REQUEST RESPONSE

Rapid Review: Exploring Alternative Mechanisms for Recognised Educational Certification in Contexts of Fragmented Governance and Displacement

REQUEST SUBMISSION

As conflict and displacement become increasingly protracted, growing numbers of children and young people complete education without access to recognised and portable certification, particularly in contexts of fragmented governance where authority, quality assurance, and documentation are contested. This review was commissioned to examine the barriers to recognised pre-tertiary certification and to identify plausible recognition pathways, approaching certification as a systemic Education in Emergencies challenge rather than a technical issue of exam delivery. The report is structured as a focused rapid review using a political economy lens, drawing on two case studies (Sudan and Myanmar), secondary sources, and cross-case comparison to analyse actors, incentives, bottlenecks across the accreditation-to-recognition chain, and the implications for equity and inclusion.

ERICC EDUCATION RESEARCH IN CONFLICT AND PROTRACTED CRISIS

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The ERICC Helpdesk provides an expert, demand-driven, high-quality, and agile call-down mechanism for technical assistance to FCDO country offices, implementation partners, and in-country partners. This provides rapid research, evidence synthesis and analysis, and expert advice, as well as the provision of small-scale research linked to program design or evaluation (including replication and implementation science studies). Through this mechanism, we support a strengthened uptake of evidence-based policies and improve value for money in FCDO-supported education programming in key FCDO areas of operation.

This mechanism links to existing and forthcoming FCDO technical assistance resources for education. In addition, with FCDO clients, the Helpdesk seeks to proactively identify areas of interest and collaborate on design and early identification of technical support needs. The Helpdesk roster comprises over 50 highly skilled technical experts and senior researcher specialists from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and partner organisations, with extensive experience in education in conflict-affected contexts.

Disclaimer

The analysis and conclusions presented in this report represent the independent views of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views, policies, or positions of the UK Government, ERICC partner organisations, or the International Rescue Committee.

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ACRONYMS

AACRAO	American Association of Collegiate Registrars & Admissions Officers
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AHEEN	African Higher Education in Emergencies Network
AOSDF	African Occupational Standards Development Framework
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BECA	Basic Education Completion Assessment *(Myanmar)*
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CIS	Council of International Schools
COBIS	Council of British International Schools
DACUM	Developing a Curriculum
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund *(UNHCR)*
DAO	Decentralised Autonomous Organisation
EAC	East African Community
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
EDGE	Electronic Database for Global Education *(AACRAO)*
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EQPR	European Qualifications Passport for Refugees
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
ERO(s)	Ethnic Revolutionary Organisation(s)
EU	European Union
FCAS	Fragile and conflict-affected settings
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office *(UK)*
FMoE	Federal Ministry of Education *(Sudan)*
GCRQ	Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
GSD	Global Secondary Diploma *(Amala)*
IB	International Baccalaureate
IBO	International Baccalaureate Organisation
IDP(s)	Internally Displaced Person(s)
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
I/NGO(s)	International / Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
IRG	Internationally Recognised Government

ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISP	International Schools Partnership
JET	JET Education Services
LLM	Large Language Model
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country(ies)
MENARO	Middle East and North Africa Regional Office *(UNICEF)*
MoE	Ministry of Education
MYP	Middle Years Programme
NEASC	New England Association of Schools and Colleges
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUG	National Unity Government *(Myanmar)*
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation *(UK)*
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency *(UK)*
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSF	Rapid Support Forces *(Sudan)*
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SSPC	State Security and Peace Commission *(Myanmar)*
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service *(UK)*
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNEVOC	International Centre for Technical & Vocational Education & Training
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UQP	UNESCO Qualifications Passport
US	United States

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Children and young people affected by fragmented governance and protracted displacement increasingly complete their education without access to recognised, portable certification. Without such certification, learners are prevented from progressing to higher education, technical and vocational education and training, and formal employment. As a result, individual and national opportunities for stabilisation and recovery are undermined.

Assessment and certification systems are typically organised around summative examinations administered by a single internationally recognised government. These systems assume continuity: stable schooling, safe mobility to examination sites, reliable identity documentation, and efficient, quality-assured administrative procedures. In contexts of fragmented governance and protracted displacement, these conditions are rare. Learning may continue through state, *de facto*, or community provision, but widely recognised certification is available to only the most privileged few.

Review methodology

This rapid review examines barriers to, and plausible pathways for, recognised pre-tertiary certification in fragmented governance contexts. It applies a political economy lens, focusing on actors, incentives, legitimacy claims, and resources, to understand how assessment, certification, and recognition operate under contested authority. Methodologically, it uses a rapid review approach drawing on two case studies (Sudan and Myanmar), publicly available English-language secondary sources, and light-touch key-informant inputs. This is not a "best practice" guide but an analysis of how certification systems function and falter under fragmentation. It also identifies quality standards that would serve pre-tertiary learners in contrast to existing alternative certification models.

Certification in practice

Certification sits at the intersection of four systemic conditions: 1) *Governance and Legitimacy*: Who is viewed as authorised to certify learning?; 2) *Quality Assurance*: Whose credentials do universities, employers, and governments trust?; 3) *Protection and Documentation*: Can learners safely participate in assessments?; and 4) *Administrative Capacity and Financing*: Can providers verify learners, negotiate accreditation and recognition, and issue certificates at scale?

When governance fragments, the formal mandate (who is legally authorised) often diverges from *de facto* capability (who can actually operate assessment and certification systems). Claimant authorities may run competing education systems, and participation can make credentials politically contested. Recognition does not rest solely on the technical merits of accredited content or certified learning assessments. In practice, it often hinges on which authority recognisers treat as legitimate and whether recognising a credential is interpreted as conferring political endorsement.

Displacement and conflict transform already high-stakes examinations into instruments of exclusion. Routine requirements—registration, identity verification, travel to approved sites, and fees—function as gatekeeping mechanisms. Protection risks become embedded in credential pathways when learners must cross conflict lines, present themselves to contested authorities, or make inherently risky political statements about their affiliations. Barriers disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including adolescents, internally displaced persons (IDPs), language minorities, and learners without legal status. IDPs face particular constraints: unlike refugees who may access

international protection frameworks facilitating recognition pathways, IDPs remain formally under the authority of the state they may be fleeing, often facing fewer legal and administrative options.

Case study insights

In Myanmar, at least half a dozen education systems operate (including the State Security and Peace Commission *junta*, National Unity Government, multiple ethnic revolutionary organisations, faith-based and community systems). Each issues its own credentials; mutual recognition is limited and political, requiring movement across contested lines.

In Sudan, the Federal Ministry of Education remains the sole issuer of widely recognised secondary certificates, but access is largely limited to Sudanese Armed Forces-controlled areas or special arrangements in Chad. Learners in Rapid Support Forces-controlled regions face near-total exclusion unless they risk sitting the national exam.

In both cases, a majority of school-age children are already out of school (53% and 73%, respectively). Stringent exam requirements, protection risks, and mobility constraints push most children out of formal certification pathways entirely.

Existing mechanisms and emerging alternatives

Existing mechanisms—such as the UNESCO Qualifications Passport and the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees—primarily support refugees with existing credentials seeking tertiary recognition. They offer little for secondary-level learners who lack certification, especially IDPs and undocumented populations. UNHCR supports such refugees seeking recognition, through its "15by30 Roadmap: Expanding Higher Education, Skills and Self-Reliance for Refugees."

Emerging alternatives aim to circumvent certain bottlenecks, including competency-based models (Amala's Global Secondary Diploma) and new secondary-equivalent examinations (Alsama G12++). Each shows promise but faces challenges that can be addressed only through multi-stakeholder collaboration: sustainability at scale, cost, language barriers, infrastructure requirements, and—critically—recognition by universities, employers, and governments that matter to learners.

Pathways forward

Durable solutions require treating assessment, certification, and recognition as an interconnected ecosystem rather than a technical fix focused on exam administration. Recognition is not an end-stage administrative task; it must shape alternative mechanism design from the outset. Those responsible for accrediting, assessing, and certifying learning must be credible to entities that will subsequently recognise issued certificates. Similarly, learner protection must be built into the design rather than appended; otherwise, marginalisation will be duplicated.

Key principles for durable alternative certification mechanisms include: 1) *early recognition strategy*: Engaging universities, TVET providers, employers, and host governments from the outset; 2) *multi-stakeholder governance*: Avoiding reliance on a single service provider; separating accreditation, assessment, certification, and quality assurance roles enhances transparency and credibility; 3) *modular, competency-based assessments*: Reducing reliance on high-stakes, one-off examinations that intensify marginalisation under displacement; 4) *protection-centred design*: Minimising hazardous travel, leveraging multi-touchpoint competency-based assessments, enabling flexible identity verification, and reducing exposure to contested authorities; and 5) *robust quality assurance*: Ensuring auditability can shift recognition decisions from political judgment toward technical trust.

In fragmented governance contexts, recognised certification is simultaneously a technical, political, and protection problem. Without alternative mechanisms that earn legitimacy, ensure safety, and operate across political lines, the majority of conflict-affected learners will remain excluded from recognised learning pathways and the futures they enable.

II. INTRODUCTION

This review addresses a persistent challenge: as conflict and displacement become increasingly protracted, more children and young people complete their education without recognised certification. Using a political economy lens, the study assesses the actors involved in recognised certification, their incentives, the barriers they face, and the resultant impacts on learners' and communities' coping strategies. As such, it approaches the challenge not as a logistical challenge in exam "delivery," but as a systems issue. It is built on an understanding of how certification and recognition function in stable state contexts and unpacks how these systems function or struggle in fragmented governance contexts. In these contexts, inequities linked to gender, displacement status, disability, language, and poverty are often augmented. It also recognises that recognition differs by legal status: refugees may benefit from international protection frameworks, while unrecognised "migrants" do not. IDPs remain formally under the authority of the state from which they may be fleeing, creating distinct barriers to certification and advancement.

Certification: Formal assurance that an individual has successfully achieved a defined set of learning outcomes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, n.d.-b).

Recognition: Having official status/acceptance of prior learning granted by an authorised body (ENIC-NARIC Networks, 2014).

The study adopts a focused design—two cases, depth over breadth, and no systematic primary data—to synthesise available evidence on how recognition operates in fragmented governance contexts and where bottlenecks arise. Recognised certification is commonly impeded by contested authority and political non-recognition, weak or incompatible quality-assurance arrangements, and documentation barriers that prevent learners from registering for exams, receiving results, or demonstrating credentials. These blockages matter for inclusion. When certification is not portable or trusted, the most marginalised learners are effectively excluded from durable learning, employment pathways, and long-term solutions.

III. APPROACH AND ANALYTICAL LENS

Review methodology

This rapid review examines barriers and options to obtain recognised pre-tertiary certification in fragmented governance contexts. Its interest is specifically young people who *do not already hold a recognised secondary certificate*—a population distinct from learners seeking recognition of existing credentials through qualification passports, bridging programmes, or university waiver schemes.

The review applies a political economy lens, focusing on actors, incentives, legitimacy claims, and resources, to understand how assessment, certification, and recognition operate under contested authority. Methodologically, it uses a rapid review approach, drawing on two case studies (Sudan and

Myanmar), publicly available English-language secondary sources, and light-touch key-informant inputs from stakeholders operating in, or open to working in, fragmented governance settings. Key informant engagement was limited with a prioritisation for a review of existing literature.

The study is organised around four objectives. First, it clarifies the core assessment and certification functions and the meaning of recognition and equivalency. It examines how they function in stable and fragmented contexts. Second, it explores the consequences of recognition and non-recognition for learners' pathways. These first two objectives are addressed through two comparative case studies. Third, it identifies and critically appraises assessment and certification models, assessing strengths, limitations, risks, and potential for adaptation or scaling in fragmented governance contexts. Finally, it highlights key questions for stakeholders to consider as they assess the minimum quality assurance strategies required for durable solutions.

Assessment: A process used to determine what learners know and can do (learning progress/outcomes), often also used to support next learning steps (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d.).

Examination: A (usually standardised) test that evaluates learning. Has a formal consequence for progression/completion (e.g., eligibility to progress or complete an officially recognised degree) (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023).

Limitations

This rapid review is not a "best practice" guide, nor an exhaustive assessment of all certification mechanisms or providers. It does not conduct case-by-case risk assessments or extensive cost-effectiveness analysis. Instead, it identifies systemic patterns across existing alternatives and establishes core principles for durable solutions. In-scope topics meriting deeper exploration are noted as areas for future discussion and research.

The study's rapid nature, reliance on available secondary data, and small cohort of informants are inherent limitations. The aim is to map the political economy of certification under fragmentation and establish a foundation for subsequent, more extensive inquiry.

IV. ASSESSMENTS, CERTIFICATION, & RECOGNITION MECHANISMS

A. Introduction to stakeholders

The following section summarises the key stakeholders involved in the study's topic. It shows how each stakeholder functions in the space, rather than their legal status, since various entities with differing legal statuses often play similar roles.

1. Governments and *de facto* authorities

Governments can be internationally recognised (IRG) or *de facto* governing entities, including armed non-state groups. IRGs are often the curriculum source, education provider, accrediting body, and assessment and certification bodies, and are also drivers of recognition and equivalence. Through a

***de facto*:** Existing or operating in practice/in reality, even without strict legal authority or formal legal status (Cornell Law School, 2022).

political economy lens, governments inherently see people under their purview as resources. They influence the sociopolitical reality. Under international humanitarian doctrine, governments are responsible for the well-being of their citizens via the principle of the responsibility to protect (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, n.d.). Under international humanitarian law, refugees with protected status theoretically have similar rights. *An example from this study would be the National Unity Government in Myanmar, or the Sudan Armed Forces-supported Federal Government of Sudan, both de facto governing entities.*

2. Households

Households are the primary consumers of education services. They make decisions about which curricula, accreditations, assessments, certifications, and recognition standards are worth their investment. Investment can take the form of direct, indirect, and opportunity costs associated with pursuing certified learning. *An example from this study would be heads of households in State Security and Peace Commission zones of control in Myanmar or Rapid Support Forces zones of control in Sudan.*

Accreditation: A formal process in which an officially approved body evaluates an institution/programme or learning outcomes against standards and formally recognises it (and/or awards equivalences, credits, or qualifications) (UNESCO-UNEVOC, n.d.-a).

3. Multi-lateral organisations, for-profit entities, and (I)NGOs

These organisations sometimes serve as intermediaries between the supply side (education service providers, accreditors, assessors, certification bodies, and recognising entities) and the demand side (households that consume these services). At the same time, each of these entities can and often do play a direct role as a supply-side provider. *An example from this study would be Alsama, Pearson, or UNESCO.*

4. Tertiary institutions, employers, and industry associations

These entities often function as practical "standard-setters" for what competencies, skills, and knowledge are prioritised in post-secondary pathways. Learners on an academic pathway are shaped by the entry requirements and preferences of colleges and universities (i.e., subject prerequisites, grades, language requirements, and the perceived credibility of specific exam boards). Learners on vocational or technical pathways are shaped by what employers and industry bodies reward in the labour market (i.e., occupational competencies, licensing requirements, or proof of supervised practice). In fragmented contexts, these downstream gatekeepers can become *de facto* arbiters of recognition and equivalence: even if learning is assessed locally, universities and employers determine whether credentials are accepted for admission, credit transfer, or hiring. *Examples from this study include the University of Cambridge and the African Higher Education in Emergencies Network.*

B. In stable-state contexts

1. Functions and responsible stakeholders

The following section introduces the standards for assessment, certification, and recognition in stable-state contexts, using the UK as an example.

Numerous actors are involved in several distinct yet interrelated processes of assessment and certification. Fundamentally, states are responsible for certifying the assessment of learning for

education occurring within their borders or under their mandates. Recognition flows from this process; if a state is recognised and considered legitimate, so too are certificates issued under its authority, thereby increasing the likelihood of its recognition. While most countries have national regulatory frameworks for recognising foreign qualifications, implementation varies across countries. This variance is fed by factors such as language, terminology, and differences in criteria. As a result, recognition is often decentralised in practice (e.g., across universities), even when, in theory, the mandate is state-level (Boces, 2025).

In a stable-state system like the UK, different actors control different functions, and the system's legitimacy depends on how those roles are distributed, checked, and socially accepted. The state (through the Department for Education) sets curriculum standards. This is an inherently political act because it defines what counts as learning. The government's Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) regulates qualifications and standards to protect public confidence and comparability. Pearson is an awarding organisation and sets assessment standards and processes. Its incentives are tied to reputation, market position, and continued regulatory approval. Universities and employers are the ultimate "consumers" of credentials: their admissions and hiring decisions effectively determine what is recognised and what is valuable.

These stable-state examples show that legitimacy is produced through the separation of roles, transparency, oversight, and routinised procedures. The test for fragmented governance contexts is: without a shared agreement about authority, trust, and enforcement capacity, how can legitimacy and thus recognition be assured?

2. Summary of current practices and options

The following section outlines how equivalency and recognition of learning certifications function in stable-state contexts.

Ongoing reliance on centrally proctored, high-stakes, summative exams. Upper secondary leaving credentials and/or national entrance exams are the dominant access mechanism to post-secondary opportunities in many systems (UNESCO, 2022b; Atherton, 2021). This standard was documented in the 1974 UNESCO Regional Convention on Recognition and remains a norm today (UNESCO, 1974). A cross-cultural snapshot shows how normative they are. In Jordan, applicants to higher education must hold a *Tawjihi*, the General Secondary Education Certificate (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research—Jordan, 2025). Similarly, India uses "common and uniform" admission tests for undergraduate entry (National Testing Agency, n.d.; Ranjan, 2024). In the UK, university entry is typically based on the most rigorous secondary-level A-level exam grades (UCAS, n.d.; University of Oxford, n.d.).

While some universities or hiring entities offer non-traditional competency assessment methods, they are inherently more time-intensive and costly for both the offering entity and the individual. These may include portfolio evaluation, interviews, and diagnostic tests, conditional recognition/admission, including conditional acceptance of documentation without apostille/consular legalisation in some contexts, or partial validation (Boces, 2025).

Growing acceptance of stackable, micro-credentialing. Micro-credentialing is increasingly normalised in the adult and lifelong learning spaces. They better match today's labour market realities: policy and provider interest is being driven by upskilling/reskilling demand, including for workers facing automation and changing skill needs, and by pressure on education/training systems to become more flexible, targeted, and learner-centred for diverse adult learners (OECD, 2023).

Micro-credentials: Records of assessed learning outcomes from a small volume of learning (e.g., a short course or training). They are designed to certify specific knowledge/skills/competences, are owned by the learner, are shareable/portable, may be standalone or stackable, and should be underpinned by quality assurance (Council of the European Union, 2022).

Stackable credentials: Short, assessed learning credentials that document specific learning outcomes (skills/competencies) and are owned by the learner, portable, and shareable. They are "stackable" because they can be combined over time into larger credentials (for example, bundled into a certificate, counted toward credit, or used alongside recognition of prior learning to contribute toward a broader qualification), rather than being only stand-alone macro achievements (Council of the European Union, 2022; UNESCO, 2022a).

Its growth is concomitant with improvements in access to digital learning opportunities and lower-cost short courses, as well as with increasingly sustained higher costs and access barriers to formal/traditional tertiary education. It also builds on the evidence supporting *in situ*, professional practice-adjacent training over traditional tertiary education, as well as the growing valuation of non-traditional, non-formal education pathways (Jones et al., 2016; Blume et al., 2010; and Card et al., 2018). In 2025, a Qatari parastatal entity began exploring micro-credentialing at the pre-tertiary level (personal communication, 2026). In South Africa, a newly introduced General Education Certificate, available at the end of intermediate school, is a policy response to a stagnant rate of workforce entry among those who do not complete secondary education (AACRAO EDGE, 2021). The International Labour Organisation (2025) is also exploring opportunities for micro-credentials for youth.

Recognition frameworks are most helpful when the person seeking recognition: a) has pre-existing upper secondary, TVET, or tertiary level certificates; b) has a certificate issued by a single internationally recognised state; and c) is mobile by choice or has recognised protected status. The majority of recognition frameworks at the national, regional, and global levels focus on legal and normative standards for the cross-border recognition of secondary and tertiary education qualifications and on practical guidance on how recognition authorities should implement them consistently. They are positioned to support entry into or continuation at the tertiary level. This is true of UNESCO's Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications (GCRQ) concerning Higher Education (2019, 2025b), UNESCO's Qualifications Passport (UQP) (UNESCO, 2025c), ASEAN's qualifications framework, the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), and the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), amongst others. Most of these guidelines describe implementation through national structures, regional networks, and member state councils. They explicitly frame recognition as linked to international cooperation and reducing barriers across borders.

C. For forcibly displaced populations

1. Political economy analysis

For forcibly displaced learners, the "value" of learning depends as much on what was learned as it does on who assessed and certified it, who is willing to recognise it, and why. In fragmented or cross-border governance, multiple actors compete to set rules: (internationally) recognised ministries and *de facto* non-state ministries, exam providers and boards, host country governments, regulators, regional and continental bodies, and international agencies and donors. Each has incentives—protecting sovereignty, signalling legitimacy, managing migration/labour-market access, or reducing political risk. Recognition decisions often reflect institutional and ideological alignments as much as standards or quality. The common challenge is to create and maintain an immutable, portable, widely recognised proof of learning tied to a single person, while navigating "red lines" around endorsing *de facto* authorities.

Immutable: Unchangeable (record); cannot be modified after it is created (UNESCO, 2018).

Five factors facilitate the assessment, certification, and/or recognition of prior learning for forcibly displaced populations. These are:

1. **The seeker is a refugee.** Refugees have a legally protected status that allows them to enrol in local schools. These options are not open to people forcibly displaced without refugee status, including people under temporary protection (Syrians in Türkiye), migrants (Myanmarese in Thailand), or IDPs.
2. **The person seeking recognition already holds a macro-credential,** namely a secondary or tertiary completion certificate or diploma.
3. **A widely recognised accrediting entity oversaw the delivery of curricular content.**
4. **A single internationally recognised government issued the certificate**.
5. **The certificate is based on a summative exam** proctored by a trusted internationally recognised government or exam board.

Macro-credential: Long-form qualifications—typically degrees, diplomas, certificates, and licences—usually awarded by accredited/recognised institutions. They signal achievement across a broad body of knowledge and transferable/technical skills, often taking years to complete, and are frequently tied to eligibility for professions or career pathways (UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, n.d.).

2. Frameworks and programmes

Multi-national entities, civil society, and private-sector entities have attempted to improve access to accredited learning, assessment, certification, and recognition for children affected by fragmented governance. The primary resources include:

a. Multi-national frameworks (regional)

UNICEF MENARO's Sahabati model: *Sahabati* emerged from a multi-country study and convening process initiated in 2013. It focused on how forcibly displaced Syrian children could access recognised learning pathways and ultimately obtain accredited certification across Syria and key host countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt) (UNICEF MENARO, 2015). Meaning "My Cloud" in Arabic, it was envisioned as self-learning kits and an e-learning programme that would teach four core subjects (Arabic, English, math, and science) through an online assessment and certification system. It was

envisioned to be covered in 1-2 years of self-directed study. The Ministry of Education under then-President Assad was the only entity approached by UNICEF that was willing to certify learning through *Sahabati* (personal communication, 2026). While never formally launched, elements of *Sahabati* were incorporated into the UNICEF Learning Passport platform, which functions as an access point to various state-sponsored curricula (Learning Passport, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, 2021, 2024; UNICEF, 2025; personal communication, 2026). It was also influenced by UNRWA Syria's hybridised curriculum, which combines core subjects from the Damascus-based Government of Syria (under President Assad) with elements of the State of Palestine's curriculum (personal communication, 2026).

Challenges/limitations:

Multi-year, self-directed study: First, children's capacity for self-directed learning and self-regulation develops gradually across childhood and adolescence, meaning that—particularly for younger learners—effective learning typically depends on co-regulation and structured facilitation rather than independent study alone (Montroy et al., 2016; Shao et al., 2023). Second, evidence from LMIC and FCAS settings shows that "self-study only" approaches tend to underperform compared with facilitated or scaffolded models (e.g., structured pedagogy, tutoring, or guided low-tech learning), including during periods of school disruption (Angrist et al., 2022; Piper & Dubeck, 2024).

Digital-based learning: Providing content on an online platform was unrealistic given the conditions of increasing impoverishment under active conflict, including the costs and gendered barriers to internet access.

Exclusion of children: The certifying body, the Ministry of Education under then-President Assad, would only allow children in Syria to participate. This policy excluded children living in contexts of fragmented governance in Syria and Syrian refugees.

The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees: The EQPR is a standardised document issued by the Council of Europe (n.d.). It contains information on the highest qualification(s) achieved, academic discipline, other relevant qualifications, the document holder's relevant work experience, and language proficiency. The evaluation methodology combines an assessment of available documentation and a structured interview.

Challenges/limitations: It is not a formal form of recognition and is available only to documented refugees. The document provides credible information relevant to employment, internships, qualification courses, and admission to studies. It also presumes that seekers have the resources to reach an EU member state.

The East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE) is a regional framework developed within the East African Community (EAC), coordinated by the Inter-University Council for East Africa, to make higher-education qualifications across EAC Partner States more comparable, readable, and portable. It classifies qualifications using a convergence scale of levels (from certificate to doctorate). It promotes a learning-outcomes approach, enabling qualifications to be understood and compared across different national systems. The framework is designed to expand mobility between countries, institutions, and education levels; support employability and skills development; and facilitate lifelong learning, including through provisions for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It also links to a broader EAC agenda of harmonising education systems to support regional integration and the Common Market, with practical "operationalisation policies" such as the issuance of qualifications, pathways, registers, alignment guidelines with national frameworks, benchmarking, and RPL roles (Sehoole & Jowi, 2020).

Relatedly, an unpublished study examined the African Occupational Standards Development Framework (AOSDF) as a practical policy instrument to help close labour-market/skills gaps (Keevy

et al., unpublished). It emphasised that occupational standards could strengthen productivity and work quality, improve the relevance of training to industry needs, support the recognition of skills, and enable worker mobility and clearer comparisons of competence. It is proposed not as a single prescriptive continental template, but more as a coordination instrument that promotes the use of recognised methodologies (e.g., DACUM[1] or functional analysis) while still enabling national/regional contextualisation. Thus, systems become more comparable without forcing uniformity. It identifies several feasible "starting points" for AOSDF prototyping, including sector-occupational maps that inform national standards, priority/generic national standards, and the use of existing regional standards.

A key proposal is a prototyping phase: an iterative, test-and-refine approach grounded in a participatory tripartite process (government, employers, worker organisations), explicitly to improve robustness, reduce duplication, and manage the costs/risks of standards development.

Challenges/limitations: The EAQFHE is higher-education-focused and relies on member-state participation within a common market.

b. Multi-national frameworks (global)

UNESCO's Qualifications Passport: In the UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP) model, candidates seeking a UQP must already have certificates in hand, which they seek to have recognised beyond the issuing agency (UNESCO, n.d.-a). They must approach the relevant national authorities seeking recognition. A credential evaluator screens eligibility and conducts an interview-based evaluation before a UQP is issued. Under the UQP, recognition remains a state-linked gatekeeping function, even when UNESCO provides a tool to support it. UQP aligns with the Council of Europe/EQPR approach and is intended to ensure a consistent QA framework for global-level evaluations.

Challenges/limitations: In its current function, the UQP can only assist someone who has a certification that is already likely to be assessed as equivalent by another certifying body. UQP is a policy workaround: it supports recognition of prior learning "in line with national legal and policy frameworks." *Legitimacy is maintained by aligning the mechanism with the state and cannot function in contexts of fragmented governance.*

UNHCR (via its 15by30 Roadmap): Its 15by30 Roadmap sets out UNHCR and partners' strategy to help 15% of refugee youth enrol in higher education by 2030. It frames higher education as central to refugee self-reliance, inclusion in national systems, and longer-term solutions. The report reviews the main "pathways" through which refugees can access post-secondary learning and skills: including national enrolment, TVET, UNHCR's mainly German-funded DAFI scholarship programme, and alternative pathways (including third-country opportunities and connected higher education) (UNHCR, 2023). In addition to the UQP model, best practices for certifying prior learning highlighted in the 15by30 roadmap include alternative forms of identity confirmation beyond national passports, supporting acquisition/certification of alternative documentation to confirm credentials and prior learning and developing and implementing self-service tools for refugees to report their credentials.

[1] DACUM job/occupational analysis are services provided through Ohio State University. They can inform assessment and testing and underpin professional certification and licensing by clarifying what competent performance requires. Clients have been in over 60 countries over 40 years, including government agencies and universities such as UC Berkeley. (DACUM, n.d.)

Challenges/limitations: These alternative ways of recognising prior learning and validating credentials are not consistently applied and vary significantly according to context and policy application. Furthermore, forcibly displaced youth may not possess or be unable to obtain proof of prior learning due to disrupted education.

c. Private sector, tertiary institutions, and civil society initiatives

Amala Education: Amala's Global Secondary Diploma (GSD) is a 15-month, upper-secondary-level programme and associated qualification. It is designed for displaced youth, enabling learners who are out of school to complete secondary education through flexible, blended delivery and structured pathways advising (Amala Education, n.d.-a). The programme targets adolescents and youth who are refugees, asylum seekers, or otherwise crisis-affected (including host-community learners), who are not currently enrolled in, or have not completed, secondary education, are fluent in English, and can work at the upper secondary (ISCED 3) level (Amala Education, n.d.-a). Delivery is currently English-medium, combining educator-led in-person learning with independent online work (about 20 hours/week in the "standard" model) (Amala Education, n.d.-a). Amala currently runs the GSD directly in Kakuma refugee camp (Kenya) and Amman (Jordan) (Amala Education, n.d.-b).

The GSD is built around ten courses across five streams, plus a Personal Interest Project (roughly 50 hours) and a pathway advising component (Amala Education, n.d.-a). Assessment is explicitly competency-based and non-exam: students submit evidence of learning across seven competency areas (including sustainable innovation, leading change, self-navigated learning, intercultural understanding, technical/scientific/numerical literacy, problem solving, and critical thinking), which are converted into credits and captured in a digital transcript through the Mastery Transcript Consortium partnership (Amala Education, n.d.-a).

The programme is jointly accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), following a three-year accreditation process (Amala Education, n.d.-c; Amala Education, 2025; Council of International Schools, 2024). All-inclusive programme costs are typically borne by Amala and range from £2,000/student (Jordan) to £1,000/student (Kenya) (personal communication, 2025). Amala is exploring franchising to scale its model. With scaling comes quality assurance challenges.

Challenges/limitations: Amala participants must have existing legal status in the places where they seek to participate in the in-person, 15-month secondary-level programme. This is inherently limiting for many forcibly displaced populations. Additionally, they must be functionally fluent in English, which limits the cohort eligible for this model and excludes the majority of forcibly displaced learners. Finally, while it is laudable that they use a novel competency-based, non-summative assessment style and transcript, the acceptance of a non-traditional certificate will be limited.

Alsama: Alsama's G12++ programme is a standardised high school–equivalent examination and certificate. "G12" stands for grade 12 high-school level capabilities, and "++" stands for mastery of essential life skills. It is designed specifically for displaced persons whose education has been disrupted and who lack an officially recognised secondary credential. A small cohort (17) will sit the first exam in February 2026. The G12++ assesses five modular areas—Applicable Maths, Scientific Thinking, English as a Second Language, Arabic as a First Language, and "Life Success Skills." Skills Builder accredits the "Life Success Skills" component and assesses candidates' essential skills at advanced/mastery levels (Skills Builder Global, n.d.). The assessment is conducted digitally, including

via remote proctoring, with test takers sitting the exam at the centre they normally attend (Fund for Innovation in Development, n.d.; personal communication, 2026; Alsama Project, n.d.; HundrED, 2025).

The model is explicitly curriculum-agnostic; it is intended to gauge real-world capabilities rather than rote recall. It is a summative, exam-based assessment currently available primarily in English; sitters must demonstrate at least B2 and ideally C1 level fluency, which corresponds to the intermediate to advanced level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (EF SET, n.d.). Like the EQPR and UQP, it is positioned as a shared "common tool" that can make admissions and recruitment decisions easier for universities. While EQPR and UQP address this through recognition frameworks, the G12++ approach treats it as a certification mechanism (Alsama Project, n.d.; University of Leicester, 2025). Alsama frames the exam as deliverable in typically "tough to reach" settings, such as refugee camps. It is priced at approximately £15, a cost borne by NGO partners (Alsama Project, n.d.; Fund for Innovation in Development, n.d.; personal communication, 2026). By 2030, they intend to offer the exam in additional languages as needed. One component of their quality assurance model is to allow only identity-verified candidates to sit the exam, which may be taken only twice within 8 weeks (personal communication, 2026). A protection-related element is that test takers must be enrolled in legally registered schools or in an NGO-provided non-formal education programme, with proof of a significant relationship with the candidate (e.g., 12+ months of service).

Alsama's programme is facilitated by first establishing partnerships with universities. Currently, it has five such agreements (Cambridge University, the University of Leicester, Arizona State University, Moravian University, and the University of Business and Science in Lebanon), all of which have agreed to accept the certificate as an admissions tool. Alsama is exploring partnerships with additional universities worldwide, including in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. These potential partners have either expressed a need for a solution such as the G12++ for admissions or are exploring collaboration on research into the beneficial impact of the G12++ for youth who earn this certification. Alsama is also working with assessment bodies such as Cambridge Assessment and digital assessment platforms such as Questionmark and Ecctis, which is providing equivalency benchmarking against UK RQF levels 2 and 3. (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.-b, 2025).

Challenges/limitations: The Alsama model relies on the traditional summative, in-person, high-stakes exam approach to assessing learning. It also offers assessments only in English, excluding large cohorts of forcibly displaced learners. It is a new model, and scaling it will take time and a strong quality assurance system.

International Baccalaureate®: The International Baccalaureate Organisation (IB) offers a suite of internationally benchmarked curricular content and credentials at the pre-tertiary level. IB provides curriculum, assessment, and certification standards. This means that IB is a content provider, an accrediting body, and a certificate issuer.

Programmes are delivered by schools that are formally authorised and periodically evaluated by the IB Organisation. IB programme standards and an evaluation cycle are the core quality-assurance mechanisms (International Baccalaureate, 2025a; International Baccalaureate, 2020). In England, selected IB assessment components—most notably its Middle Years Programme e-Assessment—have an added layer of legitimacy (International Baccalaureate, 2016b, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). This is because they are accepted/regarded by Ofqual and entered on the Register of Regulated Qualifications, signalling alignment with national regulatory expectations for quality and comparability (International Baccalaureate, 2016a; GOV.UK, n.d.).

Institutional credibility for IB-delivering schools is often reinforced through parallel school inspection and accreditation systems. These include: a) UK government-appointed inspection arrangements and published inspection reporting (Independent Schools Inspectorate, n.d.; UK Department for Education, 2025); b) Cognia, which functions as a global, non-profit accreditation body (Cognia, n.d.; International Baccalaureate, 2024); and c) membership associations such as COBIS, which can also provide an additional (optional) accreditation and school-improvement cycle alongside IB authorisation (Council of British International Schools, n.d.).

Challenges/limitations: The IB supports schools in only five countries that might be considered fragile contexts. These are Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe (International Baccalaureate, n.d.). None of these experiences fragmented governance to the degree seen in the case studies in this review (Myanmar and Sudan).

British Council: While historically known for its English-language education services, the British Council also provides non-formal education (NFE) services, teacher training services, and (high-stakes) exam administration. In fragmented governance contexts, in addition to English-language training, the British Council's practical value lies in its role as a trusted intermediary and infrastructure provider—expanding access to internationally recognised assessments/qualifications and supporting integrity/administration.

In Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, UNHCR works with Pearson EdExcel and the British Council to provide pre-tertiary content and assessment for a small cohort of US-bound Myanmar refugees (personal communication, 2026). Pearson content is used in the lower primary grades, and British Council content is used in higher grades (UNHCR, 2025a). Both provide support for teacher training (UNHCR, 2025a). Its exam administration services are offered in more than 140 countries (British Council, n.d.-a; British Council, n.d.-b; British Council Jordan, n.d.) This includes English-language testing services (jointly owned with IDP IELTS and Cambridge University Press & Assessment), used by governments and institutions, delivered as a computer-based test with certification and scoring (IELTS, 2025; British Council, n.d.-d). It also partnered with UNHCR to provide free IELTS tests for refugees, explicitly framing this as a means to reduce barriers to education and employment by addressing documentation, financial, and mobility constraints that limit access to recognised indicators of proficiency (British Council, 2024). Finally, the British Council runs Accreditation UK, an inspection-based quality assurance scheme for UK English language teaching providers, publishing lists of accredited centres and inspection reports—relevant to recognition and trust in learning pathways, even if it is not a school-leaving credential mechanism (British Council, n.d.-c)

Challenges/limitations: The British Council is a small entity that continues to rely on external awarding bodies' rules, fees, identity requirements, and potential political sensitivity surrounding foreign-linked qualifications (British Council Jordan, n.d.; British Council, n.d.-a).

Pearson operates as a large awarding organisation: it designs qualifications and assessments, manages test delivery, oversees marking/moderation, issues certificates, and provides verification services for progression into education and work (Pearson, n.d.-a; Pearson, n.d.-b; Pearson, n.d.-c). In stable systems, its value proposition is scale, standardisation, and recognisable credentials.

Challenges/limitations: In fragmented-governance contexts, the same model runs into hard constraints: safe exam access, secure centres, identity verification, data protection, and political legitimacy. Where authority is contested, Pearson's certificates may be treated as "external" and trigger pushback, while costs, language demands, and documentation requirements can deepen

exclusion. There are also risks to trust and reputation. Ofqual fined Pearson over £2 million in December 2025 across three cases (2019–2023), including issues that undermined confidence in grading standards and an online English test where malpractice led to revoked results; Ofqual notes Pearson has been fined seven times in nine years (Ofqual, 2025).

AHEEN: The African Higher Education in Emergencies Network (AHEEN) is a network of African universities focused on expanding access to academic diplomas and degrees, as well as related support programmes, with strong employability potential for refugees and IDPs in Africa (African Higher Education in Emergencies Network, n.d.). Across its members, it offers diplomas and degrees in areas such as translation, agribusiness, and social work.

Challenges/limitations: The opportunities supported by AHEEN are primarily for refugees with existing secondary certificates and are focused on tertiary-level education.

D. Case studies from fragmented governance contexts

1. Introduction to Myanmar and Sudan

Myanmar and Sudan are both contexts of fragmented governance, but of very different profiles. Both remain in active fragmentation and conflict, with large numbers of forcibly displaced people and struggling education sectors. Myanmar's most recent conflict, which started in 2021, has displaced approximately 6% of its population internally and 3% as refugees/asylum seekers as of January 2026 (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; UNHCR, n.d.-d; UNHCR, 2025b). Sudan's most recent conflict, which started in 2023, has displaced 1% of its population internally and 7% as refugees as of January 2026 (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; UNHCR, n.d.-b; UNHCR, n.d.-c). Myanmar has a more complex and larger-scale set of claimants to the governing authority providing education services. Normalisation is on the horizon in Sudan, with the Sudanese Armed Forces-supported government appearing to re-establish the Federal Government's legitimacy in Khartoum. At the same time, the RSF retains *de facto* control of the western parts of the country.

Myanmar's education system has been fragmented since its independence in 1948. Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations (EROs) run their own education systems as alternatives to the state system, thereby engaging in political resistance (Rinehart et al., 2024). Since the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's education system has further splintered into approximately half a dozen claimant authorities and providers, with uneven territorial control (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025). The military government of the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC, often referred to as the *junta*) holds the most significant territorial and thus executive, legislative, and judicial authority (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025). Education inside Myanmar now spans state-linked schooling (SPCC-provided), ethnic education departments (EROs), monastic and faith-based schools, and networks aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG) (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025). All education systems vary widely, even within the seven major EROs (Karen, Karenni, Mon, Shan, Ta'ang, Kachin, Chin). Variances include curricula, grade structures, policy frameworks, and data practices—all of these variances complicate equivalency, portability, and recognition (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025).

Opportunities for people from Myanmar seeking an education in neighbouring countries, such as Thailand and Bangladesh, are limited and fragmented. They provide little opportunity for recognised

Junta: A government, especially a military one, that has taken power in a country by force and not by election (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.-a).

certified learning. Historically, displaced Myanmar populations in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, were offered a pathway to US citizenship and an accredited, certified secondary-level education. However, the newly displaced cohort was not even allowed to study in Bangla (personal communication, 2026). In Thailand, people from Myanmar are not recognised as refugee seekers, but rather as migrants. They can study in camps, but they are barred from other Thai educational provisions (Rinehart et al., 2024). Migrant Learning Centres in Thailand do not provide harmonised learning opportunities and are not recognised as schools under Thai law. Recognition of learning in these spaces by Myanmar authorities has been mixed (Rinehart et al., 2024).

Approximately 53% of the 13 million school-age children are out of school in Myanmar due to the ongoing conflict (ISP Admin, 2025). While the SSPC oversees the largest cohort of learners (approximately 4.7 million across 45,000 schools), there is notable scale in non-state/alternative provision as well (personal communication, 2025). Separately, NUG-recognised schools operating primarily outside SAC-controlled areas are reported to serve nearly 800,000 students (Shoobridge, unpublished). In 2025, more than 427,000 children were enrolled across 4,000 schools under EROs (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025). Each entity has its own pre-primary through tertiary system. For example, Kachin and Karen EROs have 9 and 4 tertiary institutions, respectively. Although relatively new, the NUG has developed assessment and certification functions through the Myanmar Basic Education Completion Assessment (BECA), which was administered to 63,000 learners in 2023 (Rinehart et al., 2024; Shoobridge, unpublished). Matriculation rates at the tertiary level have declined notably from 2020 to 2025, with 900,000 sitting the exams in 2020 and 200,000 in 2025 (ISP Admin, 2025).

Myanmar is still a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It provides its members with an ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) (ASEAN, 2022; ASEAN, n.d.). The AQRF is designed to help ASEAN member states compare qualification levels across national systems, but it explicitly does not create automatic recognition of qualifications; recognition decisions remain with national or institutional authorities (ASEAN, 2020). The SSPC's Ministry of Education has publicised work on a national qualifications framework linked to AQRF (Ministry of Education (Myanmar), 2023).

Sudan's current education landscape is defined by conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023. The conflict severely disrupted the delivery of educational services, resulting in the closure of most schools nationwide and undermining learning opportunities for an estimated 91% of school-aged learners in 2023 (Steele et al., 2026). Learners' and teachers' access to services is directly influenced by displacement patterns, with many forced to relocate repeatedly, often to areas with limited or severely overcrowded organised educational opportunities. Funding contractions across both humanitarian and development streams are further reducing the education sector's ability to deliver.

A gradual reopening of formal schools has begun in SAF-controlled parts of Sudan. As of October 2025, approximately 27% of school-age learners in Sudan were (re)enrolled in formal education (Steele et al., 2026). The remaining 73% of this population remains disconnected from the formal system. Most are under the RSF's *de facto* governing authority in the west and south-west of the country (such as the Darfur Region and Kordofan states).

Those able to sit the secondary-level national certification exam participate in a high-stakes system with rigid standards, barriers to participation, and challenges in quality assurance. The exam requires stringent security standards and thus incurs costs for delivery and access; the Federal Ministry of Education (FMoE) has, to date, refused to proctor the exam in areas outside its control because it

cannot be delivered in accordance with its quality assurance standards (personal communication, 2026). Once a beacon of pride for the Sudanese government's education system, widely recognised across the region, it is now available only to a subset of the eligible population.

a. Assessment and certification: comparison by function

In both Myanmar and Sudan, the legal architecture of assessment still looks "state-like": the formal mandate (*de jure* authority) sits with a Ministry of Education—Myanmar's under the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) and Sudan's under the FMoE.

> ***de jure*:** Existing by law or right (i.e., formally lawful or legally recognised) (Cornell Law School, 2021).

Myanmar has at least seven education systems. The SSPC's Ministry of Education, Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations (EROs), and the National Unity Government (NUG) have developed alternative education systems that include assessment, certification, and recognition functions. Each uses examinations to demonstrate governance capacity and to claim legitimacy. Sudan, by contrast, remains closer to a single-issuer model in practice: only the FMoE administers exams (in SAF areas of control) and, with diplomatic arrangements in Chad, for children displaced in Chad, with some instances of children crossing the border from RSF zones of control. In both cases, geography and territorial control influence access.

Recognition follows a similar logic: it is not simply a technical judgement about learning, but a politically conditioned decision about which authority is treated as legitimate. Internally, Myanmar's recognition landscape is fragmented: SSPC, EROs, and the NUG do not uniformly recognise one another's credentials, and external parties (such as France, the EU, Russia, and China) are further bifurcated in their recognition depending on which Myanmar entity they back. Sudan's recognition is more straightforward: the national credential remains anchored to the FMoE, and recognition essentially tracks whether actors recognise (or pragmatically engage with) SAF and the government it supports.

For learners, seeking recognised assessments and certification becomes a risky and political act. In Myanmar, fear of reprisals shapes who registers for which system's exams, effectively fragmenting participation along lines of alliance or perceived safety. In Sudan, access is similarly shaped, though it is more bifurcated than plural. The language and perceived value of the exam, household resources, and willingness to travel into SAF-controlled areas or cross borders to sit FMoE-certified exams are all decision-making drivers. What appears to be a neutral yet high-stakes process in stable states—registration, verified identity, travel to authorised sites—becomes a dangerous, high-stakes decision under fragmentation, where participation can signal allegiance and often requires hazardous travel.

Quality assurance is the final component that influences legitimacy. Neither setting has meaningful external auditing bodies overseeing national exams, as "stable-state" systems often do. Myanmar has a regional reference point—ASEAN's qualifications framework—which the SSPC signals alignment with as a legitimacy strategy, but this does not substitute for independent exam QA. Across Myanmar's various systems, exam security and administration serve as public legitimacy tests: the ability to conduct an orderly "national" exam is itself part of the political narrative. Sudan similarly lacks external quality assurance, and international actors' advocacy around the June/July 2025 exams—for postponement, decentralised alternatives, and protection concerns tied to detention, abuse, and harassment—highlights that the binding constraint is not just technical delivery.

b. Political economy analysis

In fragmented governance contexts, "control" over learning assessment and certification is split between formal mandate (who is legally authorised to set and issue examinations) and *de facto* capability (who can safely and consistently operate exam systems at scale within a territory). These are not the same. State institutions typically claim the authority to run "national" systems, but actual delivery depends on territorial control, safe movement, communications, and logistics. Where armed actors are involved, security dynamics determine what state-like functions can operate in contested areas. These conditions interact with sociocultural factors such as the language of instruction, shaping which exam system learners can realistically access.

Recognition is politically conditioned. In principle, recognition should rest on technical trust, whether a credential credibly signals learning. In practice, recognition often hinges on which authority stakeholders view as legitimate and whether recognising a credential would be interpreted as conferring political legitimacy. For example, in Sudan, both the RSF and the SAF claim national authority, but only the SAF has administered a national examination system. In Myanmar, multiple entities run education systems, and recognition can be negotiated or refused depending on alignment and practical incentives. For example, at least one ERO seeks pathways into SSPC-linked tertiary options while others maintain separation.

Administrative compliance and identity control remain central levers. Rigorous requirements for registration, verified identity, travel to approved sites, and fees function as gatekeeping mechanisms that determine who "counts" as eligible—especially under displacement. In Sudan, FMoE secondary exams were effectively accessible only to learners who could meet identity, mobility, and cost barriers to sit exams in SAF-held areas or in Chad and who felt safe being associated with the certificate itself (Glade & Elbashir, 2025).

Universities, civil service systems, and professional bodies often rely on standardised entrance and exit exams. These standards preserve hierarchy, manage resource scarcity, and maintain order. Armed and political actors can benefit when (access to) credentials operate as patronage, recruitment leverage, or proof of state continuity. In both Myanmar and Sudan, multiple governance systems are mirrored by various education and labour-market pathways, with limited movement between them.

In summary, high-stakes, secondary-level assessments in fragmented governance function as statecraft. They are not just technical assessments; they are instruments authorities use to signal legitimacy and exercise control. Because participation typically requires documentation, registration, and interaction with official procedures—and often entails risky movement across contested space—exams can compel families to engage with (and implicitly acknowledge) the administering authority, even when its legitimacy is disputed. This creates a "legitimacy dividend" for actors who can operationalise national exams, while deepening bifurcation and inequity as various systems harden. Territorial control and diplomacy, therefore, act as gatekeepers. At the same time, protection risk becomes part of the cost of obtaining recognised credentials—making already high-stakes, centralised leaving examinations even higher-stakes under fragmented governance.

2. Bottlenecks to certification and impacts on children and communities

a. Bottlenecks to certification

Primary barriers to certification in fragmented governance settings include *security and access, displacement and mobility disruption, economic coping pressures, and administrative constraints.*

Displacement and economic contraction disrupt learning. Large-scale displacement destabilises learning pathways, making sustained attendance and progression difficult. Territorial and administrative control limits safe movement in both Myanmar and Sudan across zones of control. Secure access to schooling is further undermined by the conflict's impact on the education system, including its financing and infrastructure. Obstruction of humanitarian access (documentation requirements, movement restrictions) constrains the delivery of educational services, limiting access to materials, safe learning spaces, and proctoring capacity. Economic collapse leads to negative coping strategies that further disrupt learning. Common fall-backs often include child labour, conscription, and early marriage. These household decisions tend to affect adolescents and youth more than younger children. This reduces completion rates precisely at the stages where certification becomes decisive, usually the secondary level, but sometimes the intermediate level (United Nations, 2025).

Resultant insecurity and protection risks limit access to accredited learning and certified assessments. The UN Secretary-General's reporting on children and armed conflict documents widespread attacks on schools and military use of schools, with increases compared to prior periods—conditions that disrupt continuity and also constrain the feasibility of functioning examination centres (United Nations, 2025). Severe child protection risks—abduction, exploitation, recruitment, sexual violence, and related threats—particularly interrupt adolescent participation as learners approach exam years, contributing to dropout, prolonged learning loss, and "missing years" that sever routes to certification (United Nations, 2025). In Sudan, these dynamics have contributed to extremely high out-of-school rates (ranging from 91% in 2023 to 73% in 2025) and to weakened progression to any certified endpoint (Steele et al., 2026).

b. Implications

High-stakes exams, where they exist, serve to gatekeep societies, states, and institutions that continue to treat them as definitive proof of learning despite longstanding critiques of their equity and validity (Salamoura et al., 2024). In crisis settings, these types of exams are inherently exclusionary; participation requires stable schooling, documentation, safe mobility, and financial resources. These conditions are often least available to displaced and conflict-affected learners. Even if learners are prepared to sit these exams, many must cross conflict lines to do so. Doing so is an inherently risky prospect, even from just a protection perspective, especially for those vulnerable to recruitment or sexual violence. However, recognised certificates remain the gateway to jobs, admissions, scholarships, further training, and even a simple sociocultural status. A credential's value also hinges on the perceived legitimacy of the issuing authority; without recognised credentials, disadvantage reproduces across generations.

Recognition of certificates is another gatekeeping exercise that filters out all but the most resourced. Documentation rules, eligibility criteria, and perceptions of legitimacy drive exclusion for all but the best resourced. Systems not adapted to displacement reduce equity and efficiency, while inconsistent university admissions and hiring practices produce arbitrary outcomes for learners (Boces, 2025; UNHCR, 2024; UNHCR, 2025c). Where recognition is not granted, learners cannot convert skills into mobility and livelihoods, constraining both individual futures and economic productivity (UNESCO, 2024). In the absence of flexible formal pathways, civil society fills gaps through case management, translation, mentoring, and guidance tools (personal communication, 2026). Globally, enrolment peaks in primary and drops steeply by secondary, so investments in high-stakes exams, certification, and recognition already focus on a minority who reach exam years. The largest exclusion

occurs earlier in the pipeline, typically at or before the intermediate level on which this piece focuses (UNHCR, 2025c; personal communication, 2026).

V. DURABLE, SCALABLE ALTERNATIVE MECHANISMS

The following section reflects on the standards for assessment, certification, and recognition that support a scalable, credible, and portable certification mechanism. It considers them through the lens of political economy analysis of pre-tertiary learners in and from fragmented governance. Equitable assessment and certification options that respond to the unique needs of these learners are likely to challenge normative standards. For example, innovation in technology and risk-informed policies, in which risks are shared among stakeholders, can provide more inclusive, recognised certification options.

A. Standards

Legitimacy and recognition strategy are drivers of the mechanism's design. A durable certification mechanism requires earned legitimacy. A thoughtfully considered recognition strategy can help determine how credentials can earn this legitimacy and trust. Recognition and legitimacy are predicated on sociocultural norms and sociopolitical frameworks. The consumers of certificates, namely those seeking them and those who will recognise them, are critical drivers of legitimacy. Higher education, TVET, employers, and (where relevant) host-country institutions engaged early in the mechanism's design can support efficient equivalency and recognition. When these actors help define demand-relevant competencies and endorse pilots, the likelihood that recognition will stick—and scale—increases substantially.

Multiple stakeholders usually play various roles. Certification also gains traction when embedded in a multi-stakeholder strategy that aligns incentives and accountability among those who deliver learning, those who certify it, and those who ultimately recognise it. This was illustrated by the example of stable-state contexts (UK overview) earlier in this report. Kenya's burgeoning model seeks to contextualise this approach for the East African context (Kenya National Qualifications Authority, n.d.). If any single actor controls the whole chain—curriculum and standards, exam delivery and proctoring, marking, and certification—then legitimacy is inherently fragile because there are no independent checks. By contrast, when these roles are separated and subject to oversight that key stakeholders accept and trust, trust becomes more plausible. However, it also complicates the entire chain (from accreditation to recognition) and thus reduces efficiency.

Competency-based assessments: A competency- or concept-oriented approach to assessment (testing concept grasping or skill rather than specific knowledge) enables equitable, portable, and curriculum-agnostic assessments. Notably, more formative rather than summative assessments allow for multiple demonstrations of learning over time. This is especially important in situations of forced displacement and instability, as it supports portability, progression, and equity. Finally, if learners have no bridging or resit opportunities following displacement or disruption, a single shock can permanently derail their trajectory. Second-chance pathways increase resilience and reduce long-term exclusion.

Inclusion and protection: If access to accredited learning or certified assessments depends on rigid identity documentation, many displaced learners are excluded by default. Mechanisms that allow safe, tiered verification options make participation more realistic without abandoning integrity. Similarly, if exams require hazardous travel to a small number of centres, then access barriers and

protection risks become part of the gatekeeping architecture. Systems that reduce risky mobility (through flexible delivery arrangements) are more likely to expand access while mitigating harm. Importantly, if language accessibility and disability accommodations are not built in, certification will reproduce existing exclusions. Beyond exams, if accreditation is anchored only in single, high-stakes events focused on knowledge recall, then learners whose schooling has been disrupted are disproportionately penalised. That said, less centralised, more inclusive assessment practices also challenge traditional, high-quality assurance standards and can undermine legitimacy. A phased, sequential approach is likely necessary to address the complexities of developing a more inclusive and effective competency assessment.

Quality assurance underpins whether any alternative mechanism can foster legitimacy and, in turn, recognition. If systems and cross-checks are weak or non-interoperable, equivalency decisions become slow, inconsistent, or impossible. If procedures for security, marking, the release of results, and appeals are inconsistent or opaque, recognition decisions will default to politics and reputation rather than to evidence. Transparent, standardised, and auditable protocols shift the balance toward *technical* trust. Similarly, recognition is unlikely to hold if competent authorities are unclear or if safeguards against fraud are absent; recognisers need visible *governance and credential integrity* to justify acceptance.

B. Options for alternative mechanisms

The following section identifies a few alternatives to the current status quo, in which recognised certifications are mainly limited to those already held by individuals with legal status in a host or third country and to secondary or tertiary competition certificates whose equivalence is straightforward. It profiles the alternative mechanism through case studies and identifies some potential challenges and opportunities.

1. Intra-state mechanisms (devolution of certification authority, transitional hosting, and recognition bartering)

Profile: Devolution of certification authority to local actors is a model that has been clearly implemented in the United States, India, and Pakistan. It leaves most aspects of education service delivery to local authorities but ties them together through quality standards at the federal or national level.

Case study: Pakistan's 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 devolved primary education functions to the provinces. This resulted in a shift of many practical responsibilities for assessment, certification, and recognition closer to provincial authorities and away from the central government (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2023). It resulted in a multilayered governance structure in which provinces lead policy, planning, implementation, and monitoring, while district education departments oversee day-to-day delivery. In theory, this approach balances power and quality assurance checks, but in practice, it can operate in a fragmented manner when authority, capacity, and quality controls vary across jurisdictions (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2019). In this devolved landscape, school-level assessment and certification are commonly administered through province/jurisdiction-level examination structures (including Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education that run high-stakes examinations), and recognition can become uneven when equivalencies are accepted within a province but not consistently across the federation (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2023; World Education Services, 2020).

Under devolution, federal institutions still retain (or reassert) coordinating and standard-setting roles to harmonise practices and reduce system fragmentation. A federal ministry was re-established to support interprovincial coordination, alongside national coordination mechanisms, such as the Interprovincial Education Ministers' Conference and related structures, intended to harmonise direction across provinces (ADB, 2019). Beyond school education, national-level frameworks and bodies continue to shape recognition and comparability: the Higher Education Commission is framed in official statements as the national standard-setter for higher education, while the Pakistan Qualifications Framework is positioned to map levels and support comparability/recognition through a national register approach (Press Information Department, 2021; QAA, 2017; Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, n.d.).

Challenge: Devolution can improve delivery when authority is politically and territorially distributed, but it requires a trusted harmonisation function, which is usually vested in a central IRG. Contexts of fragmented governance lack such trusted entities to facilitate harmonisation, and recognition frameworks can only provide support in international settings, not intra-state ones. As such, devolution within fragmented government is likely to reinforce multiple, varied education systems and recognition pathways.

Opportunity: Transitional hosting can serve as a pragmatic bridge in new or disrupted states. In this context, a state to which a population was once historically and formally tied may offer an assessment and credentialing option, albeit one that relies on external support and interlocutors to ensure safety and quality. This occurred in the first three years of South Sudan's existence. Arrangements for learners to sit a Sudan FMoE exam in English, while South Sudan's Ministry of Education developed a reliable certification, provided an interim, recognised pathway (personal communication, 2026). Similar organic examples are occurring in Sudan, with learners in RSF-controlled spaces sitting FMoE exams in Chad, and in Myanmar, where one ERO is seeking recognition of its learners' secondary certification for entry into SSPC-supported tertiary institutions (personal communication, 2026).

2. Expansion of existing multilateral frameworks

Profile: Multilateral frameworks already exist that serve to support equivalency across international borders whilst respecting and recognising state sovereignty and diversity.

Case study: UNESCO's Qualifications Passport (UQP) and similar equivalency frameworks are most effective for recognising completed internationally recognised macro-credentials at the secondary or tertiary level. They are best suited to individuals who already have the resources to obtain lawful residence in a host or third country.

Challenge: The models have limited value for intermediate- and secondary-level learners who lack documented certificates of learning and are internally displaced, or for whom international travel is infeasible. They also depend on institutional uptake and alignment with national or regional qualifications systems, which is harder when governance is contested.

Opportunity: When embedded into national frameworks, they can shift recognition from *ad hoc* humanitarian fixes toward system pathways. For example, UQP is primarily a prior-qualification recognition tool. However, Kenya's plan to embed it within the Kenya National Qualifications Framework signals a move toward coordinated, cross-ministry recognition routes for refugees into education, training, and work (UNESCO, 2025a; personal communication, 2025; personal communication, 2026).

3. (I)NGO-facilitated secondary credentials (Amala and Alsama)

Profile: (I)NGOs and other civil society actors often step in to fill gaps in service provision not provided by a state or the private sector. In the case of accredited learning and secondary-level credentialing, the service gaps are wide. However, the focus is on children who do not have a certificate of accredited learning to put through the equivalency or recognition process already in place at the multilateral level.

Case study: Both the Amala and Alsama models eliminate the traditional reliance on a single IRG issuer and are designed for learners at the pre-tertiary level who have no existing macro-credentials. They are also curriculum-agnostic, focusing on conceptual and competency fluency rather than curriculum-specific subject knowledge.

Challenge: These are new, less-tested models, and equivalency/recognition is nascent for Amala and untested for Alsama. The models also perpetuate the exclusion of some of the most marginalised through their in-person delivery and English-language formats. The Alsama model aligns with the high-stakes exam model, which is a sociocultural norm but not necessarily a sound indicator of competency. They rely on external sources for cost coverage; thus, sustainability and scalability are in question.

Opportunity: These initiatives demonstrate that at least some post-secondary institutions can recognise competency-oriented alternatives. Amala's emphasis on competency-based assessment and its alums' self-reported success in recognition in their post-secondary pursuits suggests potential. Alsama offers a normative model of summative exams that is more likely to be widely recognised, provided its own G12++ certificate holders can secure recognition and entry into universities, TVET, and rewarding employment.

4. Independent assessment/certification bodies

Profile: Independent assessment and certification bodies play a key role in a multi-stakeholder, transparent accreditation-to-recognition system. Depending on their risk tolerance, brand identity, and other resourcing considerations, they can fill a service gap that other providers cannot.

Case study: IB's e-Assessment for children who have completed lower secondary is an interesting case to consider. It provides a highly regulated, high-quality, accredited curriculum with a digital, competency-focused, multi-touchpoint assessment that is certified and highly recognisable. IB programmes are found in more than 160 countries and 2,100 schools, most of which are private. Three hundred schools run the e-Assessment (personal communication, 2026).

Challenge: High-integrity international models require stable, secure delivery sites, robust infrastructure, and authorised partners. These standards are often unrealistic in contexts where security and governance are contested. For providers with well-known brands such as IB, Pearson, Cambridge, and the British Council, reputational and quality assurance concerns can undermine trust, even when technical proctoring controls are in place. The IB only supports schools in five countries that might be considered fragile contexts. These are Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe (International Baccalaureate, n.d.). None of them experiences fragmented governance to the degree seen in the case studies in this review (Myanmar and Sudan).

Opportunity: International bodies can foster legitimacy through external standards, moderation, and quality assurance that a contested national exam body cannot. The IB MYP e-Assessment exemplifies

this model through externally marked exams and portfolio assessments, offering comparability that is not dependent on a single state or a single assessment (IBO, 2016, 2025b, 2025c, personal communication, 2026). Commercial proctoring networks can also offer scalable verification capacity—if they are willing to assume the operational risks (Pearson VUE, n.d.-a; Pearson VUE, n.d.-b; Ofqual, 2025; Simon, 2015; Education International, 2018/2021; Pearson, 2016).

5. Next-generation supranational and digital horizons

Profile: Several nascent models, with limited use case evidence thus far, warrant consideration to address various aspects of the accreditation-to-recognition system. The following case studies could be helpful for alternative certification, recognition, and equivalency functions.

Decentralised autonomous organisations (DAOs) are a burgeoning concept in management and decision-making that originated in the cryptocurrency world. They are an "internet-based collaborative organisation that coordinates people and resources using rules expressed in computer code." (The Law Commission, 2024). As explained by an expert in recognition in the digital era, they could function as equivalency bodies in the same manner that double-anonymised peer-review panels quality-assure academic journal-level publications (personal communication, 2026). In this space, they would comprise all key stakeholders from citizens (such as parents) to the private sector (such as assessment companies) to the state (such as ministries of education).

Blockchain-driven digital credentialing. This method draws on the cryptocurrency world, where the use case is to make issued credentials or DAO votes immutable.

> **Blockchain:** A decentralised, tamper-resistant digital ledger that records and verifies transactions by grouping them into linked "blocks" stored across many computers. Because entries are validated through network consensus and cannot be easily altered, blockchain provides a secure, transparent, single source of truth that builds trust and reduces reliance on intermediaries (Susnjara & Smalley, n.d.).

Artificial intelligence and large language model (LLM)-assisted equivalency assessments. Leveraging Big Data mining, LLMs, and machine learning can reduce some of the human biases and errors inherent in manual equivalency. Importantly, it can be done across languages and types of evidence and can be efficient.

World Reference Levels aimed to compare and equate core curricular content globally (UNESCO, n.d.-b). They emerged from the underlying efforts that led to the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), which, in turn, serves as the model for the UQP and several regional, national, and continental frameworks. The person who advanced the references model under the EQPR explored it at a global level within UNESCO over the past 10 years. They found that core subject competencies (languages, maths, sciences) were roughly equivalent across grade levels globally (personal communication, 2026). Its uptake, however, has been limited by the UN's very mandate, which is to respect the diversity of its member states and thus the diverse competencies across education systems (personal communication, 2026). It has thus not been explored further, and the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and its Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 2019, 2025b) have supplanted it.

Tiered standards could replace the gold standard to which current credentials are held (macro-credentials issued by a single IRG that also accredits the learning). In this model, three tiers of

standards would be socialised, each with value (personal communication, 2026). A silver level could be socialised, with peer- and spot-check assessments serving to verify the value and equivalence of credentials from other markets. This is similar to what various equivalency passports do now. Critically, silver-level credentials would carry weight and not be marginalised in favour of gold-level credentials. A bronze level would also be socialised and would rely primarily on self-reports. The silver-level model is operationalised through the regional and global equivalency frameworks explored above, and the bronze-level model builds on the micro-credentialing trend.

Stackable micro-credentials are short, assessed credentials that certify specific learning outcomes (skills/competencies) and can be accumulated over time toward larger credentials (e.g., certificates, credits, or components of a qualification), rather than functioning only as stand-alone achievements (Council of the European Union, 2022; UNESCO, 2022a). They are growing in acceptance because they align better with labour-market realities and adult-learning needs: they support faster, more targeted upskilling/reskilling, offer flexible pathways for working learners, and make skills more legible to employers when coupled with more precise definitions and quality-assurance expectations (OECD, 2023; Council of the European Union, 2022; UNESCO, 2022b). Governments and international bodies are formalising standard definitions, transparency requirements, and guidance on recognition. Doing so increases consistency and trust—and makes the operationalisation of stacking and credit/recognition arrangements easier across institutions and borders (Council of the European Union, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Challenge: These future horizon options are novel, under-tested in these contexts, and not yet replicated at scale. They also challenge the status quo of highly valued macro credentials, tertiary academic degrees, state-issued credentials, equivalency frameworks, and summative exams, all of which are deeply entrenched and normative standards in most societies. Digital, blockchain, and autonomous models depend on strong quality assurance systems, trust, a fully aligned accreditation-to-recognition ecosystem, interoperable standards, privacy safeguards, and credible governance. Fragmented settings often lack the trust, coordination, and equity conditions needed, and digital divides can deepen exclusion. Security and data breach concerns complicate the handling of any information, particularly identifying information, submitted to an LLM.

Opportunity: These approaches point toward future mechanisms that could reduce dependence on any single issuer. DAO-style governance could, in theory, create multi-stakeholder oversight for credential registries; AI-enabled competency mapping could accelerate comparability across curricula; and tiered standards (gold/silver/bronze) could balance rigour with inclusion by allowing multiple forms of evidence to hold value and support progression over time (personal communication, 2026).

6. Social behaviour change communication investments to help shift sociocultural norms and standards toward durable modalities

Many of the factors that sustain normative standards around accreditation, assessment, certification, and equivalency are predicated on contexts that look nothing like those of fragmented governance. They assume stability and single IRG, and prioritise high-stakes knowledge-based exams, in-person learning, macro-credentials, and academic pathways. Hybrid learning, competency-based curricula and assessment, micro and formative assessments, stackable micro-credentialling, and TVET pathways have demonstrated value and applicability in contexts of fragmented governance.

Norm shifts require significant time and investment. This includes sustained buy-in from learners, employers, institutions, and authorities; without that social legitimacy, alternative methods of accreditation, assessment and certification will remain marginalised.

Despite these challenges, as uptake grows, these norms can expand pathways beyond a single high-stakes secondary-leaving exam. Hybrid modalities reduce dependence on synchronous in-person delivery; competency-based micro-assessments lower stakes and can be harmonised across providers; and expanding TVET pathways offers faster, more labour-market-adjacent routes into livelihoods (Steele et al., 2026; UNICEF MENARO, 2015; Steele & Alawi, 2021; personal communication, 2026). Over time, stackable, competency-focused digital records could strengthen portability for displaced learners whose documentation and schooling are repeatedly disrupted.

VI. CLOSING REFLECTION

This review's political economy framing clarifies why many well-intentioned solutions for durable recognition of certification in fragmented governance remain of limited value. Even when relevant learning can be delivered and accredited, assessment, certification, and recognition require risky decisions best borne by multiple stakeholders. The analysis surfaces the following outstanding questions for later consideration.

First, can multiple actors work together to legitimately serve as issuers of pre-tertiary credentials when a state is contested? Plausible candidates include international assessment bodies, university or employer consortia, (I)NGOs providing accredited learning, or hybrid public–private arrangements. Closely related is the question of stakeholder "red lines": under what conditions would major recognisers (states, universities, employers, and regional bodies) accept credentials linked to contested governance, and what forms of neutrality are credible in practice? What incentives would have to be in place for an authority to participate?

Second, what level of quality assurance is "enough" for recognition in these contexts? Without clearer thresholds, actors may default to either over-engineered models that exclude most learners or minimal models that fail to gain legitimacy and thus certificate recognition.

Third, the review highlights the importance of incorporating learner protection into the mechanism's design. However, it cannot fully resolve the ethical trade-offs in which the safest choice for a learner may still be politically consequential. Could blockchain-based governance and data protection ensure that certification pathways are immutable and prevent the extraction of participant data for political purposes? Would the political bodies participating in such a mechanism allow for the conditions required for this approach?

Finally, the review flags the promise of digital credentialing, AI-enabled comparability, and tiered standards, but can multi-stakeholder oversight structures be built that are trusted by recognisers while remaining accessible to displaced learners? Until that governance problem is addressed, technical innovations may remain peripheral to the learners most affected by fragmented governance.

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ANNEXES

A. Definition of terms

Term	Meaning
Accreditation	A formal process in which an officially approved body evaluates an institution/programme or learning outcomes against standards and formally recognises it (and/or awards equivalences, credits, or qualifications) (UNESCO-UNEVOC, n.d.-a).
Assessment	A process used to determine what learners know and can do (learning progress/outcomes), often also used to support next learning steps (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d.).
Blockchain	A decentralised, tamper-resistant digital ledger that records and verifies transactions by grouping them into linked "blocks" stored across many computers. Because entries are validated through network consensus and cannot be easily altered, blockchain provides a secure, transparent, single source of truth that can build trust and reduce reliance on intermediaries (Susnjara & Smalley, n.d.).
Certification	Formal assurance that an individual has successfully achieved a defined set of learning outcomes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, n.d.-b).
DACUM	"Developing a curriculum" is a structured occupational (job) analysis method used to define what competent workers actually do in a given role. In a facilitated workshop, a panel of expert practitioners works with a trained facilitator to identify and describe the job's major duties and specific tasks (often treated as competencies) in clear, industry language. The resulting "DACUM chart" becomes a practical blueprint for competency-based curriculum and training design, and it is also commonly used to build or update certification/licensing standards, performance assessments, job descriptions, and other workforce development tools (DACUM International Training Center, n.d.)
De facto	Existing or operating in practice/in reality, even without strict legal authority or formal legal status (Cornell Law School, 2022).
De jure	Existing by law / by right (i.e., formally lawful or legally recognised) (Cornell Law School, 2021).
Examination	A (usually standardised) test that evaluates learning. Has a formal consequence for progression/completion (e.g., eligibility to progress or complete an officially recognised degree) (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023).
Fragmented governance	A governance setting where authority is dispersed across multiple actors, with overlapping mandates and coordination challenges (often producing inconsistent rules/services) (Biermann, Pattberg, van Asselt, & Zelli, 2009).
Immutable record	An unchangeable record whose state cannot be modified after it is created (UNESCO, 2018)
Junta	A government, especially a military one, that has taken power in a country by force and not by election (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.-a)
Macro credentials	Long-form qualifications—typically degrees, diplomas, certificates, and licences—usually awarded by accredited/recognised institutions. They signal achievement

Term	Meaning
	across a broad body of knowledge and transferable/technical skills, often taking years to complete, and are frequently tied to eligibility for professions or career pathways (UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, n.d.).
Micro credentials	Records of assessed learning outcomes from a small volume of learning (e.g., a short course or training). They are designed to certify specific knowledge/skills/competences, are owned by the learner, are shareable/portable, may be standalone or stackable, and should be underpinned by quality assurance (Council of the European Union, 2022).
Portable credentials	Recognised and accepted as verifying someone's qualifications in other settings (e.g., other regions, institutions, industries)(U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).
Recognition of prior learning/ Recognised	Having official status/acceptance of prior learning granted by an authorised body (ENIC-NARIC Networks, 2014). Recognition is tied to concrete entitlements such as being assessed for admission and, depending on national rules, potential links to employment—but it does not automatically override country-specific admission requirements (UNESCO, 2019).
Stackable (micro) credentials	Short, assessed learning credentials that document specific learning outcomes (skills/competencies) and are owned by the learner, portable, and shareable. They are "stackable" because they can be combined over time into larger credentials (for example, bundled into a certificate, counted toward credit, or used alongside recognition of prior learning to contribute toward a broader qualification), rather than being only stand-alone macro achievement (Council of the European Union, 2022; UNESCO, 2022a).

B. Key Informant Affiliations

Alsama

Amala Education

British Council (former)

FCDO

JET Education Services

Jigsaw Education

Pearson (former)

UNESCO (current and former)

UNHCR (former)

UNICEF (former)