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# Mapping higher education access qualifications in the ARAQUA project countries for automatic recognition

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## Comparative study report

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# Methodology

Project team drafted and approved template of the country report to gain comparative data (Jan – Feb 2023)

DK, EE, IT, LV, MT, RO, SK and UK conducted desk study and composed country reports (Apr – Aug 2023)

AIC analysed the collected data and compiled the comparative report using the same structure as for country reports (Oct 2023 – Jan 2024)

Project team reviewed the comparative report and provided additional information to have objective comparison and draw conclusions (Jan – Febr 2024)

# Structure of the ARAQUA report

## **1. Methodology of the study**

## **2. Latest developments in the national secondary level education systems in the context of HE access qualifications**

## **3. Current legal framework regulating HE access qualifications**

## **4. HE access qualifications in national education system (present situation)**

- Types of qualifications, formal eligibility rights, nominal duration of learning, types of education institutions, grading system, assessment system

## **5. Flexible pathways leading to HE access qualifications**

## **6. HE access qualifications in national qualifications framework**

- EQF level of HE access qualifications, level descriptors

## **7. Quality assurance for institutions implementing/awarding HE access qualifications**

## **8. Learning outcomes of HE access qualifications**

- Formulation of learning outcomes, QA of learning outcomes for HE access qualifications, terminology of learning outcomes, hierarchy of learning outcomes

## **9. Recognition criteria and procedures of HE access qualifications in the country**

- Legislation regarding recognition of HE access qualifications, tasks of national ENIC/NARIC centres in assessment and recognition of foreign access qualifications, competent recognition authorities for HE access qualifications. criteria and procedure for assessment and recognition of HE access qualifications

## **10. Mapping HE access qualifications for automatic recognition in the project partner countries**

## **Conclusions**

# Results of analysis

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# Latest developments in the national secondary level education systems

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- The major development tendencies in education systems are **similar** due to common policy priorities in the European Education Area
- **Reforms** in relation to HE access qualifications focus on facilitating transparency of qualifications, as well as promoting responsiveness of education programmes to the labour market needs
- A shift from subject-based to **learning outcomes** oriented education programmes
- **NQFs** have been established and referenced to the EQF in all the partner countries

# NQFs in the project partner countries

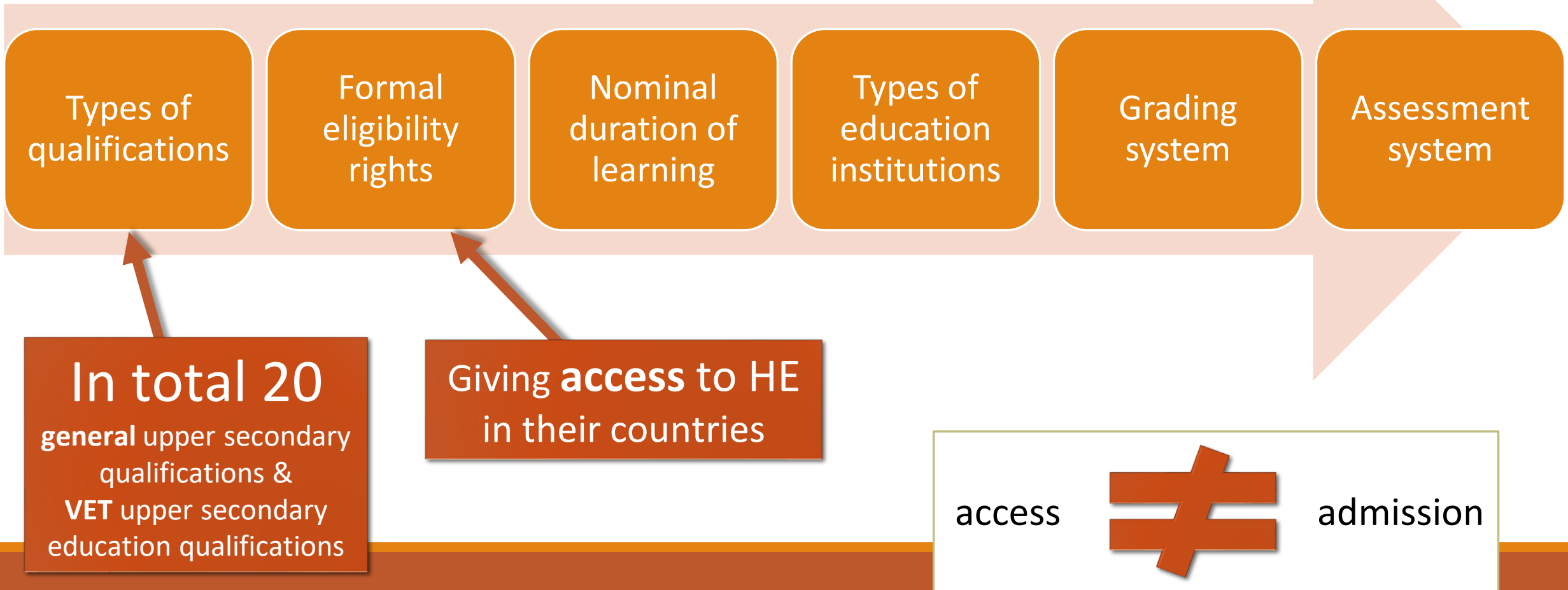
Country	Name	Abbreviation (EN)	Established	Referenced to EQF	Levels
DK	Danish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning	DQFLL	2006	2011	8
EE	Estonian Qualifications Framework	EstQF	2008	2011	8
IT	Italian National Qualifications Framework	QNNQ	2018	2022	8
LV	Latvian Qualifications Framework	LQF	2010	2011	8
MT	Malta Qualifications Framework	MQF	2005	2007	8
RO	Romanian National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning	ROQF	2013	2018	8
SK	Slovak Qualifications Framework	SQF	2017	2017	8
UK – ENG & NIR	Regulated Qualifications Framework	RQF	2015	2008	8
UK – SCT	Comprehensive credit and qualifications framework	SCQF	2001	2010	12
UK – WLS	Credit and qualifications framework of Wales	CQFW	2002	2010	8

# Current legal frameworks regulating HE access qualifications

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- DK, EE, LV – separate legal acts for general secondary and vocational secondary education stipulate HE access qualifications
- IT, MT, SK and RO a single law or act regulates HE access qualifications for both general and vocational education
- UK – no national legislative acts that stipulate the qualifications necessary to access higher education
- Due to time and resource limitations (and focus of the study), the content of legal acts was not analysed and compared among partner countries

# HE access qualifications in national education systems (present situation)





# (Some) aspects of HE access qualifications

	Duration of learning (weeks)	Duration of schooling (years)	Grading scale
DK	35-39	12-13	7-point (12: excellent; 10: very good; 7: good; 4: fair; 02: adequate; 00: inadequate; -3: unacceptable) 02 – passing grade, Pass/fail
EE	35	12-13	5-point (3 to pass) for general secondary, 4-point for VET (5-2 scale, 3 to pass), Pass/fail 100-point scale for state exams (1 to pass)
IT	33	13	10-point (6 to pass) 100-point scale for state exams (60 to pass)
LV	35 (grades 10-11), 38 (grade 12)	12-13	10-point (4 to pass) 100% scale for state exams (15% to pass in 2024, 20% to pass in 2025)
MT	39	13	Grade A – 30 grades points; Grade B – 24 grades points; Grade C – 18 grades points; Grade D – 12 grades points; Grade E – 6 grades points (44 to pass)
RO	36	12-13	10-point (5 to pass) 5 in each subject to pass state exams, average mark of 6
SK	40	13 (rarely 14)	5-point (4 to pass) where 1 is excellent and 5 is unsatisfactory 100% scale for state exams (33% to pass)
UK	39	13	England: 9-point (4 to pass), Wales, Northern Ireland: A-G (C to pass), Scotland: A-D (to pass at least D, otherwise No Award) A*-E (E to pass) for state exams (A levels)

# Grading and assessment

	No of exams to pass	Passing score for school exams (%)	Passing score for state exams (%)
DK	General upper secondary: 10 (oral and written) VET: depending on the programme	28	28
EE	5-6	41	1
IT	3	51	60
LV	5-6	31	15
MT	6	35	44
RO	5-6	50	60
SK	4-5	varies	33
UK	3	33 – England 57 – Wales, Northern Ireland 21 – Scotland	20

# Flexible pathways leading to HE access qualifications

Flexible pathways – alternative means to access HE besides completing traditional education programmes leading to HE access qualifications

- Flexible pathways differ by country but usually they are offered in form of adult education or VET-oriented programmes
- In DK, EE, IT, MT there are programmes which grants access to HE for adults aged 19+ (specific age varies by country)
- DK offers HE access programme for refugees and immigrants
- SK – no ways to gain HE access qualification through independent testing or lifelong learning, but different ways to upgrade the secondary VET qualification (without access to HE) through the build-up studies
- LV and RO – no alternative pathways for HE access qualifications

# HE access qualifications in national qualifications framework

## EQF level of HE access qualifications

primarily EQF level 4 or equal in all countries with some exceptions where EQF level 3-5 is accepted

## Level descriptors

several groups of partner countries:

- DK, LV, MT, SK use knowledge, skills and competences to describe learning outcomes
- EE, IT, RO use the EQF descriptors: knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy
- UK: England and N. Ireland use knowledge and skills, Wales uses knowledge and understanding, Scotland uses five level descriptors, including communication, ICT and numeracy

1. most common arrangement is an 8-level qualifications framework similar to EQF
2. similarities can be observed in the level descriptors
3. NQFs present a valuable, but not self-sufficient tool for credential evaluation

# Quality assurance for institutions implementing/ awarding HE access qualifications

a programme leading to a HE qualification needs a ministry licence or approval (all partner countries) – institutional and programme accreditation

renewal of accreditation or approval ranges between 1 year and 6 years with the longer period (4-5 years) being more common

both internal and external quality assurance procedures

- **internal:** periodical self-assessment reports
- **external:**
  - various organizational forms
    - state (centralized) agency responsible for QA (LV, SK, UK)
    - ministry supervision with centralized guidelines but decentralized criteria (DK)
    - separate QA schemes for VET (EE)
    - a combination of centralized QA and external agencies (IT, MT)
  - various procedures of external quality assurance: initial approval and continuous periodic evaluation and inspection, accreditation of study programmes, external testing, supervision

# Learning outcomes of HE access qualifications

## **Formulation of learning outcomes**

- by the ministries or supporting agencies in close cooperation with employers, education institutions, professional associations, etc.
- most commonly formulated by the ministry or centralized agency with some space given to the education provider

## **Quality assurance of learning outcomes for HE access qualifications**

- commonly part of the general QA process in partner countries, supervision of adhering to the stipulated learning outcomes as part of the QA process

## **Terminology of learning outcomes**

- different terminology may be used for level descriptors and learning outcomes, between general education and VET, between NQF learning outcomes and educational standard, and even programme to programme

## **Hierarchy of learning outcomes**

- level descriptors at NQF level as the basis
- state education standards and occupational standards at the programme level that still correspond to the NQF level descriptors as “the standard”

# Recognition criteria and procedures of HE access qualifications I

Country	RECOGNITION	
	Legally binding	Legally required
DK	✓	x
EE	x/✓	x
IT	x	x
LV	x	✓
MT	x	x
RO	✓	x
SK	✓	✓
UK	x	x

## Legislation regarding recognition of HE access qualifications

- compliance with LRC in all partner countries
- existing legal basis in most partner countries
- responsible body: ENIC/NARIC, HEI, other (and their combinations)

## Tasks of national ENIC/NARIC centres in assessment and recognition of foreign access qualifications

- similar assessment criteria with all levels of qualifications
- a set of required documents including application, ID, original documents or notarized copies, scanned copies
- statement issued within 30-60 days (fast track option: MT)

## Competent recognition authorities for HE access qualifications

- recognition authorities outside ENIC/NARIC centres: HEIs (EE, IT, LV, UK), regional authorities (SK)

# Recognition criteria and procedures of HE access qualifications II

Partner country	RECOGNITION	
	Legally binding	Legally required
DK	✓	x
EE	x/✓	x
IT	x	x
LV	x	✓
MT	x	x
RO	✓	x
SK	✓	✓
UK	x	x

## Criteria and procedure for assessment and recognition of HE access qualifications

- commonly, the level and formal eligibility rights are considered, in SK this foresees the recognition of the qualification level (without right to be accepted)
- duration (DK, IT, LV, MT, UK)
- access requirements, subject combination, programme structure (DK, IT, UK)
- grades (EE, LV)
- others (programme aims, assessment method, field or specialisation)



# Mapping HE access qualifications for automatic recognition in the project partner countries

similar features (EQF level, nominal duration, admission requirements)

specific qualifications need to be explored more in terms of their potential automatic recognition

list of minimum requirements?

GENERAL	COUNTRY	VOCATIONAL
stx, hhx, htx, stx, 2-årig stx HF, 2-årig hf med overbygning, HF-enkeltfag med overbygning, 2-årig hf, hf-enkeltfag	<b>DK</b>	EUX, VET Skolbevis, eux 1. del
<i>Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus</i>	<b>EE</b>	<i>Kutsekeskhariduse lõputunnistus</i>
<i>Diploma di Esame di Stato conclusivo dei corsi di istruzione secondaria superior</i>	<b>IT</b>	<i>Diploma di Esame di Stato conclusivo dei corsi di istruzione secondaria superior</i>
<i>Atestāts par vispārējo vidējo izglītību</i>	<b>LV</b>	<i>Diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību</i>
Matriculation Certificate	<b>MT</b>	Matriculation Certificate
<i>Diploma de bacalaureat</i>	<b>RO</b>	<i>Diploma de bacalaureat</i>
<i>Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>	<b>SK</b>	<i>Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>
GCE A Level, SQC Highers	<b>UK</b>	BTEC Nationals, other

# Conclusions (Automatic Recognition of HE Access Qualifications)

- **diverse education systems:** but all have undergone reforms and become oriented on learning outcomes
- **nominal duration:** 12-13 years, 33-40 weeks per school year
- **grading systems:** 21 – 57% passing score for school exams, lower passing scores for state exams which ranges from 1-15-20% to 28% and higher on the other end
- **flexible pathways:** in most PCs of flexible pathway, they should also be considered for AR (individual exceptions may apply)
- **EQF:** level 4 recommended, must be placed in NQF to be considered for AR
- **quality assurance:** all PCs have systems of internal and external QA, national license, accreditation and/or approval required for AR
- **learning outcomes:** varying systems of formulation and QA of LOs, further study necessary
- **differences:** mostly formal and concerning organization of education, not a deep division between PCs
- **recognition:** ENIC/NARICs, HEIs and other bodies; governed by LRC principles, some variety in credential evaluation between PCs, one year difference in nominal duration should not present a substantial difference

# Conclusions (Automatic Recognition of HE Access Qualifications)

- ENIC/NARICs should promote the benefits of automatic recognition supported by the national authorities
- automatic recognition criteria: according to the results of the OCTRA project (2020-2022), credential evaluators consider as most important: 1) level of the study programme and study course; 2) formal rights; 3) workload; 4) information on external quality assurance; 5) the status of awarding institution; 6) the composition of the study programme; 7) access and admission requirements; 8) graduation requirements; 9) nominal length of the full-time programme; 10) speciality of field of study
- in most of the partner countries the level of programme, formal eligibility rights and workload/nominal duration are primarily considered when evaluating a qualification
- other aspects may differ more prominently but are taken into consideration more rarely and should not form an obstacle to automatic recognition
- in respect to that, all mapped qualifications from PCs fulfil the defined criteria for AR