

outcomes and competences of individuals is a real tool for social promotion, as it is one of the essential components of employability. With the same competences, knowledge and experience, an individual who can literally prove all of this will be immediately more employable in the eyes of a recruiter.

One of the most stable results of all the fieldwork - in Enabel's partner countries, in Europe, as well as in the rest of the world - is that people are interested in a qualification. Not everyone is motivated to return to education and training, but everyone understands the potential contribution of a qualification to accessing employment, earning a decent income, and even having a social role to play in their community.

The fact is that most learning in Enabel's partner countries, because it falls within the overly large informal apprenticeship system (ILO, 2012; LuxDev, 2021), does not lead to qualification, and almost all of the learning outcomes and competences acquired through Enabel are then not visible, and therefore not usable, let alone transferable. No individual project can be built, making a career impossible, and being promoted in one's profession is rare.

### ... for the employer

However, in the case of international mobility, the issues are well perceived. The *Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa* (THAMM) programme, for example, contains a component managed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Moroccan Department of Vocational Education and Training (DFP), to showcase the competences acquired in Morocco by young Moroccans with a mobility project to Europe. The difficulty, for a European employer, to identify the effective competences of a Moroccan candidate for a job is real. This result applies to almost all recruitment situations, with or without mobility. This result can be seen as the relatively recent development of many attempts to document qualifications beyond their simple title (such as "CAP in mechanics", which is not very explicit). For example, there is the diploma supplement in Europe. Enabel would benefit from investing in this field of documentation of qualifications, beyond the simple delivery of these qualifications, for the qualifications that it would have contributed to have delivered<sup>1</sup>.

For a company, having a workforce whose [most] members own a qualification allows it to compete for larger contracts. It also often allows to bid on public sector contracts, and to have access to more attractive

contracts. Finally, it is an important parameter for a successful quality assurance approach.

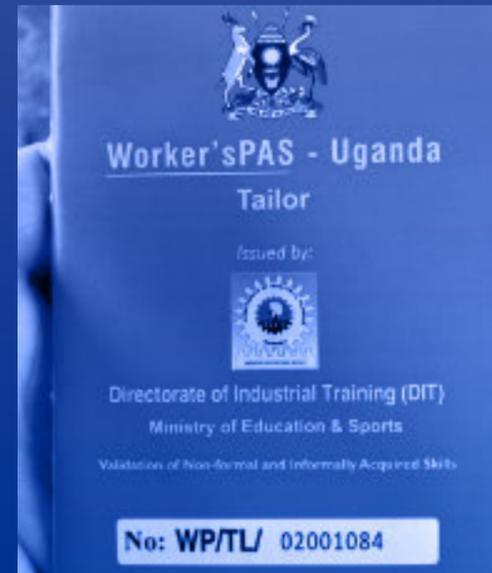
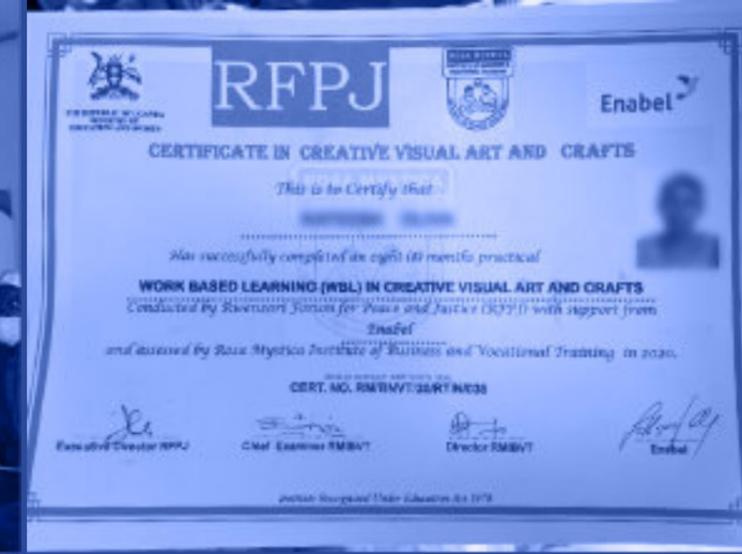
### ... for education and training providers

At a time when most European countries, under the influence of relevant work such as that of the ENIC-NARIC Network<sup>2</sup>, are abandoning the practice of issuing equivalences - because they are too difficult to establish and too binding for education and training providers - the qualification tool is becoming the most useful. Qualification allows education and training providers to distinguish themselves in the highly competitive education and training market, since the quality of education/training-to-work transition is often associated with the qualification held.

In practice, qualification and its accompanying tools - such as sectoral or national qualifications frameworks, qualifications catalogues, micro-credentials, and even RPL as a new route to qualifications - would allow the design of education and training approaches more in line with the Enabel paradigm of linking TVET and employment more directly.

Because there are many bodies awarding qualifications and there are even more qualifications, and because all this is rather positive - to satisfy increasingly specific education and training demands, it is essential to structure the education and training ecosystem to intervene as accurately and as closely as possible to the need. Qualifications - and the tools that accompany it - can act as a coordinating mechanism for the proper governance of the education and training ecosystem. It can identify and address differences in education and training quality and duration. It can help to reconcile the different approaches to education and training, especially when there is a very active private and public sector.

At a time when Enabel is developing a reflection programme with the European Training Foundation (ETF), the various dimensions described here deserve to be highlighted. In particular, they allow to concretely address the development of the employability of the individuals that Enabel has helped to undertake learning activities. They also help to make Enabel's work visible in the national statistics of its partner countries.



## Qualification for Increased Employability: Recognising Learning Outcomes in TVET

Implemented by Sogerom for Enabel



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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the work of Certif-ID (<https://certif-id.com>).

<sup>2</sup> European Network of Information Centres et National Academic Recognition Information Centre

# Issues with Qualification

## Conceptual Clarification

The term "qualification" refers both to a process and to the outcome of that process. It refers to the process that leads to the awarding of a document (qualification) that sanctions a learning process (here in TVET). It is also the name given to this document (qualification) and, in this sense, it is a perfect synonym for the word "paper certificate". It is now preferred in many contexts because it is simple, neutral, and not socially charged: it advantageously replaces the many terms that are juxtaposed, or even telescoped - such as title, degree, and diploma - and, beyond the term, proposes to consider qualification as the mirror of competence, rather than a social status. It has become a tool of labour market access policy in many countries (OECD, 2007).

The term qualification therefore refers to the process of certification of competences by a competent authority, and also to the official document that describes these competences. The word qualification is found in the name of many related expressions such as national qualifications system, national qualifications framework and catalogue of qualifications.

In French, the term qualification is a false cognate. The proper term is "certification" and, in French-speaking countries partners of Enabel, the term "certification" is found in the names of institutions such as the Commission Nationale de la Certification (for Vocational Education and Training) in Burkina Faso (CNC-FP), and tools such as the Cadre National des Certifications in Morocco, or the Répertoire National des Certifications in Burkina Faso. In French, the term qualification refers to the job position and the ability of a person to perform that job. Certification is therefore a matter for the world of education and training, whereas qualification is a matter for the world of work.

## Place of Qualification in the Context of TVET for Employment

One of the main objectives of Enabel is precisely to help build a [more] direct match between the world of education/training (qualification) and the world of work (competences). Indeed, individuals seeking a qualification are most likely to aim to work in the field corresponding to that qualification. In reality, this is often not the case, and it is not uncommon for individuals with a given qualification to work in another field (e.g. a mechanic working as a retail salesperson, or a farmer as a tour guide).

If competences and qualification refer to different concepts, it is still useful to address them together because a natural objective of Enabel's action is to

help set up a system allowing a given qualification to be legitimate so that its holder can apply for a job requiring the corresponding competences. For example, Enabel should aim to ensure that a person with a mason's qualification at a given level can legitimately apply for a mason's job at the level in question without his competences being questioned.

The recurring complaint of employers about the inability of TVET graduates to fully and effectively practice the trade for which they have been trained will disappear once this work of aligning qualifications and competences has taken place. It is clear that this effort will take time and will require a lot of social engineering as it will require the involvement of all stakeholders, first and foremost employers. It is also clear that Enabel's partner countries cannot avoid such an alignment effort.

## Pathways to Qualification for Learners

It is generally considered that there are four potential routes to qualification: the initial education and training system, the continuing education and training system, apprenticeship and the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Not all countries have these four routes but, when they do, the question arises as to whether the same qualification is awarded at the end of the learning and assessment process. When it is not the same qualification, reputation effects come into play: employers generally prefer to hire people with a qualifying route over another, even if the two qualifications are theoretically at the same level. For example, many Enabel partner countries have parallel qualification frameworks (e.g. Burkina Faso, Uganda, Morocco), because there are several bodies awarding qualifications (most of the time Ministries but also national TVET providers).

To rigorously deliver the same qualification at the end of different routes of access to the qualification, it is imperative to use the exact same qualification standards for all the routes leading to the qualification. However, using the same qualification standards for different routes is in fact much more complicated than it seems because the assessment processes are different: one does not assess in the same way in initial education and training as in continuing education and training, in apprenticeship and in RPL. Even when this difficulty is removed - for example, by using indirect means to verify that the evaluation criteria included in the qualification standards are respected - there are still reputational effects, which are almost always unfounded, and which mean that employers often prefer to recruit individuals from initial formal education and training than those who have passed through RPL, for example, even though the law would say that they have the exact same

qualification, because it is based on the same qualification, or assessment, standards.

It is now clear that RPL is a path like any other towards qualification. It is not intended to replace more traditional approaches such as assessment during the education and training period. The fact remains that RPL has the merit of combining a dose of formalisation with apprenticeship when it is informal. Moreover, RPL has the merit of not degrading informal apprenticeship - by far the most widespread mode of vocational preparation in Enabel's partner countries - because it does not propose to formalise it at the root, since it intervenes at the end of the cycle, when the competences have been acquired and it is only a matter of formalising the assessment of learning outcomes and the delivery of a qualification. Countries like Uganda have been using it for decades and its *Directorate for Industrial Training* (DIT) has earned a reputation comparable to the approaches used in Kenya or Malawi (Trade Testing).

## Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Recognition of Qualifications

In this context, it is important to distinguish between the recognition of learning outcomes and the recognition of qualifications. The term recognition is polysemous and often generates a lot of confusion when operationalising RPL programmes, for example. The recognition of learning outcomes refers to the assessment: it is the technical recognition (also called validation), by the assessors who, on the basis of the qualification standards, decide to deliver a qualification.

Recognition of a qualification refers to society's acceptance that the qualification is the proven, and therefore acceptable, evidence of knowledge and competences. It is this societal recognition that gives a qualification its value as a currency in the labour market. It is often difficult for RPL to gain acceptance because important stakeholders in society refuse to consider that a qualification obtained through RPL is the equal of a qualification obtained through initial formal education and training.

## Micro-credentials

Finally, to conclude this clarification of the issues and concepts, many countries are working on developing *micro-credentials* (Cedefop, 2022). The approach is neither new nor truly innovative, but - in its most useful version for Enabel's partner countries - it allows parts of a qualification to be delivered. This approach has the merit of corresponding to many concrete

situations in Enabel's partner countries where young people cannot invest too long in education and training but still need a document attesting to newly acquired competences.

The trend is very clear in Europe, where almost all the content of qualifications is being rewritten in terms of blocks of competences to allow for partial, yet coherent, assessment and the issuing of micro-credentials.

The most widely accepted approach in Europe is to promote micro-credentials only to the extent that it does not compromise the integrity of the national qualifications framework and the coherence of the educational progression between two consecutive levels of the framework.

## Importance of Qualification...

### ... for countries

Making visible the competences of all individuals who have them through qualification has several advantages for a country as a whole, and for the institutions that govern it. This helps to attract foreign investment, for example, which is a proven factor in development.

In general, it may be in the interest of the bodies awarding qualifications to have tools to identify - in terms of content, level and geographical location - the qualifications available to the population in order to better organise the education and training provision and facilitate the matching with the demand for work.

In fact, qualification is moving TVET being the sanction of a learning process to becoming a policy tool and an instrument of steering TVET ecosystem, right up to its encounter with the labour market. Although it does not really exist today in an operational state, the idea of evaluating, and therefore financing, education and training providers on the basis of the [additional] employability provided to graduates by the qualifications they deliver is beginning to emerge. We can see the advantages of this, compared to a more traditional approach based on counting [graduated] teachers, classrooms, equipment and other parameters that are only very weak predictors of a real transfer of knowledge and competences to learners.

### ... for apprentices and learners

Beyond the pride of being awarded a qualification - regularly observed in the field, and useful in creating motivation - any document that describes the learning