

NQF state of play

 **Croatia 2022**

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Overview

Stage of development: Operational stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:

The NQF includes all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training.

Number of levels:

Thirteen

Legal basis/stage of development:

CROQF Act (2013, last amendment in 2021) ([in Croatian](#))

NQF/EQF website:

[Website](#)

Qualifications register/database:

[Qualifications register](#)

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Croatia in 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (5.4 %) was above the EU average (5.0 %). Participation in early childhood education and care is rather low (78.8 % in 2020), while the rate of early leaving from education and training is very low (2.4 % in 2021). In 2021, tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) (35.7 %) was lower than the EU-27 average (41.2 %). In 2020, participation in upper secondary VET was among the highest in the EU (69.3 %), but the employment rate of VET graduates (age 25–34) was 69.9 %. The participation of adults in lifelong learning is significantly lower than the EU average (respectively 5.1 % and 10.8 % in 2021) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

In the last decade, the CROQF has been strongly embedded in policy initiatives and strategies, which have linked the framework with developing a quality assurance system at all levels of education and training; improving and expanding work-based learning; modernising curricula to better respond to learners' needs; and promoting lifelong learning, career guidance and the recognition of prior learning. Since 2020, the [2021–2024 implementation programme](#) of the education ministry (Ministry of Science and Education) envisages that the CROQF will contribute to raising the quality of adult education programmes and to improving and ensuring the quality and relevance of higher education. The [2021–2027 national plan for work, safety at work and employment](#) states that occupational standards can be the basis for developing learning outcomes and educational programmes that are relevant to labour market needs (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The CROQF is embedded in the [National plan for the development of the education system](#) (2023 – 2027) ([1]).

1.2. NQF legal basis

The [CROQF act](#) was adopted in 2013; its last amendment (2021) aimed to simplify and speed up the procedures for including occupational and qualification standards in the CROQF register and to improve their applicability and quality (see Chapter). For this reason, the participation of stakeholders is increased, and the existing resources are reinforced. Following the 2021 amendment to the act, the [ordinance on the CROQF register](#) – from the same year – regulates the content, registration

procedures, internal and external quality assurance system, application submission forms and content of sub-registers. The recovery and resilience plan and the adult education law aim to ensure the quality of adult education institutions. In accordance with the law, formal education programmes must be aligned with a qualification standard or unit of learning outcomes from the CROQF register, while non-formal education programmes, financed through EU-funded vouchers, must be in line with an occupational standard or unit of competences and with the qualification standard or unit of learning outcomes from the CROQF register. Furthermore, the [law on recognition and assessment of foreign education qualifications](#) gives a specific role to the CROQF in recognition procedures (see Section) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The framework was taken into account while carrying out the comprehensive curriculum reform for primary and secondary education and in the [amended act on VET](#) and in new legislation in higher education.

Policy objectives

The main aim of the CROQF apart from promoting the transparency and comparability of qualifications at the national and European levels, is to support the reform of education and training and the development of new education and training solutions reflecting national needs and priorities.

The CROQF also aims to:

- a. enable better communication and partnerships among stakeholders;
- b. make it easier to recognise foreign qualifications;
- c. promote the use of learning outcomes and key competences;
- d. ensure high-quality education and learning;
- e. promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- f. promote employability, personal, social and economic development, and social inclusion;
- g. ensure horizontal and vertical mobility and access to lifelong learning.

The CROQF functions as a tool for tackling challenges and aligning education and training with the needs of the labour market and society. For instance, one of the main functions of the framework is to modernise VET by developing curricula and occupational and qualification standards in accordance with the CROQF level descriptors. In adult education, programmes aligned with the CROQF can directly improve employability and productivity in the labour market, while this system enables the acquisition of microcredentials and partial qualifications in line with the CROQF standards. The framework also functions as a tool supporting improvements in higher education by strengthening its quality assurance system and developing programmes relevant to economic and societal needs (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

According to the 2021 amendment to the CROQF act, the framework has thirteen levels; however, its structure is compatible with the EQF. For example, CROQF level 8.1 and 8.2 are referenced to EQF level 8; the same applies for levels 4, 6 and 7. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive, practical and social) and responsibility and autonomy. Each levelled qualification is defined in terms of profile (field of work or study), reference level (complexity of acquired competences) and volume/workload (credit points) ([2]). The conditions for admission and for acquiring a qualification, and the workload requirements at each level, are outlined in the CROQF act. In addition, the types of qualifications in the CROQF are regulated by specific regulations.

Levels 4.1, 4.2, 8.1 and 8.2 cater for qualifications of different workloads and levels of complexity. For example, a qualification with a minimum of 180 CSVET/HROO points is referenced to level 4.1. For a qualification at level 4.2, a minimum of 240 CSVET/HROO points are required. Level 6.st covers professional bachelor's diplomas, while 6.sv includes bachelor's diplomas. Similarly, levels 7.1.st and 7.1.sv respectively include professional and academic master's diplomas (see Table 1).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The CROQF covers full and partial qualifications ([3]) from all levels and subsystems of formal education and training (general education, VET and higher education). Partial qualifications can be awarded at levels 2 to 7. In principle, all types of qualification can be included in the framework, regardless of the way in which they were acquired, provided they comply with quality assurance requirements. The three agencies supervised by the education ministry (see Chapter) are responsible for including qualification standards and units of learning outcomes in the CROQF register, while the labour ministry is responsible for including occupational standards and units of competences. Numerous new qualifications are created in line with these procedures (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

According to the 2021 [act on adult education](#), there are three types of

programmes leading to microcredentials (units of learning outcomes): training that can be used to acquire microcredentials at CROQF levels 2, 3 and 4, advanced professional training in adult education (CROQF level 4), and vocational specialist training (CROQF level 5) ([4]). The 2022 [Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity](#) encourages higher education institutions to develop microcredentials based on qualification standards or units of learning outcomes included in the CROQF Register ([5]).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The CROQF plays a central role in developing and implementing the learning-outcomes approach in all subsystems of education and training. All qualifications are organised into units of learning outcomes. Occupational standards are developed through the research-based analysis of labour market needs and the occupational standard survey (a questionnaire initially completed by expert groups and then confirmed by employers and employees). They are then the basis for developing standards for qualifications aimed at the labour market. Qualification standards included in the CROQF register are the basis for developing and redesigning education and training programmes. Only programmes developed in line with an CROQF qualification standard can be included in the CROQF register. Competence-based occupational standards and learning-outcome-based qualification standards are being developed, mostly through European Social Fund projects.

The learning-outcomes approach has gradually been introduced to VET since 2006. The amended act on VET defines occupational and qualification standards in compliance with the CROQF act. VET curricula are being developed in accordance with occupational and qualification standards. Since 2020, there has been considerable progress in developing learning-outcomes-based occupational and qualification standards, which have been included in the CROQF Register. They form the basis for VET curricula that are being developed and adopted ([6]).

Higher education has undergone extensive changes in the last decade, including the strengthening of the learning-outcomes dimension. The sector has been adjusted to the Bologna three-cycle system. Changes in curricula are intended to develop competences needed on the labour market. The CROQF is thought to be the main instrument for bridging higher education and the labour market (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2017).

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

The external quality assurance of education and training programmes is the remit of three different agencies: the [Education and Teacher Training Agency](#) (for general education); the Agency for VET and Adult Education; and the Agency for Science and Higher Education. They play a crucial role in assuring the quality of the procedure for including standards and programmes in the CROQF register (Chapter) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). In higher education, the CROQF has been strengthened by the fundamental regulations on higher education, the act on higher education and scientific activity and the act on quality assurance in higher education and science. The Agency for Science and Higher Education has integrated the CROQF into the quality standards used in the accreditation processes ([7]).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The education ministry, in cooperation with the labour ministry and the National Council for Development of Human Potential, is responsible for the overall coordination and oversight of the CROQF. The council comprises 25 representatives of national ministries, regional structures, social partners, education providers and national agencies involved in developing and awarding qualifications in various subsystems of education and training. The council oversees policies in education, training, employment and human resource development, and monitors and evaluates the CROQF's impact and the work of sectoral councils. The variety of stakeholders actively involved in the national council is both the strength of the current governance arrangement, as it ensures a wide consensus on matters regarding the CROQF, and its weakness, as decision-making may take a long time.

In accordance with the CROQF act, the main tasks of the education ministry include referencing the CROQF to the EQF and self-certifying it against the QF-EHEA; setting up and maintaining the CROQF and the CROQF register; providing administrative support to the National Council for Development of Human Potential; adopting guidelines on developing qualification standards; developing and monitoring a system of validation of non-formal learning; informing the public about the CROQF; coordinating quality assurance relating to qualifications and learning outcomes; and using the CROQF in the recognition of qualifications. The main tasks of the labour ministry are managing the sub-register of occupational standards and deciding which occupational standards will be included in the CROQF ([8]). It also contributes to CROQF implementation, aiming to use the framework in promoting employability and raising competitiveness (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The agencies for education and teacher training, VET and adult education, and science and higher education (supervised by the education ministry) are responsible for (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022):

- a. ensuring the compliance of learning programmes with CROQF standards;
- b. setting up and providing administrative and expert support to sectoral councils;

- c. deciding which qualification standards will be included in CROQF sub-registers (based on the opinion of an expert committee appointed by the relevant agency) ([9]);
- d. monitoring NQF-related developments at the international level.

The department for the Croatian qualifications framework, within the education ministry, is the EQF national coordination point. All of the institutions involved have a permanent staff member responsible for the day-to day running of the framework. One important task of this daily coordination is including qualification and occupational standards in the register. The CROQF implementation is co-funded through Erasmus+ and European Social Fund projects (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

According to the 2021 CROQF Act, new sectoral councils are being set up. In total, there will be 25 sectoral councils, operating as advisory and professional bodies working on the development of human potential in line with labour market needs. Each has a president and 10 members (representing the ministry of the respective sector, the public employment service, the agency for quality assurance and sectoral experts), who are appointed by the three agencies. Following the 2021 amendment of the CROQF act, their role is more strategically oriented, and they are no longer in charge of assessing proposals for including occupational and qualification standards in the register (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

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

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

The CROQF has been the foundation for the creation of the system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, as it explicitly aims to set up such a system ([10]). The implementation of the CROQF and the CROQF register, and the development of occupational and qualification standards, along with units of learning, can be considered prerequisites for a validation system. However, a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning has yet been fully developed. For example, the approach to validation differs between adult and higher education ([11]).

The 2021 adult education act specifies that the method of application and the validation of prior learning will be described in an ordinance (expected in 2023). The act defines a validation programme as a regular formal programme in adult education, in accordance with which units of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal way are validated. Validation programmes enable the validation of prior learning in accordance with the appropriate standard included in the CROQF register, while they will lead to a qualification at CROQF levels 1 to 5. The act also mentions that the expected ordinance will enable the validation of micro-qualifications, which, as stated in the act, can be:

- a. reskilling programmes (*osposobljavanje*) at CROQF levels 2, 3 or 4, which is smaller than 10 credits under the Croatian credit system for VET;
- b. upskilling programmes (*usavrsavanje*) at CROQF level 4, which is smaller than 10 credits under the Croatian credit system for VET ;
- c. vocational specialist upskilling programmes at CROQF level 5.

In practice, the validation of learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training is still rare.

In higher education, based on the principal of university autonomy, universities and university colleges (public and private) have developed internal ordinances that enable students to go through a process of

validation of prior learning.

5.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications

According to the law on recognition and assessment of foreign education qualifications, in the procedure of assessing a foreign qualification, responsible authorities should consider, among other things, its NQF/EQF level, as well as the relevant CROQF level, and (if applicable) its referencing to the QF-EHEA ([12]).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The CROQF has reached the operational stage. Apart from promoting the transparency and comparability of qualifications, the framework is an integral element of quality assurance mechanisms for the design and renewal of qualifications. It provides a platform of cooperation for stakeholders across the fields of education, training and employment, while it is also the basis for developing a validation system in Croatia. A major next step will be to indicate CROQF and EQF levels on qualifications.

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

CROQF/EQF levels are not yet indicated on any levelled qualifications. They are indicated on Europass diploma supplements (higher education) and on Europass certificate supplements of VET qualifications at levels 4 and 5 (apart from the master craftsman's diploma). CROQF/EQF levels are indicated in the CROQF register (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.3. NQF dissemination

The [CROQF website](#) is one of the main tools for disseminating information on the framework. A [series of guidance documents](#) has been published (in Croatian) on the website. Several such documents have been developed to support the implementation of the framework, including the [Methodology for developing occupational standards and units of competences](#), the [Guidelines for developing qualification standards in higher education](#) and the [Guidelines for developing qualification standards in VET](#). Conferences (organised annually) and seminars on the use of the CROQF, targeting CROQF implementers and end users, have been also organised (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.4. Qualifications databases and registers

The [CROQF register](#) includes, in its three sub-registers, a total of 516 occupational standards, 244 qualification standards and 94 programmes (as at June 2023). Only qualifications developed in accordance with the procedures introduced by the CROQF act are included in the register; since 2020, there has been considerable progress in developing such qualifications. The register provides information on qualifications

regarding the field of study, CROQF/EQF levels, learning outcomes (in the form of open text), credit points / notional workload, entry requirements, ways to acquire the qualification and relationship to occupations or occupational fields. It is planned that the register will be connected to the Europass platform (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The [Labour market portal](#), among other functions, supports stakeholders in developing occupational standards and units of competencies in accordance with the CROQF ([13]).

6.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

Education and training providers and labour market stakeholders actively participate in designing occupational and qualification standards and programmes. Some employers also use CROQF levels in job descriptions and vacancies. Job seekers sometimes use CROQF and EQF levels to describe their qualifications, especially when using the Europass documents; students and learners often contact the EQF national coordination point to receive information on the CROQF levels of programmes they have completed, or plan to complete.

Guidance and counselling practitioners use the levels in their work. Recognition authorities and bodies use the CROQF in the process of recognition, as provided for by the legislation; the ENIC-NARIC centre uses NQF levels to compare and interpret foreign qualifications. Quality assurance agencies are responsible for evaluating qualification standards in their domains. The education ministry has promoted the use of levels in legislation pertaining to regulated professions in various fields (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

6.6. Impact of the NQF

The CROQF has had a considerable impact on the development of qualifications and curricula, as occupation and qualification standards form the basis for their design. The development and inclusion in the register of qualification standards has also contributed to promoting transparency and the comparability of qualifications. Creating education programmes in line with the CROQF represents a mark of quality; additionally, quality assurance agencies play an important role in the day-to-day implementation of the framework. The CROQF has served as an important tool in fostering cooperation among educational providers (e.g. in agreeing on the core learning outcomes described in qualification standards) and between education and training institutions and labour market stakeholders in developing standards and curricula; the methodology adopted makes such cooperation obligatory (European

Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Referencing to the EQF

Croatia referenced the CROQF to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in March 2012; a joint report was published in 2014 (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014). The updating of the referencing report is planned to start in 2023, covering the new institutional set-up as the main CROQF responsibilities are delegated from the education ministry to its supervised agencies, and the emphasis is put on harmonising education programmes with CROQF qualification and occupation standards (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Important lessons and future plans

Since 2020, Croatia has achieved remarkable progress in including newly developed occupational and qualification standards and programmes in the CROQF register, in accordance with the procedures described in the amended CROQF act. These procedures ensure the labour market relevance of programmes as qualification standards are aligned with occupational standards, which reflect labour market needs. The active involvement of quality assurance agencies, supervised by the education ministry, strengthens the quality element of qualifications. The changes in CROQF governance and day-to-day implementation (mainly the amended procedure of including standards and programmes in the CROQF register) have eased and sped up the broadening of its scope and coverage (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The relatively rapid development of the CROQF illustrates the importance of stimulating active and broad stakeholder participation throughout the entire process, complemented by targeted support for, and training of, those stakeholders.

Challenges include the indication of CROQF/EQF levels on qualifications. In higher education specifically, legislation and guidelines should be developed to foster greater efficiency and clarity in using the CROQF, while the concept of microcredentials and their potential should be further explored.

The main priorities are revising the guidelines for the alignment of study programmes with qualification standards, based on the experience of higher education institutions, and updating the referencing report. In 2023, the ordinance on the recognition and validation of prior learning is also expected to be finalised and adopted.

Main sources of information

URLs accessed 18 June 2023

- [Croatian Ministry of Science and Education](#).
- [CROQF website](#).
- [CROQF register](#).
- Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education (2014). *The referencing and self-certification report of the Croatian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework and to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area*. Zagreb.

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8.2	Postgraduate doctoral degree - PhD (doktorski studij)	8
8.1	(Pre-Bologna) postgraduate research / artistic master's degree - MPhil (poslijediplomski znanstveni/umjetnički magistarski studij)	8
7.2	Advanced master's / postgraduate university specialisation study (sveučilišni specijalistički studiji)	7
7.1 sv	Master's diploma - graduate university studies (sveučilišni diplomski studiji) Master's diploma - integrated undergraduate and graduate university studies (sveučilišni integrirani prijediplomski i diplomski studij)	7
7.1 st	Professional master's diploma - graduate professional studies (stručni diplomski studiji)	7
6 sv	Bachelor's diploma - undergraduate university studies (sveučilišni prijediplomski studiji)	6
6 st	Professional bachelor's diploma - undergraduate professional studies (stručni prijediplomski studiji)	6
5	Professional higher education diploma / associate degree - short-cycle study (stručni kratki studiji) VET post-secondary development certificate (strukovno specijalističko usavršavanje) Master craftsman's diploma (programi za majstore uz najmanje dvije godine vrednovanog radnog iskustva)	5

4.2	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (Gimnazijsko srednjoškolsko obrazovanje) Upper secondary VET certificate - 4 years or more (Strukovno srednjoškolsko obrazovanje u trajanju od četiri ili više godina)	4
4.1	Upper secondary VET - 3 years or more, but shorter than 4 years (Trogodišnje strukovno obrazovanje u trajanju od tri ili dužem od tri, a kraćem od četiri godine)	
3	Upper secondary VET certificate -shorter than 3 years (Srednjoškolsko strukovno obrazovanje u trajanju kraćem od 3 godine)	3
2	Vocational and artistic training certificate (Strukovno i umjetničko osposobljavanje)	2
1	Primary education certificate - 8 years (Osnovno obrazovanje) The first 8 years of schooling are called primary education. This refers to both ISCED 1 and 2 (primary and lower secondary education). NB sv stands for academic studies (sveučilišni studij); st stands for professional studies (stručni studij)	1

Acronyms

ECVET European credit system for vocational education and training

ENIC- European Network of National Information Centres and Network
NARIC of National Academic Recognition Information Centres

EQF European qualifications framework

HKO Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir (Croatian qualifications framework)

HROO Croatian credit system for general education

NQF national qualifications framework

QF- qualifications framework in the European higher education area
EHEA

VET vocational education and training

References

URLs accessed 18 June 2023

Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education (2014). *The referencing and self-certification report of the Croatian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework and to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area*. Zagreb.

European Commission and Cedefop (2020). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF: Croatia [unpublished].

European Commission and Cedefop (2022). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF: Croatia [unpublished].

European Commission. DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022). *Education and training monitor 2020: Croatia*.

Pavkov, M. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Croatia*.

Pavkov, M. (forthcoming). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Croatia*.

Notes

[1]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[2]Three credit systems are used to measure the volume of qualifications and of learning outcomes: the Croatian credit system for general education (HROO), the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) and the European credit transfer and accumulation system for higher education.

[3]A partial qualification does not independently meet the conditions for access to the labour market or further education. It can enable access only in conjunction with a full qualification or one or more other appropriate partial qualifications, which together meet a full qualification standard.

[4]According to the methodology for creating such programmes, they are specific and do not necessarily have to ensure horizontal and vertical mobility, apart from applicable cases or if learners aim to accumulate microcredentials to obtain a partial or full qualifications. Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[5]The subsequent 2022 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science provides quality assurance procedures also for this type of programmes. Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[6]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[7]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[8]This task is performed by the permanent committee of the labour ministry, composed of various stakeholders.

[9]This is a major change, introduced by the latest amendment to the CROQF act, aiming to speed up the procedure.

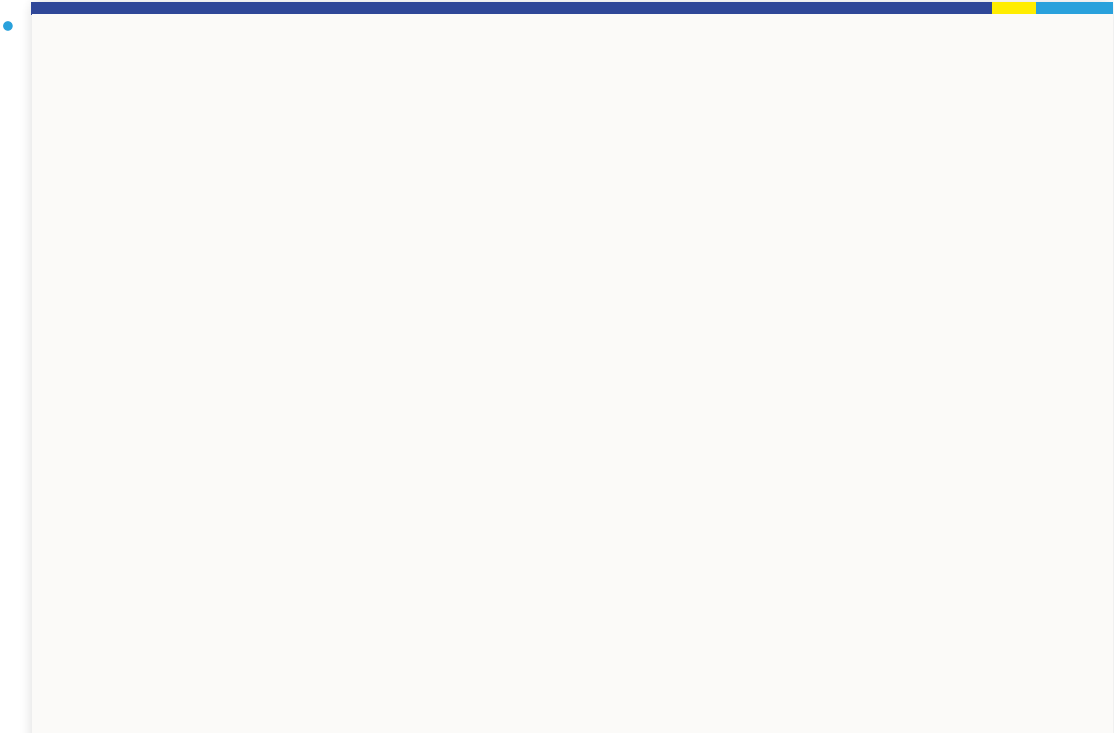
[10]Section 6.1 draws mainly on input from Pavkov (2019, forthcoming).

[11]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[12]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

[13]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Science and Education.

Related content



2022

Croatia - European inventory of NQFs 2022

European inventory of NQF



Croatia