

NQF state of play

 **Montenegro 2020**

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Overview

Stage of development: Operational stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:

Comprehensive NQF including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training and from the system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs).

Number of levels:

Eight, with sublevels at levels 1, 4 and 7

Legal basis/stage of development:

Law on the MQF (2010) (in English)

NQF/EQF website:

[Website](#)

Qualifications register/database:

[National register of qualifications](#)

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The Montenegro qualifications framework (MQF) was adopted in 2010. It is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework consisting of eight qualification levels, with sub-levels at levels 1, 4 and 7. Level descriptors are based on learning outcomes in three categories: knowledge, skills and competence. The framework includes educational qualifications from all formal education sectors (general, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and additional qualifications.

The framework is managed by the Qualifications Council, in cooperation with the National Council of Education and Higher Education Council. Its main tasks include approval and inclusion of qualifications in the MQF; the Ministry of Education provides wider strategic direction for MQF implementation.

Qualifications and educational programmes are developed based on the learning-outcomes approach, at all MQF levels. The work on the establishing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is in progress. It is possible to attain a vocational qualification (or part of it) by completing a specific module of the VET programme, or through the VNFIL process. A vocational qualification can be recognised to continue education in a formal VET programme.

The MQF is advanced in implementation and has reached an operational stage. The legal basis and governance structures for MQF implementation are in place and operational; significant progress has been made with the development and inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications database. Montenegro is a candidate for EU accession and a full member of the EQF advisory group. The MQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2014.

Policy context

Montenegro is committed to the strategic goal of European integration. It gained the status of EU candidate country in 2010 and began accession negotiations two years later. Montenegro's strategic development objective, defined in the Economic reform programme 2019-21, is sustainable and inclusive economic growth to reduce the country's

development gap relative to the EU average ([1]).

The national employment strategy 2016-20 sets a priority of improving qualifications and competences aligned with labour market needs, including promoting access and participation of adults in lifelong learning and improving the quality and relevance of education at all levels ([2]).

Montenegro is the first non-EU country that adopted the Smart specialisation strategy ([3]). This has defined four strategic priority areas for development and innovation: sustainable agriculture, green energy, sustainable health tourism and information technology.

Montenegro has also been committed to implementing and monitoring the 2015 Riga conclusions on VET and to meeting EU 2020 targets in education and training ([4]). Skills and qualification mismatch with labour market needs remains a challenge ([5]). In 2019, youth unemployment fell to 25.2%, while the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) increased to 17.3%. These rates are still high compared to the EU averages of 15.1% and 10.1% respectively. The employment rate of recent graduates (aged 20 to 34) was 65.4% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 81.5%.

Covid-19 is likely to have reversed some of the recent gains in reducing unemployment.

Adult participation in lifelong learning remains challenging, at 2.5% in 2019 compared to the EU's 10.8% ([6]). Among the country's upper secondary cohort, 67% are enrolled in VET.

Covid-19 caused schools to close for most of 2020. Distance learning was provided by two national TV channels. Additionally, the Ministry of Education established a web site for teachers, pupils and other learners to interact and exchange digital materials, videos and ideas.

Enrolment for vocational schools for the academic year starting autumn 2020 was carried out online. Looking long term, the government has announced the start of a digital classroom project, planning major investment to digitalise textbooks and educational content, as well as infrastructure development throughout the country.

NQF legal basis

The law on the MQF ([7]) was adopted in 2010, defining the principles and objectives of the framework, its levels and sublevels, qualification types and governance structure. Related regulations in education and training

include the Law on national vocational qualifications ([8]). A set of rulebooks and methodological documents set out more detailed procedures for specific aspects of NQF development and implementation ([9]).

The MQF is reflected in several strategic documents, such as the National strategy for employment and human resources development 2016-20 ([10]), the Strategy for the development of vocational education in Montenegro (2020-24) ([11]), the Strategy for adult education 2015-25 ([12]), and the Teacher education strategy (2017-24) ([13]).

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

VET reforms in Montenegro were framed by the Vocational education development strategy (2015-20) and associated action plans. Policy priorities for VET development included increasing VET quality, efficiency and relevance for the labour market; ensuring equal opportunities to acquire VET qualifications; and promoting lifelong learning and mobility. To reach these aims, specific actions included the revision of existing qualifications and development of new ones based on learning outcomes, designing modular educational programmes, supporting work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeships, promoting vocational professions, and improving teacher training ([14]).

The revised VET strategy (2020-24), adopted in January 2020, focuses on providing quality and inclusive education which is the basis for lifelong learning, economic and social integration, personal and professional development of the individual, with an effective system of management and financing ([15]).

The Adult education strategy (2015-25) defines five priority objectives: social inclusion of adults through lifelong learning education programmes and activities; improving knowledge, skills and competences of adults for employability, labour market mobility and competitiveness; improvement of employee competences; quality assurance in adult education; ensuring a flexible and sustainable adult education system.

Aims of NQF

The government sees MQF development and alignment to the European qualifications framework (EQF) as an important political priority. The law on the MQF ([16]) defines the qualifications framework as an instrument for classification, comparison, development and understanding of qualifications, the relationships between them and the pathways for acquiring qualifications to meet the needs of the labour market and society.

Apart from its transparency and comparability functions, the MQF is seen as an important tool in reforming the qualifications system using the learning outcomes approach, increasing coherence by linking the different education and training subsystems, facilitating access to

qualifications and recognising non-formal and informal learning ([17]).

The main policy objectives of the MQF as defined by the MQF law ([18]) are:

- a. clear definition of qualifications using learning outcomes;
- b. validation of qualifications of different types within the qualification system;
- c. supporting and promoting lifelong learning;
- d. connecting and aligning the different parts of the education and training system;
- e. indicating horizontal and vertical progression pathways across and within the education and training system;
- f. aiding international comparability of qualifications;
- g. promoting key vocational competences;
- h. quality assurance of the qualifications system.

The principles underlying the development of the MQF are an emphasis on learning outcomes; classification of qualifications in levels and sublevels; credit transfer; comparability with the EQF; quality assurance of qualification development and acquisition; cooperation among all stakeholders; and transparency of procedures.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The Montenegrin national qualifications framework (MQF) is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework open to qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal or informal learning. It consists of eight qualification levels, with two sublevels each at levels 1, 4 and 7.

Level descriptors are learning-outcomes based, defined for each level or sublevel and increasing in complexity from level 1 to 8. They follow the EQF categories of learning outcomes: knowledge (factual and theoretical), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (autonomy and responsibility) ([19]). Sublevel descriptors within a level are similar but were introduced to address the different types of qualifications related to the requirements of the labour market.

Types of qualifications

MQF includes qualifications of three types:

- a. educational qualifications (education level qualifications) attained upon completion of a formal education programme (general education, VET and higher education) represent attainment of an education level.
- b. vocational qualifications (national vocational qualifications, NVQs) are based on the occupational standards; they can be acquired through assessment after completing of a formally recognised training – either part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), or an adult education programme, or a special training programme in higher education – or through validation of non-formal learning.
- c. additional qualifications are other qualifications that are acquired outside programmes leading to educational or vocational qualifications. They supplement a person's qualification level testifying acquisition of additional knowledge, skills and competence and may be a prerequisite for working in a certain specific area of work.

Primary and secondary general education qualifications are allocated to the NQF levels 1 and 4, VET qualifications correspond to the NQF levels 2-

5, the higher education qualifications are allocated to MQF levels 6-8. Vocational qualifications can be allocated at all NQF levels ([20]).

Quality assurance of qualifications

The institutions responsible for the development of qualifications at levels 1 to 5 are the VET Centre and the Bureau of Educational Service. Qualifications at levels 6-8 are developed by higher education institutions.

Qualifications are developed according to the methodology and procedures adopted by the Ministry of Education ([21]). Educational qualifications are developed based on several related occupational standards (in vocational education), or educational standards (in general education). Vocational qualifications are developed based on one occupational standard.

The development of qualifications entails the development of a qualification standard, to be validated by the relevant sectoral commission and adopted by the Qualification Council. Along with the qualification standard, a VET programme (for VET qualification) or an examination catalogue (for vocational qualification) are developed. In higher education, qualification standards are developed based on accredited higher education programmes (HE qualification) or a part of one (vocational qualification).

Use of learning outcomes and standards

The law on the MQF introduced the learning-outcomes orientation as a standard for all levels of qualification. Qualification standards include the following mandatory elements: title and type of qualification, level or sublevel, qualification code, credit value, learning outcomes description of qualification (specification) and contents (entry requirements, mandatory and optional modules, assessment methods and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes) ([22]).

Occupational standards are a common element for both VET qualifications and vocational qualifications. It is possible to attain a vocational qualification (or part of it) by completing a specific module of the VET programme. A vocational qualification can be recognised to continue education in a formal VET programme.

VET programmes are developed on a modular basis, in line with qualification units (units of learning). Key competences are an integral part of qualification standards and are promoted in education and

training programmes.

Credit systems

The Montenegrin credit transfer system (MCTS) was introduced by the law on the MQF to determine the size of qualification. Credits are transferable and can be allocated to qualifications and their units, as well as to educational programmes or their parts (courses, modules, subjects). One MCTS credit refers to 25 hours of workload. The minimum educational qualification size is 60 credits, which corresponds to one academic year.

The MCTS is aligned to the European credit system for vocational education (ECVET) and to the European credit transfer system (ECTS). Use of the ECTS has been a requirement for higher education institutions since 2004.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for education policy and provides strategic direction for MQF development and implementation. The framework is managed by the Montenegro Qualifications Council, in cooperation with the National Council of Education and the Higher Education Council, which also provide policy advice to the ministry.

Responsibilities of the national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP) lie with the Division for qualifications at the ministry, established in 2011. The role of the EQF NCP is to ensure harmonisation of the MQF to the EQF and international cooperation in qualifications framework development; to maintain the qualifications register; to propose procedures for qualification development; to ensure access to information about the MQF; to implement the measures adopted by the Qualifications Council; and to provide administrative and technical assistance.

The Qualifications Council was established with the aim of improving the qualifications system and monitoring MQF development ([23]). Its main tasks include approval and inclusion of qualifications in the MQF; establishing, coordination and monitoring the work of sectoral commissions; proposing the development and improvement of qualifications, adopting methodological documents. The council is a permanent body and its members include representatives from Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, higher education institutions, Employment Agency of Montenegro, Chamber of Economy, employers' association, trade union, VET Centre, Bureau for Educational Services, and the Examination Centre. The presidents of the National Council for Education and the Higher Education Council are also members of the Qualifications Council, to ensure coordination of work on the qualifications system.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The National Council of Education approves formal education programmes and examination catalogues, and determines the compatibility between education programmes and qualification standards. It is responsible for the qualification attainment process, and

organisation of learning and teaching in formal education, adult education and special education. Its work is supported by the Bureau for Education Services and the VET Centre.

The Higher Education Council provides expert opinion on regulations in higher education, and makes proposals concerning the improvement and development of higher education. The Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education ([24]) is in charge of quality assurance in higher education, particularly the accreditation of study programmes, reaccreditation and ranking of higher education institutions, and proposals for improving quality of higher education.

In addition to the three councils, involvement of stakeholders in MQF implementation is carried out through 15 sectoral commissions set up as permanent bodies of the Qualifications Council, one for each of the 15 MQF sectors defined in the law on the MQF. These are composed of representatives of employers, trades unions, universities, relevant ministries and institutions involved in education development ([25]). Sectoral commissions analyse and identify labour market needs in skills and qualifications, propose new or revision to existing occupational standards and qualifications, elaborate basic profile/specification of qualifications, provide opinion on compliance of occupational and qualification standards, and examination catalogues, and consider initiatives for the development of new qualifications.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare approves occupational standards following Qualification Council proposal, and adult education programmes that lead to the acquisition of vocational qualifications.

Other key institutions are the VET Centre, responsible for the coordination of the development of occupational standards, qualification standards and educational programmes in vocational and adult education; and the Examination Centre, which conducts the external assessment of knowledge, skills and competences for primary and secondary education.

Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the Union of Employers are members of the sectoral commissions, the Qualifications Council and the National Council for Education.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

VNFIL arrangements

The legal framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is provided for vocational qualifications of MQF levels 1-5. The relevant legislation includes the law on the MQF (2010), the law on national vocational qualifications (2008, amended in 2016), and the law on adult education (2011, amended in 2017) ([26]). As part of the secondary legislation, the rulebook ([27]) defining the procedures for VNFIL in accordance with the revised law on national vocational qualifications (NVQs) ([28]) was adopted in 2019.

The law on national vocational qualifications stipulates that NVQs can be acquired via formal programmes and via direct assessment of knowledge, skills and competences. Assessment for vocational qualifications at MQF levels 1-5 is carried out by licensed adult education providers based on examination catalogues. Examination catalogues are developed for each vocational qualification based on qualification standards.

The examination commission is formed by the education provider from the list of licensed examiners, on proposal of the Examination Centre. The Examination Centre organises training and licensing of assessors (examiners) and shortlists them for each vocational qualification.

Higher education institutions can carry out assessments and award vocational qualifications at MQF levels 6-8 based on the special training programmes accredited by the Higher Education Council, in accordance with the act of the higher education institution.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

The MQF is seen as part of the wider set of economic, labour market and education policies to support human capital development. Its aims are aligned with policy priorities for education development outlined in the national strategic documents.

The legal basis and governance structures for MQF implementation are in place and operational, referencing to the EQF has been carried out, and significant progress has been made with the inclusion of qualifications in the national register. Efforts are continuing to review and redefine existing qualifications and educational programmes and develop new ones based on the learning-outcomes approach, at all MQF levels.

The work on the establishing a VNFIL system is also on the reform agenda ([29]). Certain elements of the Montenegrin education and training system provide a good basis for future work on VNFIL: the principles underlying the MQF, particularly the shift to learning outcomes; modular design of VET qualifications; well-established provision for development of professional competences; licencing of staff involved in the assessment for national vocational qualifications (NVQs); and work to expand the network of licenced adult education providers ([30]).

Qualifications registers and databases

Qualifications adopted by the Qualifications Council are entered in the database of qualifications ([31]). The qualifications database currently includes more than 270 qualifications from formal VET (diplomas) and from the national vocational qualifications system (certificates) at MQF levels 2-5. Qualifications are classified according to type, size, MQF level and sector, and ISCED.

Occupational standards, VET programmes and curricula, and adult education programmes are published on the VET Centre database ([32]). A database of licenced education institutions and accredited higher education programmes is available on the Ministry of Education website ([33]).

Qualification documents

VET qualifications are certified by diploma, vocational qualifications by a

certificate. Europass certificate and diploma supplements are issued, both MQF and EQF levels are indicated. In higher education, the Europass diploma supplement is issued, with the NQF level included ([34]).

Career information and guidance

The centres for professional information and counselling of the Employment Agency of Montenegro ([35]) provide information on occupations, secondary school curricula, as well as on learning and employment opportunities. The national Europass centre ([36]) promotes the implementation of Europass in the country.

Recognition of qualifications

The MQF law establishes the correspondence of national qualifications awarded before its adoption with the MQF levels and sub-levels. Recognition of foreign education qualifications is based on the comparison of a qualification with the corresponding qualification standard in Montenegro ([37]).

Tools to use the NQF

The Qualifications Council and institutions that develop and implement qualifications adhere to the following bylaws and methodological documents: *Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from the first to the fifth level of qualifications; Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from the sixth to the eighth level of qualifications; Rulebook on description of levels and sublevels NQF; Guidelines for the development of qualifications for levels I-V; Methodology for assigning qualification codes; Basis for modularisation and credit evaluation of vocational education programmes; Guidelines for the work of the sectoral commission; and Rulebook on the manner and procedure of assessment of knowledge, skills and competences in the process of acquiring vocational qualifications* ([38]).

NQF evaluation

No systematic evaluation of the NQF use or impact has yet been carried out. Based on experiences so far, the framework has played a key role in improving the qualifications system and improving education and training programmes. It has greatly influenced the promotion and use of learning outcomes, and learning units have become credit-evaluated and transferable from one qualification to another. It has influenced the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications; the whole process and procedures for qualification development have become more

transparent. It has also supported dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders across education and training sectors, and between education and the labour market ([39]).

Referencing to the EQF

Referencing to regional frameworks

Montenegro completed the process of referencing the MQF to the EQF and self-certification against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2014. A joint report is published on the Europass portal ([40]). An updated referencing report is planned to be presented in the EQF advisory group in 2022 ([41]).

International cooperation

Montenegro is a candidate for EU membership, and a participating country in the establishment of a regional economic area in the Western Balkans. The country is a member of the EQF advisory group.

The Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (AKOKVO) established in 2017 became an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2019) and a full member of the [Central Eastern European Network of Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies \(CEENQA, 2020\)](#). The country ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2004.

Montenegro continues to participate actively in the EU Erasmus+ programme as a partner country.

International donor support

The EU provides assistance to Montenegro for education and labour market reforms under the Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA). Priority interventions are: active labour market measures and local employment initiatives; improvement of quality of education with particular focus on STEM; and further development of modularised educational programmes in line with NQF ([42]).

Important lessons and future plans

Work on the MQF was undertaken as part of Montenegro's accession to the EU and supported by resources and expertise accessed through EU programmes. The strategic approach to developing and implementing the framework and commitment of all key stakeholders involved are considered as key success factors in the progress achieved so far.

The challenges related to MQF implementation include the need to improve the match between skills and qualifications demanded on the labour market and those provided through the education and training system. A wider and more systematic involvement of labour market stakeholders is needed to improve analysis and anticipation of skills and qualifications needs.

Enhancing the capacity of sectoral commissions so that they are able adequately to articulate the labour market and society's needs, identify qualification and skill gaps, and propose development of qualifications of different types and levels, remains a key challenge for the upcoming period ([43]).

The necessity to communicate the MQF beyond the education and training system and to make it more visible and clearer to stakeholders and the general public has become apparent. Employers and their associations need to be provided with information on opportunities to launch initiatives to develop new or revise existing occupational standards and qualifications.

The main challenges to be tackled to advance VNFIL implementation include improving quality assurance mechanisms and procedures for assessment of non-formal and informal learning; addressing the lack of information about VNFIL, both among the general public and among labour market stakeholders; and promoting VNFIL opportunities in a systematic manner.

Other important key measures and policies that have been put in place or are planned include: revision and development of qualifications and programmes in line with MQF principles and labour market needs; modularisation of education programmes based on learning outcomes and inclusion of key competences; and improving the quality assurance system ([44]).

Main sources of information

- The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport is the EQF NCP: <https://mps.gov.me/ministarstvo>
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National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	<p>Diploma of doctoral studies Labour-market-oriented qualifications, attained through assessment of vocational ability to perform sets of tasks linked to an occupation. Demonstrated knowledge, skills and competences can be acquired through formal or non-formal learning, including special education programmes or part of formal education programmes that corresponds to an occupational standard.</p>	8
7.2	<p>Diploma of master studies Pre-Bologna diplomas, in use until adoption of the Higher Education Act of 2002.</p> <p>Diploma of master studies</p>	7
7.1	<p>Graduate specialist academic and applied studies diploma</p> <p>Higher education diploma Pre-Bologna diplomas, in use until adoption of the Higher Education Act of 2002.</p> <p>First cycle academic and applied studies diploma Pre-Bologna diplomas, in use until adoption of the Higher Education Act of 2002.</p>	7
6	<p>Diploma of first cycle academic and applied studies</p>	6
5	<p>Diploma of post-secondary vocational education</p>	5
4.2	<p>Master craftsman examination certificate</p>	4
4.1	<p>Upper secondary school leaving diploma (general, gymnasium)</p> <p>Upper secondary school leaving diploma (vocational, four years)</p>	4

3	Diploma of secondary vocational education (three years)	3
2	Diploma of lower vocational education (two years)	2
1.2	Certificate of completed primary education (nine years)	1
1.1	Certificate of completed first cycle of primary education or completed functional literacy programme	

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession, the EU support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries
MCTS	Montenegrin credit transfer system
MQF	Montenegrin qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVQ	national vocational qualifications
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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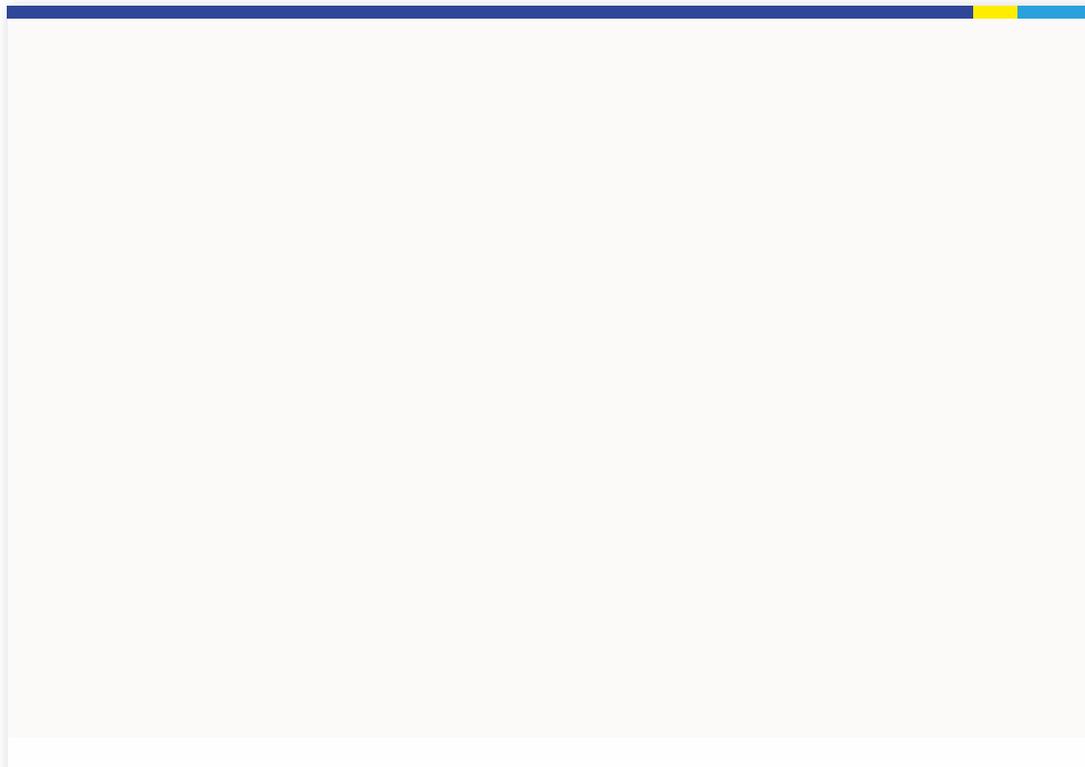
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