labour and educational migration, regional cooperation, European accession processes and other). This section is built upon the outcomes of the TO REGOS Project and in particular, on the Outcome 5. Transposition of adopted standards of occupations into standards of qualifications.

Legal and institutional framework

Table 4 compares the main institutional features of the NQFs in the six WB economies. In four out of six WB economies, the ministries responsible for education are also competent for NQFs, except for Kosovo* where National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is to develop and maintain the National Qualifications Framework and regulate the National Qualifications System and Serbia where the Qualifications Agency has been established and for Bosnia and Herzegovina where the Ministry of Civil Affairs is the coordinating state-level authority. In all the WB economies, except for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a body responsible for NQF has been established.

Table 4. Legal and institutional framework

WB economies	Document which regulates the NQF	Institution responsible for NQF	Agency responsible for VET qualifications	Bodies responsible for qualifications
Albania	The Law on Albanian Qualifications Framework	Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (for HE and GE) Ministry of Finance and Economy (for VET)	National Agency for VET and qualifications	Sectoral Committees
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Baseline for Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Civil Affairs; 12 education authorities in BiH	Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education	-
Kosovo*	The Law on National Qualifications	National Qualifications Authority	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adults UAVETA)	National Qualifications Authority
Montenegro	The National Qualifications Framework Act	Ministry of Education	VET Centre	Council for Qualifications, Sectoral Commissions
North Macedonia	The Law on National Qualifications Framework	Ministry of Education and Science	VET Centre	Macedonian Qualifications Framework Board, Sectoral Commissions
Serbia	The Law on The National Framework of Qualifications of the Republic of Serbia	Qualifications Agency, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development	Qualifications Agency	The Council for National Framework of Qualifications of Serbia Sector Skills Councils

Moreover, all the WB economies have regulated the implementation of the NQF by adopting a specific law, except for Bosnia and Herzegovina where the Baseline for Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been adopted by the Council of Ministers.

According to the ETF NQF Inventory and Cedefop Inventory of NQFs, the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was adopted by the Law No. 10247 on Albanian Qualifications Framework⁴⁵ in 2010 and revised in 2018 (Law No. 23-2018). In BiH, an Intersectoral Commission proposed the Action plan for development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina that was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015. According to the ETF NQF Inventory and the Referencing Report to the EQF, Kosovo* National Qualifications Framework (Kosovo* NQF) has been adopted in 2008 by the Law on National Qualifications No. 03/L-060. The Montenegrin system of qualifications is regulated by the National Qualifications Framework Act and the Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels. The Macedonian Qualifications Framework has been established by the Law on National Qualifications Framework and the process of referencing to the EQF levels was completed in 2016. The Law on National Qualifications Framework of Serbia (NQFS) was adopted in 2018 and the Report on referencing of the NQFS to the EQF was adopted in February 2020 as part of the EU accession process and as one of the objectives of the national strategic documents.

Methodological framework for development of qualifications standards: comparative analysis of the development of qualifications standards

The methodologies for development of qualification standards vary between the economies in several aspects. They differ to an extent to which the procedures for the development of qualifications standards have been regulated by legislation, prescribed by methodologies that have been either officially adopted by responsible authorities or bodies, or are the results of some projects and are still in the process of formal agreement and adoption. Moreover, there are differences in the extent to which qualifications standards are based on a thorough labour market analysis resulting in the adoption of occupation standards that precedes development and adoption of corresponding qualifications standards, or the labour market analysis are rather implicit to an existing classification of occupations. Furthermore, there are differences in relation to which type of institutions and bodies are involved in the process of adoption of qualifications standards and the corresponding existence of sectoral bodies and/or national bodies of stakeholders responsible for final decision making on the positioning of qualifications into the qualifications frameworks. Finally, there are differences in how the economies prescribe the compulsory elements of a qualification standard, as it is presented in the Table 11.

Although none of the economies have explicitly envisaged in their methodologies a possibility to develop a national qualification standard based on a regionally agreed qualification standard, resulting from a regionally based occupation standard, it is assumed here that there is a common agreement between the main stakeholders in the region to engage in such a policy experimentation, nevertheless.

Therefore, this Study looks into the existing methodologies for developing qualifications standards with the objective to identify common features, to address possible obstacles and to propose a methodological framework for developing regionally based qualifications standards. Developing a regionally based qualifications standard is not intended to replace the existing methodologies and practices of

45 LIGJ Nr. 10247 “Për profesionet e rregulluara në Republikën e Shqipërisë”, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.ufsh.org.al/content/uploads/2014/may/19/ligi-10171-date-22.10.2009-per-profesionet-e-rregulluara-ne-republiken-e-shqiperise.pdf>

developing national qualifications standards but rather to offer a possible path for all the economies to design a national qualification standard by using a common ground that is set in a regionally based qualification standard.

Qualifications standards in **Albania**, as standards of vocational qualifications serve as the basis for the development of a national frame curriculum for that qualification. According to the Cedefop Inventory of NQFs, 'the implementation of the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) is considered to be a tool for strong governance of the labour market and qualification systems and the policy objectives include review of existing qualifications and curricula based on AQF qualifications and standards as well as establishment of the sector committees. According to the Albanian VET Law, vocational qualifications are based on relevant occupational standards and professional qualification standards and described in terms of learning outcomes. According to the ETF NQF Inventory for Albania, the National Agency for VET and Qualifications develops occupational descriptions and qualification descriptions for all qualifications in the National list of vocational qualifications. That is being done by describing the jobs (tasks and duties), goods and services produced, skill level and specialisation, etc. The National list of occupations is used for statistical purposes and to facilitate the dialogue between the labour market and the education and training sector. The National Agency for VET and Qualifications is responsible for keeping the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications and for consulting with interested parties on the development, implementation and review of procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the AQF as well as for developing national curricula for vocational qualifications⁴⁶.

As **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is concerned, according to the ETF Inventory of NQFs, there is no register or database of qualifications at the country level neither is there a methodology for developing qualifications or qualifications standards agreed at the country level. There are, nevertheless, examples of projects where pilot qualifications standards have been developed (the EU VET project, the EU funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning') and it is under the competence of the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education⁴⁷, 'to develop education and occupational standards and curricula'. According to the ETF Inventory of NQF, about 43% of the most popular qualifications at levels 3 and 4 are based on learning outcomes that are a compulsory element and a requirement for each qualification to be placed into the qualifications framework.

The methodology⁴⁸ for developing qualifications standards in **Kosovo*** includes the analysis of the labour market presented in the respective occupation standards used for developing learning outcomes-based VET qualifications. Occupational standards are descriptions of expected work tasks and responsibilities in a given occupation. Learning outcomes within the adopted qualification standards are measures of assessed learning achievements. The occupational standards are the starting point for development of curricula and assessment for outcomes-based VET qualifications and competence-based VET programmes. The NQF has learning outcomes-based structure and level descriptors as well as modular qualifications. Several VET programmes have already been linked to the qualifications, mainly at the NQF levels 3 and 4 and they are a part of the NQF as a result of the validation and accreditation process. National Qualifications Authority is the competent body to approve proposed qualifications for inclusion in the NQF.⁴⁹

46 "About the National Agency for VET and qualifications", accessed November 27, 2020, <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/Explore+the+UNEVOC+Network/centre=519>.

47 APOSO, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://aposo.gov.ba/en/>.

48 The methodology is based on the Guidelines developed by the National Qualifications Authority titled [Udhëzuesi mbi përdorimin e standardeve profesionale gjatë zhvillimit të moduleve mësimore](#) (AKKS, accessed February, 15, 2021

49 AKKS, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://akkks.rks-gov.net/en/nga/about-us>

In **Montenegro**, qualification development (levels 1-5) encompasses the development of an occupational, educational or additional standard and development of a qualification standard. A qualification standard is developed based on an occupational, educational or other standard. An educational programme, special programme of education or other programmes are developed based on a qualification standard, upon completion of which a learner attains respective qualification (education level, vocational or additional qualification). For each of 15 qualification sectors, set by the Law on Montenegrin Qualifications Framework, the Qualifications Council is the body responsible for development and placement of qualifications in the Framework and improvement of the qualifications system. The Qualifications Council adopts basic qualification description (with learning outcomes, estimates of the labour market needs and international comparability), occupational standards and qualification standards. The Qualifications Council makes decisions on alignment of existing qualifications for their placement into the Qualification Framework, defines criteria for nomination of members of sectoral commissions, adopts instructions and guidelines for the work of sectoral commissions, coordinates their work and makes decisions on their proposals, adopts a decision on establishment of sectoral commissions, decides on definition of sub-sectors and fields within a qualification sector at the proposal of sectoral commissions. With the adoption of the National Qualifications Framework Act and different accompanying bylaws⁵⁰ setting the procedures for developing of qualifications and positioning them to the levels of the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework, development of qualification standards commenced. The qualification standards define learning outcomes and link them to the key tasks in relevant occupational standards. Educational programmes for vocational education are developed by using occupational standards and qualification standards.

In the Republic of North **Macedonia**, according to the Law on Macedonian Qualifications Framework, ‘vocational qualifications constitute vocational competences from one or more standards of occupation’. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with the VET Centre, is responsible to develop a methodology for the preparation of occupational standards and to propose development of qualification standards and occupational standards according to the labour market. The methodology for developing qualifications is described in the Qualifications Development Procedure and the methodology for including new or revised qualifications into the Macedonian Qualifications Framework is described in the Methodology for including qualifications in the Macedonian Qualifications Framework. According to the Law on Vocational Education and Training, the VET Centre is responsible for proposing national qualifications and occupational standards to the Ministry of Education and Science. Sectoral Qualifications Councils analyse the situation and the needs of the labour market and identify the needs for all types of qualifications in line with the requirements of the labour market and society as a whole and prepare basic profiles of qualifications. The National Board for Macedonian Qualifications Framework, based on the recommendation of the Sectoral Qualifications Councils, adopts decisions for the inclusion of the qualifications in the Macedonian Qualifications Framework⁵¹.

50 “The Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels”, “The Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications form level I to level V”, “The Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications form level VI to level VIII”, “The Guidelines for sectoral commissions”, “The Guidelines for qualifications development (levels 1-5)”, “The Methodology for assigning codes to qualifications, and the Methodology for placing qualifications to the National Qualifications Framework”, “The Methodology for modularisation and credit valuation of educational programmes in vocational education”. In “Referencing the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area” (Montenegro Ministry of Education, 2014), accessed November 27, 2020, http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/members/montenegro/National_Qualifications_Framework_Montenegro_2014.pdf.

51 “EQF Referencing Report of the Macedonian Qualifications Framework and Self-Certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area”, accessed November 27, 2020, http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/members/yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia/EQF_Report_Macedonia_2016_667973.pdf.

The qualification standards in **Serbia** are the basis for the development of education programs for acquiring qualifications at all levels of education. The Methodology for the development of qualification standards has been developed and based on it a *Rulebook on the Methodology for the development of qualification standards*⁵² published. The methodology relies on labour market analysis and stakeholders' involvement⁵³. According to the Report on Referencing of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and Self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, the 'development of qualification should be in line with the corresponding occupational standard, applying appropriate job analysis methods, and based on that, determining learning outcomes using taxonomic instruments to sort knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes within each vocational competence'. The body in charge of the occupational standards is Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs which is currently preparing the Methodology for occupational standards development, in line with the adopted Methodology for qualifications standards development.

An initiative for developing and adopting standards for a new qualification may be submitted by the Sector Skills Council, The Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the National Education Council, the National Council for Higher Education, the National Employment Service, a higher education institution, a state body and other legal entity (a company, Publicly Recognized Organizer of Adult Education Activities, etc.). The initiative (consisting of an Elaboration of the justification of the qualification – based on administrative data sources, relevant labour market analysis, strategic document on the development of a sector etc., and Initial proposal of the qualification standard) is submitted to the Qualifications Agency (QA). The QA then assesses the relevance of the initiative in comparison with the existing qualifications within a sector, and analyses submitted documents looking at relevance and the data quality. The QA assessment is afterwards forwarded to the corresponding Sector Skills Council. If the Sector Skills Council finds that the initiative is justified, it decides on the development of qualification standards and requires from the Agency to develop a proposal for a qualification standard. The Qualifications Agency, within 60 days, develops a qualification standard and submits it to the NQFS Council, which establishes a proposal for the standard and submits it to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) for adoption. The MoESTD adopts an act on adopting a qualification standard, which is published in the RS Official Gazette and entered into the sub-register of national qualifications and the sub-register of qualification standards. The Qualifications Agency drafts a proposal for a standard based on the data from the initiative, the study that contains the initial proposal for a qualification standard, and the Methodology for the development of qualification standards (that provides a conceptual framework for the learning outcome development within a standard) and in the drafting process may consult experts in the area of the proposed qualification or form an expert team.

In conclusion of the comparative analysis of the development of qualifications standards the common practices that can be shared across the region are identified as the following:

- All the economies aim to design their VET qualifications based on an assessment of the **labour market needs and requirements**. Therefore, in all the economies, the development of qualifications standards is embedded in the labour market analysis. The difference is whether they have set their occupation standards as a compulsory step in their procedures for development of a VET qualification standard or not⁵⁴.

52 Relevant documents available on the NQF Serbia website, http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/sr_lat/zakoni-i-propisi/, accessed March 03, 2021.

53 National Qualifications Framework in the Republic of Serbia, "About qualification standard", accessed November 27, 2020, <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/about-qualification-standard/>

54 Economies that have set their occupation standards as a compulsory step in their procedures for development

- The initiative of developing a qualification standard may be launched, in principle, by different institutions. Nevertheless, in all the economies, there are **agencies** that may be considered as the institutions responsible to assure the existence of VET qualifications standards as the basis for curriculum development⁵⁵. They either initiate development of a qualification standard either approve it. Therefore, the VET agencies are assessed to be the most important actors in the process of developing regionally-based qualifications standards.
- All the economies have identified compulsory **elements** of their own national qualifications standards templates. Although sometimes named differently, they use more or less similar concepts to describe qualifications. A comparative analysis of the elements of national qualifications standards, presented in this Study, has been used as a basis to identify and propose the minimum core elements of regionally-based qualifications standards.

Based on the above analysis, the most challenging areas that may impede the development of regionally-based qualifications standards remain in the following:

- Some economies have set their own **occupation standards** as a compulsory step in their procedures for development of a VET qualification standard. That means that a qualification cannot be developed by using a regionally based occupation standard directly or any other labour market analysis but national occupation standards. Nevertheless, an assumption is taken here that a regionally based occupational standard is first agreed regionally and then validated by the economies with possible slight modifications that adjust it to national regulations so that it becomes 'national'.
- Therefore, as presented on the Diagram 'Development and adoption of regionally based qualifications standards', once a regionally based occupation standard has been agreed between the partners, two parallel procedures should be launched: one of the adoption of the national occupation standard by slightly modifying the regionally based occupation standards and the second procedure on the development of regionally based qualifications standards and its translation into the national qualifications standard. However, this may be challenging from the perspective of efficiency of a procedure for development of regionally-based qualifications standards and the subsequent adoption of corresponding national qualifications standards that considers the workload for their development, coordination of the process at the regional level and the length of procedures of adoption at the levels of the economies.
- In none of the economies **regionally-based qualifications standards** have been envisaged by the legislation, methodologies, procedures or any other policy documents. In systems where policy experimentation may be justified only if explicitly established in relevant policy documents, this may impede, or at least slow down, necessary commitment by the most relevant actors in the process to a final adoption of national qualifications standards that arise from the regionally based qualifications standards.
- The **methodologies** for development of qualification standards differ to an extent to which the procedures for the development of qualifications standards have been regulated by legislation or prescribed by strict methodologies. Moreover, the status of these methodologies equally differs. In some economies the methodology has been officially adopted by responsible au-

of a VET qualification standard: Albania, Kosovo*, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia.

55 Economies that have agencies responsible exclusively for VET: Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia.

thorities or bodies in others the methodology is a result of a project and has still not been adopted by designated authorities⁵⁶.

- In majority of the economies there are different **bodies** that are usually attached to the agencies responsible for VET and/or all qualifications and that are, in principle, responsible also to assess whether it is justified to develop a qualification standard⁵⁷. The members of these bodies are usually experts in the sector but not primarily nor full time attached to the work related to qualifications development and therefore, not necessarily experienced nor directly informed about most recent initiatives such as the one on regionally-based qualifications frameworks. It is a challenge and a risk that is advisable to address, to involve these bodies timely in the process and assure their full support in the policy experimentation with the regionally based qualifications standards.
- **Classification of qualifications** according to VET sectors may be challenging due to the fact that not all the economies use the same methodology for classification of qualifications according to the fields of education and training. This may be additionally challenging in the economies where a more complex institutional structure has been set up to support the development and adoption of qualifications standards that is a structure that involves sectoral bodies such as sectoral commissions or sectoral skills councils that are responsible for assessment of proposed qualifications standards. More concretely, if proposals for regionally based qualifications standards are recognised as belonging to different sectors in the economies involved in the process, there might be a tendency to put more emphasis to units of learning outcomes belonging to different sectors which may, in consequence, jeopardise the aim of reaching an agreement at the regional level.

In the light of identified common practices as well as the most challenging areas listed above, this Study proposes concrete steps to follow in developing regionally-based qualifications standards. These proposals are presented in the Part Four of this Study.

Qualifications frameworks

National qualifications frameworks usually describe qualifications at all levels of education and training in terms of qualification structures, workload, learning outcomes and quality assurance. They are therefore, often used to compare qualifications both within and across countries which plays an important role in increasing the transparency of qualifications systems. The NQFs in the six WB economies are similar and have few differences. That could be a good basis for developing a regional template for qualification standards. In all the WB economies, qualifications are positioned at eight levels, some of them having also sublevels. Some economies, that is Albania, Kosovo*, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia have developed qualifications at the level 5.

56 In Albania and Kosovo* there is no more detailed information available in English on methodology for development of qualifications standards. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the methodology has been developed as a project result. In Montenegro, the methodology has been prescribed by very detailed regulations as procedures for development and adoption of qualifications and published in the Official Gazette. In the Republic of North Macedonia the methodology has been adopted by the National Board for the Macedonian Qualifications Framework.

57 These bodies are the following, as listed in the Table 4: Council for Qualifications and Sectoral Commissions in Montenegro; Macedonian Qualifications Framework Board and Sectoral Commissions in the Republic of North Macedonia, Council for National Framework of Qualifications of Serbia and Sector Skills Councils in Serbia.

Albania

AQF level descriptors have been defined in terms of learning outcomes. The AQF is open for all types of qualifications but, while the formal qualifications can be included in the AQF based on existing accreditation and quality assurance procedures, the inclusion of qualifications for lifelong learning requires special criteria and procedures regulated in a by-law⁵⁸. Albania is a member of the EQF Advisory Group. The Albanian Qualifications Framework has not yet been referenced to the EQF but the process is ongoing.

58 “Albanian Qualifications Framework. European Inventory on NQF 2018” (Cedefop, 2019), accessed November 27, 2020, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/albania_-_european_inventory_on_nqf_2018.pdf.

Table 5 VET Qualifications - Albania⁵⁹

Vocational/professional qualifications	Lifelong learning qualifications	NQF level	EQF
Post-secondary study programme of professional type Professional non-university study programme after secondary education Vocational certificate	Bridging courses (certificate) Specialisation courses based on professional requirements	NQF 5	EQF 5
State vocational matura diploma (high school vocational programme) Vocational certificate (four-year study programme for middle technicians / middle managers) Vocational certificate (two-year programme for technician / middle managers) Vocational certificate (one-year programme for technician / middle managers) Vocational certificate (apprenticeship programme)	Bridging courses Vocational training courses Specialisation courses based on professional requirements	NQF 4	EQF 4
Vocational certificate (three-year programme for skilled workers) Vocational certificate (one-year programme for skilled workers) Vocational Certificate (apprenticeship programme)	- Vocational training courses Specialisation courses based on professional requirements	NQF 3	EQF 3
Vocational certificate (two-year programme for semi-skilled workers)	- Vocational training courses	NQF 2	EQF 2

59 : Albanian Qualifications Framework. European Inventory on NQF 2018 (Cedefop, 2019), accessed November 27, 2020, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/albania_-_european_inventory_on_nqf_2018.pdf

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Level descriptors of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been defined in terms of learning outcomes. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a member of the EQF Advisory Group. The Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been presented to the EQF, but the Referencing Report has not yet been published.

Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into two types:

1. Vocational education and training of four-year duration
2. Vocational Education and Training of three-year duration.

Table 6: VET Qualifications - Bosnia and Herzegovina⁶⁰

Vocational/ professional qualifications	Description of the qualification level	NQF level	EQF level
Post-second- ary educa- tion- Master Craftsman	<p>The programme usually lasts one year and it is adapted to the needs of adults- employed persons.</p> <p>Entry requirement: three-year VET school and at least two years of working experience in the field.</p> <p>In cantons in FBiH and BDBiH VET schools provide education and training and assessments. Upon successful completion of this programme students are awarded the Master Craftsman Certificate by school or Chamber of Crafts. In Republika Srpska Ministry of industry, energy and mining is competent authority for this type of qualifications.</p>	NQF 5	EQF 5
Post-second- ary education – Specialist	<p>The programme usually lasts one year and is delivered as part-time education.</p> <p>Entry requirement: three-year VET school and at least one year of working experience in the field.</p> <p>Upon successful completion of this programme students are awarded the Specialist Certificate by VET schools.</p>	NQF 5	EQF 5
Vocational Education and Training, four- year duration	<p>This qualification can be obtained through initial VET or CVET (adult education and training).</p> <p>The aim is acquiring specific knowledge and skills. Modular curricula are adopted by competent education authorities. There is no Common Core Curriculum for VET subjects.</p> <p>Entry requirement: Primary education.</p> <p>Progression: To first cycle higher education, or to education for specialists (upon completing 1 year of working experience in a specific field).</p>	NQF 4	EQF 4
Vocational Education and Training, three-year duration	<p>This qualification can be obtained through initial VET or CVET (adult education and training).</p> <p>The aim is acquiring specific knowledge and skills. Modular curricula are adopted by competent education authorities. There is no Common Core Curriculum for VET subjects. Attention to work-based training</p> <p>Entry requirement: Primary education</p> <p>Progression: To education for master craftsman (upon completing 2 years of working experience in a specific field)</p>	NQF 3	EQF 3

60 Decision on the Adoption of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nos. 31/11, 39/12), accessed November 27, 2020, http://www.cip.gov.ba/images/pdf/okvir/Nacionalni_kvalifikacijski_okvir_bos.pdf; and Decision on Adoption of the Action Plan for development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-2020 (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No 28/15), accessed November 27, 2020, <http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/FAaZ4BuUFtA> = .

*Kosovo**

The NQF consists of 8 levels of qualifications. The level descriptors are defined in terms of learning outcomes, classifying learning outcomes into knowledge, skills and wider competences (autonomy and responsibility). Kosovo* is a member of the EQF Advisory Group. The National Qualifications Framework of the Kosovo* was referenced to the EQF in 2016 and the Referencing Report is published.

Table 7: VET Qualifications – Kosovo*⁶¹

Vocational/professional qualifications	Description of the qualification level	NQF level	EQF level
Bologna Short Cycle and / or Secondary VET Post. (Specialist, Trainer, Manager) National Professional Certificate National Professional Diploma and Certificate of Achievement	Level 5 foresees both academic and vocational qualifications (formal and non-formal) that fall between upper secondary and higher education.. In the NQF are registered 21 qualifications of level 5 offered by vocational training institutions (informal) 11 Institutions are currently accredited by the NQF.	NQF 5	EQF 5
Qualified Worker, Supervisor For combined national qualifications the titles are as follows; Combined National Certificate Combined national diploma Graduation certificate The titles of professional qualifications at this level are as follows: National Professional Certificate National Professional Diploma and Certificate of Achievement	Preparation for and advancement in higher education and/or entry into the labour market Matura qualification obtained upon completion of formal general and vocational upper secondary education, certificates obtained upon completion of formal vocational upper secondary education, and certificates obtained upon completion of short training courses provided by non-formal VET providers.	NQF 4	EQF 4
Semi-skilled worker Vocational education certificate Certificate of non-formal VET providers	Preparation for labour market (young people and adults) Qualifications obtained upon completion of two years of formal upper-secondary vocational education and certificates obtained upon completion of short training courses provided by non-formal VET providers.	NQF 3	EQF 3
Advancement from lower secondary to upper secondary education (young people), preparation for the labour market (Adults)	Advancement from lower secondary to upper secondary education (young people), preparation for the labour market (Adults) Qualifications obtained upon completion of short training courses covering low level vocational/job-related skills or basic skills (literacy, numeracy or ICT skills) provided by non-formal training providers.	NQF 2	EQF 2

61 "The EQF Referencing report of the Kosovo* NQF for General Education, VET and Higher Education" (AKKS, 2016), accessed November 27, 2020, https://akkks.rks-gov.net/uploads/kosovo_eqf_referencing_report_2016.pdf.

Montenegro

In accordance with the National Qualifications Framework Act, qualifications in Montenegrin Qualifications Framework are placed in eight qualification levels, with sublevels at levels 1, 4 and 7. According to Eurydice⁶², sublevels of levels 1, 4 and 7 reflect the need to facilitate the classification of qualifications acquired through education system prior to adopting the Law on National Qualifications Framework. Each level or sublevel has its descriptors which include three categories: knowledge, skills and competence. Montenegrin Qualifications Framework includes three types of qualifications: educational qualifications, vocational qualifications and additional qualifications. Educational qualification is acquired upon completion of publicly valid education programme and vocational qualification is acquired upon assessment of non-formal and informal learning or upon completion of a special educational programme. Additional qualification is qualification required for getting a specific task or set of tasks, upon attaining basic qualification. These qualifications do not increase the basic qualification level, but instead represent its supplement and indicate additional ability of the individual, needed for inclusion in the labour market. They are validated with a certificate, confirmation or a proof, in line with the special regulation.

⁶² “National qualifications framework- Montenegro”, accessed November 27, 2020, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/montenegro/national-qualifications-framework_en.

Table 8: VET Qualifications - Montenegro⁶³

Vocational/professional qualifications	Workload	NQF level	EQF level
Post-secondary vocational school Special programmes, modules	(120 MCTS / ECVET)	NQF 5	EQF 5
Master craftsman's exam Special programmes, modules	(60 MCTS / ECVET)	NQF 4.2	EQF 4
Four-year secondary vocational school	(240 MCTS / ECVET)	NQF 4.1	EQF 4
Three-year secondary vocational school Special programmes, modules Modules	(180 MCTS / ECVET)	NQF 3	EQF 3
Two-year lower vocational education Special programmes, modules	(120 MCTS / ECVET) (1- 119 MCTS / ECVET)	NQF 2	EQF 2
Vocational training programmes		NQF 1.2	EQF 1
Vocational training programmes		NQF 1.1	EQF 1

63 "Referencing the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Life-long Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area", (Montenegro Ministry of Education, 2014), accessed November 27, 2020, http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/members/montenegro/National_Qualifications_Framework_Montenegro_2014.pdf.

Republic of North Macedonia

In accordance with the National Qualifications Framework Act, qualifications in Macedonian Qualifications Framework are placed in eight qualification levels, with sublevels at levels 5, 6 and 7, introducing learning outcomes as the core concept described by level descriptors within three domains (knowledge and understanding, skills and competence).

Table 9: VET Qualifications – Republic of North Macedonia

Vocational/ professional qualifications	Description of qualification	NQF level	EQF level
Specialist exam- Diploma for specialized education Master exam - Diploma for completed Master exam	<p>Programmes for specialized education are proposed by the VET Centre and adopted by the Minister of Education and Science.</p> <p>Programmes for the Master exam are prepared by the VET Centre and adopted by the Chamber of Crafts with prior positive opinion of the Ministry of Education and Science.</p> <p>Programmes are delivered by accredited public and private institutions (secondary schools, higher vocational schools, specialized institutions for post-secondary education and institutions for postsecondary education within chambers, employers' organizations and labour associations and companies).</p>	NQF 5B	EQF 5
Secondary school (Technical education) Diploma for State Matura Diploma for Final Exam	<p>Duration of 4 years.</p> <p>Technical education programmes are developed by the Bureau for Development of Education and the VET Centre, and adopted by the Minister of Education and Science. Teaching is performed in the vocational schools. Practical learning is performed in schools and/or with employer.</p> <p>Entry requirements: Completed primary education. Students with special needs can enrol.</p> <p>Progression routes: to higher education, with completed State Matura.</p>	NQF 4	EQF 4
Secondary School (Vocational education for occupations) Diploma for Final Exam	<p>Duration of 3 years.</p> <p>Programmes developed by the Bureau for Development of Education and the VET Centre, and adopted by the Minister of Education and Science. Teaching is performed in vocational schools, or institutions for adult education. Practical work is performed in schools and/or with employer. New VET-3 curricula (implemented since 2013) are based on qualification standards, linked with relevant occupational standards.</p> <p>Entry requirements: Completed primary education.</p> <p>Progression routes: to technical VET, with completed final exam, and by passing additional subjects.</p>	NQF 3	EQF 3
Secondary School (Vocational training) Vocational competence exam- Certificate for vocational training	<p>Duration up to 2 years.</p> <p>Programmes developed by the Bureau for Development of Education and the VET Centre, and adopted by the Minister of Education and Science. Teaching is performed in vocational schools, or institutions for adult education. Practical learning is performed in schools and/or with employer.</p> <p>Entry requirements: Completed primary education. Also, students with incomplete primary education may enrol, under the condition they complete it during the vocational training.</p> <p>Progression routes: continue schooling in upper years.</p>	NQF 2	EQF 2

Serbia

In accordance with the National Qualifications Framework Act, qualifications in National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia are placed in eight qualification levels, with sublevels at levels 6 and 7. In the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia, descriptions of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes, necessary for the job or further learning are determined for each (sub) level of qualifications.

Table 10: VET Qualifications – Serbia⁶⁴

Vocational/professional qualifications	Description of qualification	NQF level	EQF level
craftsman	specialist education lasting up to two or one-year non-formal adult education lasting minimum of six months	NQF 5	EQF 5
four-year secondary school education	vocational education, arts education, general education	NQF 4	EQF 4
secondary vocational education non-formal adult education	secondary vocational education lasting three years, non-formal adult education with training duration of minimum 960 hours	NQF 3	EQF 3
vocational training education for informal adult education	vocational training lasting up to one year, education for work lasting up to two years, informal adult education with 120-360 hours of training	NQF 2	EQF 2

⁶⁴ “Report on referencing National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and Self-certification to the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area” (Republic of Serbia Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 2020), 108-109; 125; 140-141.

Table 11. Elements in the qualification standard – cross-analysis

Economy / Elements in the QS or qualifications descriptions	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Qualification title	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Qualification Codes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Awarding body / act adopting qualification, the number of the accreditation certificate, web site of the accredited study programmes	yes	yes	o yes	yes	yes	yes
Qualification type / aims of qualification, main target groups of learners	o yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Corresponding occupational standards, connection to ISCO or any other evidence about consultation with labour market stakeholders	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Qualification level (NQF)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Qualification level (EQF)	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Qualification credit value or years/hours of duration	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sector / the field of work / FOET	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ways of acquiring qualification (formal education, non-formal education, RPL)	no	no	yes	ye	yes	yes
Document verification / Specific quality assurance requirements of the qualification	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Qualification description / justification / rationale, need for the qualification	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Admission / entry requirements / preconditions for qualification acquisition	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Progression / permeability in the qualification system / further qualification and employment possibilities	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Intended learning outcomes expressed in knowledge, vocational skills and broader competencies	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Qualification structure: List of mandatory and elective learning outcome units (modules)	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no

Economy / Elements in the QS or qualifications descriptions	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Additional information on methods of assessment / type of assessment of learning outcomes achievement, validation including assessment and certification of the learning outcomes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Start date and end date of qualification application / Approval date	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Information on previous versions	yes	no	no	yes	no	no (being developed)
Any mutual recognition agreements with other qualifications	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Members of expert group developing/assessing the proposed standard	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no
External quality assurance arrangements	no	yes	yes	no	no	no

PART 3: Stakeholders' survey results

The third section provides the survey results on the needs and benefits of RBSQ from the perspective of stakeholders. The scope of the survey was to gather information and perception of the key stakeholders on the most relevant sectors, occupations and qualifications for an increased labour mobility based on mutual trust and regional cooperation.

The survey was distributed to 85 representatives participating in TO REGOS project. These stakeholders include institutions such as qualification or VET agencies or authorities, VET education providers, chambers of commerce/economy, professional associations, employers from sectors involved, institutes dealing with education policies. 14 responses in total were submitted. The questionnaire (in Appendix) was composed of predominantly open-ended questions, allowing for qualitative analysis. Although not satisfactory in terms of response rate, the survey was completed by multiple representatives of all economies and types of stakeholders: government authorities (ministries, agencies), businesses, education providers, and professional associations.

As for **the role of their institutions** in public policy matters, national qualification authorities made more extensive elaborations, stating roles such as maintaining the NQF policies, reform of education system, LLL and VET policies in particular. Education providers defined their roles as participating in training and standardisation of qualifications and curricula, while chambers and employers defined their role as encouraging companies to create or participate in qualifications development tailored for business needs.

Regional cooperation was in particular focus of the questionnaire and all of the respondents stated it is relevant for the role of their institution in qualifications policies or VET training. National qualifications authorities stated that besides European dimension (accession processes and EQF), regional cooperation presents an important aspect of development and sustainability due to mobility of students and their qualifications. Regional cooperation was also seen as beneficial for sharing of experiences, ideas and good practices in VET training, and work on developing regionally based standards of occupation and qualifications was stated as example of such good practice. Employers stated how sectors such as tourism have no borders, making regional cooperation extremely important. All and all, as stated by one respondent, "In addition to aligning the NQFS to the EQF, regional cooperation is valuable in order to determine similarities and differences in the context of educational and labour market needs at the regional level, as well as to facilitate recognition of qualifications." **Mutual trust** was estimated by respondents as existing and with positive trend, although with space for improvement. National authorities stated that trust must be founded on quality assurance procedures. Some respondents, particularly from business sector and education providers stated that "RBSQ can improve this trust, because the common needs for knowledge and skills of the employers of the Western Balkan countries have been establishment."

All of the respondents further stated that **RBOS and RBSQ are beneficial** for their institution's agenda and are relevant for education and business policies. The respondents recognise that "national occupational and qualification standards are developed and adopted in line with the identified educational and labour market needs of each specific country", so regionally based OS and OQ should be developed where there are additional needs that surpass national level, such as in sectors with higher migration of labour or qualifications. Regionally based standards could, further, "be beneficial as a starting point when drafting initiatives to develop and adopt qualification standards at the national level". Still, some respondents stated concerns about success of

regional initiatives in such nationally regulated procedures, e.g. differences in policies, processes, decision-making, methodologies and criteria for developing standards of qualification. The last question of the questionnaire particularly asked about obstacles to RBSQ. Here most of the respondents responded there were no or none that they know of. Some qualification authorities did however state that they are lacking information on regional policies of such type. One response sums up the main concern in this respect:

“There are no obstacles. However, there are different approaches to drafting policies in the area and diverse ways of decision-making throughout the region, which should all be taken into consideration when developing RBSQ policy.”

When asked about **country's needs and benefits from RBSQ**, the respondents listed: support to mobility of employees and students, increased educational and economic mobility and its benefits for the region, harmonised labour force and benefits for employers, facilitating of the process of recognition, improving the quality of education, competitiveness and attractiveness of regionally standardized qualification providers, providing/training professional staff recognized at regional level, improvement of curricula and competences of learners, cooperation between employers, workers and VET providers region-wide, increasing European dimension through regional cooperation, benefits for teaching staff (sharing experiences, networking), other.

Sectors and occupations listed as most **suitable for regional standardisation** were from top down sorted by frequency in responses):

Table 12. Sectors, occupations and levels of qualifications listed by respondents as the most relevant for regional cooperation

Sector	Occupation	Level (of VET)
Tourism/hospitality and catering	all, cook, waiter, chef, butcher,	3/4
Construction	all, welder, carpenter, bricklayer, locksmith, plumber	3
ICT, Electrical engineering	all, CNC operator	-
Mechanical Engineering	mechanic,	-
Trade	merchant, shop arranger	-
Traffic	traffic technician	-
Health	medical worker	-
Agriculture	-	-

As a respondent under this question stated, “in order to determine which sectors would benefit the most from developing RBSQ, an extensive research on the qualifications that are needed regionally should be carried out. Moreover, the areas of labour mobility in the region should be identified.” Although this topic was a part of a following question, this response “hits the nail” of foundations of any sustainable regional policy in this regard. Some economies, as apparent from responses, have established institutions or bodies in charge of this task. For instance, as stated by the same respondent, “Serbia is currently in the process of developing sector profiles, as well as the Integrated Labour Market and Qualifications Information System (LMQIS). Once these are developed, it will be possible to determine for which sectors RBSQ could be beneficial. In the meantime, Sector Skills Councils could give their opinion on whether RBSQ should be developed or not.”

Therefore, in most of the countries specific authorities are in charge and possess all the expertise to map potential qualifications to be developed regionally. As a respondent stated, “Sector Skills Councils are mandated to map qualifications that should be developed and modernized in each specific sector and at all NQFS levels, including VET qualifications at level 3 and 4. Once the mapping process is done, SSCs will be able to suggest qualifications that could potentially have regionally agreed core content.”

As for **available reports or sources on country’s labour market needs and features that can be used in identifying which regional standards to develop**, majority replied there were none that were known to them, or sufficient for this purpose (national needs but not regional). Mainly, the respondents stated that there were no comprehensive system analysis of labour market needs that would include regional aspects, but there are relevant data coming from different sources, which can be used when making decisions on developing regional qualification standards. Some listed institutions such as VET or qualifications authorities or chambers or employment services that regularly prepare own analyses on employers’ needs for skilled labour force and qualifications attached to that.

Finally, the respondents stated that “It would be very useful for us to develop a methodology

for the development of regionally based occupations and to apply it in the future.” This task, according to other respondents, can be supported by regional experts. The respondents expressed willingness to continue such regional policies and suggested more workshops and networking should be put in place, along with other EU policies in the area. Several stated that “TO REGOS can be a role model of good cooperation for future projects”.

PART 4: Overall findings and recommendations

The fourth section provides conclusions on the feasibility of developing regionally based qualifications standards and corresponding recommendations. Recommendations are based on the analysis of international and local context, regional cooperation and needs and benefits as stated by stakeholders.

Regionally based qualifications standards are developed on the basis of regionally based occupation standards and are considered to be the basis for specific national qualifications standards. They do not intend to substitute national qualifications standards but include the core elements of the qualifications standards. They present the common ground unanimously agreed and with no reservations by all the economies as a basis for subsequent development of national qualifications standards. The modifications from a regionally based qualification standard to national qualifications standards include all the specific features of the national qualifications standards that could have not been agreed regionally.

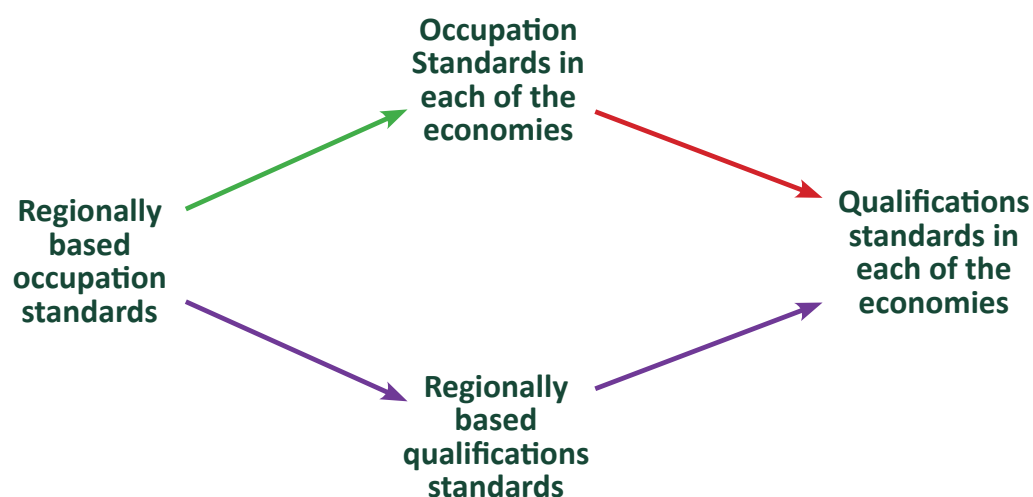
Following the conclusions of the comparative analysis of the development of qualifications standards in the economies of the Western Balkans, and identified common practices across the region, presented in the Part 2 of this Study, the following **preconditions** are assessed to be important to make regionally based qualifications standards feasible:

- All the economies commit to developing regionally based qualifications standards with the objective to use them as a basis for development of their own national qualifications standards. In case they do not have their own respective qualifications standards, the economies agree to use the opportunity to develop their own national standards in compliance with the regionally-based ones. If they have already adopted respective national qualifications standards, they commit to revise them if and to an extent it would prove necessary and appropriate.
- The agencies responsible for VET and/or qualifications in the economies agree to initiate development of regionally-based qualifications standards by using the agreed methodology for developing regionally based qualifications standards as proposed in this Study and subsequent mutually agreed modifications.
- The agencies responsible for VET and/or qualifications in the economies agree on the minimum core elements of regionally based qualifications standards as proposed in this Study and subsequent mutually agreed modifications.
- The agencies responsible for VET and/or qualifications in the economies open up for a policy experimentation that has not been envisaged by their own national procedures and embark themselves in developing regionally based qualifications standards and corresponding national qualifications standards based on the framework proposed in this Study and subsequent mutually agreed modifications and elaborations.
- The agencies responsible for VET and/or qualifications in the economies involve bodies responsible for assessing and approving qualifications standards in the process and assure their full support in the policy experimentation with the regionally based qualifications standards.
- The agencies responsible for VET and/or qualifications in the economies discuss and agree about the level of qualification for which a regionally based qualification standard is being developed.
- The agencies responsible for VET and/or qualifications in the economies discuss and agree about classification of qualifications according to VET sectors before starting with developing qualifications standards. It is advisable to use the EUROSTAT ISCED-F (FOET – Fields of Education and Training) classification.

Proposed methodological framework for developing regionally based qualifications standards

The Feasibility Study demonstrated that there are many similarities in the process of developing national qualifications standards and the authors believe that there is common ground to engage in this policy experimentation. The proposed methodological framework on developing regionally based qualifications standards starts from the labour market analysis resulting in a regionally based occupation standard. The path further includes several steps in describing qualifications in a similar manner by using agreed set of qualifications descriptors. The agreement on the regionally based qualifications standards continues by transposing them into national qualifications standards with necessary adjustments into predefined forms and by filling in the missing information depending on specific national context and finally, applying their own procedures in adopting national qualifications standards that arose from regionally based qualifications standards. The process is presented in the Diagram 'Development and adoption of regionally based qualifications standards' and a more detailed methodology is presented as a separated document.

Diagram. 'Development and adoption of regionally based qualifications standards'



Policy recommendation – a strong political commitment for a more sustainable regional cooperation

In order to develop a more systemic and sustainable cooperation at the regional level, based on the success stories presented in this Feasibility Study, there is a need for a stronger political commitment in particular by the ministers of education. Political commitment is necessary to give a strong push towards exploring further the results of the regional projects and initiatives.

It is strongly advisable to use the existing governance structures to support the political commitments towards more profound regional cooperation. Any other alternative would create more administrative burden to the governments and watered down the existing initiatives.

The ministers in charge of education have demonstrated their commitment for a deeper regional cooperation in the field of education and training by launching the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), establishing the governance structure where all the member countries are represented in the ERI SEE Governing Board and by setting up the ERI SEE Secretariat with a mandate to make their political vision operational.

Therefore, it is recommended that the ERI SEE governance structure takes the following actions:

1. Prepare concrete proposals for further cooperation in establishing regionally based qualifications standards- a paper prepared by the ERI SEE Secretariat assisted by the experts.
2. Carry out a consultation process with the relevant stakeholders to support better the proposed cooperation – webinars organised by the ERI SEE Secretariat involving ministries of education, agencies for VET and qualifications, chambers, employers' associations and other relevant stakeholders.
3. Discuss and agree further actions at the regional level – decision to be taken by the ERI SEE Governing Board on the Action Plan/Roadmap to be developed and presented by the ERI SEE Secretariat.
4. Prepare the ground for the ministerial commitments- a ministerial Declaration, Statement or Communication prepared by the ERI SEE Secretariat, agreed with the ERI SEE Governing Board and adopted at a regional ministerial Conference.

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