

NQF state of play



Cyprus 2020

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Overview

Stage of development: Activation stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:

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

Number of levels:

Eight, with sublevels at levels 5 and 7

Legal basis/stage of development:

Decision of the CoM, No 67445 on establishing the CyQF (2008)

NQF/EQF website:

[Website](#)

Introduction and context

Investment in education and training in Cyprus is among the highest in the EU except at pre-primary level. However, the rate of early school leaving is on the rise (9.2% in 2019, up from 7.8% in 2018) and is below the EU average of 10.2%. In some areas the high level of spending per student does not translate into comparable education outcomes. The basic skills levels of Cyprus' students lag behind those of other EU countries, thus addressing underachievement and students' well-being remains a priority for the country. Measures are being taken by the government to improve outcomes in response to the results of the Programme for international student assessment (PISA), as well as to integrate the growing number of migrants into the education system. Immigration to Cyprus, especially since 2016, has increased the number of asylum seekers. A main policy focus in Cyprus is on digital education but gaps in students' digital participation due to distance learning (caused by Covid-19) are evident. Despite the initiatives to improve adults' digital literacy, digital skills remain below the EU average and educational support in adult education is underdeveloped.

Initiatives in vocational education and training (VET) aim to improve labour market links, yet participation in upper secondary VET remains low. In 2018, a small number of upper secondary students (16.7%) were enrolled in VET, the lowest in the EU and well below the EU average (48.4%). A platform is being piloted for initial VET graduates, aiming to ease communication between initial graduates of secondary VET and of post-secondary, higher VET institutes and potential employers (Cedefop, 2020b). Tertiary educational attainment remains high as in 2019, 58.8% of 30-34-year-olds had obtained a tertiary degree, the highest share in the EU (41.6%). Employability among young graduates is likely to be impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, although it has risen in 2019. Another challenge for education and training, which features prominently in the current education reform, is to encourage adult participation in lifelong learning activities; it is relatively low and has been decreasing (5.9% in 2019), especially among the low-skilled, compared to the EU average (10.8% in 2019) (European Commission, 2020)

Cyprus decided to develop a comprehensive NQF, the Cyprus qualifications framework (CyQF), in 2008 (Decision No 67445 of 9 July 2008) ([1]) to improve permeability, both horizontal and vertical, within its education and training systems. The Council of Ministers approved the

establishment of the framework based on the eight levels of the EQF in 2012 and work on framework design was finalised in 2017. The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) being developed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) is an integral, but distinct, part of CyQF.

The CyQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in February 2017.

Policy objectives

The CyQF operates as a reference framework, enabling the validation and comparability of qualifications and hence the mobility of workers and learners. The main role of the CyQF is to classify qualifications according to defined levels of learning outcomes. Its implementation is expected to impact specifically on the promotion of lifelong learning, the recognition and validation of qualifications, enhanced mobility of learners and workers and improved quality assurance of education and training programmes (Cedefop, 2020a).

The reform potential of the framework is being acknowledged by linking it to wider reforms and procedures for quality assurance, assessment and award of qualifications. The aim is to develop an inclusive framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education, to promote lifelong learning. This is primarily achieved by including the vocational qualifications system – established by HRDA – within the framework (at levels 3 to 6) to bring about comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired in formal or non-formal learning. These qualifications refer to occupational standards and certificated learning outcomes acquired at work.

A further policy objective is to reinforce VET at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels through the framework initiative the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC) ([2]). The *New modern apprenticeship scheme* (NMA) (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017) provides alternative learning pathways and increased employability, based on labour market needs, for those who leave formal education without basic or vocational skills ([3]). Implementation of the NMA has begun and embraces young people between 14 and 21 years of age at two apprenticeship levels (preparatory and core, CyQF levels 2 and 3). The setting-up and upgrading of post-secondary VET institutes (MIEEK) has been a major step towards attracting more students to this pathway. They deliver qualifications fully integrated into the framework at CyQF/EQF level 5.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The CyQF includes all levels and types of qualification in all subsystems of education and training. It consists of two distinct strands: one for formal education (primary, lower and upper secondary, tertiary education and apprenticeship schemes) and one for non-formal and informal learning (the system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) – developed by the Human Resource Development Authority, and other training programmes). Levels 5 and 7 have been divided into three sublevels each (a, b, and c) to better represent the diversity of qualifications existing in the country. Level descriptors were defined in three categories (knowledge, skills and competence), inspired by those of the EQF but further elaborated, with an emphasis on problem solving, communication, cooperation, learning skills, and understanding and application of knowledge. Competence-based vocational qualifications in the SVQ are based on occupational standards (currently available for 82 occupations) ([4]), making it possible to award a qualification to a candidate irrespective of how and where they acquired the relevant knowledge, skills and competences. The SVQ system adopted the same level descriptors. Including the system of vocational qualifications within the framework (at levels 3 to 6) aims to bring about comparability of qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal learning.

The qualifications system has traditionally been input-based (quality of teachers, infrastructure and length of education and training programmes) but there has been a change towards an outcome-based approach with the SVQ system, the emphasis on learning outcomes and validation of non-formal learning. Attention is increasingly being directed to the need to focus on skills and key competences required in the 21st century, and to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies in line with learning outcomes. Several reforms have been under way, such as modernising pre-primary and upper secondary curricula, and improving VET by introducing post-secondary VET institutes. A committee at the Ministry of Education and Culture – advisory committee for the implementation of curricula, assessment and teaching – (*Syntonistiki Epitropi Analytikon Programmaton*, SEAP) is the body responsible for the implementation of learning outcomes in all grades across education departments in formal education (EQF/CYQF levels 1 to 4).

Implementation of the learning outcomes approach has coincided with the ambitious Cyprus national reform programme 2020 ([5]). Education reform programme proposes comprehensive changes and innovations at all levels and aspects of the system; its main objective is to create a democratic and learner-centred education system. Emphasis is being placed on improving teacher competences and establishing and monitoring the quality of learning outcomes. An integrated student evaluation system (ISES), which was implemented during the 2019/20 school year, aims to give emphasis to formative assessment and to diagnose student needs in relation to specific expected outcomes, and to offer early the necessary educational interventions required for improvement.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The EQF national coordination point was established at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth as an in-service department ([6]) overseeing the development and gradual implementation of the framework and coordinating the inclusion of qualifications in the CyQF registry. A National Qualifications Authority has been established ([7]) as the main body of CyQF implementation at operational level. The Authority has the power to improve quality assurance systems in education and training, to monitor and integrate into the CyQF the scheme for validating non-formal and informal learning, to monitor the CyQF/EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, to strengthen the legal aspect of CyQF and to develop a registry for it. The National Qualifications Authority is operational.

A permanent advisory body – the CyQF council– has been established, as a forum for collaboration between stakeholders ([8]); it is the consultative body for the CyQF referencing report. Its main tasks are advisory and focus on:

- a. consulting with stakeholders on CyQF development and implementation;
- b. developing, implementing and reviewing CyQF procedures;
- c. disseminating public information on the CyQF;
- d. advising the Ministry of Education and Culture on policy and resource implications.

To ensure the quality of higher education in Cyprus, there are two bodies responsible. The first is the [Cyprus council for the recognition of higher education qualifications](#) (KY.S.A.T.S), an independent body responsible for the recognition of diplomas awarded by higher education institutions. The second is the new [Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation](#) (QAAA), which is an independent body responsible for accreditation of higher education institutions in Cyprus (Cedefop; Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2019). For continuing VET (CVET) and the SVQ, the body responsible is the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA).

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

[9]

Cyprus does not have a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning, but an appropriate mechanism is currently under development through a project partly funded by the ESF. This project has supported a mapping study of the current situation in Cyprus ([10]) and a national action plan setting up a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (*epikirosi mathisis*) was developed at the beginning of 2018. This plan was put to public consultation during the first half of 2018 ([11]) and was completed in May 2018. It entered pilot implementation during 2019, focusing on adult education, youth and volunteering. The validation process will entail five stages: information-individualised counselling; identification; recognition of learning outcomes; assessment of learning outcomes; and certification. The first results from the pilot at the end of 2019 are not available yet. Within the context of the ongoing reformation of the National Qualifications Authority, the governing body of the CyQF will evaluate the results from the pilot implementation and will integrate them into the plan for establishing a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Implementation will build on work already done by HRDA, which has developed a system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) – *Systima epagelmatikon prosondon* (ΣΕΠ) – through which it is possible to validate non-formal and informal learning by the award of full or partial qualifications ([12]). It is planned to develop 80 additional vocational qualifications during the 2014-20 ESF programming period. The 82 vocational qualifications already developed will be revised in response to labour market needs ([13]). Standards used in the vocational qualifications system relate not only to occupational skills, but also to soft skills developed through work experience (such as teamwork and collaboration) ([14]); they are different from those used in apprenticeship or school-based VET qualifications and are not recognised in formal education. However, ways of linking the two VET systems are being considered as the CyQF is developed. Once the process is completed, there will be a potential link between the two VET systems.

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions enables them to

accept credits from prior learning. The Cyprus Council for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS) also recognises work experience credits as part of an individual's qualification. Success in information and communication technology examinations is certificated regardless of where and when the knowledge was developed.

Cyprus is inking the recommendation process for upskilling pathways closely with the development of arrangements for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This will provide learners with possibilities to bridge different learning routes, or to accumulate credits and partial qualifications to gain access to further learning opportunities ([15]). The Ministry of Education and HRDA prepared a report during July 2018 on how Cyprus is responding to this Council recommendation. HRDA has established a variety of programmes targeting the upskilling of the active and inactive (young and long-term unemployed) populations. It offers, or finances, training programmes such as the training of secondary and tertiary education graduates and the schemes for improving the employability of the unemployed and economically inactive women ([16]). The youth guarantee, a major part of the national action plan for youth employment (NAPFY), aims at preventing unemployed individuals from falling into long-term unemployment and inactivity traps ([17]).

NQF implementation and impact

The CyQF is a comprehensive framework including all levels and types of qualifications from formal education and training and from the system of vocational qualifications (SVQ). The decision for the establishment of the CyQF in Cyprus has been adopted by the Council of Ministers ([18]). The framework is at an activation stage. A national qualification register is under development ([19]) and will cover qualifications from general education, VET and higher education, as well as the SVQ at a later stage. So far, occupational standards have been developed for 82 SVQ qualifications and will continue to be developed for 80 additional ones. To support CyQF implementation, guidelines, criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national register were developed in consultation with stakeholders. The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires systematic collaboration between stakeholders.

The CyQF includes the development and implementation of the procedures for quality assurance and qualifications award. The new legislation ([20]) provides a quality assurance framework for higher education, within which higher education institutions will be driven to improve quality and develop an internal quality culture. The QAAA agency is, among others, responsible for the institutional, departmental and programmatic evaluation and accreditation of higher education, as well as the assessment of the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions in Cyprus ([21]). HRDA has a robust quality assurance process in place for monitoring the SVQ. All aspects of the system, and those participating in it, are quality assured by HRDA, which holds the relevant registers of assessment centres and assessors for each vocational field and region. The HRDA has also introduced a system for evaluating and certifying training. Some institutions have begun to indicate CyQF and EQF levels in national qualifications databases, on VET certificates and Europass Certificate and Diploma Supplements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020) ([22]). The CyQF Council is responsible for the approval of the CyQF logo on diplomas and supplements issued by the different institutions.

An NQF/EQF communication strategy has yet to be developed in Cyprus due to budget limitations. However, the main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on the NQF/EQF are leaflets ([23]), school-based seminars (for counselling practitioners) and

conferences organised in the Cyprus chambers of commerce and by the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation. Although education and training institutions and providers, labour market stakeholders and recognition bodies are aware of the framework, interaction and constant dialogue is needed. The development of the CyQF website, providing citizens with an update on news and developments on this matter, has been very helpful. An evaluation of the framework is not yet planned.

Referencing to the EQF

The CyQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2017. An updated referencing report will be submitted once the system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning and its links to the CyQF are in place.

Important lessons and future plans

Development of the NQF and of a competence-based system of vocational qualifications, which is an integral part of the NQF, is expected to strengthen the ties between VET for young people and vocational training for adults, and to improve their knowledge and skills. However, the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires stakeholders to work together. The creation of the Human Resource Development Authority and the setting up of a National Qualifications Authority, as well as a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency in Higher Education (QAAA), have been very important developments for the implementation of the qualifications framework. In the same vein, setting up a CyQF council was important in establishing a permanent forum for collaboration between stakeholders ([24]): the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Human Resource Development Authority and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community. The main success factor to date is the use of the CyQF as a comparison tool for qualifications within and outside the country and as a guideline for new developments in the education field in Cyprus (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Future plans for Cyprus include strengthening the legal basis of the CyQF. Once the reformation process relating to the National Qualifications Authority is completed, and following an approval by the Council of Ministers, the CyQF will be regulated by law by the House of Representatives. Developing a national register as well as the criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in this register is needed for the future. The development of guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning, analysing and implementing learning outcomes in different subsystems, are expected to be completed by 2020 to ensure continuity and consistency between levels and services (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

Main sources of information

- The Cyprus EQF NCP was established at the Ministry of Education and Culture: <http://www.moec.gov.cy>
- CyQF website: <http://www.cyqf.gov.cy>
- Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *The referencing of the Cyprus qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*.
https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/cyqf_referencing_report_140219_.pdf

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Doctoral degree (Διδακτορικός Τίτλος)	8
7c	Master degree (Μεταπτυχιακός Τίτλος)	7
7b	Postgraduate diplomas (Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα)	
7a	Postgraduate certificates (Μεταπτυχιακό Πιστοποιητικό)	
6	Bachelor degree (Πτυχίο)	6
5c	Higher certificates and diplomas - three years (Ανώτερα Διπλώματα και Πιστοποιητικά)	5
5b	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas - two years (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Διετούς Διάρκειας)	
5a	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas - one year (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Μονοετούς Διάρκειας)	
4	Upper secondary general education and evening schools certificates - 12th grade or 12th and 13th for some private schools (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Γενικής Εκπαίδευσης) Upper secondary technical and vocational education and evening technical schools certificates - 12th grade (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Τεχνικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης)	4
3	Lower secondary education certificate - 10th grade - preparatory year for upper secondary education (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 10η τάξη) New modern apprenticeship certificate - 10th grade (Νέα Σύγχρονη Μαθητεία - 10η τάξη)	3

2	Compulsory lower secondary education certificate - 9th grade (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 9η τάξη) Preparatory programme - New modern apprenticeship (Προπαρασκευαστικό Πρόγραμμα Νέας Σύγχρονης Μαθητείας)	2
1	Compulsory education certificate - elementary school certificate, or graduates of 7th and/or 8th grade (Υποχρεωτική Εκπαίδευση)	1

Acronyms

CPC	Cyprus Productivity Centre
CyQF	Cyprus qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
HRDA	Human Resource and Development Agency
KUSATS	Cyprus Council for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications
MLSI	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
MIEEK	<i>Metalykeiaka Instituta Epaggelmatikis Ekpaideysis kai Katartisis</i> (post-secondary VET institutes)
NAPFY	National action plan for youth employment
NMA	new modern apprenticeship scheme
NQF	national qualifications framework
PISA	programme for international student assessment
QAAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
SVQ	system of vocational qualifications
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 15.2.2021]

Cedefop; Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe: Cyprus*. [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database].
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/cyprus>

Cedefop (2020a). *National qualifications frameworks developments in Europe 2019. Qualifications frameworks: transparency and added value for end users*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/105773>

Cedefop (2020b), ReferNet Cyprus. *Cyprus: E-platform for data collection and employability*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/cyprus-e-platform-data-collection-and-employability>

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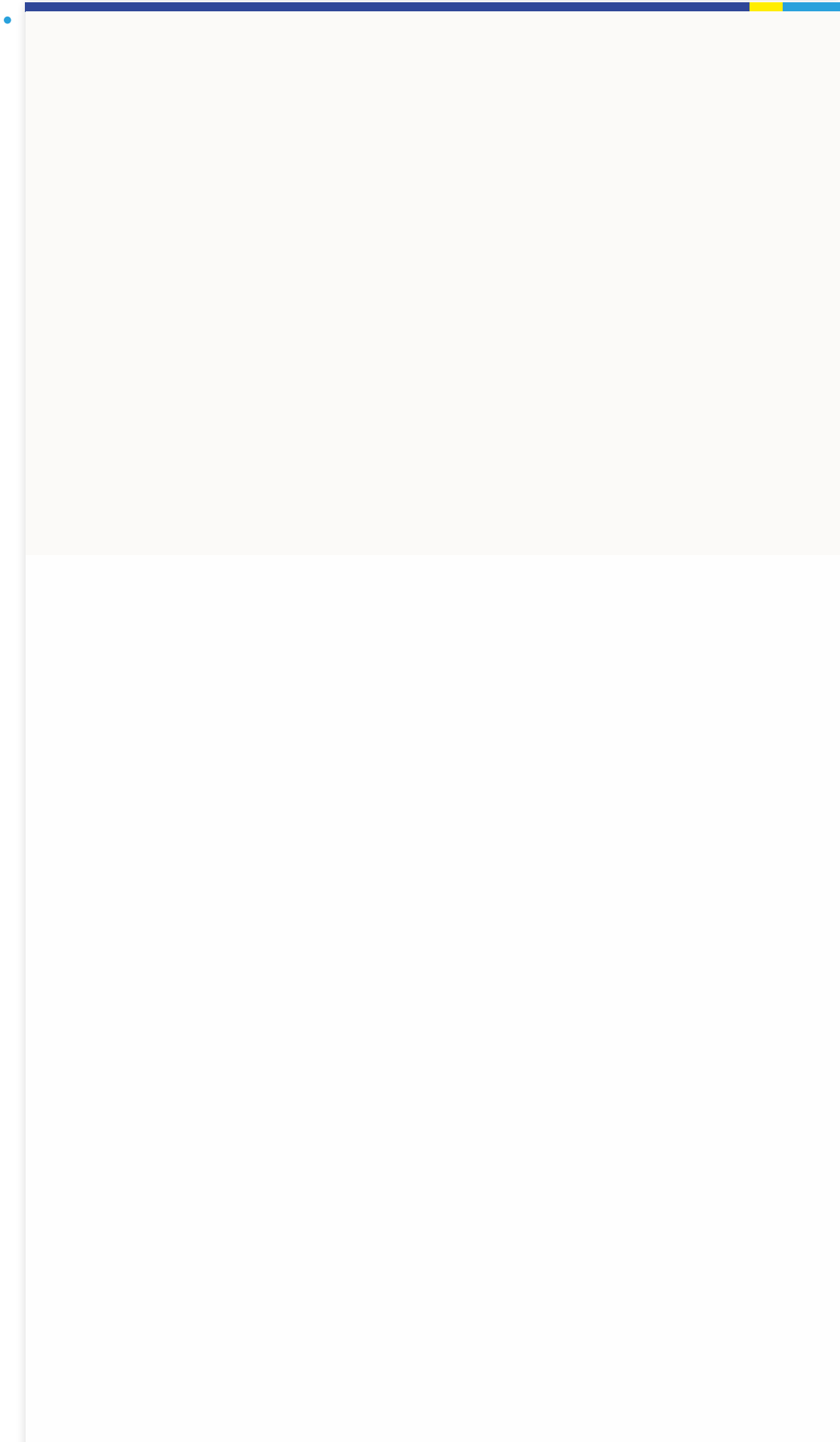
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Manoudi, A. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Cyprus*.
http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Cyprus.pdf

Related content



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Cyprus - European inventory of NQFs 2020

European inventory of NQF



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