

# **AEAA Conference**

Qualification awarding and cross-border recognition: case studies from South Africa, Kenya and Ghana

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# Presentation overview

- About SAQA
- SAQA legislative mandate
- Objectives of the NQF
- SAQA and the NQF
- SAQA's evaluation methodology: verification and comparison
- Qualification awarding and cross-border recognition: case studies from South Africa, Kenya and Ghana
- Conclusion and Recommendations

# ABOUT SAQA



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SAQA) IS A STATUTORY BODY,  
ESTABLISHED IN TERMS OF THE SAQA ACT (NO. 58 OF 1995) AND CONTINUING IN TERMS  
OF THE NQF ACT (NO. 67 OF 2008 AS AMENDED) AND  
ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

## **THE NQF ACT MANDATES SAQA TO**



**DEVELOP AND  
IMPLEMENT A  
NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS  
FRAMEWORK (NQF)**



**ADVANCE THE  
OBJECTIVES OF  
THE NQF**

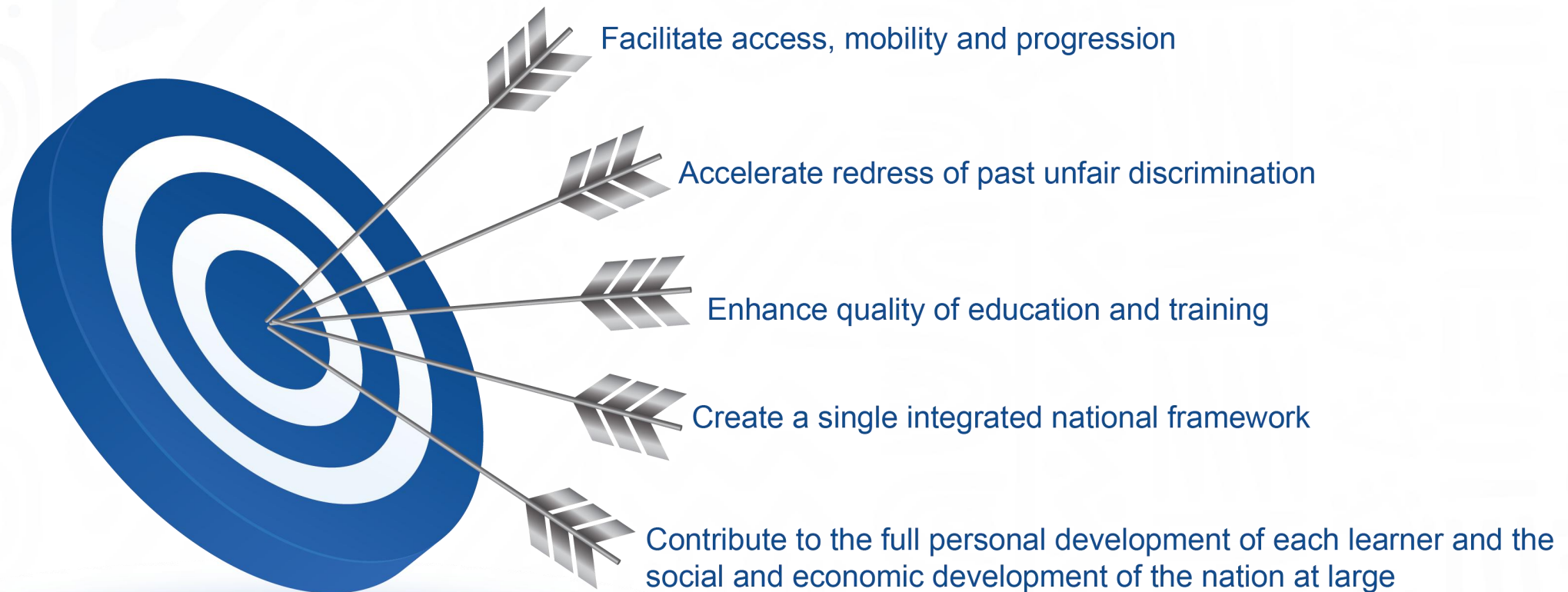


**CO-ORDINATE THE  
SUB-FRAMEWORKS OF  
THE NQF**





# OBJECTIVES OF THE NQF



# NQF

## Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework

## General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework

National Qualifications Framework		
Level	Sub-Framework and qualification types	
10	Doctoral Degree Doctoral Degree (Professional)	*
9	Master's Degree Master's Degree (Professional)	*
8	Bachelor Honours Degree Postgraduate Diploma Bachelor's Degree	Specialised Occupational Diploma Occupational Certificate (Level 8)
7	Bachelor's Degree Advanced Diploma	Advanced Occupational Diploma Occupational Certificate (Level 7)
6	Diploma Advanced Certificate	Occupational Diploma Advanced Occupational Certificate Occupational Certificate (Level 6)
5	Higher Certificate	Higher Occupational Certificate Occupational Certificate (Level 5)
4	National Certificate	National Occupational Certificate Occupational Certificate (Level 4)
3	Intermediate Certificate	Intermediate Occupational Certificate Occupational Certificate (Level 3)
2	Elementary Certificate	Elementary Occupational Certificate Occupational Certificate (Level 2)
1	General Certificate	General Occupational Certificate Occupational Certificate (Level 1)

## Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework

# SAQA's Foreign Qualification Evaluation Mandate

The purpose of SAQA's evaluation function is the recognition of foreign qualifications in terms of the South African National Qualifications Framework Act (NQF Act 67 of 2008)

SAQA Certificate of Evaluation is required in terms of the Department of Home Affairs's Immigration Amendment Act 2007 (Act No. 3 of 2007) gazetted in May 2014 for applications of work visas

SAQA performs the foreign evaluation function as an integral part of a national recognition value chain i.e. For admission to study, professional licensing, employment, and visa applications.

The Certificate of Evaluation does not replace the requirements for admission to university study, professional body registration requirements, and employment requirements within the Republic of South Africa.

# Evolution of Foreign Qualification (FQ) evaluations in South Africa

<b>1957</b>	Credential evaluation started in SA, managed by the former Department of Education, Arts and Science
<b>1969</b>	Evaluation function transferred to the Human Sciences Research Council in terms of (HSRC) HSRC Act 23 of 1968
<b>1999</b>	Evaluation function transferred from HSRC to SAQA
<b>2019</b>	Transitioned to a fully online-based application process for evaluating foreign qualifications
<b>2021</b>	SAQA ceased issuing printed certificates of evaluation – transition to issuing electronic SAQA Certificates of Evaluation (eSCoE)
<b>2025</b>	SAQA transitioned to a fully-automated evaluation system

# EVALUATION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS POLICY AMENDMENT

- Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF (as amended March 2024)
- NQF Act (Act 12 of 2019) amendments - continues SAQA's FQ evaluation mandate and strengthen the Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF
- Promote consistency and transparency in the evaluation process
- The amended NQF Act underscores the importance of fostering and enhancing international collaboration and recognising the value of diverse qualifications within the SA national framework.



# Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications (FQs)

Foreign qualification means a qualification that either:

- (1) forms an intrinsic part of an education and training system other than South Africa and is awarded by an institution that is **accredited or recognised** in that system, in accordance with the relevant laws, policies or generally accepted practice; or
- (2) meets other specific criteria as determined and published by SAQA

**NB: SAQA does NOT evaluate short courses; professional designation certificates; South African qualifications; Trade tests & Competency certificates**

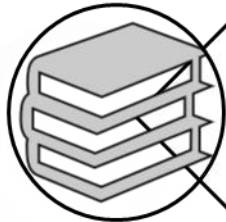


# EVALUATION CRITERIA

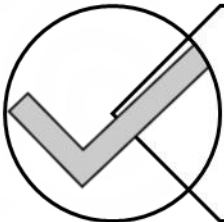
## VERIFICATION



**Awarding institution is recognized/accredited in the home system**



**The qualification forms part of the formal education and training system in the country of origin**

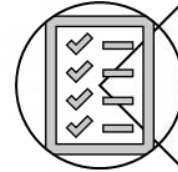


**Authenticity of the document**

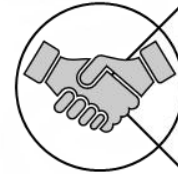


**Addis Convention** – SA is 1 of the 21 countries that ratified  
**Global convention** – SA ratified

## COMPARISON



**Framework to framework**



**Recognition agreements**



**Foreign national system compared to the South African NQF to locate the foreign qualification on the SA NQF**



**Education systems change, historical context is considered**

# School Qualifications - evaluation

If you wrote an external examination to obtain a school qualification, provide (submit to) SAQA with qualification documents issued by the official examining or certification body in the country of origin



SAQA will not issue a Certificate of Evaluation for (mid-way/ incomplete) school-leaving documents that do not certify / reflect **completion** of the qualification, or national school exit levels that were not issued by the relevant authorities (official examining body or Ministry of Education)



SAQA may, however, issue a recommendation outcome advising on the access to further study level of schooling in the form of a letter



Applicants must submit A/AS Level / HIGSCE certificates together with preceding O Level / GSCE results. SAQA will combine the results and not charge you extra for the lower level certificates

# SAQA – Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

## Consider:

Policies and criteria governing qualification types in the 3 NQF Sub-Frameworks of the South African NQF

SAQA applies the Policy and Criteria for the Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF (as amended) March 2024.

## Levels are determined:

In the SA education system, considering:

- duration of the programme
- credit volume
- learning outcomes the level descriptors

## Holistic approach:

- Comprehensive analysis of both the similarities and differences between the foreign education system and the SA education system.
- Analysis of the content of the foreign qualification in comparison with the qualifications registered on the SA NQF.

The student's performance ranking does not determine the NQF level of the South African qualification.



# **Qualification awarding and cross-border recognition: case studies from South Africa, Kenya and Ghana: School-leaving qualifications**

# Purpose of the study

- In-depth exploration of qualification awarding and cross-border recognition systems, criteria, and processes in three selected countries: South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders within the recognition value chain.
- Identify challenges and opportunities in aligning qualification frameworks for regional mobility.
- Share insights, discuss innovative practices, and collaborate to remedy challenges affecting mutual recognition of qualifications within the three countries.

# Why qualifications recognition matters

- Recognition of qualifications for cross-border mobility (mutual recognition of qualifications).
- Access to employment opportunities in host countries.
- Further education purposes.
- Professional licensing and registration (professions such as medicine, teaching, engineering and law require registration or a license to practice).
- Fraud prevention mechanisms through verification.
- Immigration and VISA applications.

# Methodology

- Qualitative approach – for analysing key policies and education frameworks of the three selected countries and conventions, as secondary data.
- Purposive sampling of case studies (South Africa, Kenya and Ghana)
- The study uses content analysis for findings.



# Selected case studies

- South Africa;
- Kenya; and
- Ghana



## School leaving qualifications

SOUTH AFRICA	GHANA	KENYA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>National Senior Certificate (NSC)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE)</li><li>General Certificate of Education (Advanced level)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).</li></ul>

# Country case studies

## SOUTH AFRICA

1. South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) – 10 levels
2. SAQA - oversight body
3. NQF Act – mandate
4. *Policy and Criteria for evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF context as amended in March 2024*
5. SAQA Certificate of Evaluation (SCoE) as a favourable evaluation outcome

## KENYA

1. Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) – 10 levels
2. KNQA – oversight body
3. *Guidelines on Equation of Foreign Certificates* and according to Section 5 (1)(g) of the Universities Act No 42 of 2012; Section 5A (2) of the Universities Act 42 of 2012, Revised Edition 2016 [2015]; Part XI of the Universities Regulations, 2014 and the Universities Standards and Guidelines, 201
4. KNEC - equation letter as a favourable evaluation outcome
- ✓ Commission for the University of Education - letters of recognition and equation of qualifications

## GHANA

1. NO qualifications framework. - Proposed 10 level GNQF under development
2. The Ghana Ministry of Education, in collaboration with regulatory agencies such as the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, Ghana Commission for TVET and the West African Examinations Council, - oversight body for education and training
3. GTEC verifies and evaluates foreign qualifications using the Policy Guide on credential verification and evaluation of academic qualifications Ghana.
4. GTEC issues evaluation outcome as an evaluation report in a letter format.

# Global and Regional Conventions Enabling Credential Evaluation

Year	Convention
1999	Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region
2014	Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States
2019	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications
2019	Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region
	Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education
2022	Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (Buenos Aires Convention)
2023	Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (Global Convention)
Not yet in force	Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States



# Overview of Regional Frameworks

- The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)
- African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF-Level 2)

## Comparative table of national and regional education systems: South Africa, Kenya and Ghana

Feature	South Africa	Kenya	Ghana	ACQF	SADCQF
<b>Qualifications Framework</b>	National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF)	Ghana National Qualifications System (no approved NQF)	African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)
<b>levels</b>	10	10	10	10	10
<b>Credit allocation system</b>	1 credit represents 10 notional hours of learning	1 credit represents 10 notional hours of learning	1 credit represents 10 notional hours of learning	1 credit represents 10 notional hours of learning	1 credit represents 10 notional hours of learning
<b>Focus</b>	National qualifications	National qualifications	National education system	Does not contain specific qualifications, focuses on level descriptors for the benefit of SADC	Does not contain specific qualifications, focuses on level descriptors for the benefit of the continent

**Evaluation of  
foreign  
qualifications by  
SAQA**

**African and  
Global Statistics  
2015 to 2024**

2015 - 2024	NQF Level 4 Schooling	NQF Level 7 Bachelors Degree	NQF Levels 8 and 9 Honours/Masters Degree
%	18%	17%	20%

2015 - 2024	African Countries	Europe	Asia	Other	Total
Number	106 634	30 427	28 637	13 289	<b>178 987</b>
%	60%	17%	16%	7%	

## Top 5 countries in terms of the percentage of evaluated qualifications

2015 - 2024	Zimbabwe	Nigeria	Lesotho	DRC	Ghana
%	37%	13%	9%	7%	4%

Trends and insights in the statistics indicate a substantial decline in evaluations between 2019 and 2021, mainly due to the impact of COVID-19 and its disruption to the South African education system and qualification processing.



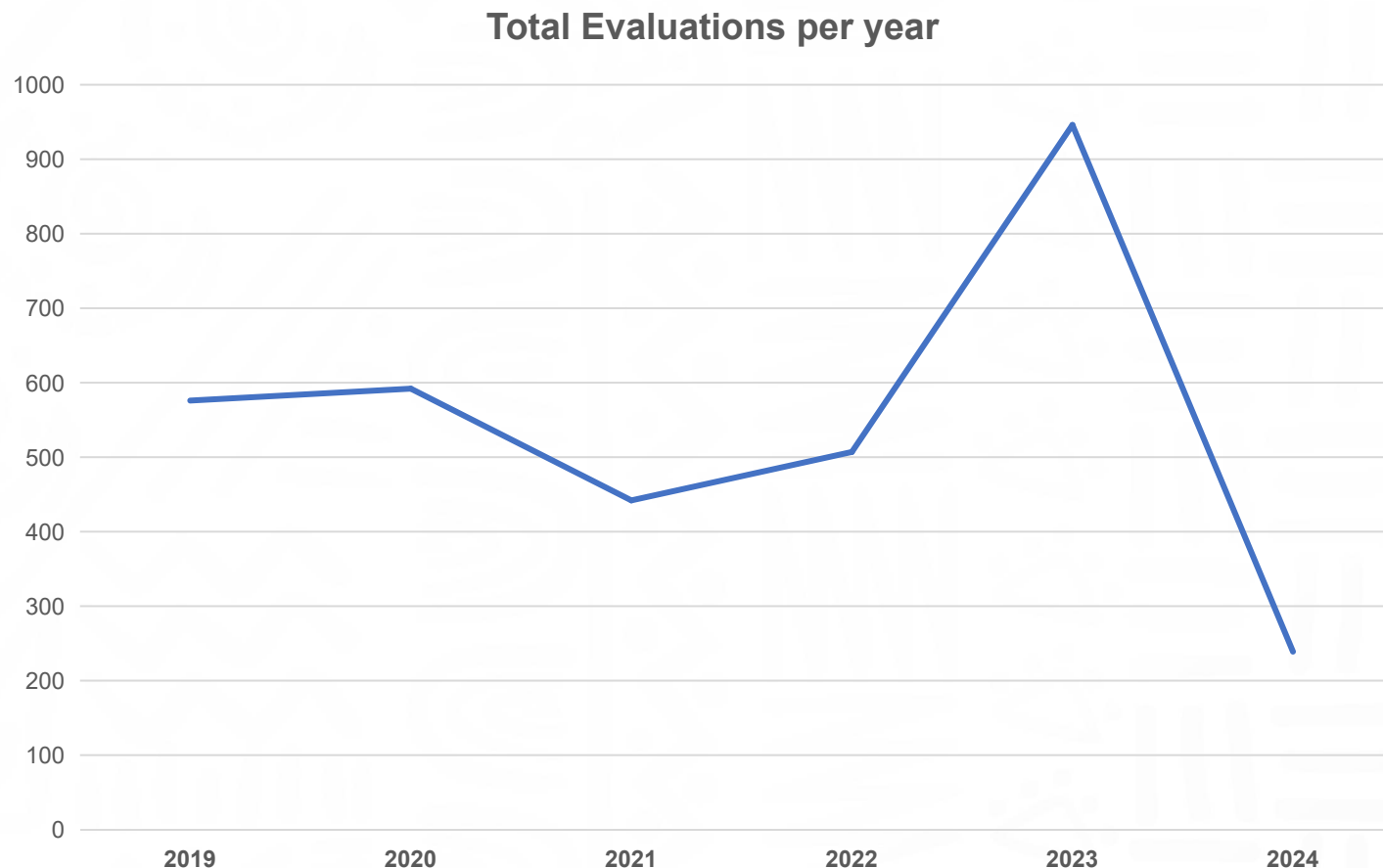
# Evaluation of school leaving qualifications (2015-2024)

2019 to 2025	Kenya	Ghana	Total
Number	1866	1436	3302
%	57%	43%	100%

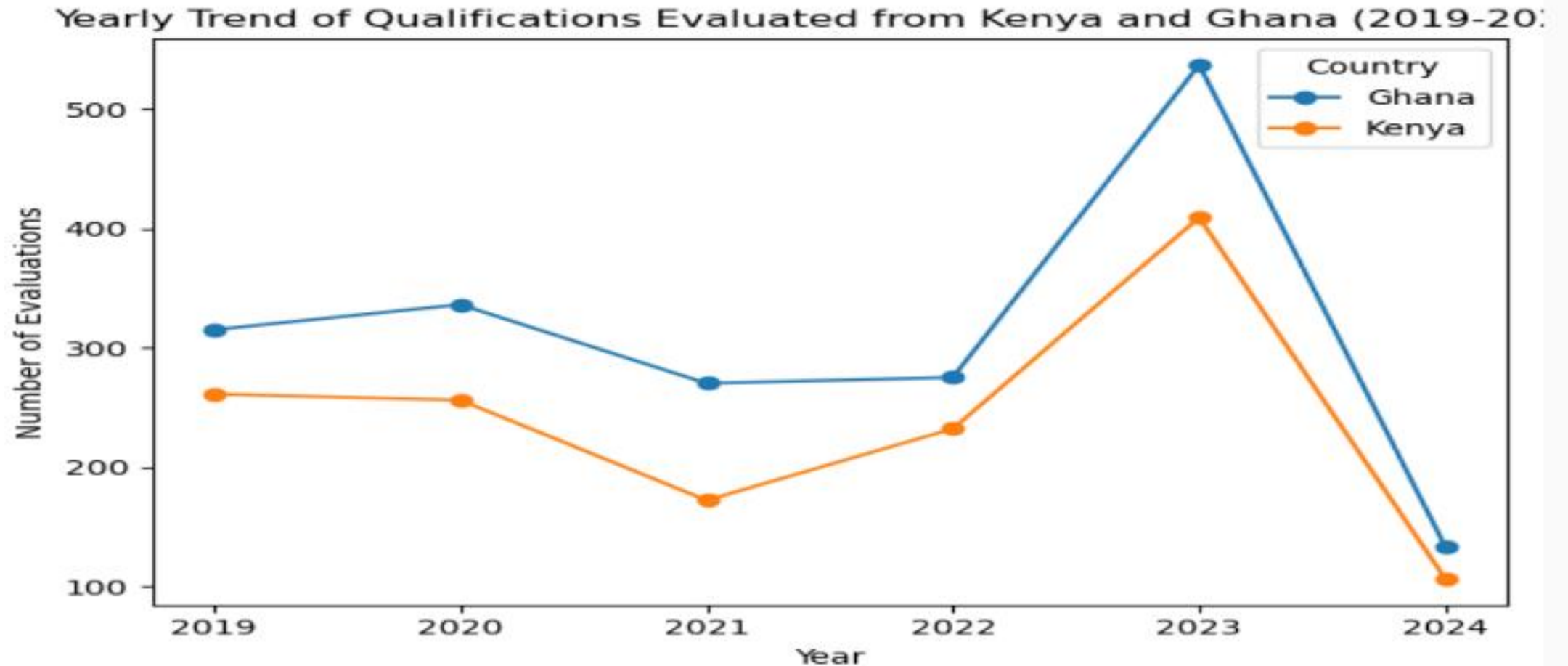
Between 2015 and 2024, evaluation records show that school leaving qualifications at NQF level 4 comprised 18% of the total evaluations. School leaving qualifications play a major role in admission to higher education.

# Kenya and Ghana evaluations yearly trends (2019-2024)

Year	Evaluations
2019	576
2020	592
2021	442
2022	507
2023	946
2024	239



# Trends per country: Ghana and Kenya



## Most frequently evaluated qualifications – Kenya focus

Qualification	Number of qualifications evaluated
Bachelor of Laws	129
Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education	121
Bachelor of Science (Nursing)	52

- There is favourable mobility for students accessing higher education studies and jobs in South Africa.
- The records can be attributed to the aligned NQF level 4 school leaving qualifications and evaluation principles between Kenya and South Africa.

# Cross-country analysis

Area – School education	
School leaving certificate subjects	In all three systems, candidates are required to choose at least 7 subjects for examinations from a combination of compulsory and elective subjects
Admission requirements	Admission requirements for post-secondary school institutions in all three countries, for various programmes, are administered at the institutional level, with institutions implementing their own admission policies
Regulatory body role	Regulatory bodies in the three countries are also similar in admission processes



## Cross-country analysis continues...

Area – Higher Education	Country	
<b>Council on Higher Education (CHE)</b>	South Africa	Responsible for the development and implementation of national guidelines for matters of higher education, informing institutional policies such as admission policies
<b>Commission for University Education</b>	Kenya	Provides guidance to higher education institutions concerning academic and administrative matters, such as admission requirements
<b>Ghana Tertiary Education Commission</b>	Ghana	Establishes national regulations and policies Alignments at the regulatory body levels (such as ministry to ministry or agency to agency) create opportunities for further referencing of systems, policies, frameworks and partnerships

# Cross-country analysis continues...

Area – Access to Higher Education	Country	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. West African Senior School Certificate</li> <li>2. General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)</li> <li>3. West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE)</li> </ol>	Ghana	<p>Give access to higher education qualifications vertically and horizontally articulated to qualifications on the Ghana National TVET Framework.</p> <p>WASSC - gives access to level 5 tertiary qualifications and vocational qualifications on the Ghana TVET Framework.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National Senior Certificate</li> <li>2. National Certificate (Vocational)</li> </ol>	South Africa	<p>Give access to higher education qualifications at level 5 and above, on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub—framework, vertically articulating to qualifications at level 5 and above, of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE)</li> </ol>	Kenya	<p>KCSE - an academic school-leaving qualification that gives access to higher education qualifications and vocational qualifications</p>

# Conclusions

- There are significant similarities between the methodologies used in Kenya, South Africa and Ghana for evaluating foreign qualifications.
- For example, they all charge fees for evaluation of foreign qualifications and verification of local qualifications.
- All three countries use criteria that seek to recognise foreign qualifications meeting the following requirements:
  - (i) qualification that is issued by an accredited or recognised issuing body;
  - (ii) qualification that is accredited or recognised in the country of origin, and
  - (iii) qualification documents that are authentic as confirmed by the issuing body.

# Conclusion

- SAQA has implemented an online-only service for applications and recently launched an automated system to enhance the effectiveness of its service offerings ([www.saqa.org.za](http://www.saqa.org.za)).
- KNEC has also recently launched an automated system for submitting applications for the equation of foreign qualifications (<http://qmis.knec.ac.ke/externalLogin>). CUE also launched an online application facility for individuals and institutions (<https://imis.cue.or.ke/RecognitionAndEquationforQualifications/>).
- Similarly, GTEC has an online application facility for submissions of applications (<https://cems.nab.gov.gh/>).

# Conclusions

- Although there are noticeable similarities in policies implemented by the three countries, there are also differences.
- Ghana and South Africa use the term "*credential evaluation*" to refer to the process leading to recognition of foreign qualifications.
- The term "*equation*" is used in Kenya to refer to the process leading to recognition of foreign qualifications in Kenya.
- Both South Africa and Ghana issue the outcome to the applicant, but the Kenya National Examination Council prohibit the sharing of the outcome with candidates (qualification holders).
- SAQA and GTEC initiate the verification process independently without the direct involvement of the applicant, while the Kenya National Examinations Council requires proof of qualification authenticity to be sent to the CEO's email address, and proof of such correspondence to be attached with the application supporting documentation.



# Recommendations

- **Aligning credential verification policies and processes** - Sector-specific assessment policies and practices, certification policies, quality assurance systems, and qualification frameworks (NQFs, NQSSs, and RQFs) and qualification types (including level descriptors and learning outcomes) will enhance the framework for recognition of qualifications, for cross-border mobility in all fields, including academic schooling, technical and vocational study types.
- In ensuring smooth recognition of these school leaving qualifications across countries, any change in the structure, system, framework or process must first consider implications on the recognition of qualifications across borders.
- **Mutual Recognition Agreements** – Promoting bilateral and multilateral agreements between countries, especially for school-leaving qualifications.

# Recommendations

- **Promote standardisation of verification fees:** standardise fees through regional agreements.
- Promote the development and adoption of secure, digital credentialing systems and networks to enhance the evaluation and verification of qualifications.
- Create a unified continental directory of accredited institutions and recognition authorities.
- **Centralised digital platforms** – Where institutions can log in and update their profiles. Scheduled updates can be coordinated biannually.
- Link national directories with regional platforms such as the ACQF Qualifications and Credentials Platform.



The booklet cover features the SAQA logo, the title 'SAQA NATIONAL VERIFICATION', and an image of a magnifying glass over a document with the word 'Verification' on it.

**Need to know more  
about**  
National Qualification  
Verification and the  
application **?**  
process?

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about  
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*Thank you  
Ngiyathokoza  
Enkosi  
Dankie  
Ngiyabonga  
Kea leboga  
Ndza khensa  
Ndo livhuwa*

