Desk research about learning outcomes for prior learning recognition to see recent situation

Toolkit for RPL

Task A1 – IO1: Learning Outcomes Report in structured matrixes

Report – Portugal

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Main characteristics of the adult education and training system[1]

In the last decades, Portugal has made a significant effort to improve the qualifications of its population. The Portuguese population continues to present a qualification deficit that inevitably conditions the development of the country. According to Eurostat data (2017)[2], more than half of the population between the ages of 25 and 64 has a qualification level equal to or lower than basic education (9th year of schooling), in fact, 53,8 % of the adult population is in this situation.

It is quite clear that the situation in the country and the pace of developments in relation to qualifications remain far below the levels of more developed countries. As such, it became essential to find innovative solutions in relation to objectives, organisation and methods used to overcome difficulties and achieve a rapid and sustained improvements in the area of the competences of the Portuguese and their qualifications and promote new qualification opportunities for people already in the employment market, many of whom have left school early or dropped out.

For these purposes, it was created several structures like the National Qualification System (*Sistema Nacional de Qualificações - SNQ*) and more recently the Qualifica Programme with its centres that will be explained in more detail in pages 7 and 8 of this report.

As part of the Qualifica programme, the Qualifica Passport has been created as an electronic record of courses already done and guidance for new courses. At the beginning of 2017, a National Credit System for Vocational Education and Training was also implemented, which allows credit points to be assigned to qualifications in the National Qualifications Catalogue (*Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações - CNQ*) and other certified training courses. They are registered in the Information and Management System of the Education and Training Provision (*Sistema de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa - SIGO*) and comply with the quality assurance criteria in force. This system incorporates the principles of the European Credit

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[1] European Comission/ EACEA/ Eurydice: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-60_en

[2] Eurostat: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do

System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), promoting mobility within Europe.

In Portugal, adult education and training provision are diversified and it is oriented towards specific aims and target groups[3][4]:
- Provision to raise achievement in basic skills:
  - Basic competences programme - Designed for adults to acquire basic reading, writing, math skills, and information and communication technologies competencies (ICT) and their subsequent integration into primary education level Adults Education and Training courses or basic level Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences processes (RVCC), equivalent to ISCED 1;
  - Portuguese for speakers of other languages - Designed to meet the legal requirement of knowledge of Portuguese language to acquire Portuguese nationality, permanent or long-term residence, as well as to promote proficiency in reading, writing and speaking.
- Provision to achieve a recognised qualification during adulthood:
  - Adult education and training courses - These courses aim to boost adult qualifications via dual certification.
- Provision targeting the transition to the labour market
  - Certified modular training - Permit the conclusion of basic or secondary education and the acquisition of academic and vocational competences, in order to return to or progress in the labour market;
- Provision of liberal (popular) adult education
  - Senior Citizen Universities are organised through the formation of associations, some of which become Private Social Solidarity Institutions. One of the main goals of the network is promoting active aging and senior citizen universities.
- Other types of publicly subsidised for adult learners
  - LLL: back to school education - recurrent education - Designed for adults who have not completed their primary or secondary education at the usual age.

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[3] http://www.anqep.gov.pt/default.aspx

[4] European Comission/ EACEA/ Eurydice: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-60_en

Regarding more specifically the recognition, validation and certification of competences process (*RVCC*) is part of the National Qualifications. This process is based on a set of methodological assumptions (competences audit, autobiographical approach) that allow the identification, recognition, validation, and certification of previously acquired competences by adults throughout life in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. The process consists of the application of a set of assessment tools and activities, in order to build a portfolio (containing evidence and/or proof of competencies adult possess in relation to a particular framework).

The RVCC process is based on frameworks that are part of the CNQ (basic level key competence framework, upper secondary key competence framework and the professional competence framework), with the academic RVCC divided by areas of key competences and the professional RVCC by competences.

Concerning the distribution of responsibilities, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational (ANQEP) and the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) are bodies with responsibilities in adult education and training. ANQEP is a public institution that is part of indirect State administration, overseen by the Ministry of Education alongside the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, in conjunction with the Ministry of Economy, boasting administrative, financial and pedagogic autonomy in the pursuit of its duties. The mission of ANQEP is to coordinate the implementation of policies regarding the education and vocational training of young people and adults, as well as to ensure the development and management of the National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences.

IEFP is the national public employment service. Its mission is to promote job creation and quality and combat unemployment via the implementation of active employment policies, vocational training in particular. Its various duties include promoting academic and vocational qualifications for young people and adults, via dual certification provision and certified vocational training respectively, tailored to individual pathways and important to the modernisation of the economy.

The main adult education in training providers are the Qualifica Centres that can be set up by public or private providers, such as public primary and secondary education school clusters or non-clustered schools, directly or partially managed vocational training centres from the network of the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), companies and associations or other bodies with significant territorial or sectorial importance and proven technical capacity regarding their sectors and end users, having been part of the contracted public network for at least five years.

The Qualifica Centres are monitored by ANQEP, which provides the members of the Government responsible for education and employment with monthly information on the monitoring findings and on the Centres' annual report, which should consider their annual self-evaluation.

Regarding another type of education and training provision targeting adults, it is worth mentioning all bodies providing adult education and training courses (EFA Courses) and certified modular training included in the National Qualifications Catalogue. These include public primary and upper secondary schools, private and cooperative schools with parallel pedagogy or recognition of public interest, vocational schools, vocational training centres, and vocational retraining centres, training bodies overseen by other ministries, training bodies in other legal entities of public law and bodies with certified training frameworks in the private sector.

The targets until 2020 to be achieved are the following:
- 50% of the working age population completing upper secondary education;
- An adult participation rate in lifelong learning activities of 15%, reaching 25% by 2025;
- 40% of higher education graduates in the 30-34 age group;
- Extending the Qualifica Centres network (300 in 2017).

State-of-the-art of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning[5]

Within the described context, improve the basic education and training of the workforce, generate the necessary competences for personal development and modernisation of enterprises and the economy, as well as facilitate citizens' academic and vocational achievement are the goals of the education Portuguese system.

The National Qualification System created by the Decree-Law 396/2007 of 31st December, aims to promote widespread completion of upper-secondary education as the minimum qualification of the population - and the mechanisms necessary for its implementation, in coordination with the appropriate financial instruments, in particular the National Strategic Reference Framework 2014-2020.

With the same goal was created the New Opportunities Initiative presented by the Portuguese government, at the end of 2005, with the objective to overcome the structural deficit in qualifications by making general schooling available to the population.

The network of Recognition, Validation, and Certification of Competences Centres which were later called New Opportunities Centres (CNO), drawing up a key competences reference framework for upper secondary education and the promotion of the comprehensive management of provision and the provider's network.

In 2013 by the Ordinance No. 135-A/2013, of 28th March was created the Qualification and Vocational Education Centres (CQEP) closing the CNO and beginning a procedure to set up structures responsible for the RVCC system. A total of 242 CQEPs were created throughout the country, maintaining the diversity of organising bodies that already existed at the CNOs. These Centres consolidate the lifelong guidance component and guidance for young people, in addition to interventions with adults.

Originally presented in 2016, the Qualifica Programme is a new government initiative that aims to improve adult levels of qualifications

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[5] European Comission/ EACEA/ Eurydice: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-60_en

and the employability of individuals by using a qualification strategy that includes various educational and training responses, tools and a broad network of operators and closed the CQEP.

The idea was to establish upper Secondary school education as the lowest platform from which to take part in our knowledge-based economy and information society. It acted as a determining factor in the economy's growth and competitive capacity, leading to improvements and growth in employment and favouring social cohesion and citizenship. It had an influence on all fields of development in terms of people and society.

The strategy that was defined resided in four domains which had the goal of:
1. Increasing the number of vacancies in dual certification courses that are increasingly more diversified; working towards clarifying the qualification offer; widening the network and the profile of the promoters; refining certification procedures including the processes involving the Validation and Certification of Competences; reviewing criteria based on funding, and, interlocking the educational system with the training system.
2. Stimulating demand and attracting the Portuguese people, so as to make them aware of the aims of qualification, and designing suitable systems of encouragement. Facilitating the attendance of diversified schooling and training courses, mobilising all relevant public and private agents and improving the articulation between the supply and demand of qualifications.
3. Speeding up the rate at which stages of schooling are accomplished in order to shorten the distance between standard European patterns and Portuguese patterns.
4. Working along an axle aimed at young people and at the same time, working along an axle aimed at adults owing to the fact that the demands of competitiveness and stake-holding in a globalised economy and society mean making up for the working adult's tardiness in obtaining his/her qualifications. Promote the idea of "adults going back to basic qualifications" so that the foundations are laid and adults become involved in a lifelong learning activity that is demanded by a fast-changing economy and society.

Therefore, where the adult domain is concerned, an effort has been made to recognise, validate and certificate competences gained in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. In also providing vocationally-oriented education, the conditions have been set up for allowing people access to and attendance of education and training courses.

One of the Government's priorities with the Qualifica Programme is to revitalise adult education and training as a cornerstone of the qualifications system, ensuring the continuity of lifelong learning policies and permanent improvement of learning processes and outcomes. This programme essentially seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase the workforce's qualifications and improve employability equipping them with skills that meet the needs of the job market;
- Significantly reduce literal and functional illiteracy rates, as well as combating semi-illiteracy;
- Improve the system with young adults investing more in education and training;
- Correct the country's structural weakness in terms of schooling and bring it in line with European levels;
- Tailor provision and training network to the needs of the job market and the national and regional development model.
- The Qualifica centres teams consist of the following elements:
- Coordinator,
- Guidance, Recognition and Validation of Competence Technicians.
- Trainers and teachers from different key areas of competence and from different areas of education and training to develop processes for recognition, validation and certification of school skills and professional skills.
- Teams of Qualifica Centres can also be supported by an administrative technician.

Description of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning process[6]

The recognition, validation and certification of competences process (RVCC) in Portugal is part of the National Qualifications System. This process is based on a set of methodological assumptions (competences audit, autobiographical approach) that allow the identification, recognition, validation and certification of previously acquired competences by adults throughout life in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. The process consists of the application of a set of assessment tools and activities, in order to build a portfolio (containing evidence and/or proof of competencies adult possess in relation to a particular framework).

The RVCC process is based on frameworks that are part of the CNQ (basic level key competence framework, upper secondary key competence framework and the professional competence framework), with the academic RVCC divided by areas of key competences and the professional RVCC by competences.

The RVCC processes, developed in the Qualifica Centres, consist of the recognition of school and professional competences acquired by adults, throughout life, with a view to their certification.

Specifically, the Qualifica Centres ensure the following stages of intervention[7]:

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[6] European Comission/ EACEA/ Eurydice: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-60_en

[7] Methodological Guide for the Application of the Lifelong Guidance Framework, ANQEP, March 2017.
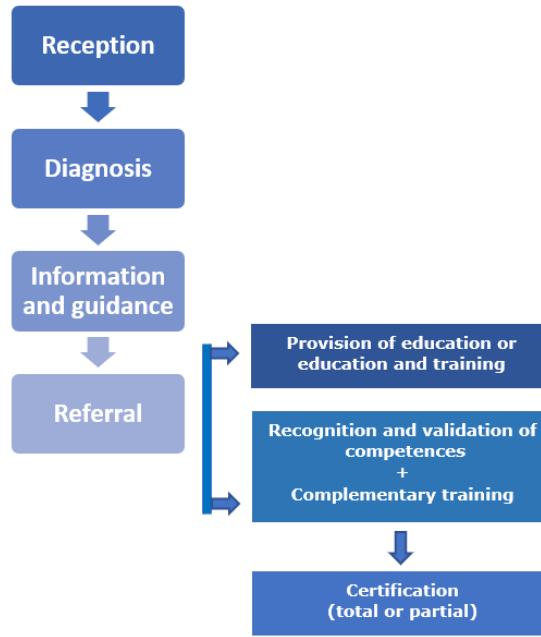
The orientation process is carried out in a Vocational Development Portfolio. This portfolio consists of the compilation documents and results of orientation activities, namely the interview, being the same of the candidate's membership and prepared by him with the support of the guidance process. Integrated into the VDP is the Individual Career Project, decision support document, which is the basis of the Individual Plan, which is effective in the Routing step.

Candidates sent to a process of recognition, validation, and certification of competencies are accompanied by their Vocational Development Portfolio, to be considered in the elaboration of the Portfolio developed in the RVCC process.

Admission requirements

To gain access to the academic or professional RVCC processes (primary level - B1, B2, or B3 and upper secondary level), candidates must be aged 18 years or over, possess sufficient knowledge (professional, social, personal, etc.) in relation to the respective frameworks ((key competence framework and the professional competence framework). To access RVCC processes, candidates of 23 and under must also submit proof of a minimum of three years professional experience via a statement issued by the relevant social security office, taking into account the provisions outlined in article 15 of Ordinance No. 232/2016, of 29th August.

Teaching methods and approaches

The duration of RVCC processes varies according to the competences demonstrated by the candidates and the proposed qualification level. They can begin at any time of the year and are not governed by the academic calendar. The timetable is adjustable and flexible, as well as agreed between the adult and the Qualifica Centre, in order to facilitate attendance by employed adults.

Information, guidance, and referral for young people and adults are provided by guidance, recognition, and validation of competencies professionals. The recognition and validation process is undertaken and a group of trainers qualified to teach specific recruitment groups, according to the key competence areas that are part of the respective key competences reference framework for adult education and training. The guidance, recognition, and validation of competencies professional monitors the adult during the process.

The candidate, whose knowledge and competences profile, professional experiences and social and personal characteristics are appropriate for an RVCC process, is asked to build a reflective and documented skills portfolio, and based on formal, non-formal and informal learning acquired throughout their life.

Learner assessment/progression

There are two stages of academic RVCC processes: competence recognition and validation, then competence certification. Adults can undertake an academic or professional RVCC process, as well as dual certification.

The recognition and validation stage involves the identification, appreciation and recognition of competences that the adult has, using the methodology of a skills audit and the history of adult life, as well as a specific set of assessment activities and tools (in the case of the professional RVCC, there are four different assessment tools: the portfolio analysis form, the technical interview guidelines, the performance in the workplace observation grid and the practical exercises assessment grid (within the context of simulated practice). This stage involves recognition sessions (both individual and group),

which are led either by guidance professionals or different trainers/teachers.

Candidates should attend a minimum of 50 hours of complementary training (internal or external) as part of the recognition, validation and certification of academic and/or professional competences process by trainers/teachers or other training bodies (Article 16).

The validation of competencies includes the results of hetero-assessment undertaken by the trainers/teachers of different key competence areas for the academic RVCC processes, and different career opportunities for the professional RVCC, which involves producing a validation session document.

Hetero-evaluation is scored by competence units in academic or professional RVCC processes on a scale of 1 to 5.

In the case of the basic education academic RVCC process, adults obtain recognition and validation in competence units whose scores are at levels 3, 4 and 5, according to the Validation Grid-scale. In the upper secondary education academic RVCC, recognition and validation are obtained in the Reference Domains, whose scores are at levels 3, 4 and 5 according to the Validation Grid-scale. However, for the Generating Core of a key competence area (KCA) to advance to the competence certification stage, at least one of the four reference domains must score at level 5 of the validation grid, plus one validated reference domain with a score of at least three.

In the professional RVCC process, adults obtain recognition and validation in competence units whose scores are at levels 3, 4 and 5, according to the validation grid scale.

Certification

Certification of competences implies that the adult's skills test is assessed by a panel, based on the candidate's performance of the said test, alongside the portfolio analysis and the assessment tools used during the recognition and validation of competences stage.

The certification of academic competences involves a demonstration before a certification panel that can be an oral presentation, or a practical presentation of competences within the scope of the portfolio,

knowledge and skills being assessed. The certification test must be closely connected with the work carried out by the candidate and the information from the assessment tools used during the process.

The certification of professional competence (professional RVCC) involves a test, preferably practical, which demonstrates a broad set of skills considered essential for the profession/activity concerned. The emphasis is on fundamentally practical tests, which can be combined with an oral or written component demonstrating the competences being assessed. The purpose is to assess the candidate's technical ability to perform tasks/activities, as well as their theoretical knowledge and social and relational capabilities, as found in the professional RVCC reference framework.

Certification is proven via the issue of a qualification certificate and a diploma issued by the body that operates the Qualifica Centre via SIGO in accordance with the models approved.

In the case of regulated professions and whenever the practice of a profession depends on fulfilling specific requirements, the RVCC processes depend on coordination with the respective authority responsible and the fulfillment of applicable legal regulations of Article 24 of Ordinance No. 232/2016 of 29th August.

The conclusion of an academic RVCC process (with the validation of all the competences corresponding to a level of qualification) confers primary level certification (certificate of qualifications corresponding to the 1st, 2nd or 3rd cycle and a diploma, if concluding compulsory education - levels 1 and 2 of the NQF qualification) or the upper secondary level (qualification certificate corresponding to the NQF level 3) is completed.

The conclusion of a professional RVCC process generates one of the following situations:
- If the candidate is able to certify all competence units deemed necessary to obtain a level 4 qualification (associated with dual certification), a Qualification Certificate with a record of all competences units certified, as well as a Diploma (fulfilling these two requirements, the certification of academic and professional qualifications can be the result of the RVCC process or the conclusion of the professional element when

the candidate already has the corresponding academic qualifications) are issued;

- If the candidate is able to certify all competences units deemed necessary to obtain professional certification but does not have the appropriate level of schooling only a Certificate of Qualifications (which identifies the units of competency certified) is issued.

If the recognition, validation, and certification of academic and professional competences does not lead to the issue of a certificate or diploma (because not all the competences corresponding to a qualification level have been validated), a qualification certificate is always issued, with the identification of competences units already validated and a Personal Qualification Plan is issued according to the professional competences lacking, which is used to refer the candidate for a training path that is external to the Qualifica Centre.

The completion of a school RVCC process can lead to full certification (equivalent to 1st or 2nd cycles of basic education or secondary education) or partial certification.

The completion of a professional RVCC process may lead to a total certification corresponding to level 2 qualification (if the candidate already holds the 3rd cycle of Basic Education) or level 4 qualification (if the candidate already holds the secondary level education) or partial certification. If the adult obtains a partial certification in the context of the development of an RVCC process, Qualifica Centre conducts it to an education and training provider.

The processes integrate two stages:
- The Recognition and Validation of Competences, which allows the identification of the competencies held by the adult, through the application of a set of specific methodologies and instruments;
- Competency Certification consists of demonstrating validated competences by performing a written, oral or practical test, or combining the various types. The test is organized by areas of key competencies, in the case of the RVCC school process, or by Competence Units, in the case of an RVCC professional process.

The processes of recognition, validation, and certification of school competences are based on the Key Competence Frameworks of Adult Education and Training for the basic and secondary level. The processes of recognition, validation, and certification of professional competences are based on the professional skills references that integrate the qualifications available in the National Qualifications Catalogue.

Basic level: The areas of Key Competences are: 'Information and Communication Technologies', 'Mathematics for Life' and 'Language and Communication', Foreign Language (English and French), 'Language and Communication', 'Citizenship and Employability'

Secondary level: Areas of Key Competences: Citizenship and Professionalism; Society, Technology and Science; and Culture, Language, Communication.

The main objective of the "diagnosis" stage is to gain real insight into the candidate by collecting information which describes their life experience, particularly their interests and expectations, their education and training and their professional and/or occupational experience.

The "information and guidance" stage complements the information gathered on the candidate's profile, so they can be given alternatives (qualifications or other) and decide what path to follow and proceed to "referral", another stage within the TORVC at Qualifica Centres.

With this framework, six key competences are considered to help adults build and manage their career, after reception and registration at a Qualifica Centre. At the end of the guidance process, candidates are expected to be able to:
1. "Develop self-concept", i.e., adopting attitudes and behaviours that reflect an adequate perception of oneself.
2. "Interact effectively", being able to relate to different people, facilitating communication and interaction, managing difficulties and any conflicts when relating to others.
3. "Manage information", using appropriate strategies to locate, collect and validate information, researching and managing information relevant to a career.

4. "Manage change" by being able to adjust to new challenges and to engage in its development, mastering strategies that facilitate transitions in the various life situation, as agents of change.
5. "Decide", when analysing and assessing alternatives, weighing the consequences of immediate and long-term options.
6. "Access and maintain qualification pathways and/or the job market", in order to master strategies for (re)entering training and (re)entering the job market.

Conclusions

The educational level of the Portuguese adult population is below the average for other European countries, as more than half of the Portuguese population has a qualification level equal to or lower than basic education, which inevitably jeopardizes the development of the country at various levels, although the studies focus only on the country's economy. Despite the initiatives promoted and carried out in recent years to overcome this situation, the quantitative data for 2017 show that the situation persists. Since 2000, the Portuguese government has initiated several policies and efforts to qualify its adult population, namely through recognition, validation, and accreditation of prior learning, but not only. The entities that provide education and training, through public funds, have streamlined a diverse series of training actions, such as adult education and training courses certified modular training and the recognition, validation, and certification of competences, among others.

However, despite the variety of the training provision and the existence for more than a decade of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning process, the percentage of the population with qualification level equal to or lower than basic education remains extremely high. Although the RPL process is agile and offers the opportunity of raising qualification, it seems that it is not attractive enough for adult people. In recent years the recognition and validation and accreditation of prior learning has undergone a series of changes always towards the increase of initiatives and the number of people covered. The Portuguese government, for example, imposes targets on the current Qualifica Centres, similar to what had already happened with the RVCC, CNO and CQEP centres. If the centres do not reach the designated goals they may see their funding reduced.

A large part of the population believes that a certification derived from the recognition and validation and accreditation of prior learning does not have the same value or quality as a certification obtained through formal means.

What we can conclude is that somehow the recognition and validation and accreditation of prior learning has not yet reached the ideal model, since the search for this system is still not enough and the population does not feel yet motivated and attracted to carry out the process.