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Country report

Portugal

2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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1 Introduction and evaluation

1.1 Abstract

In Portugal, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is available through the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences - RVCC (in Portuguese, *Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências*), and through the accreditation of learning in higher education (HE) institutions.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in general education and in VET is characterised by standardisation (of the tools that are used, of the work done by practitioners) and is carried out by Centres for Qualification and VET (in Portuguese, *Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional* - CQEP) in the RVCC context. The RVCC grants school and/or professional certification.

The accreditation of learning in higher education includes the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Although validation varies from one institution to the next, it is nevertheless possible to find framework legislation that is respected by all these entities.

The result is that while there is systematic information regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in general education and in VET, information about the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning in HE institutions is scarce. It is more difficult therefore to cover the situation in HE institutions in Portugal in the present update of the European inventory.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

With respect to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in general education and VET, the most significant changes that took place in Portugal since the 2014 update concern the introduction of the Centres for Qualification and VET. These Centres currently perform RVCC processes. This change was implemented after the public policy reforms with respect to adult education and training in 2012. As a consequence, over 450 Centres were closed down which had previously carried out validation of non-formal and informal learning until 2012.

According to an interview with a representative of the National Agency for Qualification and VET (In Portuguese, *Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional* – ANQEP), a public tender was launched in 2013 for the establishment of Centres for Qualification and VET (Notice no. 7674/2013, 12/06 according to Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03). On 11 December 2013, the national network of Centres was publicly announced by this Agency. Between January and February 2014, the Centres were formally authorised to carry out their activities (in accordance with the publication of authorisation orders for the operation of the Centres for Qualification and VET; for further information see <http://www.anqep.gov.pt>). According to data provided by the National Agency for Qualification and VET, there are currently 241 Centres, most of which benefit from public funding.

At the same time, during the first semester of 2014, official documents were published regarding the Centres' operation. These had implications for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in general education and VET although they did not fundamentally change these processes. According to the interviewed officer from the National Agency for Qualification and VET, these documents related to:

New methodological guidelines regarding RVCC operation which concerned the evaluation of competences and acquisition of certification. These changes introduced an assessment within the RVCC process that favours the certification of competences gathered by adult learners. Despite this change, the Key Competences Standards (in Portuguese, *Referenciais de Competências-Chave*), which are documents guiding the activity of adult educators and

trainers in the context of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, remained the same;

Changes in the SIGO electronic platform that records the operation of the Centres (in Portuguese, *Sistema de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa*), and in its use by adult educators and trainers working at the Centres for Qualification and VET;

Adoption of the Methodological Guide for Lifelong Guidance (in Portuguese, *Guia Metodológico de Orientação ao Longo da Vida*), which is a document for guiding the work carried out by the adult educators and trainers at the Centre. This document includes a set of aims that foster knowledge of oneself and the learner's decision concerning his/her education and training path and professional options;

- The evaluation of the interaction between different Centres in the territories where they are based, with a view to adjusting the existing education and training offers to the learners' needs. Thus, as a result of the needs expressed by the learners who approach them, the Centres identify information concerning needs for school certification and professional qualification. These Centres are also able to indicate which institutions in their locality of operation provide education and training courses and RVCC in general education and in VET. In this regard, the Centres play an important role as facilitators of networks of organisations which provide education and training courses.

Additionally, these documents, namely the legislation referred to above, grant more importance to young people's access to education and training (aged 15 or over, or attending the 9th grade). This is important to highlight because before these recent changes, the Centres did not include these young people in their activities. It is a fact that in the past, the Centres' activity was intended for adult learners (namely those that were working) who could benefit from the education and training offers.

According to the interviewed representative of the National Agency for Qualification and VET, there has been an increase in the number of applications for RVCC VET processes since the creation of the Centres in 2013. It has not been possible to access official data to confirm this trend. The increase has been attributed to the greater number of Key Competences Standards that are available in the National Catalogue of Qualifications. Currently, there are 127 Professional Competences Standards which can be used in RVCC in the VET sector.

The changes which took place since 2013 have led to a strong polarisation of the entities that perform RVCC (Lima & Guimarães, 2015). According to data from the National Agency for Qualification and VET, one third of the Centres are within basic education and secondary schools; one third in vocational training centres; 10 % in vocational (VET) schools; only 20 % of the Centres are in very diverse entities (i.e. related to the third sector, connected to local development bodies or sectoral institutions). In comparison with the distribution of the Centres that existed between 2000 and 2012, there has been an increase in the percentage of Centres connected to basic education and secondary schools as well as vocational training Centres and vocational schools, while a decline has been registered in the share of Centres in entities associated with the third sector, local development bodies and sectoral institutions (Lima & Guimarães, 2015). Due to their nature and activities, these entities in the third sector know and are closer to local communities' problems and needs and intervene in a more appropriate manner, representing a greater share in the public policy of adult education and training developed between 2000 and 2012 (Lima & Guimarães, 2012).

Despite these changes, as one interviewee linked to a Centre for Qualification and VET reported, the challenge of promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning for specific social groups still exists. This is because the RVCC promotes a system addressed to all adult learners, regardless of the specific needs of certain groups.

There have been no significant changes for the higher education sector since the 2014 update. There continues to be a strong diversity of practices with respect to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. At the same time, a consolidation has taken place of validation processes which are used by different HE institutions and covered by the legislation published in 2013 (Decreto-Lei no. 115/2013, 07/08).

According to the interviewed expert on accreditation in the HE sector, there is still a challenge because of the lack of systematic data in this field: the different HE institutions do not disclose information on these activities in the public sphere. Neither does the Ministry gather such data systematically.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

Since the 2014 update, the changes described in the previous section fit with the commencement of operation of the Centres for Qualification and VET (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03). These centres ensure the validation of non-formal and informal learning which was previously carried out by the former New Opportunities Centres. The network of Centres for Qualification and VET across the country (which have been established since then) and the national entity, the National Agency for Qualification and VET, ensure the management and development of the activity of the Centres which develop processes for the validation of non-formal and informal learning locally.

Between 2012 and 2015, no public funding was assigned to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In the second trimester of 2016, however, procedures were put in place to apply for ESF funding specifically allocated for the implementation of validation processes. This funding is given to Centres established in the North, Centre and Alentejo regions and is devoted to increasing the RVCC, but is not to cover all of the expenses involved. However, due to delays in granting public funding that allows the Centres to increase their work, the number of RVCC processes (of school certification and/or VET) is still low, according to the interviewee from the National Agency for Qualification and VET.

Validation in general education (basic and secondary education) refers to non-formal and informal learning aimed at obtaining school-certification. It is carried out according to different areas of key competences and levels of school certification, according to the existing Key Competences Standards. It has the same legal value as any other way of obtaining school certification, allowing learners to pursue further studies in other forms of provision within the national education and training system. The validation of non-formal and informal learning is directed at acquiring school certification (equivalent to 6, 9 and 12 years of schooling, levels 1, 2 and 3 of the National Qualifications Framework – NQF - and of the European Qualifications Framework - EQF) or a school and professional certification (equivalent to levels 2 and 4 of the NQF and of the EQF).

The formal certification of competences is carried out by a Jury (the jury includes trainers, representatives of employers and trade unions of various sectors), which establishes a relationship between the competences proven by adult learners and the Competences Standards. Initially, these competences were presented as part of a portfolio as well as an oral presentation and/or demonstration; nowadays, according to changes in the legislation (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03), a portfolio is produced and is then both self-evaluated and evaluated by the guidance, recognition and validation of competences (ORVC) practitioner and the trainers; these assessments must score between 0 and 200. The RVCC also includes an assessment of adult learners' competences at the certification stage.

In terms of the RVCC, learners carrying out the validation of non-formal and informal learning can obtain school certification in the framework of general education, and a professional certification, as regards VET.

The Key Competences Standards underlying validation procedures for RVCC in general education have not changed since they were established in 2004, for the basic level, and 2006, for the secondary level. The Professional Competences Standards are updated whenever considered necessary as part of the work developed within the scope of the National Catalogue of Qualifications. Additionally, since 2009, validation of non-formal and informal learning is part of the National Qualifications Framework (Portaria no. 782/2009,

23/07), which is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. Within adult education policies and in line with lifelong learning guidelines established by the European Union and in support of a specific policy agenda, the main goal of the validation of non-formal and informal learning is to increase the levels of certification of the Portuguese population, namely those of working age (whether employed or unemployed).

As no specific target groups were established, the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Portugal is not directed at a specific social group. These processes may be carried out by adult learners who are over 18 and hold neither basic (4th, 6th, 9th grades) nor upper-secondary education (12th grade), or professional certification allowing them to recognise, validate and certificate competences (school and/or professional) acquired throughout life in formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

It should be noted that adult learners aged under 23 must have at least 3 years' professional experience to be able to develop these RVCC processes.

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 4), validation in HE is the outcome of changes due to legislation from 2013 (Decreto-lei no. 115/2013, 07/08). There are general rules that apply to all higher education institutions, and it is up to each institution to set the specific validation procedures. However, the legislation in force today requires more detailed analysis than before 2013: procedures have to be clearer and must be validated by the scientific board of Universities and Polytechnics. Under this new legislation, HE institutions need to have formal rules concerning validation published in the government's official journal. In addition, there is a limit to the total number of credits gained through validation: up to one third of the total number of ECTS relating to the HE degree in which learners must be enrolled. The award of credits is possible if the learners are enrolled in a degree and intend to pursue studies to obtain an academic diploma. An exception to this situation is the Technological Specialisation Diploma (Decreto-lei n.º. 88/2006, 23/05) in which it is possible to claim for a full diploma without being enrolled at HE institutions. As mentioned in the referred European inventory, "The new legislation also clarifies situations where it is not possible to award credits (for example, through partial crediting of curricular units or through training from unauthorised courses)" (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 4).

This most recent legislation seeks to frame the validation of non-formal and informal learning within the guidelines established by the European Union (Pacheco, 2003; Lima, Azevedo & Catani, 2008). Thus, the validation of non-formal and informal learning shows a growing interest in other forms of learning by actors within the national education system and HE institutions. This interest includes learning such as that based on experience (Pires, 2007), especially learners' professional experience. This effort is part of the upward trend¹ in the number of students enrolled in higher education, in democratising access to and in promoting equal opportunities in higher education. However, in this context and over about 10 years, there has been a significant reduction in public funding (Cerdeira, 2009; Jezine, Chaves & Cabrito, 2011; Pires, 2012; Pires, 2016). According to Pires (2012, p. 3), higher education institutions' commitment to the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning is based on a "reactive logic", because it focuses on responding to the demands imposed by the legislation in force, instead of being based on a "strategic and proactive logic", whereby HE institutions would take the initiative and anticipate possible changes.

2.2 Validation in education and training

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is integrated into the national system for RVCC. These processes are unique and developed by all Centres for Qualification and VET. These validation processes can be developed by Centres, and these entities might be

¹ A trend recorded in Portugal in recent years, in response to the country's still very low attendance rates in higher education in comparison to many other EU countries.

connected to sectoral training centres or to entities which act in specific economic fields, though this situation does not involve resorting to differentiated tools of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

It is possible for an individual to gain certification by means of validation of non-formal and informal learning at different stages of an individual's life/career progression. For example an individual may have achieved a certain certification by means of validation of non-formal and informal learning. If this individual then goes on to acquire new knowledge, skills and competences, he/she can apply to have this new learning validated, in order to obtain a new level of certification (up to level 4 of the NQF). This represents a strength of the Portuguese validation system, according to an interviewee at a Centre for Qualification and VET.

The existing validation procedures in RVCC are not specific to open educational resources (OER). RVCC in general education and VET mainly involves face-to-face arrangements and procedures. However, information on validation procedures in RVCC is available on-line, which allows learners to be informed of the existing arrangements. Additionally, learning acquired through MOOC or OER can be validated in this learning and can be matched to the existing Key Competences Standards.

General education (and not so clearly VET) RVCC was given priority from 2000 to 2011, within the previous adult education and training public policy and this situation was also clear in terms of the funding allocated, the level of human resources, etc. However between 2012 and the end of 2015, as part of the changes in public policy, general education and VET RVCC were not given priority owing to the lack of financial and human resources.

In the higher education sector (HE), validation of non-formal and informal learning is carried out in relation to courses that are in operation, that are identified within study plans and formal ECTS accreditation and in line with the Bologna process, as pointed out by the interviewed expert on HE issues.

In HE, access to Professional Higher Technical Courses, *Licenciatura*, Master's or PhD can be achieved through the assessment of the learner's school, scientific and professional curriculum vitae. This assessment is carried out according to procedures set by each HE institution and involves the agreement of the scientific council of the HE institution in which learners want to enrol (Decreto-Lei no. 115/2013, 7/08), as mentioned in the 2014 Update of the European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014).

No specific area or sector has been given priority in the validation system.

Higher education institutions use ICT-based tools for validation. For example, the request for validation of non-formal and informal learning is generally made online through electronic platforms managed by the given higher education institution. In addition, some institutions hold face-to-face interviews to assess the non-formal and informal learning claimed by learners, as well as face-to-face jury meetings involving the analysis of the portfolios and/or documents presented by learners stating the learning and skills developed throughout life.

Furthermore, according to the applicable law, the awarding of credits for professional experience may be fully or partially conditional on assessment procedures with respect to specific knowledge.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

In the case of the tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning used in RVCC in general education and VET, the most recent changes (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03) involve the creation of an Individual Career Plan by adult learners². This aims to identify professional choices of adult learners, including education and training paths, and may impact the adult learners' choices in the future. The individual career plan is developed by

² Source: Interview with the National Agency for Qualification and VET.

the adult learner with guidance from the ORVC practitioner, and an adult educator and trainer from a Centre for Qualification and VET.

The Professional Competences Standards included in the National Catalogue of Qualifications were the subject of discussion by the Sector Councils for Qualification. The Sector Councils aim to keep the National Catalogue of Qualifications up-to-date, for instance by building or upgrading tools that may be used in granting adult learners professional qualifications. These Councils (Decreto-Lei no. 396/2007, 31/12) are formed by experts, ministerial representatives, social partners, companies, training and technological centres. They focus on 16 different economic areas, such as the agro-food sector, arts and crafts and jewellery, commerce and marketing, the construction industry and urbanism, culture, patrimony and content production.

Even though not every profession may currently benefit from Professional Competences Standards, two of the stakeholders interviewed³ considered the discussion within these Councils to be positive.

The validation procedures in place are directed towards promoting access to and keeping adult learners in the labour market and, eventually, at supporting their career development. However, achieving these aims strongly depends on the economic and working conditions that have not been favourable overall in recent years due to the economic and financial crisis. In addition the preparation of the Portuguese workforce to help build a stronger national economy since the mid-1980s, driven by globalisation and by Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community/European Union, was part of a human resources management effort (Lima & Guimarães, 2011).

Although this is not specific to certificates acquired through validation, it should be noted that the certification obtained by validating non-formal and informal learning does not always comprise professional certification in specific professional outcomes regulated by sectoral entities, such as in the case of electricians. In these cases validation does not result in certification outcomes that are recognised by sectoral regulations. Learners are therefore confronted with the need of developing two different professional certifications: the one which involves validation in general education and/or VET; and, another one related to a specific sector of professional activity, such as electricity. This circumstance was pointed out by the interviewee linked to a Centre for Qualification and VET as being a "critical factor" for learners in terms of the connection between validation and the labour market.

It is not possible to register specific validation arrangements for sectors of economic activity when they are particularly directed at promoting access to the labour market of that sector.

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014), in higher education, validation involves the accreditation of professional experience and/or teaching and training attendance in different education and training contexts developed in institutions officially allowed to do so (Decreto-Lei no. 115/2013, 7/08). Therefore, validation is linked to the credit system and unit-based structure of the different degrees within the Bologna framework. Apart from the degrees, such as *Licenciatura*, Master's or PhD, HE institutions have recently created the Professional Higher Technical Courses (Decreto Lei no. 43/2014, 18/03) which may also involve processes for the validation of non-formal and informal learning if required by learners.

Learners who are successful in their validation application are given ECTS credits, which can be used for exemptions from part of the Professional Higher Technical Courses, *Licenciatura*, Master's or PhD pathways. The award of credits is only valid in the programme of studies in which students are enrolled.

³ Source: Interview with the National Agency for Qualification and VET and with the Centre for Qualification and VET.

HE institutions have to allocate their own funding to validation processes. Additionally, they determine specific fees to be paid by learners for the validation and accreditation processes, which vary largely across the different institutions.

2.3.1 Skills audits

RVCC in general education and in VET is based on Key Competences Standards (for general education validation) and Professional Competences Standards (for VET validation) that include the assessment of skills. In this regard, by developing specific activities and applying a set of assessment tools, adult learners are expected to gather biographical and curricular documents in a portfolio. These documents should clarify and facilitate the organisation of evidence or proof of their competences. This effort should allow their validation and subsequent certification, based on the Competences Standards regarding the level of certification adult learners aim to obtain.

The success of the validation of non-formal and informal learning procedures is evaluated by the Agency for Qualification and VET, the institution responsible for monitoring and assessing the recognition, validation and certification processes, according to the work performed by the Centres for Qualification and VET. According to the existing legislation, annual reports would have to be made public; however, these reports are not in the public domain even if these documents are in the possession of the National Agency for Qualification and VET.

While legislation (Portaria no. 135-A/2013 – 28/03) states that the functioning, results and impacts of the Centres for Qualification and VET activities may be the object of external periodical assessment under specific contracts established with scientific institutions, the assessment programme under development (Carneiro, 2011) up until 2012 was not carried out afterwards. However, several studies have been conducted within HE institutions since 2014 (such as Calha, 2015; Aníbal, 2014; Oliveira, 2014; Meireles, 2014), as well as the ones published in Portuguese scientific journals (Canelas & Azevedo, 2014; Fernandes & Santos, 2014), regarding RVCC and the activities performed by Centres for Qualification and VET developing validation procedures.

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 11), in HE, institutions and degrees are the object of external assessment. For this purpose, “a national independent agency for quality assurance (*Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior*) was established (Decreto-Lei no. 369/2007, 5/11). Reports and decisions resulting from this assessment are made available in the websites of the referred agency, of the Ministry of Education and Science and of HE institutions themselves. On an internal level, HE institutions prepare their own self-assessment report. They also publish annual reports discussing the impact of the Bologna process. Due to the scientific and pedagogic autonomy of institutions, Universities and Polytechnic Institutes may develop their own internal quality assurance systems with the support of the mentioned agency for quality assurance”.

Specific reports on validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education cannot be found in the public domain. However, the applicable law provides that the above mentioned agency should include in the assessment of programmes of studies, an analysis of the practices of HE institutions in accreditation.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

Validation procedures in the third sector are part of the validation arrangements that exist in general education and VET RVCC; they have no specific objectives or funding channels but have the same connection to the national education and training system, to the National Qualifications Framework and to the European Qualifications Framework already mentioned in this report.

The Competences Standards in general education and VET RVCC which apply, for instance, to the validation of non-formal and informal learning of a professional nature, include learning developed by learners, such as that which occurs in activities to support elderly people, children and youth. In many cases these professional activities are developed by third sector entities.

3 Links to national qualification systems

Validation procedures of the general education and VET RVCC are in line with the National Qualifications Framework and with the European Qualifications Framework as already mentioned in this report. Validation procedures of the general education and VET RVCC allow a school certification and/or a professional certification linked to the different levels of the National Qualifications Framework and of the European Qualifications Framework. Therefore, learning acquired through non-formal and informal means can be used to acquire school certification and professional certifications, as legally established, and to access formal learning provision included in the national education and training system. Diplomas obtained through general education and VET RVCC have the same official value.

The existing validation procedures are based on the criteria indicated in the National Qualifications Framework (and in the European Qualifications Framework).

School certification in Portugal corresponds to levels 1 (6 years of schooling), 2 (9 years of schooling), 3 (12 years of schooling) - and 4 (12 years of schooling and professional certification) in the paths corresponding to compulsory education.

The following levels concern higher education paths: level 5 (post-secondary, in the case of Professional Higher Technical Courses), levels 6 (Licenciatura) and 7 (Master's), in which case the processes for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are in line with the study plans of these formation programmes, as already mentioned, and level 8 (Phd).

4 Standards

When school certification and/or professional certification is awarded through the validation procedures included in RVCC, they have the same value and are equivalent as those acquired through the formal education and training system.

Standards used in validation procedures are different than those used in the formal education and training system. As regards standards used for school certification awards, the Key Competences Standards are the basic tools for developing validation procedures. There are two different Standards: one specific to basic education (i.e. corresponding to 4, 6 and 9 years of schooling) and another specific to secondary education (the 12 years of schooling that compulsory education currently encompasses). With respect to standards used for professional certification, currently there are more than 100 standards in the National Catalogue of Qualifications (that includes 296 qualifications from more than 40 education and training areas in accordance with the National Classification of Education and Training Areas – Portaria no. 256/2005, 16/03).

Despite the lack of studies on the value that both public, private or third sector organisations attribute to the school certifications and professional certifications that adult learners have obtained, in principle these should be valued in an increasingly competitive labour market where highly technological and scientific entities are emerging. The companies structured according to new ways of organising work whereby workers are more and more autonomous (Kovács, 2006), also depend increasingly on the attribution of national and international certification. In several cases, this certification includes criteria related to workers' levels of schooling and professional certification.

However, there are still social recognition issues regarding the certificates obtained through RVCC in general education and VET. Professionally, as regards the recognition granted by employers, there are challenges, reflected in the difference in career conditions and even salary levels between adult learners who concluded the RVCC in general and VET and those who obtained qualifications through the formal pathway of education and training (Lima & Guimarães, 2012).

As mentioned in the 2014 Update of European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014), in HE formal rules concerning validation are framed by the existing legislation (Decreto-Lei no. 115/2013, 7/08) and accreditation procedures are set by the HE institutions themselves. Therefore, it is possible to find different accreditation procedures.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Centres for Qualification and VET promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning. These centres may integrate public basic education schools and/or high schools, vocational training centres connected to the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (with direct or participatory management), vocational schools, and other entities such as sectoral associations, non-governmental organisations (among them local development associations, companies). In this regard, there are Centres for Qualification and VET in public entities (that depend on State bodies), in profit-making (private sector) entities and in non-profit entities. All of the existing 241 Centres may carry out school RVCC and 162 of these are allowed to develop VET RVCC⁴.

According to data provided by the National Agency for Qualification and VET, at the time of writing this report, 241 Centres for Qualification and VET were operational, of which 82 were based in public schools and 81 in training centres under the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training. Likewise, 50 centres were in very diverse institutions, namely in third sector, social solidarity and local development associations. Also, 28 centres were integrated with vocational schools.

The Centres for Qualification and VET that belong to the national public system, which is the large majority, have financial support from the State budget (from the Ministry of Education and from the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training). The Centres for Qualification and VET that do not belong to the national public system have their own budgets and are not State-funded.

The legal framework for Centres for Qualification and VET (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03) emphasises the establishment of partnerships, at a territorial level, which encourage cooperation with employers, training institutions, organisations from the third sector and State-dependant organisations, in order to create synergies and ensure robust actions. Besides these efforts, the National Agency for Qualification and VET must coordinate these entities' activities with regard to the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The entities involved in the crediting of non-formal and informal learning in HE are HE institutions, whether State-funded or private. Though most HE institutions offer the possibility of accrediting learners' non-formal and informal learning, none of them are organised in regional or national entities which coordinate this activity. Furthermore, as Pires states (2012, p. 4), practices involving the validation of non-formal and informal learning are "*recent and have not, as yet, been a priority for most institutions*". An exception to this situation is the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute Unit for the Development, Recognition and Validation of Competences, thanks to the work it has carried out in this respect since 2007 (Pires, 2010).

⁴ According to official numbers from <http://www.portaldasqualificacoes.pt/Pesquisa/pesquisarCQEP.jsp>, accessed on 13th March 2016

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

The existing channels for recruiting adult learners are not devoted to specific target groups, although public policy is visibly concerned with working-age adult learners' school certification and professional certification. Information about RVCC is provided by the Centres for Qualification and VET to all the individuals who approach them. Furthermore, the Centres may give information about validation of non-formal and informal learning in information sessions that take place in working contexts, such as in companies, as well as in other social contexts, such as in parish councils, non-profit associations etc. Besides other institutions, the National Agency for Qualification and VET provides information on RVCC, namely through its website.

In the higher education sector, each institution is responsible for sharing information and providing support regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning. According to the interviewed expert on HE, due to the autonomy that HEIs have, there are many different practices, from administrative information available on the website of the HEI, to the support and guidance provided regarding compliance with the validation procedures, to supplying manuals and answering frequently asked questions on-line, as is the case of the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute (http://www.ips.pt/ips_si/web_base.gera_pagina?P_pagina=33582) and the Bragança Polytechnic Institute (<http://portal3.ipb.pt/index.php/pt/guiaects/instituto-politecnico-de-braganca>).

In the HE sector, accreditation is not provided for specific target groups, but for all learners, regardless of their specific characteristics.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

As mentioned in the 2014 Update of European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 6-7), information and guidance on validation are available at Centres for Qualification and VET. These centres are devoted to informing, counselling, and guiding learners (young people and adults) who seek to improve school certification and professional certification through education and training and the development of processes for the recognition, validation and certification of competences. The aims of such Centres include:

- guiding and referring young people to VET paths;
- connecting training providers to companies in order to ease training opportunities in the workplace;
- developing information sessions relevant to companies and other employers;
- guiding and referring adult learners to education and training paths; and,
- developing RVCC that may allow access to qualification paths.

Although the present adult education and training policy is directed at all adults in general, the interviewee working at a Centre for Qualification and VET stressed the need to guarantee general education and/or VET RVCC for specific social groups, as part of an additional policy.

Adult educators and trainers in charge of such information and guidance are currently called competence guidance, recognition and validation practitioners (in Portuguese, *técnicos de orientação, reconhecimento e validação de competências*).

In HE, each institution has information about the validation of non-formal and informal learning which can be made available on its official site, as already mentioned, and given to the learners who approach its academic services. The validation of non-formal and informal learning should be based on official documents, approved by the universities' and

polytechnics' scientific boards, and provided to learners when requested. Furthermore, many of these institutions have a student support office which can share information and give guidance and counselling to learners who are wanting to engage in the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

The National Agency for Qualification and VET organises and carries out actions for training adult educators and trainers of all the Centres which provide RVCC. These training actions consist of one working day, related to a specific theme. By doing this, the intention is to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst practitioners working in these Centres.

In addition to these training sessions, there are training practices between peers, in which adult educators and trainers from different Centres for Qualification and VET take part. This training method began before 2012 and it is currently a common practice, according to one interviewee working at one Centre. It involves local cooperation strategies in forming communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Including training sessions, meetings, seminars and workshops, among others, it emerges from the needs adult educators and trainers express locally, which explains why a training and bottom-up learning approach is adopted.

In HE, it is up to each institution to find ways of enhancing the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst the processes for the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning for which they are responsible. Given the diversity of the existing procedures and the difficulty in accessing this information, it was not possible to gather data that would enable a more detailed answer to this issue.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Since 2013, and according to the standing legislation (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03, Articles 11 and 12), the Centres for Qualification and VET are made up of the following elements: coordination and guidance, recognition and validation of competences (ORVC) practitioner(s). Regarding the development of RVCC processes, these teams are complemented by educators/trainers or teachers that may also be working outside of the Centres.

The coordinator is appointed by the entity which is responsible for the Centre for Qualification and VET. He/she must ensure institutional representation and guarantee the Centre's good operation in terms of pedagogical, organisational and financial management. The coordinator's responsibility also includes:

- Promoting partnerships with relevant entities in the context of qualification and employment, and ensuring their ongoing stimulus and monitoring, so as to maximise the relevance, efficacy and social use of the services provided by the Centre for Qualification and VET;
- Enhancing the establishment of partnerships with employers, with a view to promoting lifelong learning, including the workers' improvement, specialisation and retraining, as well as fostering the collection of internship proposals and training opportunities in the workplace;
- Coordinating the strategic intervention plan and preparing the report of activities in connection with partners and other elements of the team;
- Gathering, treating and systematically sharing information on the entrepreneurial projects, job opportunities and qualification offers for young people and adults;

- Sharing all relevant information and collaborating with the National Agency for Qualification and VET as regards structuring the territorial qualifications network, and following and monitoring the respective offers.

The coordinator is also in charge of:

- Managing the team and developing its potential, with a view to fulfilling the Centre for Qualification and VET's tasks, fostering innovation, quality and directing the service at users and at the labour market;
- Implementing systematic self-assessment arrangements that allow the quality of interventions and users' satisfaction to be measured;
- Sharing the necessary information to follow, monitor and assess the activity, according to the National Agency for Qualification and VET guidelines;
- Adopting measures that boost the services provided by the Centre for Qualification and VET, taking into account the results of the self-assessment and comprehensive assessment processes;
- Ensuring the reliability of the information registered on the electronic platform SIGO;
- Ensuring an effective operationalisation that guarantees essential support to people with disabilities in their certification process.

Guidance, recognition and validation of competences (ORVC) practitioners are responsible for the stages of welcoming learners in the Centre for Qualification and VET, diagnosing, informing and guiding, channelling and conducting RVCC processes. Regarding the phases of welcoming, diagnostic, guidance and channelling, it is up to the TORVC practitioner to:

- Enrol young people and adults in the electronic platform (SIGO) and inform them about the actions of the Centre for Qualification and VET;
- Promote guiding sessions which will allow each young person or adult to identify the most suitable response to their skills and motivations;
- Promoting information sessions on education and training offers, the current labour market, emerging professional opportunities, prospecting training needs, as well as mobility opportunities in Europe and internationally in terms of training and work;
- Channelling young people and adults taking into account the information on the labour market and the education and training offers available in the training entities of that territory or, in the case of adult learners, to an RVCC process whenever that is appropriate;
- Monitoring the trajectories of young people and adults referred by the Centre until they complete their qualification pathway and, when applicable, up until their insertion in the labour market;
- Developing dissemination and information actions aimed at the different target groups who live or study in that territory, regarding the role of the Centre for Qualification and VET and qualification opportunities, namely the offer of double certification courses.

As concerns the phases of recognition, validation and certification of competences, the ORVC practitioner is also responsible for:

- Placing candidates in the RVCC, school, vocational or double certification process, according to their life experience and competences' profile;
- Providing information about the methodology adopted in the RVCC process, the techniques and demonstration tools used and the certification of competences, depending on the field of intervention;

- Monitoring adult learners throughout the RVCC process by promoting recognition sessions, supporting the creation of portfolios and applying specific assessment tools, in articulation with educators/trainers or teachers;
- Identifying adult learners' training needs, in articulation with educators/trainers, teachers and other practitioners specialised in incapacity and/or disability, and, after partial certification, channelling them towards offers leading to the completion of a qualification.

In collaboration with educators/trainers and teachers, the ORVC practitioner must also accurately register in the SIGO all the data concerning the activity he/she is part of in the Centre for Qualification and VET.

The educators/trainers and teachers of the promoting or training entities that establish partnerships with the Centre for Qualification and VET should act in close collaboration with the respective team, in order to guarantee appropriate standards of rigour and quality for the requirements of the different interventions. Regarding Centres for Qualification and VET interventions, educators/trainers and teachers are responsible for:

- Participating in the RVCC, school, vocational or double certification process, by applying tools for the recognition and validation of competences and by supporting adult learners in creating their portfolios, in the respective field of intervention;
- Informing the certification jury about the development of the RVCC process of the adult learners they monitor;
- Taking on the role of evaluator, as part of the certification jury, namely in the key competence performance or demonstration tests, regarding the qualifications aimed by the adult learners who developed RVCC processes monitored by other educators/trainers;
- Collaborating with the ORVC practitioner in identifying each adult's training needs, after partial certification, so as to define a sustained channelling towards training programmes aiming at school and/or professional qualification.

One challenge faced by the Centres' coordinators, ORVC practitioners and educators and trainers is the lack of initial and/or specific training when they are hired. In Portugal, there are no specific options at the *Licenciatura* regarding adult education and working with adult learners in places with certain characteristics like the Centres for Qualification and VET, so the knowledge and abilities related to these professional activities are often drawn from experience in the workplace.

In HE, the strategies chosen by different HEIs are diverse, from juries made up of a president and other elements, as in the case of the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute (mentioned by the interviewed expert on higher education), to institutions which leave that responsibility to a teacher-coordinator of educational offers or to a commission in charge of the offers from which the accreditation of learning is sought, such as in the case of the Institute of Education of the Lisbon University. These people are in charge of verifying the documents submitted by learners, and analysing and deciding with respect to the requests made.

7.2 Qualification requirements

A Centre for Qualification and VET coordinator is required to have a higher education degree, show knowledge of existing education and training offers for adult learners, and have proven experience in managing these offers or in managing schools, Centres of the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training and/or training entities.

Guidance, recognition and validation of competences practitioners are required to have a higher education degree, proven experience in adult education and training as well as in the use of diagnosis and guidance techniques and strategies and/or in skills assessment methodologies and in the development of portfolios.

Educators, trainers and teachers are required to have teaching and/or training qualifications according to the key competences filed where they intervene and preferably professional experience in adult education and training. They are also required to have a qualification as educators/trainers and technical knowledge, as well as experience in the targeted professional outcome, namely those involved in the validation of non-formal and informal learning regarding VET.

In HE, the quality of the validation of non-formal and informal learning is secured by the institutions' scientific boards, which approve the rules and procedures to be applied in requests for the accreditation of learning, as well as by the intervention of juries and/or teacher-coordinators or commissions formed by teachers who check, analyse and decide with respect to the requests made.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

No specific initial training is provided to practitioners involved in validation of non-formal and informal learning in Centres for Qualification and VET. However, the National Agency for Qualification and VET organises and carries out actions for training of adult educators and trainers of all the Centres which provide RVCC for school certification and professional certification.

In HE, it is up to each HE institution to provide training and support to validation practitioners, so it is possible to find many different practices, from workshops and training actions concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning (as observed at the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute, according to the interviewed expert on HE), to simply providing teachers with written information about the standing rules and procedures.

8 Quality assurance

RVCC involves validating non-formal and informal learning through an assessment taken by adult learners. Assessment is carried out by a jury which includes several experts from a professional field and/or people who are locally and socially recognised and are not directly involved in the RVCC process in the case of VET RVCC, which enhances the social and professional recognition of RVCC.

Additionally, quality assurance measures to support assessment methodologies are carried out when the electronic platform SIGO makes available most information concerning RVCC (such as general information on learners, adult learners' enrolment, participation in training, etc.) for adult educators and trainers and other professionals working in Centres for Qualification and VET.

Besides, the National Agency for Qualification and VET has produced and disseminated a set of methodological guidelines and a Reference Guidance for Quality Assurance in Centres for Qualification and VET.

However, as regards the quality, the interviewee linked to the Centre for Qualification and VET highlighted certain challenges which are currently not being met by the existing mechanisms, namely those previously mentioned. One is the need for greater monitoring by the National Agency for Qualification and VET of the work carried out in the Centres in terms of practice implementation (for instance, when using Key Competences Standards, using SIGO, in the monitoring of the creation of portfolios). Another challenge has to do with the importance that self-assessment may have in Centres, in so far as it involves not only an indication of the objectives the Centres are obliged to fulfil, but, above all, the analysis of practices that are developed and a reflection of the daily work carried out. A third aspect is related to the importance that adult educators' and trainers' continuous training may have for discussing and reflecting about RVCC and about the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In this sense, continuous training arrangements which include differentiated methodological approaches were pointed out as necessary. A final aspect involves the need

to value other educational and formative activities, besides RVCC, that Centres can offer to adult learners, motivating and mobilising them towards education and learning, thus ensuring a better quality of the learning experiences of adult learners.

According to the existing legislation, annual reports on quality assurance referring to RVCC (of school certification and professional certification) would have to be made public; however, these reports are not in the public domain.

In HE, the quality assurance of validation of non-formal and informal learning rules and procedures depends on each institution. Therefore, a large variety of practices can be found, as mentioned previously in this document. The assessment made by the agency for quality assurance may, in the long-term, confer some coherence to the variety of processes.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

The Centres for Qualification and VET that belong to the national public system have recently been given financial support through the European Social Fund – *Programa Operacional Capital Humano* (85 %) – namely for Centres located in the North, Centre and Alentejo regions - and from the general State budget (15 %) for the next five years (2015-2019). Centres based in schools and training centres, in the Lisbon and Algarve areas, are mainly State-funded and it is possible to identify a few that are not State-funded and need to find their own funding resources.

Recognition, validation and certification is a non-paid process for adult learners. In the case of private Centres, these have to find resources to support expenses related to the recognition, validation and certification of competences.

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 8), “Since HE institutions are autonomous they can determine their own procedures and fees regarding validation processes”. There are institutions where learners pay on the basis of a fixed amount plus a variable amount, depending on the number of curricular units required for accreditation, such as in the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute, according to the interviewed expert on HE. For instance, at the University of Lisbon, learners pay a fee according to the number of credits claimed, up to a maximum of EUR 250 and at the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute students pay a fee of EUR 30 for the process plus EUR 10 for each curricular unit claimed.

9.2 Distribution of costs

Costs of the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning procedures and arrangements that are provided by Centres of the national system of education and training include the payment of adult educators and trainers. A reduced amount of costs (about 15 %) can be directed at covering general costs of these Centres. This is related to the European Social Fund guidelines, which state that financial support should encourage Centres’ activities, namely those related to RVCC, but that it does not involve supporting all expenses, namely inherent operation costs regarding the Centres’ activity.

According to data obtained during the interview with the expert from a Centre for Qualification and VET, there has been a substantial reduction in the amount of funding given to these entities which develop validation of non-formal and informal learning in comparison with the Centres’ financial situation prior to 2012.

In HE, the costs of the accreditation of learning are shared by the institutions and partly by the learners. The value of these processes is established by each HE entity, thus varying from one institution to the next.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Contrary to the situation in other EU countries and even to the situation prior to 2012 in Portugal, it is not possible nowadays to find official data regarding the benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning to adult learners.

However, according to the interviewee from the National Agency for Qualification and VET, since the end of 2015, the number of adult learners carrying out RVCC has increased. The interviewee suggested that this showed that there is a growing interest by adults to undertake validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In HE, it is not possible to find official information regarding the benefits of developing validation of non-formal and informal learning for learners. However, according to the expert on higher education interviewed, despite the organisational complexity of the requests for the accreditation of learning, the benefits are quite substantial. This is because learners do not need to attend the curricular units where they request accreditation. This situation favours “a better management of their paths, a shortening of the study period and greater personalisation of their educational trajectories, depending on the knowledge acquired and on the specific projects of each person” (Pires, 2012, p. 9).

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Data available from the Directorate-General for Statistics in Education and Science Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência (2014 and 2015) show that in 2013/2014, 435 learners were enrolled in the 1st cycle diploma, 999 the 2nd cycle, 499, the 3rd cycle and 350 secondary education. In 2014/2015, 543 were enrolled in the 1st cycle diploma, 1 247 the 2nd cycle, 2 878 the 3rd cycle and 2 902 secondary education. Therefore, these numbers show an increase, even if small.

In HE, it was also impossible to find data regarding trends in the accreditation of learning in Portuguese HE institutions. However, although, according to the expert on higher education interviewed, in the case of the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute, between 2009 and the moment of writing this report, there were 159 applications, with a success rate of around 95 % in the year 2011/2012 (Pires, 2012, p. 8). This rate showed a trend according to the expert on higher education.

9.4.2 Validation users

Both in RVCC and in HE, it was not possible to find official information regarding the characteristics of learners using the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

No new validation initiatives or projects targeted at migrants, refugees or disadvantaged groups were identified.

10 Validation methods

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 11), in general education, the methods in which validation procedures are included follow the stages referred to below (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03):

- Reception: adults are advised about the mission of the local Centres for Qualification and VET and about RVCC; they are enrolled.

- Diagnosis of adult learners' competences: 'adults' profiles are prepared in specific sessions and meetings; the adult learners' curriculum vitae analysis is carried out; individual and/or collective interviews with learners are undertaken to identify their motivation, needs and expectations; information and support is given to adult learners in order to define the appropriate education and training path.
- Orientation of existing training paths or recognition, validation and certification paths: according to data collected in the previous stages, adult learners are guided towards an educational and training form of provision, or to RVCC
- Competences recognition: self-identification of competences developed throughout the adult learner's life; an activity set is implemented according to the methodology proposed to the RVCC, several assessment tools are used, by which adult learners identify their competences; building of a learning reflective portfolio.
- Competences validation: assessment of the identified competences by comparison with existing standards. Validation includes writing a learning reflective portfolio self-assessment, the assessment made by the guidance, recognition and validation practitioners, educators and trainers from the different qualification areas. The coordinator of the Centres for Qualification and VET is the chair of the validation meeting. A grade for the result of the validation is given to the adult learner, on a 0-200 scale.
- Certification: a certification jury is established and adult learners are evaluated through a written, oral or practical examination, or through a combination of these. Results will be graded on a 0-200 scale. Afterwards, adult learners receive a certificate of the attained full or partial certification. During the RVCC, adult learners may have education and training needs that might be fulfilled with an education and training programme of up to 50 hours; Centres for Qualification and VET will be in charge of this education and training programme. If an adult learner receives a partial certification, Centres for Qualification and VET will have to build a personal qualification plan (to achieve a full qualification) and refer the adult learner to an adequate education and training path.

As stated in legislation (Portaria no. 135-A/2013, 28/03) and in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 12), "the use of a diversity of practices is acknowledged as one of the strongest points of the RVCC process, because it is possible to adapt it to the specific needs of the individuals. The main advantage of the use of qualitative methodologies (such as the competences' portfolio) is well known and documented in literature and previous studies within the adult education field".

Table 1 Stages of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in RVCC and methods preferred

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate	X		
Declarative methods	X		
Observation	X		
Portfolio method	X	X	X
Presentation	X		
Simulation and evidence extracted from work		X	X
Tests and examinations	X	X	X
Other (e.g. e-learning methods)- please specify			

Source: the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning - European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 12

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 12), “Regarding the specific methodologies used by RVCC, the identification of competences can be carried out through a range of activities. This includes declarative methods, interviews, simulations, tests and examinations with the purpose of organising a portfolio. The portfolio is the instrument that integrates documentation of different types, either biographical or curricular, that will then allow the assessment and validation of competences according to the respective standards.

Validation is based both on a self-assessment and a hetero-assessment carried out in an independent way and with different results. It is developed with the support and guidance of staff (a guidance, recognition and validation of competences practitioner, educators, trainers, teachers and the coordinator of the Centre for Qualification and VET).

The certification of competences is attributed by a Jury. Educators and trainers involved in the identification and demonstration process cannot be a part of the jury. The certification process ends with the issue of a certificate as the result of an examination.

The assessment process is based on a written test or examination, a practical situation, or a combination of different assessment methods, under the responsibility of the Centres for Qualification and VET adult educators and trainers. The inclusion of an examination besides the other assessment tools is mandatory.

The National Agency for Qualification and VET is responsible for establishing the general assessment criteria”.

As mentioned in the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International, 2014, p. 12), validation practices in HE institutions are diverse. Most institutions do not have a specific department or even specific staff for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Juries are organised according to the accreditation of learning requested by the learner. Usually the jury includes a president and additional members, with relevant scientific and academic experience regarding validation methods, as happens in the Setúbal Polytechnic Institute (as mentioned by the expert on HE interviewed)⁵. The coordinator of an educational offer or a commission including several teachers of a specific degree or a set of degrees may be the one in charge of analysing and assessing learners’ requests.

These validation methods may include documentation and CV analysis, interviews, portfolios, practical or written examinations, depending on the specific nature of the crediting requested by the learner.

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⁵ The Setúbal Polytechnic Institute is an interesting example of an institution in which a unit was established specifically to develop validation practices of non-formal and informal learning in HE (for more information, see *The European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Case study: recognition of Prior Experiential Learning in Higher Education in Portugal*, in <https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2011/77633.pdf>, accessed on 8th June 2016).

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- Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior (<http://www.dges.mctes.pt>);
- Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (<http://www.ips.pt>);
- Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (<http://www.ipb.pt>).



Country report Portugal

2016 update to the European inventory on
validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



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