

Interim Report on the state of play concerning the inclusion of sport qualifications in NQFs with a reference to EQF (1 December 2016)

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1. Introduction

This is an Interim Report on the state of play concerning the inclusion of sport qualifications in NQFs, with a reference to EQF. This was an objective of the Expert Group in Human Resource Development in Sport which was outlined in the EU Work Plan for Sport 2014-17. The approach taken by the Expert Group was to review and update the “Inclusion of Sport Qualifications in National Qualification Frameworks (NQF’s) Draft Mid-term Report” produced by the previous EU Expert Group (Education and Training in Sport) as part of the EU Work Plan for Sport 2011-2014. This fits in the with the EU Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017) principle “to build on the achievements of the first EU Work Plan for Sport”. The specific task that was set in the Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017) is to have an ‘Exchange of best practices, and report on the state of play, concerning the inclusion of sport qualifications in the NQFs with a reference to the EQF’

This task sets out the ambition for the the European Council to have more sports qualifications recognised through their NQFs and aligned to the EQF, or at least for qualifications delivered (through formal or informal systems) to be aligned to the EQF. The Expert Group were all requested to share best practice for the benefit of supporting future development of sports qualifications for Member States. Collaborative learning across Member States such as sharing best practice is one of the benefits of having expert groups established.

The report also provides further analysis regarding the ongoing relationship of sports education programmes and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) showing the on-going commitment of Member States to a consistent and systemic approach to EU-wide referencing and alignment of their qualifications.

This report is largely developed using data that is available from two core documents:

- Inclusion of Sport Qualifications in National Qualification Frameworks (NQF’s) Draft Mid-term Report, European Council, 2013 (referred to in this report as The 2013 Report)
- Study on Sport Qualifications Acquired Through Sport Organisations and (Sport) Educational Institutes, European Council, 2016 (referred to in this report as The 2016 Report)

It should be noted there have been a variety of contributions to the final version of both documents from education and sport experts, CEDEFOP and other supporting agencies.

A major challenge for a study that covers all the EU Member States is finding consistent measurements and definitions that all Member States can recognise. The Commission contracted PWC to gather the required information and it should be noted that they provided a detailed report (The 2016 Report) that has been extremely useful for providing the evidence for the conclusion and recommendations in this paper. To ensure consistency this paper uses the definitions and categories adopted in the PWC report, however this also means that this report is also susceptible to the different interpretations used by member states.

Country	Education sector NQF Status	Is there are non- Formal System	NQF and non-formal System Aligned	Sports Qualifications aligned with EQF
Austria	Legislative Stage	Yes	Partial	Yes
Belgium (French)	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes
Belgium (Flemish)*	Full (HE Only)	Yes	Included	Yes
Bulgaria*	Full	Yes	Pending	Partial
Croatia*	Early	Yes	Pending	Yes
Cyprus*	Design Stage	Yes	No	Unsure
Czech Republic	Full	Yes	No	Yes
Denmark*	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes
Estonia*	Full	Yes	Included	Yes
Finland	Legislative Stage	Yes	Partial	Planned
France*	Full	Yes	Partial	Partial
Germany*	Partial	Yes	Pending	Partial
Greece	Early	Yes	Partial	Yes
Hungary*	Full	Yes	No	Yes
Ireland	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes
Italy*	Design Stage	Yes	No	Yes
Latvia*	Early	Yes	Partial	Yes
Lithuania	Full	Yes	Pending	Yes
Luxembourg*	Full	Yes	Pending	Yes
Malta*	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes
Netherlands*	Full	Yes	Pending	Yes
Poland	Legislative Stage	Yes	Partial	Planned
Portugal*	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes
Romania*	Design Stage	Yes	Pending	Yes
Slovakia*	Early	Yes	Pending	Yes
Slovenia	Legislative Stage	Yes	Partial	Planned

Spain	Legislative Stage	Yes	Partial	Planned
Sweden*	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes
United Kingdom	Full	Yes	Partial	Yes

The 2016 Report categorised the formal education system of sport as a “sport education system regulated by general education legislation”, and non-formal system as one “in which the education and training is not under specific legislation”. Whilst not categorised in the 2016 Report, it may also be useful to consider that those programmes in the non-formal system may be semi-regulated by a national organisation (such as a National Olympic Committee), or self-regulated (for example by the awarding federation).

The 2013 Report was explicit that a follow up report would be inevitable due to the complex and dynamic nature of the area. It is recommended in this report that similar

This paper describes the developments in the categories identified above since the 2013 Report, and provides an overview of the current state of play. It summarises the state of play of the inclusion of sport qualifications in national qualification frameworks, including international qualifications and recommends to the Council further actions by the Member States, and the Commission.

2. Overview of Member States NQF, EQF and Non-formal Systems

The following table provides an overview of the current State of Play:

Table 1: Overview of current State of Play for sports qualifications engaged with NQF

* Information updated in 2016

For the purposes of this report the following definitions have been used:

- Education sector NQF Status – This identifies the current stage of development with each Member States’ NQF across the whole education sector
- Non-formal system – This identifies if the Member State has acknowledged the existence of a non-formal system of sports education system in one or more of the sports segments defined (coaching, management, officiating and instructing)
- NQF and non-formal system aligned – This shows where there is evidence that the NQF and non-formal systems are communicating with each other
- Sports qualifications aligned with the EQF – This identifies where, in general terms, the sports qualifications are aligned with the EQF, either directly or through the medium of the NQF.

3. General Developments in NQFs and engagement with the EQF

The 2013 Report highlighted that all Member States were committed to the development of their own NQF. Of the Members States, 16 had completed their NQFs and mapped them to the EQF [Austria, Belgium (FL), Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany,

Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK]. There were several countries with NQFs which were not yet mapped to the EQF.

The current stage of development as shown in the 2016 Report can be identified as in one of four stages:

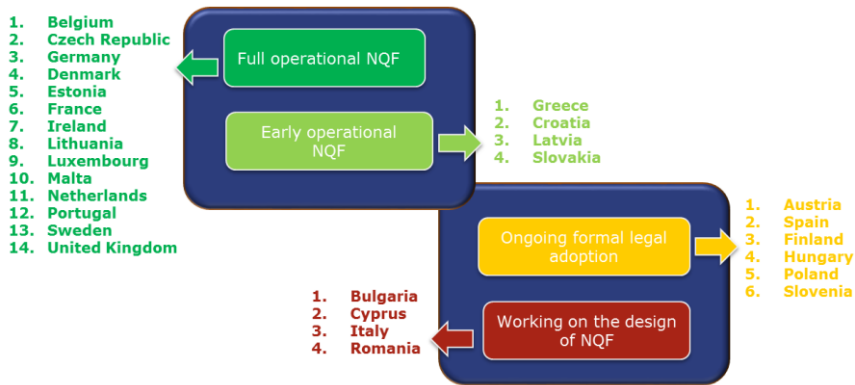
- Full operational NQF (Full)
- Early Operational NQF (Early)
- Ongoing Formal Legal Adoption (Legislative Stage)
- Working on the Design of the NQF (Design)

The one exception is Germany where feedback has been received that the original table was incorrect. It has been changed to *partial* whilst further clarification is sought.

The current situation of NQF engagement across member states can be shown in the following figure taken from The 2016 Report, and based on the briefing note produced by Cedefop, *Qualifications and Frameworks in Europe, 2016*. It should be noted Bulgaria have now moved to a Full Operational NQF.

Figure 2

NQF development in the EU Member States



Commented [AG1]: Changes to model are still required. This includes Bulgaria moving to 'Full Operational'

Whilst there is some discrepancy regarding the perceived stages of development, possibly down to the terminology used, there are some key general messages from the progression in this area:

- There appears to be an ongoing commitment to the engagement across the Member States. This evidenced by their ability to articulate their current stage of development with all Member States in working towards the NQF in some way.
- Whilst slow there has been progress (16 Member States to 19 Member States) towards the engagement with NQFs, and the associated mapping to the EQF.

21 countries have also aligned their national qualifications to the EQF Levels. This would suggest that a number of countries [Austria, Italy, Hungary] have already aligned their national qualifications with the EQF, without their NQF being legally adopted.

There also appears to be a continued commitment from all member states to a learning outcomes approach. The progression offered by the increased engagement with NQFs based on learning outcomes, would suggest this commitment is still there.

4. Sport Qualifications included in The NQFs

The specific focus for the sport engagement with the EQF came through the EU Belgium presidency in 2010. Sport ministers of all EU Member States expressed their support to the EQF in the field of sport and called upon the Member States to bring all qualifications in sport in line with each other within this framework by 2012. To do this they highlighted the importance of including sport-related qualifications in national qualification systems.

Information requested in 2015 to support the production of the 2016 Report gave rise to 13 updates from member states regarding the inclusion of sports qualifications with the NQFs or related national systems. Additionally, 10 Member States have provided written updates to the Expert Group in October 2016.

One key area to highlight is that it is still likely that there have been developments in some of 15 Member States who have either not had their updates published, or have not provided the information. In the UK for example there have been significant changes to the nature of the NQF which may make the engagement of sports qualifications with the NQF more or less likely.

An additional challenge is that in the 2013 Report the categories used were trainers / coaches; referees / officials, medical practitioners and sports managers / board members. There was also the option for an 'other' if there were sports qualifications which didn't fit those categories. The 2016 report gathers data on coaching, management, officiating and instructing. This mismatch makes it difficult to explore trends in progression, however there are some elements which seem to offer an opportunity for commentary.

As the 2016 Report identifies, from the information provided by the 13 Member States:

- Progress on sports qualifications being formally deposited on NQFs has been limited over the last two years, potentially indicating that the qualifications that needed to be on the NQF had been done by 2013
- There is an ongoing development of sports qualifications based on learning outcomes

The 2016 Report also identified that one of the challenges to sport qualifications and NQF engagement appears to have been matching the employment skills, and the associated qualifications, with the needs of the labour market. Whilst this is worth noting, this paper will continue to focus on the NQF, EQF, and non-formal elements of the sport education and training process.

The following snapshots are based on commentary offered by Member States in either 2013, information gathered for the The 2016 Report, or subsequent written confirmation to the Expert Group. There might be a slight mismatch in information provided due to timing (e.g. an NQF might now be agreed / amended which wasn't agreed when the commentary was originally provided). This is inevitable with an ongoing process.

Updated (Feedback from XG October 2016)

- Bulgaria – The current NQF does not embrace all sports qualifications (just levels 6 to 8), but the intention is for the emerging NQF to encompass all sports qualifications
- Croatia – The development of new, and amendments of existing, legislation will allow for more engagement with sports qualifications, focused on the ones aimed at professional staff (coaching and sport management). For over 10 years Croatia have exclusively recognised formal qualifications that can be acquired through post-secondary education. The NQF is learning outcome based, and will be the basis for accrediting non-formal and informal learning. It has clear alignment to the EQF. This will require stronger cross sector co-operation (especially with the education sector).

- Estonia – Coaches qualifications at six levels (NQF = EQF from 3 to 8 level) are completely integrated into the NQF. This includes almost all sports federations (58) and specialisation on 100 sports and disciplines. All licenced coaches (with respective NQF qualifications, this totals number 3500) are entered into the Estonian Sports Register. Preparations for manager’s qualifications are currently underway. Learning outcomes are basic for all approved qualifications
- France – There are two main frameworks (RNCP and the QAI) which make up the NQF. Qualifications for coaches, teachers and instructors are embedded. Referees, officials and managers are currently not.
- Hungary – Sports qualifications are part of the national framework but implementation has not yet begun
- Italy – Most sports qualifications will be embedded in the emerging NQF. Certain regional qualifications (mainly sports management) will require further engagement on a region by region basis.
- Latvia – Formal sports qualifications are fully embedded in the NQF, and linked to the EQF. Non-formal ones are not.
- Luxembourg – For the last two years all ENEPS (Ministry of Sports) / Brevets d’ Etat Diplomas have been referenced to the NQF and EQF.
- Romania – Formal sports qualifications are integrated into the NQF. Coaching qualifications are linked to a sectoral framework.

Updated (2016 Report):

- Belgium (Flemish) – There are both sport professional qualifications, and sport educational qualifications (only delivered by education institutions and mainly in sports science and sports management). There is a hybrid collaborative structure which offers training for sports coaches and outdoor instructors. There is a drive to acknowledge informal and formal learning as part of the NQF. The qualifications are being phased into the NQF. The NQF is aligned to the EQF.
- Cyprus – There is now a robust framework which incorporates vocational training, which appears would allow sports qualifications to engage with the NQF. However, it appears that this is not yet planned.
- Denmark – There is a separate sport qualification framework with a formalised link to the NQF, and is based on learning outcomes. It is aligned to the EQF. This is particularly for coaching and sports management. The non-formal system linked to the Federations is not currently aligned to the NQF but discussions are taking place.
- Germany – Non-formal qualifications are not yet connected to German Qualification Framework (DQR). That means also, that the Qualifications managed by the DOSB and the Federations (e.g. Trainer Qualifications) are not yet connected with the German Qualification Framework (DQR), or aligned to the EQF. The integration of all sports qualifications (managed by the DOSB) into the NQF (DQR) is currently underway.
- Malta – Coaches, trainers and sport instructor qualifications are completely integrated into the NQF. Referees and managers appear not to be.

- Netherlands – The formalisation of the link between the sports qualifications (coaches, trainers, sports instructors) and the NQF is underway.
- Portugal – There is currently no direct link between the sports qualifications and the NQF as they are self-regulated. Work is underway to ensure the regulation of sport licences.
- Slovakia – The alignment of all formal and informal sports qualifications is underway to ensure full alignment with the newly agreed NQF.
- Sweden – Whilst there is currently no link between the sport qualification framework, it is hoped that once the formal education system has been engaged the non-formal activities could be included.

Not yet updated

- Austria – No consensus across the four areas – Management not identified, coaches engaged with NQF, instructors and officials have no link to NQF. Currently aligning NQF with EQF.
- Belgium (French) – Once the NQF is operational it is likely that all sports qualifications will be directly integrated into it and therefore aligned to the EQF
- Czech Republic – Currently no NQF, although there are two operational frameworks. The sports qualifications are not learning outcome based.
- Finland – Coaches, trainers and instructors (in sport disciplines) are directly integrated into the NQF, which in turn is linked to the EQF. Referees, officials and sport managers are not currently included in the NQF
- Greece – Formal sports qualifications are embedded into the NQF, however others are not.
- Ireland – There is a formalised link between the sports qualifications framework, and the NQF which encompasses coaches, leaders and sports instructors' qualifications. Currently there is no link with the referees / official's framework.
- Lithuania – Plans are underway to formalise a link between the sport qualification framework and the NQF
- Poland – Formal qualifications will be encompassed in the NQF when it is agreed and implemented. Non-formal qualifications such as those for coaches, trainers and sports instructors may be embedded in the emerging framework.
- Slovenia – Coaches, trainers, sports instructors, referees and official qualifications are all embedded in a framework with a formal link to the NQF. Managers are missing.
- Spain – The formal sports qualifications are integrated into the NQF. Non-formal sports training is not.
- UK – There are five frameworks across the four UK home nations with most popular sports qualifications being embedded in one or more of them. The exception would be officiating and some national federation coaching qualifications.

As can be seen above there are varying levels of engagement of sports qualifications and the NQFs.

From the narrative provided in updates and factsheets, this is partially down to the Members States' existing programmes and whether there is a general desire to change the

way programmes are delivered. Part of this may be a lack of political will to use the move to NQFs to formalise the Member States' sports qualifications offering, and part of it may be down to the historical non-formal delivery mechanisms used.

From the data available it is difficult to draw specific conclusions across the different categories of qualifications (coach, official, instructor and manager). However, in broad terms it appears that sport science, management and higher level coaching programmes are more likely to be embedded in the NQFs as these have traditionally been offered through higher education institutes, many whom have been involved in the development of the Member States' NQF.

The officiating, instructing and more entry-level coach education programmes seem to be delivered through more non-formal education networks.

5. Non-formal sports education system

In the information provided all Member States advise there is some form of non-formal education system which sport qualifications and training programmes are engaged with. Whilst this is no surprise, it is still worth noting that non-formal sport education features across the EU. There does not appear to be a Member State where there is education delivered solely through the formal mechanisms. This again is worth noting as it may provide an opportunity to explore the benefits of the non-formal system and how it can best align to the formal sports education systems and NQFs. One of these benefits might be the acknowledgement of informal and non-formal learning as part of the achievement of the qualifications. This is almost certainly a discussion the formal systems could benefit from.

6. NQF and non-formal system alignment

As expected there is a direct link between the level of engagement of sport qualifications within an NQF, and whether there is a relationship between the NQF and the non-formal sports education system. It has been necessary to understand how the two systems fit, especially when there are categories of qualifications which are delivered partially in each system (for example coaching in many Member States). Whilst in many cases it seems the direct alignment is not agreed, it is clear there are discussions taking place to help unpick the relationship between the qualifications, and hence the relationship between the two systems (formal and non-formal). This should be identified as a success of the current developments. Ensuring there is an acknowledgement of both systems, and how they are able to exist together, will help understand the benefits of each and look to transfer these across systems.

There seems to be some benefit to those Member States who are adopting NQFs later in the process as they are able to articulate, and be intentional about the relationship between

the formal and non-formal systems. This currently seems to be moving towards three forms:

- Embracing the sports qualifications fully within the formal NQF or providing a direct link (for example Estonia)
- Aligning the with the NQF using a mixed economy of formal and non-formal qualifications (for example Finland)
- Supporting the sports qualifications being completely delivered through non-formal mechanisms (for example Cyprus)

7. Sports Qualifications aligned with EQF

As identified above it is important to note where, in general terms, the sports qualifications are aligned with the EQF, either explicitly or through the medium of the NQF. As mentioned previously there appears to be a number of countries [Austria, Italy, Hungary] who have already aligned their national qualifications with the EQF, without their NQF being legally adopted. This should support the smoother transition of the qualifications as and when the NQFs are operational.

8. Engagement with International Federations

As with much of the data provided to date it proves difficult to identify any specific trends across Members States regarding their engagement with International Federations.

The data providing in 2016 suggests there continues to be specific relationships with most Member States across a range of sports, and this relationship is linked to the need of the Member State in that sport. This is most evident in sports coaching.

The relationship follows a range of different models:

- International Federation qualification is delivered and recognised in the Members State (Croatia - football and skiing)
- Members State qualifications and International Federation qualifications area delivered at the same time and acknowledged by each other (for example, Spain and Estonia – football)
- International Federation qualification is delivered but not recognised in the Members State (Denmark – football, handball, softball)
- Member State's federation qualification is delivered but is mapped to the requirements of the International Federation (Belgium (Flemish) – most sports)
- Member State's federation qualification is delivered but there is no direct reference to the International Federation qualification (UK – most sports)

From the data provided there is clearly a need to keep an ongoing dialogue with the Global and European Federations, and that currently Members States are choosing a mixed economy on how to engage with the International Federations. This will be compounded as

the NQFs mature, and the discussion turns to the engagement with informal and non-formal learning.

In the case of fitness and the outdoor sectors, though the work completed through the European Skills Competencies Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) referencing, there is an informal referencing of their qualifications and standards to the EQF. The fitness and outdoor sectors (active leisure) present their main occupations within the term of an “international sectoral qualifications framework”.

9. Recommendations

Not unexpectedly for a report of this nature, a robust analysis of the current situation proves to be challenging due to the collection of consistent data across all Member States, and for the wide range of types of sports qualifications. In addition to this, there still seems to be different interpretations of various terminology and changes of approach to data collection in this area. This has added to the complexity of the task.

Even within the data available there seems to be different understandings of what is meant by an NQF. Some Member States seem to interpret it as an agreed framework across sport domestically, some define it as a government led education framework, and some are defining it as a framework aligned to the EQF. Whilst it is important for each Member State to define its own sport and education frameworks, for Member States and the Commission to allocate support and resource appropriately there needs to be a common understanding for the purposes of data collection. This features as a recommendation for any further studies undertaken on sports qualifications.

For the achievement of the objective of this report, the Expert Group in Human Resource Development in Sport provides the following recommendations:

The XG HR recommend that from 2017 onwards the Member States should:

- **Continue to gather the evidence of the benefits of sports qualifications** through the systematic and consistent data collection.
- **Highlight the impact sports qualifications have with other Expert Groups in Sport such as economic benefits, volunteering, good governance and employability.** Two examples where sports qualifications can add value are the *Recommendations on the contribution of sport to the employability of young people, including young professional sportsmen and women*, and *the creation of jobs in the sport and sport-related labour market* and from *Grassroots Sport - Shaping Europe*¹.
- **Continue to promote the benefits that sports qualifications bring to the EU.** This would be through evidencing engagement of increased employability, economic growth, social inclusion and increased physical activity as outlined in the EU Work Plan for Sport 2014-17. One example could be to reference, where applicable, to the statistical code of economic activities (NACE) and the nomenclature and classification of professional units (ISCO).
- **Promote the benefits of national and international sports federations working collaboratively.**

This would reinforce the benefits of sports persons being trained, qualified and employed in a collaborative manner and should align with recommendations in the EU Expert Group report *Practical guidance on compliance of national qualifications with international qualification standards of international sport federations*.

- **Promote the benefits of engaging wider stakeholders**, such as sector skills councils, education institutes and employers **when developing qualifications**
- **Promote the benefits** of the learning experience and gaining the qualifications for developing **wider skills for employability and personal well-being** as well as supporting the growth of the community
- **Promote best practice in sports qualifications that provide personalised and meaningful learning experiences**, are quality assured and are delivered with a skilled workforce
- **Recognise the value of informal and non-formal learning and training**. This should be done through the adoption of systems that can accredit these experiences and are recognised across Member States and their sports organisations.
- Produce, with the support of the Commission, **an EU Sport Qualifications Action Plan and Guidelines Document** to support the implementation of these recommendations. This should include information on the organisations and tools that are currently available for Member States to use to support qualification development such as Europass, ISCO, ECVET, EQAVET, European Coaching Council's CoachLearn, Romanian Goalkeeper. It should also include support for the gathering and dissemination of core data and examples of good practice.

10. Conclusion

The evidence provided in the 2016 Report indicates that sports qualifications are highly regarded across the EU. There are differences across the Member States in terms of their sports qualifications alignment to the National Qualification Framework, however it remains a realistic objective for all sports qualifications to one day be levelled against the National Framework and the European Qualifications Framework. Future reports on sport qualifications should commence with a workshop or forum session where the commissioned researchers can discuss with the experts the definitions and categories being adopted to support a consistent interpretation.

The Europe Strategy 2020 outlines the many benefits that sport can provide such as tackling health and obesity and creating social inclusion. From this we can state that sports qualifications have a similar role to play. Achieving sports qualifications can help tackle employability and raise self-esteem, improve the standards of sporting experiences and consequently have more people taking part in sport and improve the mobility of the sport workforce across the EU. It is important we continue to generate evidence to show this impact.

Considerable progress has been made by Member States around their development of sports qualifications and the European Work Plan for Sport must support the continuation

of this. The recommendations above should be reflected in the final version of the EWPF 17-20.

It is recommended that for future reports that amendments to definitions are agreed by Member States to ensure accuracy, and to support an agreed collaborative approach to developments of NQFs, the EQF and non-formal sports education systems.

Member States should use the data and insight featuring in the PWC report to promote sports qualifications and their wider benefits to national and international stakeholders, at every opportunity, to influence the policy and strategy makers to ensure this area of work remains a priority at national and EU level. This information should be built upon further.

In the light of the available information, whilst there is Member State clarity, the NQF / EQF landscape across the EU remains disconnected. This is to be expected due to the specific nature of the sport and education systems in each Member State, however there are certainly areas which could be explored further through the recommendations. It is unlikely there is a critical path which will cover every Member State, however learning could be gleaned from Member States experiences at each stage.

It may be unrealistic for every sports qualification to be fully integrated with NQFs due to the nature of the qualifications, however a realistic aim is for all to be consistently levelled against the EQF outcomes. Further long-term collaboration between Member States could provide standardisation of the size of similar sports qualifications at each level. This would be a challenge for Member States, however it would enhance the mobility of the workforce by smoothing the equivalency of qualifications across the nations and sports federations, and allowing for recognised prior learning to be integrated.

Further information is required from Member States to support this proposition, and to help opportunities to learn from experiences across Member States. Mechanisms should be developed to share information more regularly, and in more detail, to support a collaborative approach across the EU.