



EUROPEAN
INVENTORY
OF NQFs 2022

POLAND



European Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – Poland

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1. Introduction

This report is part of the European inventory of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Since 2009, Cedefop has been carrying out a systematic mapping and analysis of NQF developments in countries participating in the European qualifications framework (EQF) process. These reviews, done in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation, have directly supported the development of operational and sustainable NQFs. The report offers a detailed description of the structure and scope of the Polish NQF, and its objectives, functions and institutional arrangements, along with data on its implementation and impact.

Poland has developed the Polish qualifications framework (PQF) (*Polska Rama Kwalifikacji*, PRK) as part of the [Integrated Qualifications System – IQS](#) (*Zintegrowanym Systemie Kwalifikacji*). The PQF includes qualifications from formal general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, along with state- and non-regulated (market) qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. It is at the operational stage. The PQF was referenced to the EQF in 2013 and self-certified against the qualification framework of the European higher education area in the same period.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In Poland in 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (5.2 %) was slightly above the EU average (5.0 %). Participation in early childhood education and care (90.8 % in 2020) is close to the EU average, while the rate of early leaving from education and training in the country is well below the EU-27 average (respectively 5.95 % and 9.8 % in 2021). In 2021, tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) (40.6 %) was slightly below the EU-27 average (41.2 %). In 2020, participation in upper secondary VET was rather high (53.1 %). In 2021, the share of adults who had participated in learning in the last month was 5.4 % (the EU average was 10.8 %) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

The PQF is part of the [integrated qualifications system \(IQS\)](#), together with the [integrated qualifications register \(IQR\)](#) and quality assurance and validation arrangements. A cornerstone of Poland's approach is the integration of these reform instruments, addressing all levels and subsystems of education and training, into a wider policy strategy, and their combined use in that strategy. The shift to learning outcomes is at the core of this approach.

The [2020 strategy for responsible development](#) (with a perspective to 2030) indicates the further development of the IQS as a strategic aim. The [2030 human capital development strategy](#) explicitly mentions strategic projects aimed at further developing the IQS. The IQS is also referenced in the [general](#) and [detailed](#) parts of the [2030 integrated skills strategy](#) as being one of the policy tools for skills development. The development and renewal of qualifications in different sectors of the economy should be consistent with the objectives and assumptions of the integrated skills strategy (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

2.2. NQF legal basis

The [act on the integrated qualifications system](#) entered into force in January 2016. It specifies the institutional framework of the IQS and describes detailed procedures and criteria ⁽¹⁾ for including new qualifications in it. The PQF was formally adopted as an annex to the act. [Amendments to the act and implementing acts](#) have been adopted since then, for instance regulating the sub-frameworks of the PQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The act also set up the IQR and defined the role of stakeholders and the principles of quality assurance.

3. NQF objectives and functions

The framework, through its focus on learning outcomes, is seen as an important instrument for strengthening the transparency and overall consistency of education and training. Other objectives include:

- (a) contributing to integrating the qualifications subsystems into the IQS;
- (b) increasing accessibility to and the quality of qualifications;
- (c) implementing the policy for lifelong learning more effectively;
- (d) fulfilling the Council recommendation on the EQF;
- (e) fitting into the wider European context of qualification systems.

The PQF provides a common framework for describing qualifications awarded in formal education and training and through non-formal learning (continuing VET, on-the-job-training and validation). The PQF is the basis of the IQS, which enhances the quality of qualifications and makes access to qualifications easier for all learners (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

⁽¹⁾ The criteria for the inclusion in the IQS of qualifications awarded by national and international bodies focus on why the qualification is needed, and by whom; links to similar qualifications; target groups; the conditions for validation; the typical uses of the qualification; entitlements deriving from the qualification; and the intended learning outcomes, including sets of individual learning outcomes.

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The PQF has eight learning-outcome-based levels, covering all types of qualification. Aiming to connect education and training subsystems and facilitate synergistic developments, the framework has introduced three types of level descriptor with different degrees of generality and for different purposes:

- (a) universal level descriptors that form the basis of the comprehensive PQF – these descriptors are at all PQF levels and are the most generic;
- (b) level descriptors for the education and training subsystems and sub-frameworks – these are distinct descriptors for general education (levels 1 to 4), vocational education (levels 1 to 8) and higher education (levels 6 to 8) ⁽²⁾;
- (c) level descriptors for sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQFs) ⁽³⁾, developed on the basis of the second type of descriptor.

The first two types of level descriptor are interconnected and should be consulted together to fully understand the specificities of each PQF level (Educational Research Institute, 2017).

The universal-learning-outcome descriptors include knowledge (scope and depth of understanding), skills (problem solving, applying knowledge in practice, learning and communication) and social competence (identity ⁽⁴⁾, cooperation and responsibility) (Educational Research Institute, 2017). These descriptors are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for developments at the subsystem and sector levels. The degree of specificity differs between subsystems (second type of level descriptor).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

Three types of qualification can be levelled to the PQF and included in the IQS, classified according to whether or not they refer to a level of formal education and according to the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification:

- (a) state-regulated qualifications within the formal education and training system (general education, VET and higher education);
- (b) state-regulated qualifications awarded outside formal education and training;

⁽²⁾ At level 5 there are also descriptors serving as a bridge between descriptors typical of qualifications attained in general education (level 4) and those typical of qualifications attained in higher education.

⁽³⁾ SQFs are formally established by an act of law. In accordance with the IQS act, they are a description of levels of qualifications functioning in each economic sector. SQF levels refer to the relevant PQF levels. Sectors develop them and propose their inclusion in the IQS (Chapter 5).

⁽⁴⁾ Readiness to accept the obligations resulting from membership of various communities.

- (c) non-regulated qualifications from the private sector, provided they meet specific quality criteria (market qualifications). Some of them could be considered as a type of microcredentials.

A distinction is made between full and partial qualifications included in the PQF. Full qualifications are awarded exclusively within the formal system, where partial qualifications can also be awarded. All non-formal qualifications (both regulated and non-regulated) are considered partial qualifications.

Learning outcomes and PQF levels of formal general education, VET and higher education qualifications are specified in relevant legal acts. The IQS act has set out the criteria for the inclusion in the IQS of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. The procedure is initiated by the awarding body that applies for inclusion and comprises an expert assessment of the qualification's learning outcomes, a recommendation by industry stakeholders and a final decision by the relevant ministry (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Table 1. Polish national qualifications framework (PQF) levels and examples of qualifications

| PQF level | Qualifications from the formal education system | Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system (*) | EQF level |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 8 | Doctoral diploma (<i>Dyplom doktora</i>) Postgraduate qualification (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych</i>) | | 8 |
| 7 | Second-cycle higher education diploma (master) (<i>Dyplom ukończenia studiów drugiego stopnia</i>) Integrated first- and second-cycle diploma (<i>Dyplom ukończenia jednolitych studiów magisterskich</i>) Postgraduate qualification (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych</i>) | E.g. diagnosis and psycho-oncological help for people who are ill, for people after cancer and for their families and surroundings – psycho-oncologist (<i>Diagnoza i pomoc psychoonkologiczna osobom chorym onkologicznie, osobom po chorobie nowotworowej oraz ich rodzinom i otoczeniu – Psychoonkolog</i>); checking and evaluating responses to examination tasks for the matriculation examination in mathematics (<i>Sprawdzanie i ocenianie odpowiedzi do zadań egzaminacyjnych egzaminu maturalnego z matematyki</i>) | 7 |

| PQF level | Qualifications from the formal education system | Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system (*) | EQF level |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 6 | <p>First-cycle higher education diploma (bachelor's) (<i>Dyplom ukończenia studiów pierwszego stopnia</i>)</p> <p>Postgraduate qualification (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych</i>)</p> | <p>E.g. conducting environmental therapy for children and adolescents (<i>Prowadzenie terapii środowiskowej dzieci i młodzieży</i>); conducting judicial and extrajudicial mediation in business matters (<i>Prowadzenie mediacji sądowych i pozasądowych w sprawach gospodarczych</i>)</p> | 6 |
| 5 | <p>Certificate of professional competence in the profession (<i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy (**)</i>) – full qualification</p> <p>Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (<i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej (**)</i>) – partial qualification</p> <p>Certified specialist diploma – short cycle (<i>Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty / specjalisty technologa</i>)</p> | <p>E.g. planning, creating and distributing content marketing (<i>Tworzenie oferty, planowanie i prowadzenie sprzedaży skierowanej do klientów biznesowych – handlowiec</i>); conducting training using activating methods (<i>Prowadzenie szkoleń metodami aktywizującymi</i>); data recovery from hard drives (<i>Odyskiwanie danych z dysków twardych HDD</i>); restaurant management (<i>Zarządzanie pracą restauracji</i>)</p> | 5 |
| 4 | <p>Upper secondary school leaving exam certificate (<i>matura</i>) (4-year general secondary school – <i>liceum ogólnokształcące</i>) (<i>Świadectwo dojrzałości</i>)</p> <p>Certificate of professional competence in the profession (<i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy (**)</i>) – full qualification</p> <p>Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (<i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej (**)</i>) – partial qualification</p> | <p>E.g. designing computer graphics (<i>Projektowanie grafiki komputerowej</i>); creating clothing templates for the production of industrial clothing (<i>Konstruowanie szablonów odzieżowych do produkcji przemysłowej odzieży</i>); piloting tourist events (<i>Pilotowanie imprez turystycznych</i>)</p> | 4 |
| 3 | <p>Certificate of professional competence in the profession (<i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy (**)</i>) – full qualification</p> | <p>E.g. assembly of construction woodwork (<i>Montowanie stolarki budowlanej</i>); programming and servicing of 3D printing (<i>Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D</i>); preparing</p> | 3 |

| PQF level | Qualifications from the formal education system | Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system (*) | EQF level |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 2 | Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (<i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej (**)</i>) – partial qualification | food in accordance with market trends and the principles of healthy nutrition (<i>Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia</i>); mounting and servicing of connections and indoor installations in fibre optic technology (<i>Montowanie i serwisowanie przyłączy oraz instalacji wewnętrznych w technologii światłowodowej</i>) | 2 |
| | Lower secondary school leaving certificate (***) (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia gimnazjum</i>) | | |
| | Certificate of professional competence in the profession (<i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikację zawodową / Dyplom zawodowy (**)</i>) – full qualification | E.g. installation and maintenance of autonomous detectors: carbon monoxide, smoke, heat and gas (<i>Montaż i konserwacja autonomicznych czujek: tlenku węgla, dymu, ciepła i gazu</i>); computer skills certificate – basic level (<i>Certyfikat umiejętności komputerowych – poziom podstawowy</i>) | |
| | Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (<i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej (**)</i>) – partial qualification | | |
| | Primary school leaving certificate (8 years) (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (8-letniej)</i>) | | |
| 1 | Primary school leaving certificate (6 years) (***) (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (6-letniej)</i>) | | 1 |

(*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications).

(**) Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, to be completed in 2023/2024. Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.

(***) Lower secondary schools have been phased out and primary education has been prolonged from 6 to 8 years. No 'new' lower secondary diplomas have been issued since 2018, but all diplomas that were issued up to 2017 had the PQF level indicated. Primary school (8 years) leaving certificate has been levelled at PQF/EQF level 2.

NB Postgraduate qualifications are included in the IQS on a voluntary basis, i.e. higher education institutions may offer unlevelled postgraduate qualifications.

Source: European Commission and Cedefop (2022).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The PQF attempts to integrate several qualification sub-frameworks by using learning outcomes as an overarching conceptual approach, as all IQS qualifications should be described in terms of learning outcomes. The act has also set a standard for describing qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, and has introduced a process of assessment and certification, along with internal and external quality assurance systems (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). By moving beyond the general, national level descriptors, the PQF is more able to be linked to the development and revision of standards and curricula, and eventually to learning and assessment.

There has been an overall shift towards learning outcomes. Core curricula, formulated in terms of learning outcomes, have been introduced for all of the main sectors of education and training. The core curriculum for general education was gradually implemented starting with the 2009/2010 school year, and a revised core curriculum has been introduced since the 2017/2018 school year. Since 2019, the core curriculum for vocational education has included not only detailed learning outcomes but also the criteria for verifying these outcomes. The core curriculum also forms the basis for assessment criteria in general education. Amendments to the act on higher education in 2011 defined ‘learning outcomes’ and required all study programmes and resulting qualifications to be described in terms of learning outcomes (as of the 2012/2013 school year). A 2016 regulation of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education replaced the concept of learning outcomes with that of ‘qualification characteristics’ or ‘descriptions’ ⁽⁵⁾ in full accordance with the IQS. These developments were aimed at promoting lifelong learning and the recognition of learning acquired outside the formal system (Duda, 2019).

4.4. Quality assurance arrangements

One important aim of the IQS is to extend systemic quality assurance to all qualifications listed in the IQR. They should comply with uniform quality assurance requirements that are consistent with European guidelines and standards. For qualifications awarded in the formal education system, quality assurance procedures function in accordance with European standards and recommendations. According to the IQS act, the awarding bodies (certifying institutions) of state-regulated and market qualifications awarded outside formal education and training must have a system of internal quality assurance and be part of an external quality assurance system. The purpose of the internal quality

⁽⁵⁾ A description of the typical PQF level for qualifications obtained in higher education should be understood as a set of general statements (components of PQF level description) characterising the knowledge, skills and social competences required for qualifications at a given level.

assurance system is to ensure that assessment of achieved learning outcomes and certification are properly performed and improved. External quality assurance monitors and evaluates all activities and procedures relating to awarding qualifications. It is provided by an external quality assurance institution selected by the relevant ministry (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The education ministry ([Ministry of Education and Science](#)) is responsible for the overall coordination of the IQS and the PQF, while the [Educational Research institute \(IBE\)](#) is responsible for the day-to-day running and coordination of the IQS, providing substantive support for its implementation, along with running the integrated qualifications register. Since 2016, the education ministry has been the EQF [national coordination point \(NCP\)](#). The IBE continues to play a key role in the qualifications system and framework by offering technical and organisational support to the ministry and monitoring implementation. The institute is responsible for supporting and coordinating the development and inclusion in the IQS of qualifications attained outside formal education. It is also responsible for operating the IQR and for including IQS qualifications in the register. A unit for coordinating the PQF development has been set up at the education ministry (with three posts). The IBE has approximately 90 experts in PQF implementation. All relevant ministries have at least one expert post (some have specialised units) focusing on levelling market qualifications (levelling is often supported by external experts). PQF implementation is financed through EU-funded projects and the state budget. Projects focus on describing new qualifications, supporting qualification-awarding bodies in designing and conducting validation, thus further developing the IQR (including the development of AI-powered tools) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Representatives of relevant ministries are involved in the Interministerial Task Force for Lifelong Learning and IQS, which monitors IQS implementation at a more strategic level. Regarding the PQF governance, stakeholders play a crucial role in decision-making, policy formulation and system evaluation through bodies like the IQS Stakeholder Council and [sectoral competence councils](#) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The IQS Stakeholder Council is an advisory and consultative body to the education ministry. The council consists of 34 representatives of education and training providers, employers, trade unions, associations of higher education institutions, commercial training institutions, local

governments, representatives of learners, the education ministry and the Central Examinations Board. Its responsibilities include:

- (a) monitoring the functioning of the IQS and proposing improvements;
- (b) advising on draft regulations relating to the IQS;
- (c) giving an expert opinion on the PQF level that regulated and market qualifications awarded outside formal education and training should have;
- (d) advising on proposals to include SQFs in the IQS.

Sectoral competence councils consisting of representatives of employers, employees and sectoral public institutions facilitate the dialogue between education and the economy, acting as forums to discuss sector skill needs, for instance when designing SQFs. One of the main goals of the councils is to develop SQFs as an extension of the PQF for specific sectors. At the end of 2022 there were 18 SQFs⁽⁶⁾, all being developed with the support of the IBE. Sector representatives (trade unions, sector organisations) can apply to include SQFs in the IQS⁽⁷⁾ (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). SQFs have become a response to the deregulation that has occurred in many sectors. They serve as a reference point that supports the levelling process and can be used to analyse the demand for and supply of competences and qualifications in each sector (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Stakeholders are also actively involved in the day-to-day running of the PQF. For instance, they participate in designing qualification standards, assessments and certification processes aligned with the PQF, and in public consultations on applications to include qualifications in the IQS. The [regional centres](#) for the IQS and for lifelong learning support involve stakeholders (e.g. career counsellors and learners) in designing and developing IT tools relating to lifelong learning and career counselling (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

⁽⁶⁾ In the fields of banking; sports; IT; tourism; telecommunications; development services; construction; the fashion industry; public health; trade; chemical engineering; agriculture; the energy sector; the automotive sector; waste management; water and wastewater management, land reclamation and remediation; mining; and real estate.

⁽⁷⁾ Five SQFs have been included in the IQS (tourism, sports, trade, development services, construction).

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

A key element of the IQS is the introduction of a more consistent and quality-assured approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) ⁽⁸⁾. Overarching measures were introduced to integrate existing validation arrangements, while specific validation procedures for each education level are adjusted individually. The learning-outcome-based PQF provides a reference point, signalling that qualifications at all levels can be acquired not only through formal education and training but also through non-formal and informal learning. The IQS act and its implementing legislation specify relevant matters, including the scope of information collected in the IQR and procedures for comparing learning outcomes for qualifications with PQF characteristics.

In general education and VET, the possibility of acquiring qualifications via VNFIL is guaranteed by law (based on extramural examinations for adults). Both initial and continuing vocational qualifications can be obtained by passing external examinations to validate professional knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace. In higher education, there is the possibility of recognition of prior learning as an alternative path in order to enter or receive an exemption from a study programme (up to 50 % of European credit transfer and accumulation system credits can be gained through VNFIL).

For non-formal qualifications included in the IQS, general arrangements for validation are a mandatory component of the description of each qualification, alongside the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The IQS does not impose a single model for carrying out validation; each qualification has its own requirements for validation, and each awarding body has a certain amount of freedom in deciding the exact process and in creating its own validation tools (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

6.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications

Foreign diplomas and certificates can be recognised in three ways:

- (a) automatically, by virtue of a national law or an international agreement;
- (b) by the education superintendent (*kurator oświaty*) as a result of administrative proceedings (primary and secondary education);
- (c) by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (higher education).

⁽⁸⁾ Section 6.1 draws mainly on input from Duda (2019).

No data were available to the EQF NCP on whether and how the institutions mentioned above use the PQF/EQF in the recognition of foreign qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The PQF has reached the operational stage, and is well embedded in legislation and related policies. It is a permanent and visible feature of education and training, serving as a map of qualifications, providing a reference point for the development and review of standards and curricula, and providing a platform for cooperation of stakeholders across education, training and employment.

7.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

PQF/EQF levels are indicated on the certificates and diplomas of all levelled qualifications, apart from postgraduate qualifications at levels 6 to 8 (they are indicated only on some of them). The levels are indicated on the Europass certificates and diploma supplements of formal VET and higher education qualifications; such supplements are not available for postgraduate qualifications. Levels are indicated on all qualifications included in the IQR; they are indicated only on some postgraduate qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.3. NQF dissemination

The PQF has been communicated and promoted as part of, and along with, the IQS. Overall, the IQS communication strategy has aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the lifelong learning policy and the PQF, and of the benefits for the three main target groups identified (IQS architects, ambassadors and beneficiaries), and at fostering the engagement of key stakeholders to ensure successful implementation. A formal strategic document on communication is being developed.

The main channels that have been used to communicate about the IQS and the PRK are the [IQS portal](#) and [website](#), the [EQF NCP website](#), social media such as [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) (the IBE is also active on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#)), a [radio spot](#), regional IQS information centres (providing information and advice on the system to employees, teachers, students, jobseekers, employers and career counsellors), public relations activities, seminars, conferences, participation in events, [articles](#) and media materials such as [infographics](#). The IQS portal offers learner-oriented [information](#) and [publications](#), and also specific information for

employees. Furthermore, there is a long list of publications⁽⁹⁾ aiming to help experts and the public to better understand the learning-outcomes approach and to assist all of the actors that are involved in developing new qualifications, such as ministries, education and training providers, quality assurance bodies and qualification-awarding bodies. The IBE has been carrying out information activities, including consultation seminars addressed to career counsellors working in labour market institutions and in education. In addition, through the campaign *Education in your hands* (*Edukacja w zasięgu ręki*), which promotes education and lifelong learning, a variety of films and audio presentations aiming to raise awareness of the IQS have been developed (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.4. Qualifications databases and registers

The *integrated qualifications register (IQR)* functions as an information source for all IQS qualifications, targeting learners, ministries, education and training providers, employers and researchers. The IQR enables users to search for and compare qualifications. Since 2020, there has been considerable progress in including qualifications in the IQR. In October 2022, there were 16 451 qualifications in the register (mostly formal general education, VET and higher education qualifications); 170 of them were market qualifications, while 253 extra proposals for levelling market qualifications had been submitted. The number of proposals signals that the level of interest on the part of stakeholders far exceeds the original national target of including 200 market qualifications by 2023. The capacity of the IQS is nowhere near its limit (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The register provides information in Polish on the PQF/EQF level, the awarding body, credit points / notional workload (if applicable), the external quality assurance / regulatory body, the entry requirements, ways to acquire the qualification and the relationship to occupations or occupational fields, along with any additional information and a link to the qualification (for some qualifications there is also information in English). It also includes, for each qualification, a summary of the learning outcomes⁽¹⁰⁾, the sets of intended learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and social competences) and analytical descriptions of the individual learning outcomes comprising the sets.

⁽⁹⁾ Since 2020, the following handbooks have been published: *Recommendations on functioning of the certifying authorities within the IQS*; *Guidelines for Description of Post-diploma Qualifications*; and *Procedures for executing minister's tasks regarding the IQS qualifications*. Previous publications include the *Polish Qualifications Framework: User's guide*; *Describing qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems*; and *Assigning the PQF level to qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems*.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A concise description of the knowledge, skills, and competencies that a learner is expected to have acquired (maximum number of characters 9 000). It is usually written in a bullet-point format and is intended to provide a quick summary of the main learning outcomes.

The IBE has developed several qualification-related online tools, which are linked to the IQR and based on its data. [VET Compass](#) guides schoolchildren in finding VET qualifications on the basis of their field of interest; it includes information on schools in a given region and on the expected regional labour market needs in the field. NIWUS is a tool that will support describing qualifications, levelling them to the PQF and comparing them with similar ones. [My Portfolio](#) helps individuals showcase their competences, collect various achievements in one place and present them in a user-friendly way. The [Odznaka+](#) system is a web-based application that allows for the issuing, staged accumulation, storage and sharing of digital microcredentials in the form of open badges (standard and digitally secured PDF certificates) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). *Chatbot ZETERKA*, is a tool for automatic support of educational and career counselling, which enables users to find information on a qualification, using a semantic search mechanism; it also suggests qualifications based on end users' hobbies, interests and predispositions.

7.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

Using the PQF is compulsory for formal education institutions, as curricula should be based on PQF-derived learning outcomes. Furthermore, education and training providers, for instance in VET, should design learner assessments accordingly. In non-formal training, many providers apply for the inclusion of new qualifications in the IQS. Learners are increasingly aware of the PQF, as its levels are indicated on certificates and diplomas, and of the PQF-based core curricula and examination requirements. Guidance counsellors are aware of the IQS, its structure and principles, the procedure for including qualifications in it and the opportunities it offers to end users (through IBE seminars), and refer to these points in their daily work. The IQS has introduced a systemic approach to quality assurance for all qualifications included in the IQR (Section 4.4).

Labour market and sector representatives are aware of the PQF and use it to develop SQFs, which serve as tools to organise and analyse the demand for and supply of competences and qualifications in each sector (Chapter 5). Regional labour offices actively promote PQF awareness among employees and jobseekers, for instance through dedicated [conferences](#) and seminars (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.6. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

Implementation is supported by research projects and studies. In 2019, the [final report](#) on the implementation of the IQS was published, aiming to assess the efficiency and complexity of the process for including market qualifications in the IQS. Markowska (2018) aimed to evaluate the potential of the external quality

assurance institutions to ensure the quality of IQS qualifications that are awarded. The key message from both reports is that procedures for including qualifications in the system need to be made more efficient. They also provided evidence for planned changes to the IQS act. Since 2020, no PQF/IQS evaluation studies have been carried out; however, 27 evaluation seminars discussing various aspects of functioning of IQS have been conducted by the IBE (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.7. Impact of the NQF

Work on the PQF is an integral part of the broad reform and modernisation of the IQS, addressing all levels and all subsystems of education and training. One important part of this reform, supported by the PQF, has been an overall shift towards learning outcomes. The PQF has contributed to the redesign of programmes, standards and curricula that was required. The framework has been an important tool in increasing the transparency and consistency of education and training and of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education and training. The IQS has played a crucial role in fostering quality assurance, especially regarding qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. Additionally, as all qualifications can be included in the IQS provided they comply with predefined requirements, the system promotes parity of esteem between different types of education and training and different types of qualifications. For example, levels 6 to 8 of the PQF are not reserved for higher education qualifications, as market qualifications can be levelled there (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

IQS and PQF implementation activities, coordinated by the IBE and involving representatives of the education ministry and the Central Examinations Board – such as informing awarding bodies and validation institutions about how to operate according to IQS principles – have resulted in the dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders being strengthened across education and training sectors. Sectoral competence councils have promoted links between the labour market and education; for instance, developing SQFs involves cooperation between representatives of these areas (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

8. Referencing to the EQF

The PQF was referenced to the EQF in 2013 (Educational Research Institute, 2013). A separate report on the self-certification of the national qualifications framework for higher education against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area was also developed (Educational Research

Institute, 2014). An updated referencing report is expected (in 2023 or 2024) following the adoption of planned amendments to the IQS act (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

9. Reflections and plans

Poland has adopted a holistic approach, introducing the IQS, which is strongly interrelated with the PQF and IQR, along with quality assurance and validation arrangements. This approach can be described as a cornerstone in the successful implementation of the IQS and the PQF. Their joint implementation is considered by the government as being key in increasing the quality of human capital. Thus, main successes included making the PRK and the IQS operational and including in them qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. Activities such as capacity building for entities involved in operating the PQF and the IQS (e.g. ministries, awarding bodies and external quality assurance entities) and developing descriptions of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training have proved useful, and will be continued. The number of proposals for the inclusion of market qualifications in the IQR, which has exceeded the initial target, is also an indication of successful implementation. The progress made in developing SQFs, which link the PQF to the labour market, is also a positive signal (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Challenges include how the IQS could support further modernisation of formal education and training and how it could promote adult learning and lifelong learning in general. IQS tools should also be aligned with the public employment service, counselling services and the training activities under the National Training Fund of the labour ministry. Efforts should continue to institutionalise employers' and other stakeholders' involvement in the public dialogue on the skills agenda (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The main priorities include ensuring the efficiency of the IQS and further developing the IQR, and using them together with the PQF as policy tools promoting lifelong learning and skills development. Other specific priorities include exchanging good practices and improving methods of operation; supporting awarding bodies; increasing awareness regarding the certification of qualifications and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning; conducting research and analysis on the demand for skills and qualifications and on non-formal and informal learning; and developing AI-powered innovative tools and data resources relating to qualifications, skills and classifications. Poland has also started conceptual work on microcredentials and individual learning accounts, and how they can be integrated into the IQS (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Acronyms

| | |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EQF | European qualifications framework |
| IBE | Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych (Educational Research Institute) |
| IQR | Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji (Integrated Qualifications Register) |
| IQS | Zintegrowanym Systemie Kwalifikacji (Integrated Qualifications System) |
| NCP | national coordination point |
| NQF | national qualifications framework |
| PQF | Polska Rama Kwalifikacji (Polish qualifications framework) |
| SQF | sectoral qualifications framework |
| VET | vocational education and training |
| VNFIL | validation of non-formal and informal learning |

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[IQS.](#)

[IQR.](#)

[EQF NCP.](#)