



EUROPEAN
INVENTORY
OF NQFs 2022
SLOVENIA



European Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – Slovenia

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Contents

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 1. | Introduction | 1 |
| 2. | National context | 1 |
| 2.1. | Policy context | 1 |
| 2.2. | NQF legal basis | 2 |
| 3. | NQF objectives and functions | 2 |
| 4. | Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications | 2 |
| 4.1. | NQF structure and level descriptors | 2 |
| 4.2. | NQF scope and coverage | 3 |
| 4.3. | Use of learning outcomes | 5 |
| 4.4. | Quality assurance arrangements | 6 |
| 5. | Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement | 6 |
| 6. | Recognition and validation of prior learning | 7 |
| 6.1. | Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways | 7 |
| 6.2. | Credit systems | 8 |
| 6.3. | Recognition of foreign qualifications | 8 |
| 7. | NQF implementation and impact | 8 |
| 7.1. | Stage of implementation | 8 |
| 7.2. | Indicating EQF/NQF levels | 8 |
| 7.3. | NQF dissemination | 9 |
| 7.4. | Qualifications databases and registers | 9 |
| 7.5. | Awareness and use of the NQF | 10 |
| 7.6. | Monitoring and evaluating the NQF | 10 |
| 7.7. | Impact of the NQF | 10 |
| 8. | Referencing to the EQF | 11 |
| 9. | Reflections and plans | 11 |
| | Acronyms | 12 |
| | References | 12 |
| | Web pages and databases | 13 |

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 Slovenian NQF, and its objectives, functions and institutional arrangements, along with data on the framework's implementation and its impact on broader policy areas.

The 10-level Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) (*Slovensko ogrodje kvalifikacij*) was adopted in July 2016. It was linked to the EQF and self-referenced against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in May 2013. Its comprehensive nature covers educational qualifications (awarded through general, vocational/technical and higher education), vocational qualifications (Section 4.2) and supplementary qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualifications system. The SQF is at the operational stage.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In Slovenia in 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (5.8 %) was well above the EU average (5 %). Participation in early childhood education and care is close to the EU average (92.6 % in 2020), while the rate of early leaving from education and training is very low (3.1 % in 2021). In 2021, tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) (50.2 %) was higher than in the EU-27 (41.2 %). In 2020, participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) was high (65.9 %), while the employment rate of VET graduates (25–34 years old), was 78 %. The participation of adults in lifelong learning is significantly higher than the EU average (respectively 18.9 % and 10.8 % in 2021) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

The SQF is referenced in policy documents like the [2022–2030 resolution on the national programme of adult education](#) and the '[Guidelines for preparation of short, upper secondary vocational and technical educational programmes](#)', which emphasises the need to include educational qualifications in the framework and promotes the learning-outcomes approach. The [2020–2030 strategy for short-cycle higher vocational education](#) emphasises the compliance of short-cycle programmes with the SQF to ensure high education standards and links the framework with lifelong learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

2.2. NQF legal basis

The SQF was embedded in national legislation by the [SQF act](#) in July 2016. This law summarises the main responsibilities of stakeholders in designing and awarding qualifications and defines the tasks of the SQF/EQF national coordination point (NCP) and the SQF/EQF NCP expert committee. It regulates the referencing of SQF levels to the EQF and the QF-EHEA, funding provisions and the SQF register. The SQF act refers to procedures and levelling methods for all types of formal qualifications. An important development brought about by the act was the definition of the procedures and quality criteria for levelling supplementary qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualification system. The [vocational education](#) and [higher education](#) acts have integrated the SQF and are aligned with it. The [2022 act on professional, academic science and art titles](#) harmonises them with the SQF.

3. NQF objectives and functions

The SQF is primarily a framework for communication, aiming to promote the transparency and comparability of qualifications in Slovenia and the EU. Its fundamental objectives are to support lifelong learning by including all levels and types of qualifications and showing relationships and support pathways between education sectors, and to improve the quality of qualifications.

Due to its comprehensive nature, the SQF offers a systematic organisation and presentation of the education and training system in Slovenia, which provides a clear and transparent overview of the qualification structure and individual qualifications. It also has an important quality assurance function. Although the SQF is not seen as a tool for reform, it promotes the learning-outcomes approach and contributes to developing a comprehensive, responsive and flexible qualifications system that supports lifelong learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The SQF is a comprehensive framework with 10 qualification levels. The descriptor for each level has three categories of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competences. Each qualification in the framework includes all three categories, although it is not necessarily the case that each category has equal weight within the qualification. This approach, allows the SQF to capture the full diversity of learning outcomes and qualifications that, though acquired in different settings and for different purposes, are broadly comparable in terms of learning outcomes.

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The SQF is a comprehensive framework that includes:

- (a) educational qualifications, awarded after the completion of formal education programmes (general, vocational/technical and higher);
- (b) vocational qualifications, which can be national vocational qualifications (NVQs), obtained through the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) (see Section 6.1), or vocational qualifications certifying the completion of training or continuing education (leading to a certificate of completed further training programme at SQF levels 3 to 5), issued in accordance with the regulations governing technical and higher education ⁽¹⁾ (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022);
- (c) supplementary qualifications ⁽²⁾, acquired through further and supplementary training in the labour market (offering supplementing abilities and competences), can be included at levels 2 to 8 – they have a strong labour market focus and are awarded outside the regulated qualifications system by an employer, a group of employers or the public employment service.

Input criteria are used in addition to learning outcomes for educational qualifications acquired after the completion of nationally accredited programmes. These criteria include the access requirements, the typical programme length and the input in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and higher education (also defined in credit points). For NVQs, only the qualifications and the assessment standards of learning outcomes are defined, not the programmes or pathways that lead to the NVQ. In accordance with the SQF act, legacy awards and qualifications awarded before the Bologna reform are also included.

In accordance with the SQF act, applications to level supplementary qualifications may be submitted by an employer, a group of employers or the Employment Service. The [National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training \(CPI\)](#) assesses the application and prepares an opinion. If the assessment is positive, the EQF NCP expert committee – nominated by the minister for labour – submits a proposal levelling the supplementary qualification to the SQF, which is approved by the labour ministry. The levelling criteria include the suitability of the applicant, relationships to existing qualifications, a description of the learning outcomes, the consistency and feasibility of the training programme, quality assurance relating to the training programme and the labour market relevance. The supplementary qualification is included in the SQF for 5 years; 3 months before expiration, the provider may apply for

⁽¹⁾ Vocational qualifications are different from educational qualifications awarded after the completion of formal vocational/technical education programmes.

⁽²⁾ Supplementary qualifications are considered the type of SQF qualifications that resemble the most microcredentials (Cedefop, 2023). Stakeholders focus groups will discuss the option of including microcredentials into the SQF; a possible approach could be to transform the pillar of supplementary qualifications to a microcredentials pillar (Source: internal communication with the CPI).

an extension. There are eight supplementary qualifications included in the SQF (June 2023).

Table 1. **Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF)**

| NQF level | Educational qualification | Vocational qualification | Supplementary qualification | EQF level |
|-----------|---|---|--|-----------|
| 10 | Doctoral degree (<i>Diploma tretje stopnje, Diploma o doktoratu znanosti</i>) | | | 8 |
| 9 | Research master's degree (<i>Diploma o magisteriju znanosti</i>) (*) Specialisation diploma following academic higher education (<i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>) (*) | | | 8 |
| 8 | Master's degree (<i>Diploma druge stopnje, Diploma o strokovnem magisteriju</i>) Specialisation diploma following professional higher education (<i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>) (*) Diploma of academic higher education (<i>Diploma o univerzitetnem izobraževanju</i>) (*) Higher education diploma (<i>Diploma o visoki izobrazbi</i>) (*) | Certificate of completed study programmes for further training | | 7 |
| 7 | Academic bachelor's diploma (<i>Diploma o izobraževanju prve stopnje – univerzitetna, UN</i>) Professional bachelor diploma (<i>Diploma o izobraževanju prve stopnje – visoka strokovna, VS</i>) Professional higher education diploma (<i>Diploma o visokem strokovnem izobraževanju</i>) (*) Specialisation diploma following old short-cycle higher education (<i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>) (*) | Certificate of completed study programmes for further training | Certificate of supplementary qualification | 6 |
| 6 | Short-cycle higher vocational diploma (<i>Diploma o višji strokovni izobrazbi</i>) Old short-cycle higher vocational diploma (<i>Diploma o višješolski izobrazbi</i>) (*) | NVQ certificate Certificate of completed study programmes for further training | Certificate of supplementary qualification | 5 |

| NQF level | Educational qualification | Vocational qualification | Supplementary qualification | EQF level |
|-----------|---|--|--|-----------|
| 5 | Vocational <i>matura</i> certificate (secondary technical education, 4 years) (<i>Spričevalo o poklicni mature</i>) General <i>matura</i> certificate (<i>Spričevalo o splošni mature</i>) Master craftsperson's examination certificate (<i>Spričevalo o opravljenem mojstrskem izpitu</i>) Foreperson's examination certificate (<i>Spričevalo o opravljenem delovodskem izpitu</i>) Managerial examination certificate (<i>Spričevalo o opravljenem poslovodskem izpitu</i>) | NVQ certificate Certificate of completed further training programme | Certificate of supplementary qualification | 4 |
| 4 | Final examination certificate (secondary vocational education, 3 years) (<i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu, Srednja poklicna izobrazba</i>) | NVQ certificate Certificate of completed further training programme | Certificate of supplementary qualification | 4 |
| 3 | Final examination certificate (lower vocational education, 2 years) (<i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu</i>) | NVQ certificate Certificate of completed further training programme | Certificate of supplementary qualification | 3 |
| 2 | Elementary school leaving certificate (9 years) (<i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i>) | NVQ certificate | | 2 |
| 1 | Certificate of completing grades 7 or 8 of elementary education (<i>Potrdilo o izpolnjeni osnovnošolski obveznosti</i>) Elementary school leaving certificate (<i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i>) | | | 1 |

(*) Qualifications awarded before the Bologna reform.

Source: European Commission and Cedefop (2022)

4.3 Use of learning outcomes

The learning-outcomes approach was already embedded in the education system before the introduction of the SQF and was well accepted, following the reforms carried out since the 1990s. These reforms have supported and broadened the assessment of learning outcomes. The learning-outcomes approach was central to developing the SQF (Section 7.7).

New programmes in general (compulsory and upper secondary) education include learning outcomes to be achieved either at the end of the three stages of compulsory education or at the end of upper secondary education, tested by the external *matura* examination.

The learning-outcomes approach is seen in VET as a useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to real life and labour market needs. The

basis for all VET qualifications is a system of occupational profiles and standards identifying the knowledge and skills required in the labour market. National VET framework curricula define the intended knowledge, skills and attitudes. The school curriculum is developed by VET providers, giving them increased autonomy in curriculum planning, especially in taking the local environment and employers' needs into account.

In higher education, reforms and the introduction of study programmes in accordance with the Bologna declaration guidelines have gradually taken place. Learning outcomes are described in terms of general and professional / subject-specific competences.

4.4 Quality assurance arrangements

The SQF, in its role as a gatekeeper, has an important quality assurance function, creating a quality assured environment for designing, providing and awarding qualifications. Each qualification included in the SQF register must fulfil many requirements and must be accredited and described transparently (in learning outcomes), with legally prescribed parameters, while the learning outcomes should reflect the SQF descriptors.

The education ministry (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport) is responsible for overall quality assessment and assurance processes in pre-higher education and, in part, in higher vocational schools. Both internal and external quality assurance are implemented, including the external assessment of learning outcomes (standards of knowledge) in secondary education. The CPI, acting also as the EQAVET national reference point, gathers information about quality assurance in VET schools, monitors 11 quality indicators at the national level and supports such schools. Education institutions must carry out a self-evaluation process every year and report on it to their managing authorities. The school inspection services are responsible for administrative supervision. The [Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(NAKVIS\)](#) is responsible for the development and operation of the quality assurance system (accreditation of study programmes and institutions) in higher education and for the evaluation of higher vocational education in line with European standards and guidelines.

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The labour ministry, in cooperation with the education ministry, has the overall competence and responsibility for developing and implementing the SQF. The leading institution at the operational level is the [National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training \(CPI\)](#), which carries out a number of projects and activities for both ministries and cooperates closely with social partners (e.g.

coordinating 10 sectoral committees in charge of developing occupational standards and NVQ assessment standards, coordinating the development of national VET framework curricula and supporting in-service teacher training). It serves as the SQF/EQF NCP. The SQF unit (an organic part of the CPI) coordinates the implementation of the framework. Its roles and responsibilities are stipulated in the SQF act, including providing information on and communicating about matters related to the SQF and EQF, managing the process of placing qualifications in the framework, coordinating the work of other stakeholders involved in linking qualifications to the EQF via the SQF and maintaining the SQF register. Two employees are responsible for the day-to-day running of the SQF unit, which is financed by EU and national funds. The EQF NCP collaborates with the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education on all issues relating to higher education. This cooperation is based on a written agreement signed by the two agencies in 2012.

The EQF NCP expert committee, appointed for a term of 4 years, comprises seven members (three proposed by the labour ministry, one by the education ministry, one by the economy ministry and two by the Economic and Social Council (one representing employers and the other representing trade unions)). Its responsibilities are to set out the criteria and prepare proposals for including supplementary qualifications in the SQF; to monitor developments related to the SQF, the EQF and the QF-EHEA; and to carry out other tasks necessary for placing qualifications in the framework. Moreover, cooperation with stakeholders (e.g. the ENIC-NARIC centre) takes place by recognising qualifications and supporting professionals who prepare/revise the descriptions of qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

The NVQ, operating under the labour ministry, is the most widely implemented VNFIL system; it is fully integrated into the SQF, covering EQF levels 2 to 5 (SQF levels 2 to 6) ⁽³⁾. The NVQ system is legally embedded in the [national professional qualifications act](#), targeting adult learners. In accordance with this act, NVQs are fully awarded based on the validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences. The nationally approved occupational and qualification/assessment standards are the basis for validation.

Since 2006, VNFIL has also been possible in all formal education subsystems, regulated by sector-specific acts and regulations. Validation arrangements are measured against the learning outcomes of formal education programmes (VET, higher

⁽³⁾ Section 6.1 is based on Pavkov (2019) and National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (2020).

education and general education) included in the SQF. Non-formally acquired knowledge and skills are considered to shorten the length of studies. VNFIL is most advanced in VET, higher VET and adult education, but other subsystems allow certain validation possibilities. For example, people over 21 can take the general *matura* exam without being enrolled in formal education, while the master craftsperson qualification can also be acquired through validation, by participating in preparatory programmes. The higher education act obliges institutions to prepare validation measures and form a committee for VNFIL. Universities are autonomous and can decide on their own procedures for this. The result of validation in higher education can be the award of European credit transfer and accumulation system credit points for a single course or a module within a study programme. Validation arrangements are also available for supplementary qualifications.

VNFIL is well embedded in the SQF. The links to the framework are becoming increasingly visible to and understandable by the wider public due to the numerous awareness-raising activities implemented by ESF-funded projects.

6.2. Credit systems

An accumulation and transfer credit system, compatible with the principles of the European credit system for VET, is used in vocational education to describe the volume and weight of programmes and units/modules. The European credit transfer and accumulation system has been obligatory in higher education since 2002.

6.3. Recognition of foreign qualifications

Recognition authorities (e.g. the ENIC-NARIC centre) are well informed about the SQF/EQF, and use the SQF as an additional source of information in the process for the recognition of foreign qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The SQF and the SQF register are fully operational. The framework serves as a map of qualification types, supports quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications and provides a reference point for the development and review of standards and curricula, and of VNFIL. SQF/EQF levels are indicated on certificates, diplomas and supplements of levelled qualifications, while the SQF register includes information on the content and profile of all SQF qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

According to the 2016 SQF act, SQF/EQF levels are indicated on all certificates, diplomas and Europass supplements for general education, VET, higher education,

NVQs and supplementary qualifications awarded after the adoption of the act. For certificates, diplomas and supplements issued before the act was adopted, holders can obtain information (free of charge) on the SQF/EQF level of educational qualifications from the ENIC-NARIC centre and of NVQs from the SQF/EQF NCP (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.3. NQF dissemination

An SQF/EQF communication strategy – targeting learners, education and training institutions, jobseekers, employees, career counsellors, and professional and recognition bodies – was developed in 2014. The main communication channels are the [SQF web portal](#), videos (targeting [companies](#), [education institutions](#) and [individuals](#), presenting an [overview](#) of the SQF register's functions and promoting [supplementary qualifications](#)), social media, events, job fairs and a promotional leaflet. The SQF/EQF NCP has also developed [guidelines on the use of learning outcomes in practice](#), to support those responsible for developing and updating qualifications and assigning them to SQF levels, and [video guidelines](#) for those interested in filling out the application form for levelling a supplementary qualification (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

7.4. Qualifications databases and registers

The [SQF register](#) is a publicly accessible information system, which includes all SQF-levelled qualifications and aims to increase their transparency and comparability. The register targets learners, jobseekers, employees, employers, education institutions, guidance counsellors and others. In July 2023, it included approximately 1 750 active qualifications (1 390 educational qualifications, 356 vocational qualifications and eight supplementary qualifications)⁽⁴⁾ and 360 archived qualifications. For each qualification, the register provides, in Slovenian and English, information on the title, the field of study, credit points (if relevant), the entry requirements, the SQF/EQF level, the International Standard Classification of Education level, the learning outcomes, the awarding body and any transition possibilities, along with a link to the qualification. The register is interconnected with the [NVQ database](#) and the database of higher education qualifications, while it is linked to the Europass (via the Qualifications Dataset Register) and ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) platforms, enabling comparison between Slovenian and EU qualifications. Through its interconnection with the other databases, the register's information system is automatically informed when a new qualification is included in them, and the former qualification is archived. Among the other interesting functions of the register, video presentations are available on occupations connected with individual qualifications, along with presentations on possible career paths in the selected professional fields (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

⁽⁴⁾ Source: internal communication with the CPI.

7.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

The first systemic evaluation of the SQF and the SQF register (see Section 7.6) showed that one third of the public were aware of the SQF (62 % of the participants in the survey were learners and 23 % were employees). Approximately half of them found out about the framework through the internet and 26 % from certificates or diploma/certificate supplements. Most of those who were aware of the SQF (85 %) knew the level of their qualification. Only those directly using the SQF in their work (including representatives of education institutions, qualification and study programme developers, experts involved in the preparation of occupational standards, etc.) had more detailed knowledge of the content, uses and purpose of the SQF. 80 % of them were familiar with the SQF, while 60 % used it in their work. They most often used it in preparing new and revising existing study programmes, designing learning outcomes, developing supplementary qualifications or preparing a catalogue for hands-on training (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020). Guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities also used the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). There is limited evidence that employers use SQF/EQF levels in recruitment procedures and vacancy notices (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020). The SQF links to the EQF help employers compare qualifications internationally when recruiting candidates from other EU Member States.

7.6. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

The [first evaluation of the SQF and the SQF register](#) used a combined quantitative and qualitative research approach, including research tools such as questionnaires for the public and experts, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with key national stakeholders. The evaluation focused on the understanding, awareness and use of the SQF and the SQF register among the main national stakeholders, and on the influence of the SQF on the education system (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020).

7.7. Impact of the NQF

The SQF evaluation showed that the framework is accepted among various stakeholders and users. Stakeholders consider that its contribution to transparency, understanding and comparability at the national and international levels stands out. This indicates that the communication function of the SQF is well received. At the same time, stakeholders believe that the SQF has contributed to the systematic organisation of the qualifications system by integrating all qualification types. Nevertheless, the impact was greater in sectors that were well developed before the introduction of the SQF (formal education, NVQ system). The analysis of curriculum documents that was part of the 2020 SQF evaluation showed ‘a considerable impact leading to an increase of the use of learning outcomes in education and training and to a more clearly formulated logic of qualification levels. Higher education stakeholders in particular have highlighted a positive impact on this sector, as level descriptors can be used as an evaluation tool, can help describe competences and can define different levels of higher

education qualifications. However, the SQF has not yet been widely recognised as a means of enhancing mobility and linking education with the labour market (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020). Following the levelling of NVQs, the framework now provides a reference point for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning and for VNFIL. Regarding permeability, the SQF plays an informational role; the register includes information on qualifications' entry requirements and possible transition routes. The SQF has also promoted lifelong learning and the cooperation of stakeholders across the education, training and employment sectors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

8. Referencing to the EQF

The SQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in a joint report in 2013.

9. Reflections and plans

Embedding the framework into education and lifelong learning policies was a major milestone in the implementation of the SQF. The framework has also assumed an important role as a gatekeeper, encouraging trust in SQF-levelled qualifications through quality assurance. Furthermore, it has been successful in promoting the transparency and comparability of qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

According to the 2020 evaluation, stakeholders have indicated that the SQF has not performed well in terms of including new types of qualifications acquired outside the formal education system. Those who do not yet use the SQF have indicated that the level descriptors are too general to be used in developing education programmes and occupational standards. Another challenge is that there is considerable room for improvement in the use of the SQF in national and sectoral legislation and documents. Participants in the evaluation also emphasised the need to promote the SQF more to the public (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020), and that the use of the framework in the labour market needs to be improved. Another challenge to be addressed is the need to establish more efficient links between different categories of qualifications included in the SQF, for instance between NVQs and formal qualifications. In this way, any NVQ certificate that is an integral part of a formal VET education programme in terms of its content could be recognised automatically in the process leading to educational qualifications.

The evaluation includes recommendations, such as (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020):

- (a) promoting dialogue with experts and labour market stakeholders on the role and purpose of different types of qualifications and the relationships between them in a lifelong learning perspective (e.g. to identify labour market needs for

- supplementary qualifications and further develop the levelling methodology of these qualifications to the SQF);
- (b) designing further activities to increase the visibility and promote the practical use of the SQF among key stakeholders and the public;
 - (c) providing further professional support on the use of learning outcomes and the SQF level descriptors to the developers of qualifications and programmes.

Discussions are taking place at the national level on including microcredentials in the SQF. Additionally, the EQF NCP, based on the key findings and recommendations of the SQF evaluation, is preparing a document with recommendations for the further development of the SQF, and is also exploring the need to update the report on the referencing of the SQF to the EQF. The final decision on whether the referencing report will be updated is the responsibility of an appointed national group of stakeholders.

Acronyms

| | |
|------------|---|
| CPI | Center RS za poklicno izobraževanje (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training) |
| ENIC-NARIC | European Network of National Information Centres and Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres |
| EQF | European qualifications framework |
| NCP | national coordination point |
| NQF | national qualifications framework |
| NVQ | national vocational qualification |
| QF-EHEA | qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area |
| SQF | Slovenian qualifications framework |
| VET | vocational education and training |
| VNFIL | validation of non-formal and informal learning |

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Web pages and databases

URLs accessed 17 July 2023

[Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training](#)

[SQF/EQF portal](#)

[SQF register](#)