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EUROPEAN INVENTORY OF NQFs 2024 **CROATIA**

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1. Introduction

Cedefop's work on qualifications frameworks dates back to 2003. The Centre has contributed to the conceptual development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and has supported its further implementation, working alongside national authorities and stakeholders to introduce and develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). This report is part of the European inventory of NQFs, which systematically maps and analyses NQF developments in countries participating in the EQF process. The inventory is updated biennially in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. The report provides a detailed description of the structure of the Croatian NQF (CROQF) and its institutional arrangements. It also examines the framework's implementation and its impact on broader policy areas, focusing on key developments since 2022.

The Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) (*Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir*, HKO) is a comprehensive 13-level framework. It includes qualifications from all levels and sectors of formal education and training, i.e. general, vocational education and training (VET), higher and adult education. The CROQF register, which includes occupational and qualification standards, is a pivotal instrument of the country's qualification system and a cornerstone of quality assurance. The CROQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2012; the updated referencing and self-certification report was endorsed by the EQF Advisory Group in 2024.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In Croatia in 2022, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (4.8%) was slightly above the EU average (4.7%). Participation in early childhood education and care was rather low (83.5% in 2022) but had significantly increased since 2013 (67.6%), while the rate of early leaving from education and training was very low (2.0% in 2023). In 2021, tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) (38.5%) was lower than the EU-27 average (44.2%). In 2022, participation in upper secondary VET was among the highest in the EU (70.5%), but the employment rate of VET graduates (age 25–34) was 70.0% (2023). The participation of adults in learning in the previous 12 months (excluding

guided on-the-job training) was significantly lower than the EU average (23.3% and 39.5% respectively in 2022) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024).

Since 2020, as envisaged in the [2021–2024 implementation programme](#) of the education ministry, the CROQF has helped to raise the quality of adult education programmes and to improve and ensure the quality and relevance of higher education. According to the [2021–2027 national plan for work, safety at work and employment](#), occupational standards have become the basis for developing learning outcomes and educational programmes that meet labour market needs (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). The [national plan for the development of the education system](#) (2023 – 2027) considers the CROQF as a key instrument in developing higher education programmes that address labour market needs. According to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026), the harmonisation of adult education programmes with CROQF qualification standards can help combat low participation in such programmes (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

2.2. 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 (see Section 7.2) and to improve their quality. It also changed the structure of the CROQF, introducing 13 levels (see Section 4.1). Following this amendment, the 2021 [ordinance on the CROQF register](#) regulates the content, registration procedures, internal and external quality assurance systems and application submission forms. The CROQF is incorporated into the legislation promoting quality assurance in all education and training subsystems. According to the 2018 amendments to the Law on VET, the vocational curriculum should be based on one or more CROQF qualification standards developed according to one or more CROQF occupational standards (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming). The [Law on quality assurance in higher education and science](#), states that one of the criteria for the initial accreditation of a study programme is its compliance with a CROQF qualification standard (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). To ensure the quality of adult education institutions, the adult education law states that formal education programmes should align with a qualification standard or unit of learning outcomes from the CROQF register. Non-formal education programmes, financed through EU-funded vouchers, must align with an occupational standard or unit of competences and with the qualification standard or unit of learning outcomes from the CROQF register. The ordinance on validation of prior learning states that validation

arrangements should use the relevant qualification standard or unit of learning outcomes from the CROQF register (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Further, the [Law on recognition and assessment of foreign education qualifications](#) gives a specific role to the CROQF in such procedures (see Section 6.3) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). The [Act on higher education and scientific activity](#) regulates the link between lifelong learning programmes offered by higher education institutions and the CROQF (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

3. NQF objectives

The CROQF mainly aims to promote the transparency and comparability of qualifications at the national and European levels, to support the reform of education and training and to develop and update education and training programmes 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, economic development, and the competitiveness of the Croatian economy;
- (g) promote personal and social responsibility, democratic values and social inclusion;
- (h) ensure horizontal and vertical mobility and access for all to lifelong learning.

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

Following the 2021 amendment to the CROQF Act, the framework has 13 levels. However, its structure is compatible with the EQF as it has eight levels of learning outcomes. The level descriptors represent minimal conditions for placing qualifications at CROQF levels (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming). For example, CROQF levels 8.1 and 8.2 are referenced to EQF level eight; the same applies to 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 learning outcomes), and volume/workload (credit points).

Levels 4.1, 4.2, 8.1 and 8.2 cater to qualifications of different workloads and levels of complexity. For example, a qualification with a minimum of 180 CSVET points is referenced to level 4.1. For a qualification at level 4.2, a minimum of 240 CSVET/HROO points is required (see Section 6.2). Level 6.st covers professional bachelor diplomas, while 6.sv includes bachelor diplomas. Similarly, levels 7.1.st and 7.1.sv respectively include professional and academic master's diplomas (see Table 1). The learning outcomes of qualifications obtained through university and professional studies differ in the share of knowledge and skills (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The CROQF covers full and partial qualifications from all levels and subsystems of formal education and training: general education, VET, adult education, higher education and lifelong learning programmes offered by higher education institutions. In principle, all types of qualifications can be included in the framework, regardless of how they were acquired, provided they comply with quality assurance requirements (see Section 7.2). Adult education includes programmes that are adjusted to the needs of adult learners and can lead to all VET qualifications at CROQF levels 2 to 5. Validation of non-formal and informal learning can lead to a partial or full CROQF qualification (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). The CROQF included 545 qualification standards as of December 2024, while 17 qualification standards were no longer active (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Partial qualifications ⁽¹⁾ and micro-qualifications ⁽²⁾ are part of adult education and have been included (from an early stage) in the CROQF at levels 2 to 5. Their number and use have significantly increased since the adoption of the Council Recommendation on microcredentials. They are parts of CROQF qualifications and learners can stack them to acquire a full qualification. Learners receive a certificate, which should indicate the CROQF level of the partial or of the micro-qualification ⁽³⁾. The CROQF register includes standards of partial qualifications and units of learning outcomes, which form the basis for developing partial qualifications and micro-qualifications (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming). According to the 2021 Act on Adult Education, there are three types

⁽¹⁾ 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. To acquire a partial qualification learners need a minimum of 10 CROGE, CSVET or ECTS credits and at least 50% of credits should correspond to units of learning outcomes at the given CROQF level of the partial qualification.

⁽²⁾ This is the equivalent term used at national level for microcredentials.

⁽³⁾ Source: Internal communication with the Ministry of Science, Education & Youth.

of programmes leading to micro-qualifications and partial qualifications: training at CROQF levels 2, 3 and 4, advanced professional training in adult education (CROQF level 4), and vocational specialist training (CROQF level 5) ⁽⁴⁾.

According to the 2022 [Act on higher education and scientific activity](#), higher education institutions can offer lifelong learning programmes (adult education/microcredentials), based on CROQF occupational and partial qualification standards or units of learning outcomes. Only programmes aligned with the CROQF can be considered microcredentials and financed through vouchers (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming) ⁽⁵⁾. These programmes can be, but are not necessarily, part of a higher education programme. The CROQF is open to international qualifications. To include such qualifications in the CROQF, potential providers should follow the procedures described in Section 7.2 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Table 1. **Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF)**

CROQF level	Full qualifications	Partial-, micro-qualifications	EQF level
8.2	Postgraduate doctoral degree – PhD (<i>doktorski studij</i>)	Level 8 lifelong learning programmes (**)	8
8.1	(Pre-Bologna) postgraduate research / artistic master degree – MPhil (<i>poslijediplomski znanstveni/umjetnički magistarski studij</i>)		
7.2	Advanced master / University specialisation studies (<i>sveučilišni specijalistički studiji</i>)	Level 7 lifelong learning programmes	7
7.1.sv	Master diploma - graduate university studies (<i>sveučilišni diplomski studiji</i>) - integrated undergraduate and graduate university studies (<i>sveučilišni integrirani prijediplomski i diplomski studiji</i>)		

⁽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 micro-qualifications to obtain a partial or full qualifications. Source: Internal communication with the Ministry of Science, Education & Youth.

⁽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, Education & Youth.

CROQF level	Full qualifications	Partial-, micro-qualifications	EQF level
7.1.st	Professional master diploma – graduate professional studies (<i>stručni diplomski studiji</i>)		
6.sv	Bachelor diploma – undergraduate university studies (<i>sveučilišni prijediplomski studiji</i>)	Level 6 lifelong learning programmes	6
6.st	Professional bachelor diploma – undergraduate professional studies (<i>stručni prijediplomski studiji</i>)		
5	Professional higher education diploma / associate degree – short-cycle study (<i>stručni kratki studiji</i>) Post-secondary vocational specialisation and training certificate (<i>strukovno specijalističko usavršavanje i osposobljavanje</i>) Master craftsman's diploma (<i>programi za majstore uz najmanje dvije godine vrednovanog radnog iskustva</i>)	Level 5 lifelong learning programmes Level 5 partial qualifications Micro-qualification (through vocational specialist training)	5
4.2	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (<i>Gimnazijsko srednjoškolsko obrazovanje</i>) Secondary VET certificate – 5 years (<i>Četverogodišnje i petogodišnje strukovno srednjoškolsko obrazovanje</i>)	Level 4 partial qualifications Micro-qualification (through advanced professional training in adult education)	4
4.1	Upper secondary VET certificate – 3 years (<i>Trogodišnje strukovno obrazovanje</i>)		
3	Upper secondary VET certificate – 2 years / Upper secondary VET certificate – 1 year (<i>Jednogodišnje i dvogodišnje srednjoškolsko strukovno obrazovanje</i>)	Level 3 partial qualifications Micro-qualification (through training)	3
2	Vocational training certificate (<i>Strukovno osposobljavanje</i>)	Level 2 partial qualifications Micro-qualification (through training)	2
1	Primary education certificate – 8 years (<i>Osnovno obrazovanje</i>) (***)		1

(*) Partial qualifications and micro-credentials are explicitly linked only to the CROQF and not to the EQF in the legislative framework.

(**) At level 8, it is only possible to include lifelong learning programmes based on units of learning outcomes.

(***) Primary education includes both primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1 & 2)

NB sv stands for academic studies (*sveučilišni studij*); st stands for professional studies (*stručni studij*)

Source: European Commission & Cedefop (2022).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The CROQF plays a key role in developing and implementing the learning-outcomes approach in all education and training subsystems. All qualifications are organised into units of learning outcomes. The CROQF register includes occupational standards ⁽⁶⁾ and units of competences, as well as qualification standards ⁽⁷⁾ and units of learning outcomes (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming). Since 2020, there has been considerable progress in developing learning-outcomes-based occupational and qualification standards ⁽⁸⁾. Occupational standards are developed through 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 form the basis for developing qualification standards. Only programmes developed in line with a CROQF qualification standard can be included in the register, making the framework an integral part of the country's qualification system (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The CROQF was considered during the curriculum reform for primary and secondary education, focusing on developing core competences for lifelong learning and defining clear learning outcomes. The primary and secondary education curricula, as well as the subject-specific curricula and the cross-curricular topics, expressed in learning outcomes, were adopted in 2019 and have been implemented in all grades since 2022. Following the 2018 amendment of the VET Act, VET curricula designed according to CROQF occupational and qualification standards, and expressed in learning outcomes and competences, were introduced in formal VET. Curricula of general education subjects in VET programmes leading to qualifications at the CROQF level 4.2 are also expressed in learning outcomes (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

In higher education, the learning outcomes of all study programmes should comply with the corresponding approved CROQF qualification standard and with

⁽⁶⁾ The occupational standard is the result of the agreement of all relevant stakeholders in the labour market and education on the optimal content of a particular occupation and on the required knowledge, skills and autonomy and responsibility (competences). It determines the key tasks for a particular profession and the competences needed to perform them. Competences are grouped into logical units (units of competences), regardless of the type of work and key tasks.

⁽⁷⁾ The qualification standard determines the content and structure of a certain qualification. It includes all the data needed to determine the level, volume and profile of the qualifications, such as credits, entrance requirements and requirements for acquiring the qualification and assessment procedures. The qualification standard consists of several units of learning outcomes. The latter represent the smallest complete set of learning outcomes of a certain level, volume and profile.

⁽⁸⁾ Source: Internal communication with the Ministry of Science, Education & Youth.

the CROQF level descriptors. Further, lifelong learning programmes offered by higher education institutions are based on CROQF qualification standards or units of learning outcomes (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

According to the 2022 Adult Education Act and its by-laws, each programme, including those leading to micro- and partial qualifications, should directly connect with the competences and learning outcomes described in CROQF occupational and qualification standards ⁽⁹⁾. This ensures high quality and alignment with labour market needs, while supporting learners' personal and professional development (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

4.4. 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 ensuring the quality of the procedure for including standards and programmes in the CROQF register (see Section 7.2) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

Following the legislative changes, mostly after 2020, the CROQF is now incorporated into all key legislation on quality assurance in different parts of education (see Section 2.2). For example, in higher education, the procedure for obtaining a licence to conduct study programmes and the criteria for programme evaluation include the programme's compliance with the CROQF qualification standard (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The education ministry, in cooperation with the labour ministry and the National Council for the Development of Human Potential ⁽¹⁰⁾, is responsible for the overall coordination and oversight of the CROQF. The council comprises 25 representatives from national ministries, regional structures, social partners, education providers and national agencies involved in developing and awarding qualifications. This variety is both the strength of the current governance arrangement, as it ensures a broad consensus, and its weakness, as decision-making may take a long time.

⁽⁹⁾ Most adult education programmes are aligned with the CROQF register.

⁽¹⁰⁾ It oversees policies in education, training, employment and human resource development, and monitors and evaluates the work of sectoral councils.

According to the CROQF Act, the main tasks of the education ministry include referencing the framework 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 the Development of Human Potential; adopting guidelines on developing qualification standards; informing the public about the CROQF; coordinating the quality assurance mechanisms of qualifications; and using the CROQF to recognise qualifications. The main task of the labour ministry is managing the sub-register of occupational standards (see Section 7.2), contributing to promoting employability and raising competitiveness by aligning qualifications with labour market needs.

The department for the CROQF, within the education ministry, is the EQF national coordination point (NCP). All institutions involved have a permanent staff member responsible for the day-to-day running of the framework. An 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 & Cedefop, 2022).

Following the 2021 CROQF Act, 25 [sectoral councils](#) have been set up (December 2025). They are coordinated by the education ministry and administratively supported by the agencies for education and teacher training, VET and adult education, and science and higher education. They operate as advisory and professional bodies working on the development of human capital in line with labour market needs. Each council 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.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

Since the adoption of the CROQF Act, the framework has played a pivotal role in creating a system for validating non-formal and informal learning. The implementation of the CROQF and the CROQF register, including the development of occupational and qualification standards, is considered a prerequisite for a validation system. However, the implementation of the national system for

validating non-formal and informal learning is still in its early stages (Pavkov, 2024) ⁽¹¹⁾.

According to the 2021 amendment to the CROQF Act, higher education institutions can develop internal validation procedures. These procedures can provide access to programmes leading to CROQF qualifications above level 6, offer exemptions or credits towards such qualifications, but cannot lead to a full qualification – only to a unit of learning outcomes or a partial qualification. The Act also states that the quality assurance of these validation procedures should be part of the regular assessment of these institutions. In 2023, the education ministry published specific [guidelines](#) to promote validation in higher education, encouraging institutions to base their procedures on CROQF qualification standards and units of learning outcomes (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The 2021 Adult Education Act specifies that validation should be carried out through formal validation programmes offered by adult education institutions. Validation can provide exemptions or credits towards qualifications at levels 2 to 5 or lead to a micro, partial or full qualification at these levels. Validation arrangements should use the relevant CROQF standard (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming). The [ordinance](#) on how this type of validation of non-formal and informal learning is carried out was adopted in 2024 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

In practice, the validation of learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training remains rare (Pavkov, 2024).

6.2. Credit systems

Three credit systems measure the volume of qualifications and learning outcome units: the Croatian Credit System for General Education (CROGE/ HROO), the Croatian Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (CSVET), and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for higher education. The 2021 amendment of the CROQF act redefined the VET credit points, introducing CSVET points instead of ECVET points and stating that vocational qualifications should only have one set of credit points (previously, both ECVET and CROGE points were used). One CROGE or CSVET point includes 15 to 25 hours (60 minutes each). One ECTS includes 25 to 30 hours (60 minutes each). A single unit of learning outcomes must have a minimum volume of 1 CROGE, (CROGE), CSVET or ECTS credit (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

⁽¹¹⁾ Source: Internal communication with the Ministry of Science, Education & Youth.

6.3. Recognition of foreign qualifications

According to the 2022 Law on recognition and assessment of foreign education qualifications, in the procedure of assessing a foreign qualification for employment purposes, responsible authorities (Agency for Science and Higher Education, Agency for Vocational and Adult Education, Teacher Training Agency) should consider, among other things, its NQF/EQF level, the relevant CROQF level, and (if applicable) its referencing to the QF-EHEA. For recognising a foreign education qualification for education purposes one of the three criteria applied by the responsible agencies states that the level of the foreign qualification should match the one required for continuing education in the requested education programme in Croatia. It is implied that NQFs, EQF or QF-EHEA should be used in order to determine the compliance with this criterion. Moreover, the law stipulates that higher education institutions and the Agency for Science and Higher Education should apply automatic recognition of foreign qualifications from a country with an NQF referenced to the EQF and QF-EHEA, provided that external quality assurance of the awarding institution has been carried out by an authority registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

6.4. Promoting lifelong learning

The Adult Education Act and its by-laws have aligned this sub-system with the CROQF. Since February 2023, adult education institutions can only offer programmes based on CROQF occupational and qualification standards. The inclusion of such institutions in the national system of qualifications has significantly contributed to promoting lifelong learning and professional mobility. Including these qualifications in the CROQF ensures that they address labour market needs and that meet high-quality standards. Further, formal adult education programmes have been transformed; they are now designed and delivered in a more flexible and dynamic way.

These developments have also boosted the use of partial qualifications and micro-qualifications. Being part of the CROQF ensures their recognition by labour market stakeholders. The Adult Education Act has also introduced the voucher system, which enables citizens to attend, free of charge, adult education programmes (including micro-qualifications) designed according to CROQF occupational and qualification standards. In September 2024, 204 education institutions were participating in the voucher system (managed by the Croatian Employment Service), offering 1 559 programmes. These programmes have already become one of the most forward-looking measures in attracting learners to adult education.

Adult education and post-secondary professional education full and shorter programmes, along with lifelong learning programmes offered by higher education institutions (see Section 4.2) have opened new possibilities for horizontal and vertical mobility throughout the education system and more direct access to the labour market (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The CROQF has reached the operational stage. Apart from promoting the transparency and comparability of qualifications, the framework has become an integral element of the qualification system of the country.

7.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

One of the main changes introduced by the 2021 amendment of the CROQF Act and the Ordinance on CROQF Register is that the three agencies (the Education and Teacher Training Agency, the Agency for VET and Adult Education, and the Agency for Science and Higher Education) are responsible for including qualification standards and units of learning outcomes in the CROQF register. The labour ministry is responsible for including occupational standards and units of competences.

Any legal entity, natural person or national authority can request to include a qualification standard in the CROQF register. The Agency for Science and Higher Education is responsible for requests regarding qualifications at levels 5 (for higher education qualifications) to 8.2. The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education is responsible for qualifications at levels 2 to 5 (for VET post-secondary development certificates and master craftsman's diplomas). Requests for qualifications at levels 1 and 4.2 (for general education) are submitted to the Education and Teacher Training Agency. The agencies appoint committees, on an ad hoc basis, to evaluate requests. Based on the committee's expert opinion ⁽¹²⁾, the responsible agency decides whether the request fulfils the formal and professional conditions to be included in the CROQF register. Upon receiving a request for entry into the sub-register of occupational standards, a permanent committee appointed by the labour ministry issues an expert opinion, and based on this, the ministry decides upon the inclusion of the standard in the CROQF register. For the development of both types of standards, the competent ministries

⁽¹²⁾ For regulated professions, the opinion of the public administration body responsible for this profession is also considered.

have issued methodologies and prepared guidelines for all interested parties (see Section 7.4) (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

7.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

CROQF/EQF levels are not yet indicated on any CROQF qualification. The 2023 [ordinance](#) on the form and content of certificates, diplomas and diploma supplements mentions that supplements should indicate the CROQF/EQF level of qualifications. They are indicated on diploma supplements (higher education), on Europass certificate supplements of VET qualifications at levels 4 and 5 (apart from the master craftsman's diploma), and on the supplement of the upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.4. NQF dissemination

The [CROQF website](#) is one of the main tools for sharing 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 framework's implementation, 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, such as the annual conference of the National Council for the Development of Human Potential (2022 and 2023) and seminars on the use of the CROQF, targeting CROQF implementers and end users (e.g. labour market stakeholders), have also been organised. For example, a [workshop](#) aimed to inform the members of sectoral councils about the CROQF, while a [peer learning workshop](#) brought together institutions providing CROQF-based microcredentials. The country plans to develop a CROQF communication strategy by 2026 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

7.5. Qualifications databases and registers

The [CROQF register](#) includes, in its three sub-registers, a total of 590 occupational standards, 545 qualification standards and 130 programmes (January 2025). Only qualification standards developed in line 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 (in Croatian) 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 its relationship to occupations or occupational fields. The register is currently being upgraded to enable its connection with the Europass platform (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The labour market portal, among other functions, supports stakeholders in developing occupational standards and units of competencies in line with the CROQF ⁽¹³⁾.

7.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

The broader public, including learners, workers, jobseekers and employers, has a moderate level of awareness and use of the CROQF. Job seekers sometimes use CROQF and EQF levels to describe their qualifications, especially when using Europass documents. Learners often contact the EQF NCP to get information on the CROQF levels of programmes they have completed, or plan to complete. They also use the framework for recognition purposes when studying abroad. Employers use the CROQF levels in job descriptions and vacancies, mostly in the public sector.

Education and training providers, labour market stakeholders (such as employer representatives, trade unions and employment services), quality assurance agencies (see Sections 4.4 and 7.2) and recognition authorities (see Section 6.3) have very high levels of awareness and use of the framework. Education and training providers actively participate in designing occupational and qualification standards, while they develop their programmes in line with these standards. Labour market stakeholders play a crucial role in developing occupational standards. Guidance and counselling practitioners use the CROQF moderately in their work. The education ministry has promoted the use of levels in legislation on regulated professions in various fields (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

7.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

The labour ministry has requested the Institute for the Development of Education to carry out an independent external evaluation of the CROQF. The institute is currently assessing:

- (a) the evaluation procedures of CROQF standards and programmes;
- (b) the challenges in including occupational and qualification standards in the CROQF;
- (c) if the role of the actors involved in the CROQF implementation is clear and their capacity sufficient;
- (d) whether the capacity of sectoral councils and the National council is sufficient to perform their task;
- (e) whether there is a need to improve the CROQF register and how.

⁽¹³⁾ Source: Internal communication with the Ministry of Science, Education & Youth.

7.8. Impact of the NQF

The CROQF is explicitly considered a reform tool promoting changes in the education and training system. It has a considerable impact on promoting lifelong learning (see Section 6.4) and modernising qualifications and curricula to meet learners' needs better, for instance by supporting the use of stackable partial and micro-qualifications. In parallel, the CROQF has become a cornerstone in promoting the learning-outcomes approach in all education and training subsystems (see Section 4.3).

The development of the framework and of the CROQF register has also promoted transparency and the comparability of qualifications at national and international levels. Following the 2022 legal changes on the automatic recognition of foreign education qualifications, the role of the CROQF has become crucial in this area (see Section 6.3). Creating programmes in line with the framework represents a mark of quality across all education and training subsystems, as CROQF qualification and occupational standards are approved by expert committees. The framework has also initiated the development of validation arrangements in the country (see Section 6.1).

The CROQF has been an important tool in fostering cooperation among education 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 adopted methodology makes such cooperation obligatory (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024). The education and labour ministries collaborate on implementing the CROQF, while the National Council for the Development of Human Potential provides a platform to promote cooperation among stakeholders.

The framework addresses labour market needs, enabling education and training to remain relevant, improving employability, and boosting the economy's productivity. CROQF qualification standards are linked to occupational standards, which result from a quantitative and qualitative examination of labour market data.

The referencing of the CROQF to the EQF has strengthened Croatia's involvement in the core of European integration processes (Ministry of Science, Education & Youth, forthcoming).

8. 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 & Sports, Agency for Science & Higher Education, 2014). The updated

referencing report was endorsed by the EQF advisory group in late 2024 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

9. Reflections and plans

Following the 2021 amendment of the CROQF Act, Croatia has made remarkable progress in including newly developed occupational and qualification standards and programmes in the CROQF register. The active involvement of quality assurance agencies, supervised by the education ministry, has strengthened the quality of qualifications and sped up the broadening of its scope and coverage (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024). The rapid development of the CROQF highlights the importance of active and broad stakeholder participation and cooperation throughout the process, complemented by targeted support and training for those stakeholders.

Challenges include indicating CROQF/EQF levels on qualifications and linking the CROQF register with other national databases.

The main priorities include updating CROQF occupational and qualification standards; upgrading the CROQF register to support procedures such as submitting proposals for standards; revising adopted guidelines, e.g. on developing study programmes in line with the CROQF; further supporting the design of microcredentials in line with the CROQF across all education subsystems; and finalising the communication strategy of the CROQF.

Acronyms

CSVET	Croatian credit system for vocational education and training
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
HKO	Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir (Croatian qualifications framework)
HROO	Croatian credit system for general education
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training

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