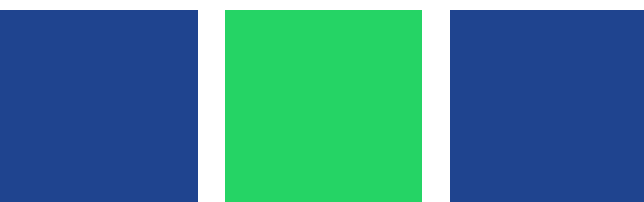

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,
flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality assured

PORTUGAL



Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality-assured:
Portugal

[Thematic perspectives](#) provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

This thematic perspective was prepared based on data/information from 2023.

Thematic perspectives are co-financed by the European Union and ReferNet national partners.

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Please cite this publication as:

Barbosa, J., & Moura, H. (2024). *Implementing European priorities in VET: making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive, inclusive and quality-assured: Portugal*. Cedefop Refernet thematic perspectives.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The Portuguese NIP aims to fulfil policy priorities in the fields of education and training, lifelong learning, employment, social and territorial cohesion, and economic sustainability, combined with environmental preservation and well-being. It is coordinated with a set of national policy documents, namely the Strategy Portugal 2030.

This Strategy is the national strategic reference framework for the various public policy instruments, such as the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) and the 2021-2027 Partnership Agreement established between Portugal and the European Commission. This Strategy establishes medium-term guidelines for the country's economic, social and environmental development until 2030, in order to overcome existing structural barriers.

The Strategy presents a vision for recovering the economy, protecting employment, and turning the next decade into a period of recovery and convergence of Portugal with the EU. This vision will ensure greater resilience and social and territorial cohesion. It includes four thematic agendas for developing the economy, society and Portugal as a whole until 2030.

The Thematic Agenda 2 focuses directly on qualifications and aims, among others, to address blockages, to face new technological and societal challenges that are associated with the digital transition and the industry 4.0.

Overcoming these challenges contribute to the pursuit of the *Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience* and the *Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies of the 30 November 2020*. The following quantitative objectives of this thematic Agenda should be mentioned:

- (a) reduce the early dropout rate from education and training to less than 5%;
- (b) increase to up to 70% the adult population having completed secondary education;
- (c) increase to up to 55% the number of graduates with completed secondary education in double certification (academic and professional);
- (d) reach 60% of adults' participation in lifelong training, bringing Portugal closer to the European average;
- (e) reach 80% of individuals with basic digital skills or above.

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

The **Qualifications needs anticipation system** (SANQ - *Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificações*) is an instrument that contributes to the objectives of the National qualifications system (SNQ - *Sistema Nacional de Qualificações*). It not only defines the priorities and criteria for establishing the VET supply network, but also signals missing qualifications in the job market. This helps to update the National catalogue of qualifications (CNQ - *Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações*) accordingly. In 2023, the basic diagnosis at national level, as well as in-depth regional diagnoses of qualification needs, were updated.

As part of the CNQ updating, the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP - *Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*) developed a new

methodology for designing qualifications based on learning outcomes. In 2023, 21 studies diagnosing skills and qualifications needs were completed, and the respective skills referentials are currently being developed.

Still within the scope of CNQ updating, since 2020, ANQEP has invested in the creation of short and medium-term training paths in various fields (digital, green skills, internationalisation) as well as in regulated professional activities, such as taxi driving. These paths last no more than 350 hours and enable an autonomous certification. The units of skills and/or training units completed credit towards obtaining one or more CNQ qualifications. In 2023, CNQ integrates 41 short and medium-term courses that respond to sectoral, professional and regional needs and dynamics, ensuring the alignment of VET initiatives with these needs and dynamics, prioritising emerging areas of competence.

As tourism is one of the most relevant economic exporting activities in Portugal, the Ministry of Economy and the Sea, through Turismo de Portugal, launched, in 2023, the Agenda for Tourism Professions, with the identification of priorities and actions, namely which concerns the qualification of professionals, companies and regions, to ensure consistent growth of the sector in the medium and long term.

Also, within the scope of this priority, reference should be made, as an example, to a [training action programme](#) developed, in 2023, by the Confederation of Portuguese Farmers which provided training to workers, entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs in the field of agriculture, focusing on themes associated with innovation and change (Agricultural management, Efficient use of water, Energy efficiency, Certification of sustainable forest management and Organic agriculture). 17 Associations, 503 SMEs and 520 trainees were involved.

2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

In July 2021, a [VET agreement](#) was signed at the Social concertation standing committee, which defines the principles, measures and initiatives with the goal of strengthening professional training, aiming to improve qualifications in Portugal, from a lifelong learning perspective. As a result of this Agreement, in 2022, the legislative review of the main SNQ training modalities was carried out.

In 2023, there was a reinforced focus on implementing these measures, namely by giving financial support to adults to complete qualification through [Recognition, validation and certification of competences](#) (RVCC) processes, having 15 976 adults benefit from this support. To address the general lack of qualified workforce, the programme [Qualifica Indústria](#) was launched in 2023. It consists of financial support for upskilling and reskilling of workers of SME businesses in industries experiencing reduced orders or less turnover. This programme, with a budget allocation of EUR 10 million, is managed by the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP - *Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional*), the Portuguese Public Employment Service.

In 2023, several measures integrated into the [INCoDe.2030 programme](#) and the [Action plan for the digital transition](#) (e.g. +CO3SO digital; Employment+; Digital guarantee; Portugal digital academy platform; Digital public administration programme; Youth+ Digital) were

implemented to provide lifelong qualification opportunities in the digital area, thus contributing to increasing the digital skills of the Portuguese population.

Also, from a lifelong learning perspective, it is worth mentioning [Youth STEAM incentive](#) and [Adults impulse](#) programmes. As part of the RRP reforms and investments, these programmes are developed by higher education institutions, in partnership or consortium with companies, local authorities and local, regional and national public entities. Financial execution, across both programmes, doubled from 2022 to 2023, growing by 37% in Youth STEAM incentive and by 32% in Adults impulse.

2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

Portugal made, in 2023, a significant investment in both [modernisation of the vocational training centres network of IEFP](#), and in strengthening this same network through the creation of new training centres in strategic sectors of activity, in partnership with the associations representing these sectors.

In this regard, reference should be made to the Training centre for energy transition created to support a fair and equitable transition. This Centre is the result of a partnership between the IEFP, the Agency for Energy and the Portuguese Renewable Energy Association.

Also, through a protocol established between the IEFP, the Portuguese Entrepreneurial Association, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the National Association for Young Entrepreneurs, the Entrepreneur academy - Training centre for entrepreneurship, management and leadership was created.

Still in line with the creation of structures, 261 new [specialised technological centres](#) were created in 2023 in schools with vocational education, in four areas of specialisation (137 in the IT area, 81 in the Industry area, 18 in the Digital area and 25 in the Renewable Energy area), which adds to the 104 already existing. This action impacted on the planning of the network of professional training offers at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF/EQF, increasing the training offer in IT, industry, digital and renewable energy areas developed by these centres.

Regarding the modernisation of existing structures, IEFP continued the modernisation of laboratories and training posts in the digital, industry 4.0 and environmental areas. This modernisation makes it possible to improve the quality of training, and the offer of new training fields (wind and photovoltaic energy production, hydrogen production, energy efficiency, electric mobility).

2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

Among the measures associated with promoting the attractiveness of VET, the extension to level 5 of the NQF/EQF and the training actions for teachers and trainers stand out.

The legal framework was changed in 2022, to extend the [Modular training courses](#), the [Apprenticeship+ programme](#) and the [RVCC](#) to qualification level 5 of NQF/EQF.

In 2023, Modular training courses had a strong impact on the qualifications of adults, particularly those who needed to complete qualifications which resulted into 75 996 certifications. Regarding the Apprenticeship+ programme, in 2023, 1 814 young adults

participated in these courses.

The School Association Training Centres and ANQEP promoted, in 2023, the training of VET teachers and trainers. In this sense, two e-learning training courses were developed, covering around 300 participants, aiming to reinforce and improve skills in developing and managing the curriculum of professional courses, as well as promoting greater integration of external stakeholders in VET processes. The products created by the participants will be part of an e-book to be made available to schools.

2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

In 2023, several measures contribute to promoting equal opportunities, among which we highlight:

[Local projects promoting qualifications level B1/B2/B3](#) aiming to improve the qualifications of less qualified adults (below the 3rd cycle of basic education, i.e., ISCED 100, 231 to 245 and 251 to 254). These projects, promoted by the [Qualifica Centres](#), are based on local networks and partnerships and the provision of qualification responses that are more appropriate to the needs of people in different regions. In 2023, 226 new projects were approved.

[Portuguese host language programme](#) has significant relevance, given the size of the migrant community in Portugal (about 7% of the total population). It allows migrants to increase the expression and understanding skills of the Portuguese language, and facilitate their social, professional and civic integration process, contributing to the prevention of discrimination based on origin and promoting equality. In 2023, around 18 000 people belonging to 139 nationalities were certified.

The [inclusive education approach](#), a flexible learning model, extendable to the whole Portuguese educational and training system. It aims to ensure that everyone, regardless of their economic, cultural, linguistic or ethnic backgrounds and ability, has the access and means to participate effectively in education, i.e., to have the same opportunities to access the curriculum and fully participate in society. To support VET teachers and trainers, 5 e-books have been published in 2023: Inclusive Education Management; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion; Universal Design for Learning; Inclusion in the Classroom; Inclusive Learning Environments. Training actions were developed for teachers and other educational agents on these topics.

To reinforce the learning of the Portuguese language, from an inclusive education perspective, guidelines were published regarding the operationalisation of VET attended by migrant students. These guidelines cover issues relating to the curriculum and assessment. The schools could, together with parents, provide educational responses facilitating access to the curriculum, through selected teaching activities, based on the sociolinguistic profile and educational trajectory of migrant students.

Still within the scope of Inclusive education programme, due to its innovative nature, it is worth mentioning the creation of a Multidisciplinary team to support inclusive education in the 12 schools of Turismo de Portugal in the school year 2023/2024.

The *I'm digital programme*, framed in the [Action plan for digital transition](#), aims at the digital inclusion of info-excluded adults, based on a national network of young volunteers. To

implement this programme, the Portuguese Institute of Youth and Sports (*Instituto Português da Juventude e do Desporto*) developed, in 2023, two actions, named Generations in Network, which involved 49 entities that carried out 57 projects through the intervention of 132 young volunteers who trained 5 012 adults.

2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

Within the scope of the [VET agreement](#), a commitment was made to ‘improve the certification system of training entities, in dialogue with social partners, in order to promote the quality of professional training, namely making the system more agile and more effective, reinforcing the periodic monitoring mechanisms of certified entities, strengthening coordination with EQAVET and promoting coordination with certification systems in different sectors of activity’. This commitment was translated into some NIP measures.

Following this, Directorate General of Labour and Industrial Relations (DGERT) reviewed the legislation on the certification of training entities in 2023 to streamline the certification process and clarify its understanding by citizens, hold operators responsible and commit to quality assurance, and continually monitor and evaluate operators.

Also, in 2023, ANQEP, as a National Reference Point, continued the process of implementing [quality assurance systems](#) aligned with EQAVET and awarded 78 EQAVET seals, attesting to the conformity of the training practices of these operators with the principles and criteria of EQAVET.

CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

The participation of stakeholders in the design and implementation of training policies has been a practice for many years in Portugal, resulting in intervention at the level of defining public policies. Good examples of this practice are the 2021 VET agreement signed at the Social Concertation Standing Committee and the 2022 Agreement for Vocational Training and Qualification of Social Economy between the Government and the representatives who are part of the National Council for Social Economy (representatives from government, municipalities, local and regional development associations, cultural associations, social solidarity organisations and personalities from civil society), which encompasses some of the NIP measures.

On the other hand, the involvement of stakeholders is achieved by the presence in various consultative bodies of entities responsible for implementing NIP measures, such as the Sectoral Councils for Qualification (trade unions, employers’ associations, training providers, companies and individual experts), which support ANQEP in identifying needs for updating the CNQ and designing qualifications for the job market.

The involvement of the different stakeholders is also seen in the creation of training structures, with emphasis on the creation of new training centres, whose network, as already mentioned, was reinforced, in 2023, in sectors of activity and strategic training fields.

At another level, the establishment of some training programmes, such as the definition

of study plans and the operating authorisation, is preceded, regularly and obligatorily, by consultation with employers and business and/or socio-professional associations of the region where the offer is located.

As an example, reference should be made to the training developed under a partnership between the IEFP, the Portuguese Business Confederation and the Portugal Digital Organisation.

CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

The NIP framed the measures that contributed to the progress made in achieving the national and European priorities set out in the Recommendation, as detailed in Chapter 2 above. Some of the developments seen refer to new measures, others result from the increase in measures prior to the NIP and which were integrated into it. Considering that the different priorities are interdependent, any development in each of them is necessarily reflected in the others. For instance, the modernisation of training structures (Recommendation C) impacted on training responsiveness to the labour market needs (Recommendation A) and also the diversification of lifelong learning opportunities (Recommendation B). It means that is quite difficult to highlight the progress made in a specific priority. Another success factor is the systemic and holistic approach adopted in the design of the Portuguese NIP.

However, a special reference should be made to the progress in the design and implementation of qualification offers adapted to the needs of individuals, territories and sectors of economic activity, emerging from the digital and the green transitions, emphasising the provision of short and medium-term training courses at the CNQ. It is also worth mentioning the increase and diversification of lifelong learning opportunities, with a view to qualification and requalification in digital areas as described in sections 2.1. and 2.2.

Furthermore, the country managed, during this period, to improve its training structures, either by modernising existing ones or by creating new structures to adequately respond to the upskilling and reskilling needs of citizens and the labour market, as specified in section 2.3.

The improvement of the legal framework for the different qualification modalities has made the SNQ more coherent and more attractive. In this regard, it is worth highlighting both the possibility of permeability between qualifications obtained through training and through RVCC, and the extension of some of the training programmes to level 5 of the NQF/EQF, as referred in section 2.4.

Another aspect to highlight refers to the consolidation of measures that contribute to the promotion of inclusion, towards a fairer, cohesive and inclusive society, as specified in Section 2.5.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

The measures integrated into the NIP have, in general, been implemented as planned. However, some aspects, as the monitoring process, still need to be adjusted, making it more streamlined and agile in mobilising and involving the various stakeholders.

Among these aspects is the mobility of trainees and trainers. Despite the investment that has been made, particularly within the scope of the Erasmus+ Programme, the 8% target established in the Recommendation is still far from being achieved. This challenge can be

overcome with the implementation of a national strategy to promote the mobility and the current setting up of regional and local centres for information and dissemination, under the responsibility of Portuguese Erasmus Agency. At European level, the approval of the Recommendation on mobility opportunities for all, which is being prepared by the Council, could create a facilitating context for the implementation of this measure.

The implementation of Local projects promoting qualification level B1/ B2/ B3 represented a great challenge due to the difficulty of outreaching and mobilising the target groups (adults poorly schooled and with very low levels of qualification who are usually reluctant to participate in education and training activities because they feel that they have failed in these areas before). The design of the measure has a strong component of promoting networks of local and regional partnerships (training organisations, employers, organisations and community services), which has been a key element in overcoming the challenge of outreaching the adults. Another key element is the intensive support of adults, from enrolment to certification, minimising the risk of drop-out and optimising certification rates.

Despite the observed increase, the rate of double certification graduates has not grown at the desired rate, and is still below the defined target, which relates with the lower social value given to VET programmes by students and their families.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

It can be generally stated that the country is more prepared to respond to the priorities of the Recommendation and trust that it is possible to achieve the goals of the Strategy Portugal 2030 in terms of education and training that are linked to it. Without being exhaustive, we just mention some of the progress observed in 2023:

Regarding 'Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs', 41 new short and medium-term courses have been integrated into CNQ. These courses respond to sectoral, professional and regional needs and dynamics, ensuring the alignment of VET initiatives with these needs, prioritising emerging areas of competence.

In terms of 'Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities' several digital actions have been implemented, integrated in the INCoDe.2030 programme and in the Action plan for the digital transition (e.g., +CO3SO digital; Employment+; Digital guarantee; Portugal digital academy platform; Digital public administration programme; Youth+ Digital).

Concerning 'Innovative and excellent VET,' a significant investment both in modernising the IEFP's network of training centres and in strengthening this network by creating new training centres in strategic sectors of activity, in partnership with the associations representing these sectors. In line with the creation of structures, 261 new specialised technological centres have been created in vocational schools in four areas of specialisation.

Regarding 'Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision', 75 996 level 5 certifications were awarded through Modular training programmes.

In the field of 'Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities', measures that contribute to the promotion of inclusion towards a fairer, cohesive and inclusive society has been implemented, such as Local projects promoting qualifications level B1/B2/B3 aiming to

improve the qualifications of less qualified adults; Portuguese host language programme addressing migrant people; and the Inclusive education approach.

About 'VET underpinned by quality assurance', 78 VET providers have been awarded EQAVET seals, attesting the conformity of their training practices with the principles and criteria of EQAVET.

Regarding the next steps, Portugal should continue to focus on:

- (a) CNQ, centred on skills and learning outcomes, which allows greater flexibility and encourages a more dynamic search for qualifications.
- (b) The reinforcement of double certification modalities capable of attracting more young people to VET programmes.
- (c) The adoption of new methodologies and practices in VET due to the challenges of the transition to a greener, sustainable and digital economy and the new forms of work, such as remote or platform work.
- (d) Promoting post-secondary and higher education VET.

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