



**Comparative analysis of the implementation of the
National Qualifications Frameworks,
ECVET and the situation of the
low level qualifications (levels 1 and 2 EQF) in
Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia**

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Introduction

The goal of this research is to explore the challenges, problems and solutions of the positioning and referencing of the low level qualifications (corresponding to EQF levels 1 and 2) in the National Qualifications Frameworks, as well as the challenges of implementation of ECVET in the field of these qualifications in the project partners countries (AT, DE, IT, SI). To achieve this goal:

- There are overviewed and analysed the principles of referencing of qualifications to the National Qualifications Frameworks and the EQF, as well as the principles of implementation of the ECVET and their specificities in the low level qualifications.
- There is compared the situation of the implementation of the NQFs and ECVET in the project partners' countries by outlining specific challenges problems and solutions related to EQF levels 1 and 2 qualifications.

A. Principles of referencing of qualifications to the National Qualifications Frameworks and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

European Qualifications Framework (further EQF) is being designed and implemented in order to enable the comparison of qualifications in the European Union countries (and even beyond) and to enhance the transferability of qualifications between countries, mobility of employees and learners seeking development of competitive human resources, effective European labour market and the European space of vocational and higher education.

In order to achieve these aims, the designers and implementers of the EQF have already faced and will face in the future the challenge posed by the important differences in the structure and contents of qualifications inside the sectors of activities in the different EU countries. These specific functions of the EQF also implied very abstract formulation of level descriptors. EQF level descriptors are considered as generic descriptors, which can be used for the comparison of more specific national and sectoral descriptors of qualifications and their levels. However, the understanding of the EQF level descriptors and their practical usage in the different sectors of economy sometimes requires contextualisation of level descriptors in terms of the sector of economy or sector of education of concrete countries. For this reason we can find different cases of the usage of the structure of EQF level descriptors (knowledge, skills, competence) in the designing of the sectoral qualifications frameworks (e.g. European sectoral qualifications framework for the construction sector, e-competence framework for the IT sector) or the national qualifications frameworks (e.g., designing of the NQF of Austria). There can be distinguished and discussed the following cases of the comparison of qualifications in the different countries (Fig. 1):

1. Direct comparison and compatibility of qualifications between the different countries without referencing to the NQFs and the EQF. In this case of comparison the most important factors are the characteristics of work, typical for the sector and the specificities of the sector in terms of size of enterprises, market niches, work organization and applied technologies, business organisation and human resource management etc.
2. Referencing qualifications from one country to the NQF levels of another country. The most important factors in this case of comparison are models of the supply and awarding of qualifications in the national systems of VET and higher education and related hierarchical structuring of qualifications in the countries, as well as the compatibility of the structure of compared qualifications with the NQF criteria for the structuring of qualifications into levels.
3. Referencing of qualifications to the levels of the EQF without the referencing of these qualifications to the levels of the NQF of their origin country. The most important issue in this case is the compatibility of the structure of compared qualifications with the criteria for referencing levels of qualifications to the EQF for the structuring of qualifications into levels.
4. Compatibility and comparison of qualifications between the countries with the intermediation of the NQFs of these countries and the EQF. The quality and validity of such comparison of qualifications is largely dependent upon the complex compatibilities between the structure of the compared qualifications and the criteria for the structuring of qualifications into levels in the NQFs of compared countries and the EQF.

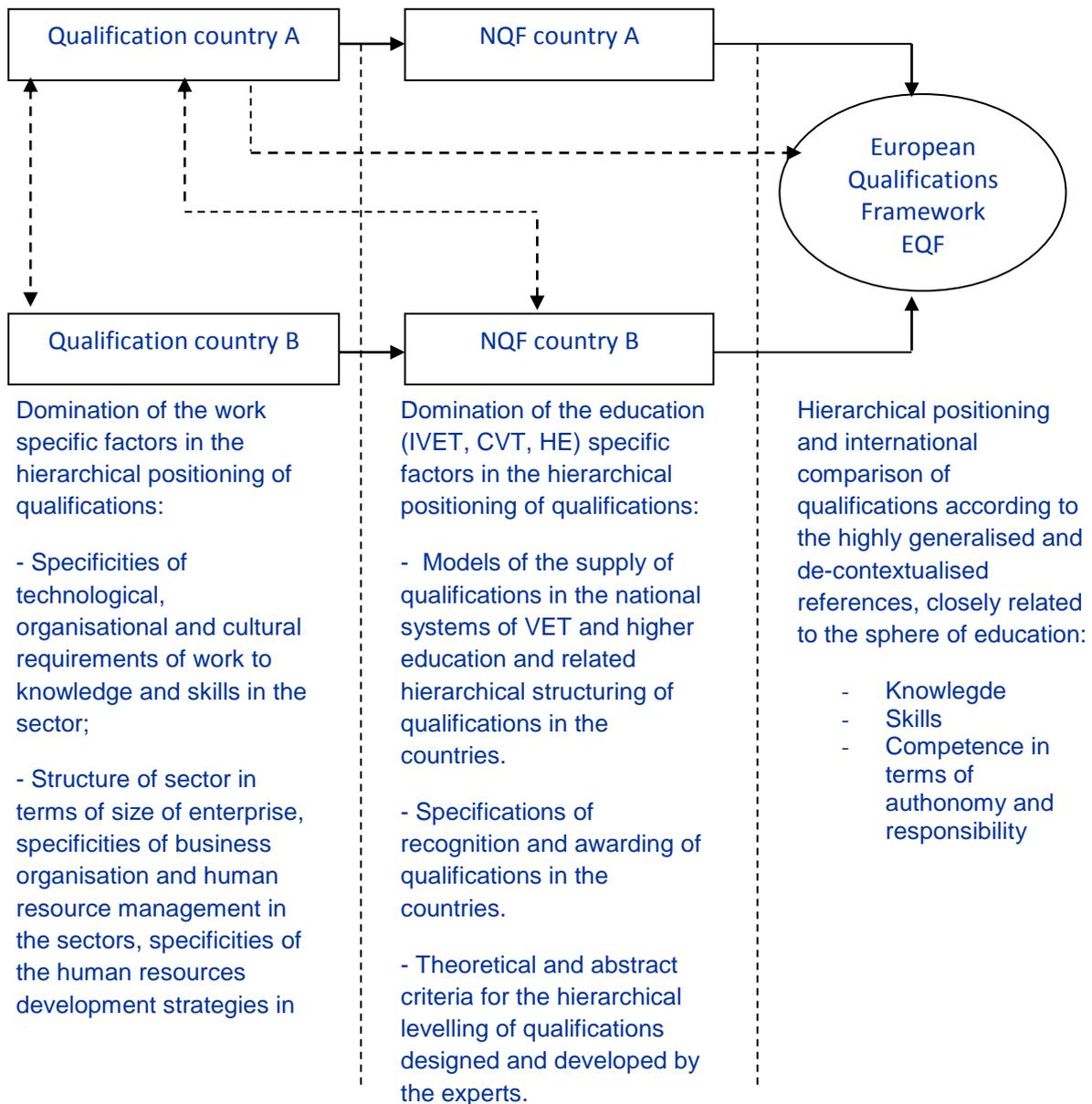


Fig. 1. Possibilities of the inter-country comparison of sectoral qualifications

The structure of the EQF descriptors (knowledge, skills, competence) in principle can be applied for the comparison of the qualifications of different levels.

The levels of qualifications and their constituents (knowledge, skills and competence) can be defined referring to the different perspectives:

From the **training supply perspective** the main factor for the definition of the level of qualification is the established institutional hierarchy of the provision of qualifications in the

countries or sectors that define the corresponding positioning of qualifications and their level comparing to other qualifications. For example, it implies higher positioning of higher education degrees and qualifications comparing to qualifications provided in the initial VET in the countries, where there is strict hierarchic separation of these sub-sectors of education system.

From the **perspective of the demand of workforce** one of the main factors that define the level of qualification is the requirements of knowledge and skills in the workplaces originating from the specific technological and organisational conditions of work. Here the main decision on acceptance of the level of qualification is made by employers and employees or their representatives and they are reflected in the different fields of human resource management: recruitment requirements, remuneration policies, assessment of performance, career planning and designing etc.

Referencing of sectoral qualifications to the levels of NQF incurs the inevitable deviations and losses of accuracy of information about the contents of qualifications, because this referencing takes into account mainly those characteristics of the contents of qualifications which can be 'measured' and 'assessed' according to the logic and criteria of levelling of the NQF. Therefore the characteristics and elements of sectoral qualifications which do not fit to the logics and criteria of the NQF levels can be ignored or not taken into account, whatever their weight and importance for the levelling of qualification to the hierarchy of qualifications in the sector or in the field of professional activity. The referencing of sectoral qualifications to the NQF and levelling of these qualifications according to the NQF can reduce and simplify the information about the contents and characteristics of qualifications, i.e. about the requirements of qualifications for the knowledge, skills and abilities, which are defined by the characteristics of activities. Why can this happen?

The possible reasons are the differences in the underlying characteristics and principles of the structuring of qualifications in the sectors and the National Qualifications Frameworks:

Structuring of sectoral qualifications according to the requirements and specifications of the professional activities of the sector	National Qualifications Frameworks (Young, 2005)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed in response to the specific technological, organisational and cultural needs and specifications of the work in the sector; • developed incrementally, applying adaptive and evolutionary approach, considering the existing context of social and labour and training relations in the sector; • based on the shared input from the employees, employers, providers of qualifications and other stakeholders of the sector; • (some) qualifications (sometimes) are tied to the diverse traditional and institutionalized forms and ways of provision specific to the sector ; • based on more or less stable and mutually recognised balance of influences, functions and powers of stakeholders of sector influenced by the traditional ways and forms of the designing, provision and awarding of qualifications; • permits the diversity of qualifications depending on the specifications of the sector of activities and the forms of the acquisition; • designing and development of new qualifications is based on the existing actual needs of sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed from a national decision to establish a common framework of qualifications; • developed applying reformative (innovative) and /or revolutionary approach, very often ignoring the existing socioeconomic and cultural context and leading to the disruption or significant change of the existing paths of institutional development in the designing, provision and awarding of qualifications; • based on the top-down initiatives and centralized approach in designing and implementation of the framework; • implies changes of influences, functions and power relations of stakeholders involved in the processes related to qualifications; • establishes commonality across different qualifications and specifies qualifications in terms of standards, levels and outcomes; • implies presence of qualifications at any level and in all sectors regardless of the existence of need for them.

Table 1. Differences in the underlying characteristics and principles of the structuring of sectoral qualifications and the National Qualifications Frameworks.

B. Definition of the structure of qualifications and its implications for the comparability and referencing of the low level qualifications (EQF levels 1 and 2)

Definition of the structure of qualifications in the countries and sectors differs but usually focuses on the structure of the work processes and / or tasks and is based on functional analysis or work process analysis approaches. It is important to notice, that the structure of qualifications in the countries largely depends on the specific characteristics of the systems of initial VET and higher education, as well as specificities of their development. It creates important challenges for the implementation of the unified approaches of the introduction of learning outcomes and competences in the countries.

For example, there are some contradictions and difficulties in shifting to a learning outcomes approach in the dual system of VET in Austria and Germany. First of all, the acquisition and awarding of qualifications in the dual system is traditionally based on the holistic approach to occupational and vocational knowledge. The traditional holistic approach to qualifications typical for Germany and Austria is not compatible with the flexible and unit-based structuring of qualifications promoted by the ECVET policy and similar instruments. Some of the ECVET-Recommendations (Transparency, Learning Outcomes) are in line with the discussions about modernisation of the design of qualifications in these countries, others are contrary. Especially the prohibition of double assessment and the determination on assessment of each unit separately could lead to strong contradictions to the established approach of final exams. Another potential problem is the change from minimum to regular standards by crediting the units - this is easily feasible in school based systems but not in dual ones. Each company that is certified for apprenticeship in Germany has to tackle all content-areas of the profile, but the time and the meaning they spend on the single positions is open to certain differences, e. g. training time between 2 - 4 months on a position. One of the challenges and, at the same time, reactions to the design of qualifications in the dual system from the processes associated with a learning outcomes orientation and modularisation is strengthening the match between the practical [in companies] and theoretical [in schools] competence areas in the curricula. Respecting the different organisation of work in the enterprises, this does not mean that each competence area must be taught at both places in the same period. But to derive these areas by analysing work processes and to develop both (school & company) curricula accordingly is a fairly modern approach.

Slovenia presents a bit different case. Changes in the VET curriculum design in Slovenia that started in 2001 can be characterised as shifting to modular VET curricula. Introduced modules of training are based on vocational qualifications and integrate theoretical knowledge and practical skills, practical skills being the major part of the module. The VET programme itself consists of general subjects (mother tongue, foreign language, mathematics, social science, natural science, arts education, sports...), which are common to the majority of vocational schools and which enable students to switch to other vocations (if they feel more motivated for those), and vocational modules as well as practical training at, for example, construction sites and workshops. In addition to the national VET framework curriculum, the school curriculum was introduced and represents an important innovation in Slovenia giving schools increased autonomy in curriculum planning and especially in taking into account the local environment and employers' needs when developing the curriculum. The general curricula had been designed at national level and serve as a reference for vocational schools to design their own curricula. For example, in the general curricula in the field of construction there can be discerned such compulsory vocational modules, common for all curricula in the field of construction, as construction, elementary construction technologies, vocational drawing. There is also a major module for a chosen vocation (masonry or carpentry or stone cutting or...) which is based entirely on vocational qualifications, as they are defined by the vocational standard. This new modular approach in curriculum design also seeks to ensure coherence and intertwining of the provision of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. For example, the curricula for construction occupations were designed to match the vocational qualification in such a manner that theoretical knowledge and practical skills are intertwined, closely following one another or are executed at the same time at the workshop.

In Lithuania currently designed system of sectoral-occupational standards will consist of the sets of qualifications structured according to the needs and requirements of the sectors. It will require undertaking sectoral approaches in analysing the structure and contents of the existing systems of occupations and qualifications. Designing of qualifications is planned to follow the hierarchical structuring of qualifications by using levels descriptions of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework, but this framework in principle permits and to certain extent even can enhance the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks. The Government decree of the 4th of May 2010 No.535 on the approval of the level descriptors of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (further LTQF) foresees, that „13. By following the

order prescribed by law, there can be introduced sub-levels of qualifications related to the experience of professional activity in order to enhance the professional development of employees.” This legal statement permits to sectoral stakeholders to establish their sectoral frameworks of qualifications as the sets of ‚sub-levels‘ of the LTQF in cases, when the qualifications in the practices of human resource management and development of the sector are structured in a

different way, than the structure of levels of the LTQF. This clause of the government decree opens the possibility for the sector-based implementation of the LTQF, when the ‚placement‘ and referencing of qualifications to the LTQF levels is executed following the needs and requirements of activities in the sector and practices of human resource management and development in the sectors.

Referring to the currently used VET standards the only relationship of these standards with the sectors is that these standards were designed by the sectors’ experts groups consisting of the representatives of enterprises, trade unions and VET institutions. The VET standards make the standardised part of the VET curriculum (professional activity areas, competences and training objectives) which is automatically transferred from the appropriate VET standard. The designers of the VET curricula in the VET schools may include additional competences to satisfy local needs. Both VET standards and training curricula are based on competences – combinations of knowledge, skills and key skills applied in execution of the work tasks and processes. However, the VET curricula to some extent integrate the competence based approach with the input approach, because in the curricula the competences are split into training objectives – smaller units of learning, that are related to subjects.

It is foreseen to apply sectoral approach in the designing of the national modular curricula of VET, because national modular VET curricula will be designed referring to the sectoral-occupational standards. These standards will provide the information about the competences that will make the basis for the training modules.

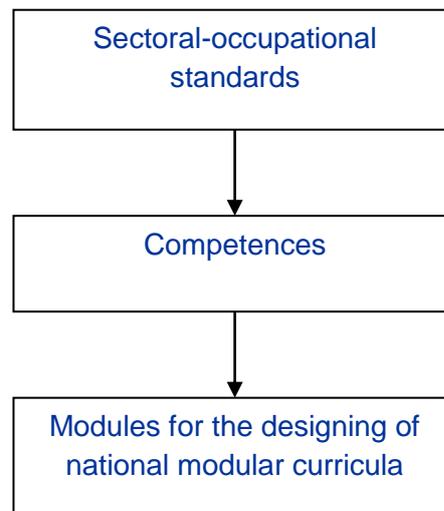


Fig. No. 2: Design and implementation of the system of national modular curricula

The main purpose of the foreseen modularisation of VET curricula is to increase the flexibility of curricula in order to enhance their adaptability to the changing needs of economy and to standardise the contents of curricula to enhance the training quality and recognition of learning outcomes when moving from one institution to another. The modular VET system will be implemented in 2 stages: on the first stage there will be developed the model of the modular VET system and prepared plan of development of modular VET curricula. On the second stage the current subject based curricula of initial VET will be redesigned to modular curricula according to the prepared model. It is foreseen to prepare 40 modular training curricula in at least 25 sub-sectors of education.

It is foreseen, that modularisation of the VET curricula will be related to sectors and sectoral qualifications in the following ways:

1. The national modular curricula will be developed on the basis of sectoral-occupational standards.
2. The experts of sectoral professional committees will be involved in the quality assurance and approval of the national modular curricula.

C. Allocation of the ECVET points to qualifications and their parts

ECVET methodology outlines the following criteria for the allocation of the ECVET points:

- importance of the learning outcomes for labour market, participation and social integration;
- complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the units of qualification;
- effort required by the learner to acquire learning outcome.

All these criteria imply big subjectivity in allocation of the ECVET points, because the judgments on the importance of learning outcomes to labour market, their complexity and weight in the units of qualifications, as well as efforts required by the learner to acquire learning outcomes can be very different in the sectors of economy and education.

Specific challenges of allocation of ECVET credit points arise when dealing with qualifications referenced to the EQF levels 1 and 2. The learning outcomes referenced to the levels 1 and 2 EQF in the most cases are not important for the labour market (there is decreasing demand of such skills in labour market), but are important for the participation and social integration, because they can present the first steps for further learning and skills development. In terms of complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes, these are hardly compatible and comparable with the volume and size of learning outcomes in the higher level qualifications. Some stakeholders (especially employers and professional organisations) express their doubts, whether there are any qualifications at all at these levels, or these are only learning outcomes / competences that create certain preconditions to acquire qualification. However, the learning and training duration to acquire these learning outcomes and especially the efforts required by the learner can still be rather significant and high, having in mind, that the bigger share of the target group targeted by these learning outcomes and partial qualifications have different learning difficulties (due to special needs, poor learning experience etc.). These conditions require looking for the different approaches in setting the credits for learning and make the application of standardised ECVET type credit system very difficult, or even impossible.

D. Permeability between the qualifications referenced to the EQF levels 1 and 2 and higher level qualifications

Permeability of learning outcomes means the capacity and potential provided by the acquisition of learning outcomes to apply these learning outcomes for the further learning in the different learning fields and levels. Permeability of learning outcomes is created by the similarity of the contents of learning outcomes and the width of their applicability in the different learning processes and fields. Permeability of learning outcomes is usually associated with the learning progress leading to the transition from the lower to higher level qualifications (vertical permeability) or to the vocational adaptation from one occupation to another (horizontal permeability). In case of vertical permeability the focus is on the possibilities of access to learning leading to higher level qualifications provided by acquired learning outcomes or to recognition of these acquired learning outcomes as a part of higher qualification. In case of horizontal permeability the focus is made on the access to learning leading to the acquisition of learning outcomes in the other occupation or field of activity or on the exemption / recognition of acquired learning outcomes as a part of qualification from another / different occupation.

Referring to the permeability of qualifications referenced to EQF levels 1 and 2 there emerge similar challenges as with the allocation of the ECVET points. First of all, there emerges the question on the rationale to ensure permeability of these qualifications and here one of the main arguments could be decreasing demand of low-skilled and unskilled workforce in the labour market, what requires creating the possibilities and pathways for further learning to the holders of level 1 and 2 learning outcomes and partial qualifications. In case of the search of the possibilities for permeability it is necessary to analyse different work processes requiring competences or units of qualifications referenced to the different EQF levels and to define in them work tasks and objectives that require competences or partial qualifications referenced to the EQF levels 1 and 2. For example, by describing the whole work process in cooking, to identify those tasks requiring competences referenced to the EQF levels 1 and 2.

E. Situation of the implementation of the NQFs in Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia and its implications to the qualifications referenced to the EQF levels 1 and 2

Referring to the current status of the implementation of the NQFs in Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia there can be noticed rather different progress and advancement of the countries in the field. **Slovenia** has already approved the NQF descriptors and designed corresponding occupational standards, what makes their NQF in principle functional. **Germany** is in the advanced process of the implementation of the German Qualifications Framework: the descriptors of DQR are prepared and approved (in May 2013 by the Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Economy and Technologies, Ministry of Culture and Conference of the Ministers of Economy) and formally provided qualifications are being allocated to the levels of the DQR. Established culture of social dialogue implies high involvement of social partners in the regulation of the national system of qualifications. There are wide discussions on the provision of qualifications to disabled persons and integration of these qualifications in the national system of qualifications. One of the discussed options is to provide to this group of learners the formal qualifications in the field of crafts (Kraftpraktikerberufe) having lower level of cognitive competences. Other discussions in this field concern the challenges of allocation of non-formally acquired qualifications. From the one side, the voluntary principle of learning in the non-formal learning should not be altered and from the other side, recognition of non-formally and informally acquired qualifications should not cause disadvantages to the persons who do not apply for this procedure. Besides, it is not clear what institutions should be assigned the role for assessment of informally acquired competences and awarding of qualifications.

Austria is also in the similar process of implementation by running the discussions and negotiations between the stakeholders in the sectors on the allocation of the qualifications to the levels of NQF that are designed by applying EQF level descriptors (it is planned to allocate formally provided qualifications to the NQF by end of 2014, and non-formally provided qualifications in 2015 - simulation phase is already running).

It should be noticed, that in **Germany and Austria**, the design and implementation of the NQF is based on wide consultations of the stakeholders in the sectors seeking to define the structure and content of level descriptors and to position qualifications in the levels of framework. These negotiations and discussions facilitate the development of comprehensive

qualifications frameworks integrating the academic, vocational and adult education qualifications on the highest levels of qualifications. Such qualifications frameworks completely fit the trends described above in relation to the design of qualifications and curriculum design in these countries. Principle of consensus between the stakeholders largely defines the progress and the quality of the implementation of the NQFs and allocation of qualifications to the NQFs in these countries. As it is noticed in the Report of referencing the German Qualifications Framework to the EQF:

The original goal was to include the qualifications from the formal sector – general education, higher education and vocational education and training, including continuing education in each case – in the first stage, while initial qualifications from the non-formal sector were to be included in a second stage. The fact that it has not been possible to fully accomplish this objective by the referencing stage is due to the consistent consideration of the above principle of consensus. Since it has not thus far been possible to reach a consensus supported by all stakeholders on the allocation of the Allgemeine Hochschulreife [general higher education entrance qualification] and the Fachgebundene Hochschulreife [higher education entrance qualification restricted to a specified field of study]) to a level on the basis of learning outcomes, in the interests of a holistic consideration for the time being the general education sector has not been allocated as a whole. But this does not signify any move away from the concept of a qualifications framework spanning all educational sectors. A consensual allocation of general education qualifications is now to be developed during a five-year introductory phase. There is consensus that the DQR should include all educational sectors and that the comparability of general and vocational education must be adequately reflected.

In **Italy** the situation is different due to the high regional disparity in the system of qualifications, what makes it highly complicated to design and implement unified and comprehensive National Qualifications Framework. For this reason, 8 EQF levels and level descriptors are used nationally in the Italian referencing process to link national qualifications from formal education and training to the EQF. Italy does not yet have an NQF. However, work to establish an Italian national qualifications and certification framework has been going on since 2003. The responsibility for taking forward this initiative is shared between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research. The absence of an explicit and adequately regulated national system of qualifications (even if there are regional qualifications systems) is regarded a barrier to taking forward coherent

lifelong learning policies and validation of non-formal and informal learning and making learning pathways for lifelong learning more visible. The process is complex due to shared responsibilities for education, training and certification of knowledge and skills between State, regions and social partners and due to diverse approaches to certification and acknowledgement of acquired skills developed at regional level. However since 2004, many national agreements have been signed between the state, regions and social partners which can be regarded as steps toward the establishment of an NQF. In February 2010, an agreement between Ministry of Labour, Regions and Social Partners was signed in relation to the training policies to be jointly implemented. This agreement called Guidelines for Training in 2010 sees the national qualification system in a wider European context (referencing qualifications levels to the EQF directly without an established NQF) and underlines the key role to be played by a learning outcomes approach in aiding individual learning. Also, recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been mentioned within these guidelines as a strategic focus in the perspective of human capital competitiveness and lifelong learning aims. Recent reform in upper secondary education also points in this direction, introducing new levels defined by learning outcomes and reflecting the EQF level descriptors.

It should be noticed, that in **Germany, Slovenia and Austria** the legal power of the National Qualifications Frameworks will be exerted only (exclusively) in the fields of education and human resource development by using these Frameworks exclusively for the designing, provision and awarding of qualifications. The NQFs in these countries will not interfere into regulation of human resource management in the field of wage setting, career design etc. However, the NQFs can be used as example and reference for the designing, implementation and development of different human resource management instruments and measures in the sectors and enterprises. There are some interesting examples of the usage of NQF in the human resource practices of enterprises and sectors in Slovenia.

In Italy there are being established legal preconditions for the development of the national system of qualifications. Since 2003 various laws and agreements between ministries, social partners and regions have been adopted. The National Law on Labour Market (2012) emphasises important priorities: defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes, developing national register of all qualifications (acquired in formal, non-formal and informal ways) and setting up a national certification system which should be installed by

2018. The Regions and Autonomous Provinces have 'exclusive' legislative powers over Vocational Education and Training, apart from tasks connected with the European Union, and parallel legislative powers over general education, although the State is responsible for deciding the basic principles.

What regards the contents of the National Qualifications Frameworks and the allocation of the formally, informally and non-formally provided qualifications in these frameworks, the situation in the countries is a bit different:

In **Slovenia** the National Qualifications Framework includes all formally, informally and non-formally provided vocational and occupational qualifications, but excludes the qualifications provided by the higher education institutions. According to some established typologies of the National Qualifications Frameworks (Young, 2005; Tuck, 2006; Spūdytė, 2011) this kind of the NQF is defined as partial NQF.

The NQFs in **Germany and Austria** are comprehensive and overarching frameworks that include all qualifications (including higher education) provided in the formal, informal and non-formal ways. Besides, the NQFs of Germany and Austria are based on the principle of the parity of esteem between so called vocational and academical pathways, what permits to allocate vocational qualifications to the all levels of the NQF (including the highest ones).

In Austria levels 6-8 are split in an academic and and vocational branch. The direct and automatical permeability between the vocational and higher education pathways is not possible for the different subjective and objective reasons. One of the main objective reasons is the rather different structure and contents of learning outcomes acquired in the vocational and academic pathways of education and training (competences in the vocational pathway are dominated by the professional knowledge and practical vocational skills, while the learning outcomes in academic pathway are based on academic and methodological knowledge and cognitive skills). Amongst the subjective reasons there can be mentioned political contestations of the higher education providers, especially universities, to control and protect the access of higher education from the „non-academic“ learners.

F. Comparison of the NQF levels descriptors that corresponds to the EQF levels 1 & 2

Comparing the descriptors of the levels of German Qualifications Framework (DQR), Austrian Qualifications Framework¹ and Slovenian Qualifications Framework corresponding to the EQF levels 1 and 2 there can be noticed:

	German Qualifications Framework	Austrian Qualifications Framework	Slovenian Qualifications Framework
Level 1	Be in possession of competences for the fulfilment of simple requirements within a clear and stably structured field of study or work. Fulfilment of tasks takes place under supervision.	<p> Holders of qualifications of Level 1 have an</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - elementary-level general education and - are familiar with social norms and values as well as accepted and common ways of behaving. <p>This knowledge enables them to overcome simple everyday challenges under given framework conditions and with relevant instructions.</p>	
Knowledge	Be in possession of elementary general knowledge . Have an initial insight into a field of study or work .	He/she has -elementary-level general education , including fundamental knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic and use of modern information and communication	Elementary general knowledge enabling further systematic learning

¹ In this case as level descriptors we use the comments of the EQF descriptors elaborated by the Austrian experts

		<p>technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge about social norms and values - knowledge about the accepted and common ways of behaving in everyday situations - an insight into the world of work and occupations, which enables him/her to make a decision on the educational and professional career - the ability to acquire available knowledge independently - knowledge which enables transfer to further school-based education or training at the upper secondary level 	
<p>Conclusions</p>	<p><i>Descriptors of knowledge are very similar in stressing elementary character of knowledge.</i></p> <p><i>Descriptors of knowledge of Austrian and Slovenian QFs stress the potential of elementary knowledge for the further learning and acquisition of the new higher level knowledge.</i></p>		
<p>Skills</p>	<p>Be in possession of cognitive and practical skills required to carry out simple tasks in accordance with pre-stipulated rules and to evaluate the results of such tasks. Establish</p>	<p>In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - communicate properly using language, participate in discussions and share his/her views - deal with simple everyday activities under given framework 	<p>Basic literacy and the ability to learn information and concepts.</p> <p>Practical skills required to carry out simple, repetitive tasks or a short sequence of simple tasks</p>

	<p>elementary correlations.</p>	<p>conditions with the use of literacy and numeracy skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - look for different possible solutions to simple problems, select the appropriate solution and use this to carry out the task - gather basic information about simple themes from common, including computer-aided sources, form a subject-related and value-oriented opinion and take up a corresponding stance - develop his/her own position on issues which affect him/her using social norms and values as a basis - take part in social events and find his/her own role within a community 	
<p>Conclusions</p>	<p><i>The skills requirements of the DQR and Slovenian QF are very similar stressing the possession and application of elementary cognitive and practical skills for the execution of simple tasks in highly structured environment.</i></p> <p><i>The skills requirements in the Austrian QF are a bit higher with the abilities to look for different possible solutions to problems, gathering information with the help of computer-aided sources, forming subject-related and value-oriented opinion etc.</i></p>		

Competence	Social competence: Learn or work together with others, obtain and exchange information verbally and in writing. Autonomy: Learn or work under supervision. Appraise own actions and the actions of others and accept learning guidance .	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to deal with simple situations under given framework conditions and with corresponding assistance	Ability to operate in a specifically defined and highly structured setting
Conclusions	<i>The descriptors of competence are similar. One of exceptions, showing a bit higher level of competence requirements in the DQR is the requirement to appraise own actions and especially the actions of others.</i>		
Level 2	Be in possession of competences for the professional fulfilment of basic requirements within a clear and stably structured field of study or work. Fulfilment of tasks takes place largely under supervision.	Holders of qualifications at Level 2 have a - sound general education and elementary-level previous professional qualification in a specific field. This enables them to - carry out simple routine work in their field of work or study independently under given framework conditions and using given tools as well as to cope with standard challenges autonomously .	
Knowledge	Be in possession of basic general knowledge and	He/she has - a sound general	Basic general and applied knowledge covering

	<p>basic professional knowledge with a field of study or work.</p>	<p>education knowledge of fundamental business connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - basic knowledge of the structure of the labour market and how it works - elementary-level previous professional qualifications in a specific field - knowledge which enables transfer to further school-based or vocational education or training 	<p>understanding of the main social and natural concepts, processes and laws; serves as the basis for further learning and social participation.</p>
Conclusions	<p><i>All descriptors stress requirements for basic general knowledge that enable further progressing and learning. The descriptor of Austrian QF indicates the basic knowledge of the labour market and business connections, stressing knowledge for employability.</i></p>		
Skills	<p>Be in possession of basic cognitive and practical skills required to carry out tasks within a field of study or work, evaluate the results of such tasks in accordance with pre-stipulated criteria and establish correlations.</p>	<p>In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use given instruments, methods and procedures appropriately - cope with simple routine tasks - autonomously deal with simple standard challenges - independently develop certain independent and logical thought - actively take part in 	<p>Basic literacy and practical skills including the use of basic tools, methods and materials.</p> <p>Ability to carry out simple, repetitive tasks consisting of a small number of operations.</p>

		<p>discussions on familiar themes and take up his/her own viewpoint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understand and use information to fulfil his/her tasks from given sources - present facts and circumstances from his/her experience orally and in writing using the correct standard language 	
<p>Conclusions</p>	<p><i>All descriptors require applying simple basic cognitive and practical skills.</i></p> <p><i>The DQR outlines the abilities to evaluate the results of carried tasks according to pre-stipulated criteria, while the Austrian QF descriptor stress the ability to apply procedures or work, to independently develop autonomous and logical thoughts and taking own viewpoint in discussions on familiar topics.</i></p>		
<p>Competence</p>	<p>Social competence: Work within a group. Accept and express general feedback and criticism. Act and react in accordance with the given situation with regard to verbal and written communication.</p> <p>Autonomy: Learn or work in a responsible manner and largely under supervision within familiar and stable contexts. Appraise own actions and the actions of others. Use pre-stipulated learning guides and request learning guidance.</p>	<p>In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to act autonomously in simple situations, cope with simple challenges under given framework conditions and with a certain amount of assistance</p> <p>successfully deal with new, more specific activities with corresponding support and guidance in order to develop the self-confidence required to take on more extensive tasks</p>	<p>Ability to operate with limited autonomy on the basis of verbal or written instructions and to acquire new knowledge and skills in a predictable and structured setting. Taking a limited degree of responsibility.</p>

Conclusions

All descriptors are quite similar in stressing the requirements to act autonomously and responsibly in the simple and predictable situations as well as to learn by acquiring new knowledge and skills.

In concluding the comparison of the descriptors of levels 1 and 2 of the NQFs of Germany, Austria and Slovenia there can be noticed, that the descriptors of these levels presuppose and stress the potential and even requirements for further learning and progress in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills leading to higher level qualifications. None of the descriptors presuppose specific requirements or criteria for the competences or learning outcomes adapted to the learners with special needs. Even the functions of assistance in executing of work tasks or learning are mentioned very episodically. Expressing it in other words, analyses level descriptors focus of the progression and permeability of learning (by considering the learning outcomes referenced to these levels as the starting steps in learning and skills development) and not on the adaptation of qualifications requirements to learners and workers with special needs.

G. Comparison of the status in the implementation of ECVET in Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia

Implementation of the ECVET in Austria and Germany are at the initial phasis while Slovenia achieved more important progress in this field.

According to the monitoring report of Cedefop on the implementation of the ECVET (2013) there can be noticed the following differences of ECVET implementation in the above mentioned countries:

Austria

The added value of ECVET is still not entirely visible. There is a strong focus on the mobility projects and it is expected that ECVET can improve the quality of the European learners' mobility and transparency of qualifications, thus contributing to the national VET reform. The process of ECVET implementation is governed by the Ministry of Education with the high involvement of different experts, social partners and governmental institutions. Introduction of ECVET does not require change and adaptation of existing VET legislation so far. The curricula of VET are increasingly shifted to the learning outcomes approach, but it has only indirect influence for the introduction of ECVET.

Germany

Implementation of ECVET is considered to enhance the shift to learning outcomes in the initial VET, as well as to increase the mutual understanding and trust amongst the sectoral stakeholders enabling more effective mobilities of VET students. ECVET is tested within the framework of the ten guidelines for the modernisation and structural improvement of VET (from 2007). Guideline eight focuses on improving mobility and recognition and includes the testing of a national credit point system in VET (DECVET) as well as supporting the establishment of a European credit system for VET in the context of transnational mobility. Stakeholders and the public are informed and supported by the national contact point for ECVET.

Existing legislation is sufficient for the implementation of ECVET and covers all aspects. Learning outcomes and units are possible and other elements like validation and recognition procedures can still be compatible due to the great flexibility of the legal framework. The National LLP Agency has been nominated the NCP and a national steering committee exists.

The steering committee includes Ministries, social partners, chambers (through umbrella organisations), regions ("Länder"), the national LLL agency and trade unions. There is a constant mechanism of provision of information to sector organisations in the skills and crafts sectors. The regions ("Länder"), the Federal Ministry of Education, the ministries and the NCP are involved.

The DECVET project showed that by recognising prior learning using the LO approach, the quality and attractiveness of VET could be improved. Germany works in building up programmes in a LO format with which ECVET is compatible although ECVET points are not considered yet. Qualification modules (Qualifizierungs- und Ausbildungsbausteine) are designed to make it easier for young people to enter training. They are particularly helpful for socially disadvantaged young people and those who find learning difficult. Qualification modules in pre-vocational training contain vocational elements of recognised training occupations. These modules could also be used when moving within different subsystems of VET (e.g. moving from full-time vocational training to dual training) or entering higher education.

Italy

Due to the 20 regional authorities, the recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes from one region to another is still critical, although national standards exist. Currently such recognition is possible only for formal learning. The main difficulties of recognition of qualifications between regions are caused by the different regional regulatory framework. There are Regions, such as Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Molise, the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, and Sicily, which are in an exploratory stage where validation initiatives were carried out in the context of specific projects, programs, and training sectors. Other Regions are currently defining their regulatory frameworks but have not yet implemented the relevant services. These include Basilicata, Latium, Liguria, Marche, the Autonomous Province of Trento, Apulia and Sardinia. Finally, in seven Regions - Emilia Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta and Veneto – the strategy was formalized and regulated within the regional system of validation and certification and relevant activities were carried out. In this case, the issue of validation is an integral part of the regional system of certification and is closely linked to the regional repertoires of qualifications; the latter allow to identify and describe the competencies to be validated and to identify the levels of recognition (individual units of competence, professional profile).

Following the approval of Law n. 92/on the labour market reform, the issues of validation of non-formal and informal learning and the national system of certification of competences have become two key elements to ensure and implement lifelong learning, thus offering citizens employability conditions. In addition, implementation of this part of Law 92 consists of the approval of the Legislative Decree No. 13 (16 January 2013) on the national competences certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, the recognition of informal and non-formal learning is still at the piloting stage.

The above mentioned regulations are moving to a more efficient and homogeneous national qualifications system based on LO, more flexible qualifications and assessment standards.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, and regional authorities are in charge of ECVET as the three of them are competent in the policy and management of VET and HE. The social partners and sector representatives are usually involved in relevant processes and can also be found as partners in the Leonardo da Vinci ECVET projects. . Even if there has been no specific and explicit adoption of ECVET in Italy, there are quite a number of developments that are, in a way, 'approaching' this goal.

The learning outcomes approach has been implemented in different areas of the Italian qualifications system, although differences, mainly terminological, still remain among different subsystems. The LOs approach will be extended in the near future with reference to the second phase of the referencing process of the national qualifications system to EQF and the implementation of the latest national regulations on VET. A system based on modular qualifications (ECVET model) is partially adopted. Some subsystems can give citizens the opportunities to achieve partial qualifications after the assessment of prior learning or accumulating the units (for example, in Tuscany such units are referred as areas of activity) and related value in terms of credit, changing from one pathway to another. With the implementation of the latest national regulations on VET, the LOs approach and the transfer opportunities will be further developed.

Slovenia

The Ministry of Education, the Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and VET schools are in charge of the process of implementation of the ECVET. All required legislation exists and is compatible with ECVET implementation. CPI has been nominated the National Coordination Point for implementation. There are designed and implemented national occupational standards. In 2006, the Vocational Education Act established the legal framework for the Slovenian credit system. Since then, the system has been a credit -transfer system designed for (formal) vocational education and training. It enables systematic description of educational programmes and their units The vocational matura comprises four units, with the possibility of adding a fifth unit from the general matura.

Source: Monitoring ECVET implementation strategies in Europe, CEDEFOP Working paper No. 18, 2013

However, currently ECVET is used only for the mobility purposes. ECVET units are under the preparation by the experts. Implementation of the ECEVET system is closely related with the introduction and standardisation of the modular VET curricula.

Concluding this analysis there can be indicated, that although in most of analysed countries there are already established national legal and political preconditions for the implementation of the ECVET, the implementation of the learning outcomes approach as well as design and allocation of the credit points to learning outcomes encounter more challenges and are implemented with quite different progress. These differences can be explained by the variety of institutional approaches of the ECVET implementation, which depends on the traditional institutional patterns of VET provision (e.g., higher involvement of sectoral stakeholders and social partners and bigger attention to the needs of sectoral stakeholders in Germany and Austria, „regional“ approaches of the implementation in Italy, coherent national coordination of ECVET implementation process in Slovenia).

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