

NQF state of play



Slovakia 2020

Table of contents

- Chapter 1 - Overview
- Chapter 2 - Introduction and context
- Chapter 3 - Policy objectives
- Chapter 4 - Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications
- Chapter 5 - Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement
- Chapter 6 - Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways
- Chapter 7 - NQF implementation and impact
- Chapter 8 - Referencing to the EQF
- Chapter 9 - Important lessons and future plans
- Chapter 10 - Main sources of information
- Chapter 11 - National qualification framework (NQF)
- Chapter 12 - Acronyms
- Chapter 13 - References

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. Includes a sub-framework of occupational qualifications awarded outside the formal education system.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Act on Lifelong Learning (2009) and amendments to certain acts (2012) (in Slovak)

NQF/EQF website:

[Website](#)

Qualifications register/database:

[National qualifications register](#)

Introduction and context

Slovakia is focusing on digital education, adopting a 2030 broad strategy for digital transformation of the Slovak Republic ([1]) aiming to enhance digital competences, improve access to digital education content, and modernise the existing infrastructure. However, gaps in digital skills remain: in the wider population in 2019, the proportions (aged 16-74) with at least basic digital skills (54%) and above basic digital skills (27%) were below the EU-27 average (58% and 33% respectively); and systemic policy evaluation is missing (European Commission, 2020b). A current challenge is the need to improve educational outcomes and to increase the quality and equity of education, particularly for the Roma population. The achievement of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science basic skills has worsened over recent years, especially among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first action plan of the 10-year education strategy, the *National programme for the development of education and training 2018-27* ([2]) has been implemented; from 2021, Slovakia is making efforts to introduce compulsory education from age five, improve the continuing development of teachers and improve the quality assurance system in higher education, aligning it to European guidelines for accreditation ([3]) (European Commission, 2020a).

Strengthening early childhood education and care and improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession are key aspects in tackling the country's challenges. The tertiary education attainment rate has increased in recent years (40.1% in 2019) and has reached the EU average of 40.3%. Slovakia has a high rate of employment of recent graduates (ISCED levels 3-8) and a relatively low rate of early leavers from education and training (83.9% and 8.3% respectively in 2019); still, systemic solutions are needed to address the gap between policy and implementation. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) at 67.8% in 2018 is stable and significantly above the EU average of 47.8%. The Act on VET adopted in 2015 ([4]) introduced elements of 'dual education' inspired by the German system, but adapted to the Slovak context, with involvement of employers in VET provision and in teacher training ([5]). The ESF project *Sector driven innovations for an efficient labour market in the Slovak Republic* ([6]) was launched in 2019, focusing on initial and continuing vocational education and training (European Commission, 2020a).

Work on the Slovak qualifications framework (SKKR) started with a 2009

government decision on the European qualifications framework (EQF) implementation. The 2009 Act on Lifelong Learning, amended in 2012 ([7]), stipulated the legal background for development of a national qualifications system and framework. An eight-level comprehensive framework was developed and is being implemented. The new law on lifelong learning planned for 2022 will further legally embed the SKKR ([8]). In line with the preparation for this law, a new Strategy for lifelong learning and career guidance for 2021-30 (to be called Lifelong learning strategy) is being prepared ([9]). This strategy will be based on measures grouped around different thematic areas ([10]) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The SKKR was referenced to the EQF in October 2017.

Policy objectives

The SKKR aims to provide a transparent and comprehensive classification of all qualifications, to pave the way for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, ease communication within education and training and with the labour market, improve quality of qualifications, and promote student and workforce mobility.

The specific objectives of SKKR implementation are (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017):

- a. increased education system transparency, both for individuals and employers, as well as for international comparison;
- b. increased transparency of qualifications, through their description in terms of learning outcomes rather than inputs;
- c. better match between education and training and the needs of the labour market through a more demand-oriented education system;
- d. strengthened relationships between all stakeholders involved in education, and developing general principles for validation and recognition of qualifications;
- e. modernisation of education through the application of quality principles in the process of acquiring qualifications;
- f. increased quality in the processes of verification and recognition of qualifications.

The function and policy objectives of the SKKR have not changed since 2018 but future developments will be influenced with the development of the occupational qualifications sub-framework in the country. This development is related to the flexibility of qualifications and the openness of the occupational sub-framework to combined qualifications and micro-credentials, in line with the system of recognition for non-formal and informal qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The SKKR ([11]) is a comprehensive and overarching framework that has eight learning-outcomes-based levels and includes qualifications from all subsystems. It is organised in four sub-frameworks: for general education ([12]), VET ([13]), higher education ([14]), and occupational qualifications (awarded outside the formal system, as a result of further education, adult education and validation of non-formal learning) ([15]). The SKKR served as a tool to develop a typology of qualifications in the national context ([16]). Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (general and vocational/professional), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (responsibility, autonomy and social competences).

From the beginning of the framework's development, a distinction was made between full and partial qualifications, also reflected in the national qualifications register; a full qualification entitling the holder to perform all tasks within an occupation, and a partial qualification allowing performance of one or a limited set of tasks within that occupation ([17]). Qualifications were assigned to SKKR levels following analysis of the learning outcomes set in the qualification standards, and their comparison with the national descriptors. Qualifications issued by conservatories posed a challenge in terms of levelling ([18]). The new Law on lifelong learning planned for 2022 foresees a new approach to the design of qualifications based on smaller components/ blocks of learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2020).

In general education, the shift to learning outcomes was marked by the 2008 Education Act. This strengthened quality assurance measures, introduced performance standards defined in knowledge, skills and competences, and a two-level model of curriculum for both general education and VET: State curricula and school curricula (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017). Assessment standards specify criteria and assessment procedures for achieving performance standards corresponding to the respective school environment (Cedefop; State Institute of VET, 2019).

In VET, the outcomes approach has been reinforced through the VET Act of 2009 ([19]) and the 2015 Act on VET. Since 2015, developing curricula for dual VET has been in progress, based on requirements from chambers and employers' representatives; companies offering practical training

directly participate as co-authors of the respective school educational programmes. From 2019, the same educational programmes apply for school-based (with practical training in school workshops or facilities, or with contracted segments of practical training in companies) and dual VET (Cedefop; State Institute of VET, 2019).

In higher education, a KA 3 Erasmus + project SIHE19 ([20]) – from 2016 to 2018 – indicated solid progress towards learning outcomes, but learning- outcomes-based programming has remained insufficiently visible (Vantuch, 2019). Following the 2013 *Criteria for the accreditation of higher education study programmes* ([21]) a new legal framework was adopted in 2018 ([22]), with a new system of accreditation in higher education institutions. The framework was developed according to the quality principles set by Law No 269/2018 on the quality assurance of higher education ([23]). This system aims to increase the importance of quality assurance in line with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (European Commission, 2020a). The new Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education ([24]), operational since 2020, is currently developing internal quality assurance standards and study programme standards that focus on the expected level of learning outcomes of graduates, through the achievements of higher education and their compliance with the required level of the national qualifications framework ([25]).

According to the Education Act, quality of education and training is monitored and evaluated by the school or school facility, the State School Inspection, the [Ministry of Health](#), for the professional part of preparation of education for healthcare programmes at secondary healthcare schools, as well as the [National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements](#). In adult education, the [Accreditation Commission for Further Education](#) is an advisory body of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, which validates education institution ability to provide educational programmes and recommends that the Ministry issues a certificate of accreditation of an educational programme if the requirements are met ([26]). There has been strong consensus and support to the SKKR from all quality assurance bodies and the Slovak community so far (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The SKKR is legally embedded in the Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning, and its 2012 amendment (Act No 315/2012 Coll., in force since 1 January 2013) ([27]), introducing the SKKR and its definition as a framework. The new Law on lifelong learning planned for 2022 aims to strengthen further the legal basis of the SKKR.

Since 2016, the governance structure has been simplified: it now consists of the State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV), currently hosting the EQF NCP and playing a coordination, technical and methodological role, supported by 24 sector councils ([28]). The State Vocational Education Institute is also the contact point for other EU initiatives (EQAVET, ECVET, European Agenda for Adult Learning). The Ministry of Education maintains overall competence and responsibility for SKKR development and implementation and is the highest approval body for qualifications and the national qualifications register; however, the memorandum of cooperation, signed in 2014 with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, aimed for better alignment between labour market needs and the education system ([29]) (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

The functions of the EQF NCP include the promotion of the SKKR, EQF and Slovak qualifications, managing the process of referencing the SKKR to the EQF, and maintaining the national qualifications register and its links to European portals (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

The main strength of the current governance structure of the SKKR is the active participation of stakeholders, including the Slovak Rectors' Conference and Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education; this requires effective communication strategies yet to be developed. ŠIOV participates directly in the EHEA-QF network and ensures information transfer to relevant bodies. ŠIOV cooperates with national and international stakeholders: the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, national institutions in education, education providers and NGOs, and NCP contact points in other Member States. In relation to the lifelong learning strategy, the Ministry of Labour is involved in the cooperation with the other ministries ([30]) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Activities related to the introduction and implementation of the SKKR

were mainly project-based. Since 2016, ŠIOV is financed by a yearly renewable contract with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports and uses financial support from the Erasmus+ Programme in order to develop its activities (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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

[31]

There is currently no systemic approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Slovakia. However, certain elements of a national approach for validation have been introduced through the 2009 Act on Lifelong Learning (amended in 2012) ([32]), creating some of the conditions for gradual development of a validation system ([33]). Although no direct SKKR impact on VNFIL is expected in the short term, the completion of the referencing process in 2017, the description of more than 1000 qualifications aligned to the SKKR, with their related qualification standards defined in learning outcomes, and their inclusion in the national qualifications register, are completed preconditions for the development of a VNFIL system ([34]). Qualifications required on the labour market and contained in the NQR are expected to be gradually placed into the information system of further education (ISDV) and made eligible for validation ([35]).

The 2009 Lifelong Learning Act (amended in 2012) refers to the recognition of results of further education based on assessment of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through accredited programmes, leading to a full or partial qualification. This case is only partly linked to non-formal learning: individuals with five years of workplace practice can apply to have their non-formal learning validated, assessed and certified without prior completion of a programme. In the second case, validation practices refer to the verification of professional competence necessary for running a business (regulated by the Trade Licensing Act No 455/1991 Coll. based on assessing compliance with standards, for which a formal certificate of apprenticeship is required) ([36]). This certificate is not equivalent to the qualification certificate obtained through formal education; it aids access to the labour market, though not to continuing formal education.

Progress has been visible in the labour sector, where methodology based on the concept of *bilan de compétences* has been implemented by public employment services; labour office counsellors ([37]) serving the unemployed have received training in the first two stages of validation (identification and documentation) ([38]). Extending this methodology to the education sector is under discussion.

The lifelong learning strategy, presented by the end of 2019 ([39]), and the ESF-funded project *System of verifying qualifications* (SOK) ([40]), initiated in 2018, which includes a VNFIL-related component, are expected to support the development and implementation of validation of non-formal learning and clarify conceptual and terminological inconsistencies. This forms the basis for the new Act on Lifelong Learning, introducing a clear conceptual framework which was expected to be in force in 2020; however due to the changes within the priorities of the new Government (elected in March 2020) and due to COVID 19, the plan was postponed for 2022-23 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF implementation and impact

The SKKR is a comprehensive and overarching framework with eight learning- outcomes-based levels. It covers all sub-systems of formal education and includes regulated training and qualifications awarded outside formal education. The SKKR is organised in four sub-frameworks, based on sectoral legislation: for general education, VET, higher education; and for occupational qualifications (awarded outside the formal education system, as a result of courses and work experience). In the future the occupational qualifications sub-framework will include international qualifications and those of private awarding bodies. The SKKR has reached activation stage.

The SKKR development has been a lengthy process that involved a range of different stakeholders and was carried out within wider reforms aimed at the creation of a national system of qualifications. This system consists of two pillars: the SKKR with eight learning-outcomes-based levels and the national qualifications register (NQR) ([41]). Development of the two was closely related. The NQR ([42]) includes qualifications with the description of qualifications (general information on the qualification, qualification standard, assessment standard, and guidelines for validation and certification of learning outcomes) ([43]). By April 2021, more than 1000 qualifications at levels 2 to 8 were described in learning outcomes, and included in the NQR; of these, approximately one third can be obtained in formal education and two thirds through non-formal and informal learning ([44]). General education qualifications are not yet included into the register, but they are placed at SKKR levels 1,2 and 4 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Qualifications were levelled to SKKR based on the 'best fit' principle, following analysis of learning outcomes defined in qualification standards and their comparison with national level descriptors. This methodology was also used by the sector council members and their sectoral working groups as a tool for defining learning outcomes in qualifications standards and for better understanding of the whole process. Thus, defining learning outcomes in line with level descriptors has strengthened the cooperation between members of sector councils from the labour side and the education authorities (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF and EQF levels are indicated on qualification documents and [Europass supplements](#) for all qualifications included in the SKKR ([45]).

No evaluation of the SKKR has been carried out so far. An evaluation is planned, in line with the measures stated in the new lifelong learning strategy, focusing on occupational and sectoral qualifications (regulated by sectoral legislation and awarded by varying sectoral authorities) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The EQF NCP has been disseminating information about the framework to increase its visibility. Tools were developed to facilitate the use of the framework by different stakeholders ([46]). The main communication channels include sector councils, seminars and conferences for stakeholders, training courses for teachers, other national and international events, information materials, the [SKKR webpage](#) and social media. Employers and education staff are the main target groups. The NCP has established cooperation with the Euroguidance centre, mainly in relation to the *System of verifying qualifications* (SOK) project. Education and training institutions, and providers and recognition authorities and bodies, are already fully aware of the framework; so are labour market stakeholders related to sector councils, professional associations, and other organisations that have been engaged in its development. The SKKR is only partly known to other labour market stakeholders and to guidance and counselling practitioners.

Referencing to the EQF

The overarching SKKR was referenced to the EQF in 2017. The report on the fulfilment of self-certification criteria against QF-EHEA will be presented at a later stage. An updated referencing report is not planned before 2023 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

Important progress has been achieved in developing the SKKR and populating it with qualifications in recent years. A comprehensive framework with a clear structure and ambitious objectives has been put in place and reached activation stage. A national register of qualifications has also been developed. More than one thousand qualifications, ranging from levels 2 to 8, have been described in learning outcomes, assigned to SKKR levels and included in the register. The influence of the framework is evident in the transparency and comparability of qualifications, and the design of qualifications standards and curricula in terms of learning outcomes. The cooperation between the members of sectoral councils from labour side and the education authority in setting up the qualification standards has been strengthened as the SKKR provides the platform for cooperation. More time is needed to implement quality assurance procedures and better address higher education qualifications, with stronger involvement of higher education stakeholders.

One of the key challenges in developing and implementing the SKKR is its division into four sub-frameworks (for general education, VET, higher education and occupational qualifications). Establishing adequate relationships between them would help minimise any barriers that might occur between the different parts of education, training and qualification and would support individual progression. Strengthening the learning outcomes approach across all levels of the education system is a key challenge in the implementation of the SKKR; deeper understanding is needed of the impact of learning outcomes on learner performance, as well as establishing correct assessment procedures. Adequate expertise, teaching materials and professional assistance are required.

Future plans include eliminating terminological inconsistencies and establishing effective links between formal, non-formal and informal pathways to qualifications in order to develop a trustworthy system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is supported by recent developments related to the SKKR, the inclusion of qualifications and related standards in the register, the planned new act on lifelong learning, and by the new ESF-funded SOK project. As the SKKR is considered a basis for setting up upskilling and reskilling pathways for the lower qualified, it could be extended towards including lower levels of adults focusing on basic skills. The first draft of the additional levels was proposed within the BLUESS projects in cooperation with the Central

Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. In line with the planned lifelong learning strategy, there is a clear need to make the system of qualifications more flexible by introducing micro-qualifications in the occupational qualifications sub-framework as well as introducing individual learning accounts (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

COVID-19 has had an impact on the mode of delivery for online learning but not on the certification of qualifications; the school calendar for VET has been extended and flexibility has been allowed regarding practical experience in the workplace, while work-based learning modules will be exceptionally integrated with a project module so that the work environment-related objectives can be addressed (European Commission, 2020a).

Main sources of information

- The State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV) is the EQF NCP:
<http://www.siov.sk/>
- Website of the national qualifications system:
<http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/>
- National qualifications register (NQR):
<http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/kartoteka-kariet-kvalifikacii#/>
- State Vocational Education Institute (2017). *Referencing report of the Slovak qualifications framework towards the European qualifications framework*. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Diploma + Certificate of State exam + Diploma supplement (Vysokoškolský diplom + Vysvedčenie o štátnej skúške + Dodatok k diplomu)	8
7	Diploma + Certificate of State exam + Diploma supplement (Vysokoškolský diplom + Vysvedčenie o štátnej skúške + Dodatok k diplomu) Certificate of qualification (Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii)	7
6	Diploma + Certificate of State exam + Diploma supplement (Vysokoškolský diplom + Vysvedčenie o štátnej skúške + Dodatok k diplomu) Certificate of qualification (Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii)	6
5	Maturita certificate + Certificate of apprenticeship (Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške + Výučný list) Maturita certificate (Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške) Certificate of final post-secondary exam + Absolutorium diploma (Vysvečenie o absolventskej skúške + Absolventský diplom) Certificate of qualification (Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii)	5

4	Maturita certificate + Certificate of apprenticeship (Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške + Výučný list) Maturita certificate (Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške) Certificate of qualification (Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii)	4
3	Certificate of final exam + Certificate of apprenticeship (Vysvedčenie o záverečnej skúške + Výučný list) Certificate of qualification (Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii)	3
2	Lower secondary education certificate with supplement (Vysvedčenie s doložkou) Certificate of final exam + Certificate of apprenticeship (Vysvedčenie o záverečnej skúške + Výučný list) Certificate of qualification (Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii)	2
1	Primary education certificate with supplement (Vysvedčenie s doložkou)	1

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ISDV	information system of further education
ISTP	Internet guide through the labour market
NBEQ	National Board for Education and Qualifications
NCEQ	National Council for Education and Qualifications
NFIL	non-formal and informal learning
NOR	national occupations register
NQR	national qualifications register
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
ŠIOV	State Vocational Education Institute [<i>Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania</i>]
SKKR	Slovak qualifications framework [<i>Slovenský kvalifikačný rámec</i>]
SOK	the ESF-funded project <i>System of verifying qualifications</i> [<i>Systém overovania kvalifikácií</i>]
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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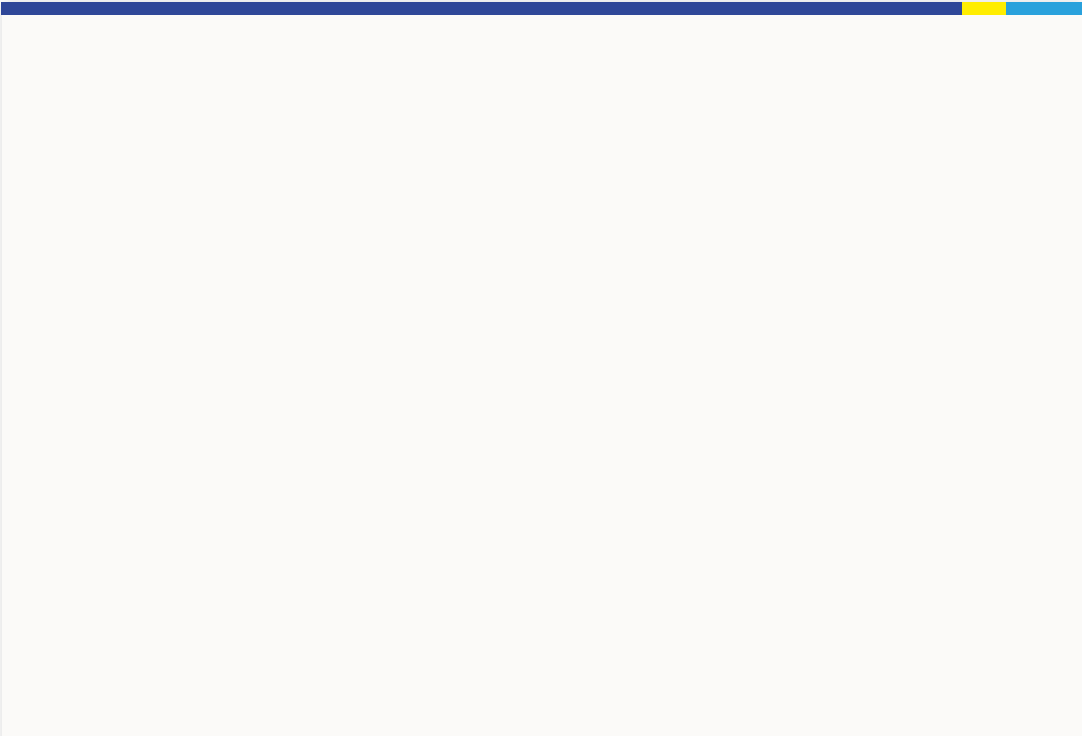
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Related content



2020

Slovakia - European inventory of NQFs 2020

European inventory of NQF



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