

NQF state of play



Finland 2022

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Overview

Stage of development: [Operational stage](#)

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:

The framework covers state-recognised qualifications, i.e. formal qualifications awarded by the education and other ministries, and competence modules, which may be shorter than a qualification and can be awarded outside formal education and training.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Act on the national framework for qualifications and other competence modules (93/2017)

[\(in Finnish\)](#)

[\(in English\)](#)

Government Decree on the NQF (120/2017)

[\(in Finnish\)](#)

[\(in English\)](#)

NQF/EQF website:

[Website](#)

Qualifications register/database:

[Studyinfo database](#)

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Finland in 2021, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product was 5.9 %, well above the EU average. The country keeps increasing participation in early childhood education (90.9 % in 2020), while the share of early leavers from education and training (age 18–24) was 8.2 % in 2021. In the same year, tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) was 40.1 % (slightly below the EU average). Vocational education and training (VET) is a popular study path, attracting 67.8 % of learners at upper secondary level in 2020. In 2021, the share of adults participating in learning was among the highest in the EU-27 (30.5 %, compared to 10.8 % for the EU as a whole).

1.2. NQF legal basis

[Act 93/2017 on the national framework for qualifications and other competence modules](#) and the [government decree on the national framework for qualifications and other competence modules](#) both came into force in March 2017. An amendment, [Act 1230/2020](#), came into force in 2022, aligning it to acts and decrees on basic and upper secondary education that were adopted after the framework was set up. The decree specified the levelled qualifications and syllabi in its annex. The FiNQF is updated and supplemented by amending this annex, which is a responsibility of the education ministry (Ministry of Education and Culture) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Policy objectives

The FiNQF aims to improve the clarity, transparency and effectiveness of Finland's qualifications system, and to increase comparability of qualifications at the national and European levels. It also aims to promote mobility and lifelong learning (see the [FiNQF website](#)). It reflects the current system of qualifications, and for this reason, no specific policy strategic targets have been set.

The FiNQF eases the comparison of qualifications and qualification levels from different countries (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). It is used as a tool for promoting the learning-outcomes approach; the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences; national and international mobility; and lifelong learning. The framework is also linked to policies, introduced prior to the adoption of the NQF, on transfer and progression, the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and quality assurance.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The eight-level framework is learning-outcome based, and describes qualification levels using an integrated approach, in terms of knowledge, skills, competences and their interrelationships, without an explicit distinction between them.

While the requirements for knowledge and skills are closely aligned with those of the EQF, the descriptors relating to competences reflect national objectives in these areas (e.g. relating to key competences such as entrepreneurship and language skills). A good illustration is the descriptor for level 4, where personal and social competences are described in the following way.

- a. Has a good command of the knowledge base of his/her field of work or study in broad contexts in and certain cognitive and practical skills as well as expression skills, and makes use of such knowledge and skills when solving problems specific to his/her field and carrying out tasks in the field. Works independently in operating environments that are usually predictable but are subject to change.
- b. Takes responsibility for completion of his/her tasks and works safely and responsibly within a work community. Works in an economical, productive and systematic manner, and organises his/her work taking other actors into consideration. Is able to supervise routine tasks performed by others. Has the ability to work in an entrepreneurial manner in someone else's service or as an independent entrepreneur in the field. Evaluates his/her competence and scope of duties and improves actions relating to work or studies. Develops himself/herself and his/her work.
- c. Has the ability for lifelong learning. Acts in a way that complies with ethical principles when interacting with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks. Communicates diversely and interactively in different situations and produces varied and also field-specific texts in his/her mother tongue. Communicates in the second national language and interacts in his own field in at least one foreign language, also

internationally.

Source: Government of Finland (2017), Government Decree 120/2017, Annex.

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The FiNQF includes the full range of formal qualifications from general education, VET and higher education, within the remit of the education ministry, along with qualifications awarded by other ministries, such as qualifications related to defence and police. Certain competence modules, awarded outside formal education and training, are defined in learning outcomes and are included in the framework ([1]); they can 'refer to a part of a qualification (an entity), qualification units, further training related to an eligibility, or module of studies that is a requirement for a particular profession' (Finnish National Agency for Education and Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). These play an important role in lifelong learning and many relate to access to regulated or specialised professions.

The initial implementation phase covered formal qualifications under the responsibility of ministries. In February 2020, 16 competence modules ([2]) were included in the framework at levels 2 to 7 based on a proposal (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019) made by a working group set up by the education ministry ([3]). The qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules are levelled based on the required competences. Stakeholders can propose new competence modules to be levelled to the FiNQF, while the education ministry is responsible for updating and supplementing the framework ([4]) (see Section 2.2). In August 2022, two competence modules ('Preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification' and 'Non-qualification programmes at folk high schools for learners within the scope of compulsory education') have been included in the FiNQF, at level 3. 'Preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification' has replaced 'Preparatory studies for general upper secondary school' and 'Preparatory education for vocational training', which are no longer offered (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022); however, they remain part of the FiNQF ([5]).

Regarding microcredentials (*pienet osaamiskokonaisuuDET*), a review will be launched in autumn 2023 focusing on the possibility of including microcredentials in the FiNQF. The review will try to shed light on the possible benefits, added value and challenges for various stakeholders; it will also try to define alternatives to increase the visibility of

microcredentials (Puukka, forthcoming).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

Developments in education have long occurred in parallel with the objectives of the EQF; vocational-competence-based qualifications ([6]) were introduced in the mid 1990s, and learning-outcome-based vocational qualifications in the late 1990s. Learning outcomes were chosen as the basis for levelling qualifications to the FinQF.

Finland's 2018 VET reform reflects a holistic approach to lifelong learning, with initial and continuing VET reorganised under the same legislation. Flexibility and customer orientation are the main features, translating into more provider autonomy and responsibility. This flexibility allows VET to be taken up at any time, depending on provider arrangements, following personal development plans that build on learners' knowledge, skills and competences. The more learners know and can do already, the shorter their studies. All programmes enable progression to higher education. The scope of the competence in qualifications and units is expressed as competence points: 60 competence points corresponds to approximately 1 year of studies. Each VET qualification has a number of competence points (equivalent to the European credit system for VET) mentioned on all diplomas/certificates (Cedefop, 2019).

In higher education, Finland has actively, and at an early stage, complied with what was agreed in the Bologna process. The shift towards learning outcomes in higher education has been slower than in other sectors of education, but the progression has been systematic, and has intensified in recent years.

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

Quality assurance of education is based on a principle of decentralisation for which the self-evaluation of education providers and external evaluations by national expert bodies provide the basis. External evaluations are mainly carried out by the [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre \(FINEEC\)](#) ([7]), which operates as a separate unit within the [Finnish National Agency for Education \(EDUFI\)](#). EDUFI is the national reference point for quality assurance in VET and assists in this respect; however, VET providers are responsible for the quality of the qualifications, the training and any other services they provide.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The education ministry has the overall responsibility for the FiNQF and its further development. EDUFI is a government agency, working under the ministry, responsible for developing education and training, early childhood education and care, and lifelong learning, and also for promoting internationalisation. In 2008, the education ministry designated EDUFI the EQF national coordination point, with the following tasks:

- a. participating in the development and implementation of the FiNQF;
- b. disseminating information to stakeholders about the EQF, the FiNQF and the levelling of qualifications to the framework;
- c. giving guidance and advice to stakeholders in using the FiNQF;
- d. promoting national and international collaboration on qualifications frameworks.

In 2019, the following tasks were also assigned to EDUFI:

- a. communicating, on its website, information on how to propose new competence modules to be levelled to the FiNQF and on the levelling process;
- b. compiling the proposals received from other administrative sectors and stakeholders for levelling new competence modules, issuing an opinion on each one of them and submitting them to the education ministry on an annual basis.

Since 2009, EDUFI has represented the country in the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. The agency is the national Europass centre, while it guides and supports cooperation between stakeholders, sectoral working life committees ([8]) and providers of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the early, preparatory stages of the FiNQF developments. Higher education institutions have supported the development of the FiNQF from the start and have contributed to the composition of the framework. This reflects the education culture, as interaction between general, vocational and higher

education and training institutions seems to operate more smoothly than in many other countries.

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

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

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has relatively long and well-established roots, while relevant legislation and policies are well developed and detailed. Laws and regulations for each field of education (i.e. general upper secondary education, VET and higher education) define validation separately (Karttunen, 2019). Actors such as employment services, and liberal adult education, have each developed different ways of identifying and recognising non-formal and informal skills, including competence certificates and competence badges (Puukka, forthcoming).

Validation opportunities are offered by education and training providers and used by individuals to a varying extent. In VET, validation applies to all learners; VET institutions identify and recognise their previously acquired relevant competence. The results of validation are not singled out on certificates, but validation and school-based learning bear equal status. In upper secondary education, the general upper secondary education act (Act 714/2018) has strengthened validation by introducing credit points and improving practices for identifying and recognising previously acquired competences. In higher education, validation arrangements vary from one institution to another. Validation and 'typical' learning have equal status, and validation outcomes are not separately indicated on certificates (Puukka, forthcoming).

In principle, credentials obtained through validation can be combined to obtain a full FiNQF qualification; however, this depends upon the education and training providers. The FiNQF promotes the validation and recognition of prior learning when moving within the qualifications system, thus supporting lifelong learning. It benefits the non-formal sector, as such courses and course curricula can be described according to the FiNQF levels and referenced to the framework to promote validation between non-formal and formal education providers (Puukka, forthcoming).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The comprehensive FiNQF has reached the operational stage and is well embedded in the national education, training and qualification structure. The number of levelled qualifications is growing. FiNQF/EQF levels are indicated on most certificates and diplomas, while a qualification database is in place. The framework supports the cooperation of stakeholders across education, training and employment, and serves as a reference point for the development and review of qualifications and modules. It also supports the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

FiNQF/EQF levels are indicated on certificates for all qualifications awarded under the responsibility of the education ministry; only on a few qualification documents awarded by other ministries are FiNQF/EQF levels not indicated. They are also indicated on Europass certificate and diploma supplements. EDUFI recommends that all education providers indicate FiNQF/EQF levels on their certificates (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The [Studyinfo](#) database (Opintopolku in Finnish; Studieinfo in Swedish) includes information on the FiNQF/EQF levels of all qualifications ([9]).

6.3. NQF dissemination

The main source of information about the FiNQF is its [website](#), where all information can be found in English, Finnish and Swedish.

6.4. Qualifications databases and registers

EDUFI maintains the Studyinfo portal, which provides information about all levels and types of education. The information provided on this portal is designed to meet the needs of learners, education providers, officials, study counsellors and any individual willing to apply to a study programme. The database contains 1 939 qualifications, providing information in English, Finnish and Swedish on the field of study, the EQF level, the awarding body, the intended learning outcomes, credit points (if applicable), the entry requirements and the relationship to occupations or occupation fields. It also gives the information source and any further information available on the qualification, along with a link to relevant

supplements. The next steps include connecting Studyinfo to Europass and including a qualification comparison tool in the database. Some FiNQF qualifications provided by other ministries / administrative sectors are not included; information on these is available on the websites of the providers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Studyinfo also includes [eRequirements](#) (ePerusteet in Finnish; eGrunder in Swedish), which offers detailed information on the degree requirements for and learning outcomes of vocational qualifications. Users can also access the curricula for early childhood education and care, basic education and general upper secondary education, and the intended learning outcomes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

There is no systematic gathering of data on the awareness and use of the FiNQF. The number of enquiries that EDUFI receives from individuals regarding the FiNQF/EQF level of their qualifications has slightly increased, as has the number of enquiries from education providers regarding designing qualifications and study modules based on the learning-outcomes approach. VET and higher education institutions are aware of the FiNQF level descriptors, as they were prepared and developed in cooperation with education providers. Furthermore, qualifications and study modules are increasingly being modified to reflect the FiNQF descriptors. EDUFI is increasingly using the framework as an information source in the comparison and recognition of foreign qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.6. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

There has been no specific evaluation of the FiNQF. In a survey, carried out by FINEEC, many national-level respondents stated that the FiNQF has improved clarity, made the skills and competences of qualifications more visible and promoted the use of the learning-outcomes approach in course and curriculum design. It has also improved the comparability of degrees, which has furthered international student mobility in particular. The survey report suggests that the next steps should include improving the awareness and understanding of qualifications and level descriptors, and increasing dialogue between the world of qualifications and the world of work. Other important areas for national discussions include the role of the FiNQF in advancing flexible learning pathways and increasing synergies between EDUFI and FINEEC.

6.7. Impact of the NQF

Through the wider coverage of the FiNQF, the transparency of the qualification system has increased as other competence modules have been brought in besides degrees and qualifications. The framework also supports the validation of prior learning and promotes clarity and transparency in the recognition of foreign qualifications. The FiNQF also promotes dialogue across education and training sectors, and between them and the labour market, through the setting-up of a national committee for the recognition of prior learning and the further development and enlargement of the FiNQF for the years 2021-2024 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Referencing to the EQF

The FiNQF was referenced to the EQF in December 2017. Finland carried out referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the European higher education area as one process and a combined report was produced.

Important lessons and future plans

One important feature of the framework is that it can be widened and modified to include more qualifications and competence modules. Significant progress has been achieved in this area, as the coverage of the FiNQF has broadened since 2020. According to EDUFI, the FiNQF's coverage is satisfactory as it includes all qualifications (full qualifications and some competence modules) under the education ministry, along with qualifications from other administrative sectors. However, one challenge that Finland is facing is that the awareness of the FiNQF amongst citizens and stakeholders could be higher. Plans include further widening of the coverage of the FiNQF by levelling more competence modules (European Commission and Cedefop 2020).

Main sources of information

URLs accessed 9 June 2023

- [FiNQF](#). webpage
- [Studyinfo](#) database (Opintopolku in Finnish; Studieinfo in Swedish)
- Finnish National Agency for Education and Ministry of Education and Culture (2018), *Report on the referencing of the Finnish national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework and the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area*.

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Universities and National Defence University scientific and artistic postgraduate degrees (Yliopistojen ja Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulun tieteelliset ja taiteelliset jatkotutkinnot) General staff officer degree (Yleisesikuntaupseerin tutkinto) Specialist degree in veterinary medicine (Erikoiseläinlääkärin tutkinto) Specialist training in medicine (Erikoislääkärikoulutus) Specialist training in dentistry (Erikoishammaslääkärikoulutus)	8
7	Master's degrees - universities (Ylemmät korkeakoulututkinnot) Master's degrees - universities of applied sciences (Ylemmät ammattikorkeakoulututkinnot) Professional specialisation programmes provided by universities and universities of applied sciences intended for holders of a master's degree or a university of applied sciences master's degree (Yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen erikoistumiskoulutukset, joiden kohderyhmänä ovat ylemmän korkeakoulututkinnon tai ylemmän ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon suorittaneet henkilöt) Advanced pastoral qualification (Ylempi pastoraalitutkinto) Senior staff officer course (Esiupseerikurssi) Further studies in war economy and technology (Sotatalouden ja tekniikan lisäopinnot) Specific qualification on prescribing medicines (Rajatun lääkkeenmääräämisen erikoispätevyys)	7

6	Bachelor's degrees - universities (Alemmat korkeakoulututkinnot) Bachelor's degrees - universities of applied sciences (Ammattikorkeakoulututkinnot) Professional specialisation programmes provided by universities and universities of applied sciences intended for holders of a bachelor's degree or a university of applied sciences bachelor's degree (Yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen erikoistumiskoulutukset, joiden kohderyhmänä ovat alemman korkeakoulututkinnon tai ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon suorittaneet henkilöt) Specialised training provided by the church (Kirkon erityiskoulutukset) Pastoral qualification (Pastoraalitutkinto)	6
5	Specialist vocational qualifications (Erikoisammattitutkinnot) Sub-officer qualification - fire and rescue services (Alipäällystötutkinto, pelastusala) Vocational qualification in air traffic control (Lennonjohdon perustutkinto) Although this qualification is no longer offered, it remains part of the FiNQF. General level (1 and 2) study module for non-commissioned officers (Aliupseerin yleistason (1 ja 2) opintokokonaisuus) Master's level study module for non-commissioned officers (Aliupseerin mestaritason opintokokonaisuus)	5

4	General upper secondary school leaving certificate (Lukion oppimäärä) Matriculation examination (Ylioppilastutkinto) Upper secondary vocational qualifications (Ammatilliset perustutkinnot) Further vocational qualifications (Ammattitutkinnot) Basic examination in prison services (Rikosseuraamusalan tutkinto) Firefighter qualification (Pelastajatutkinto) Emergency response centre operator qualification (Hätäkeskuspäivystäjätutkinto) Basic course for border guards (Rajavartijan peruskurssi) Basic study module for non-commissioned officers (Aliupseerin perustason opintokokonaisuus)	4
3	Preparatory studies for general upper secondary school (Lukiokoulutukseen valmistava koulutus) Although this qualification is no longer offered, it remains part of the FiNQF. Non-qualification programmes at folk high schools for learners within the scope of compulsory education (Kansanopistojen oppivelvollisille suunnattu vapaan sivistystyön koulutus) Preparatory education for vocational training (Ammatilliseen koulutukseen valmentava koulutus) Although this qualification is no longer offered, it remains part of the FiNQF. Preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification (Tutkintokoulutukseen valmentava koulutus) Advanced syllabus for basic education in the arts (Taiteenperusopetuksen laaja oppimäärä)	3

2	Basic education certificate (9 years) (Perusopetuksen oppimäärä) Preparatory education for working life and independent living (Työhön ja itsenäiseen elämään valmentava koulutus)	2
1	(not available)	1

Acronyms

EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
FINEEC	Finnish Education Evaluation Centre
FiNQF	Finnish national framework for qualifications and other competence modules (Suomen tutkintojen ja muiden osaamiskokonaisuuksien viitekehys (in Finnish); Finlands referensram för examina och övriga samlade kompetenser (in Swedish))
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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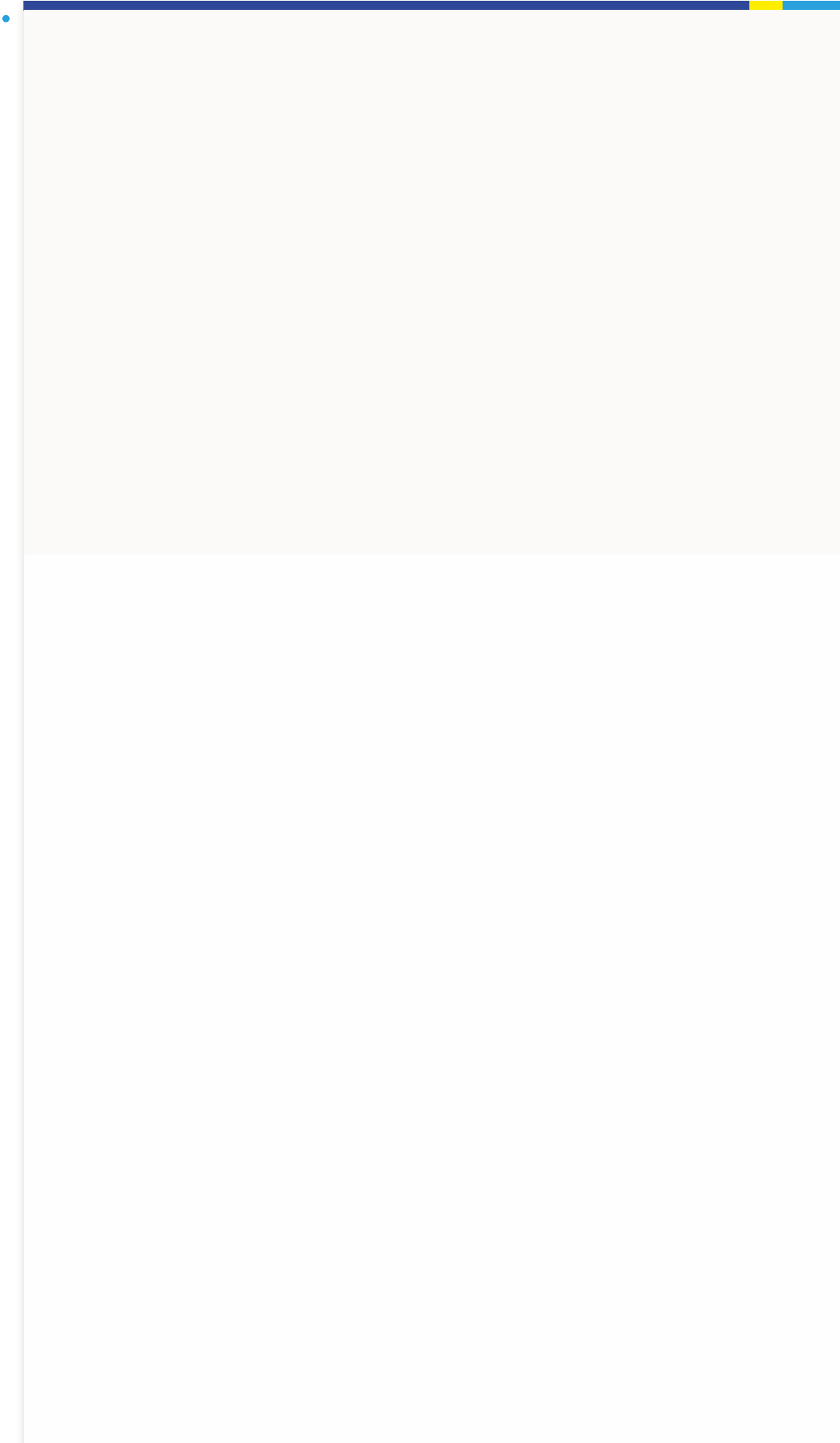
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Related content



2022

Finland - European inventory of NQFs 2022

European inventory of NQF



Finland