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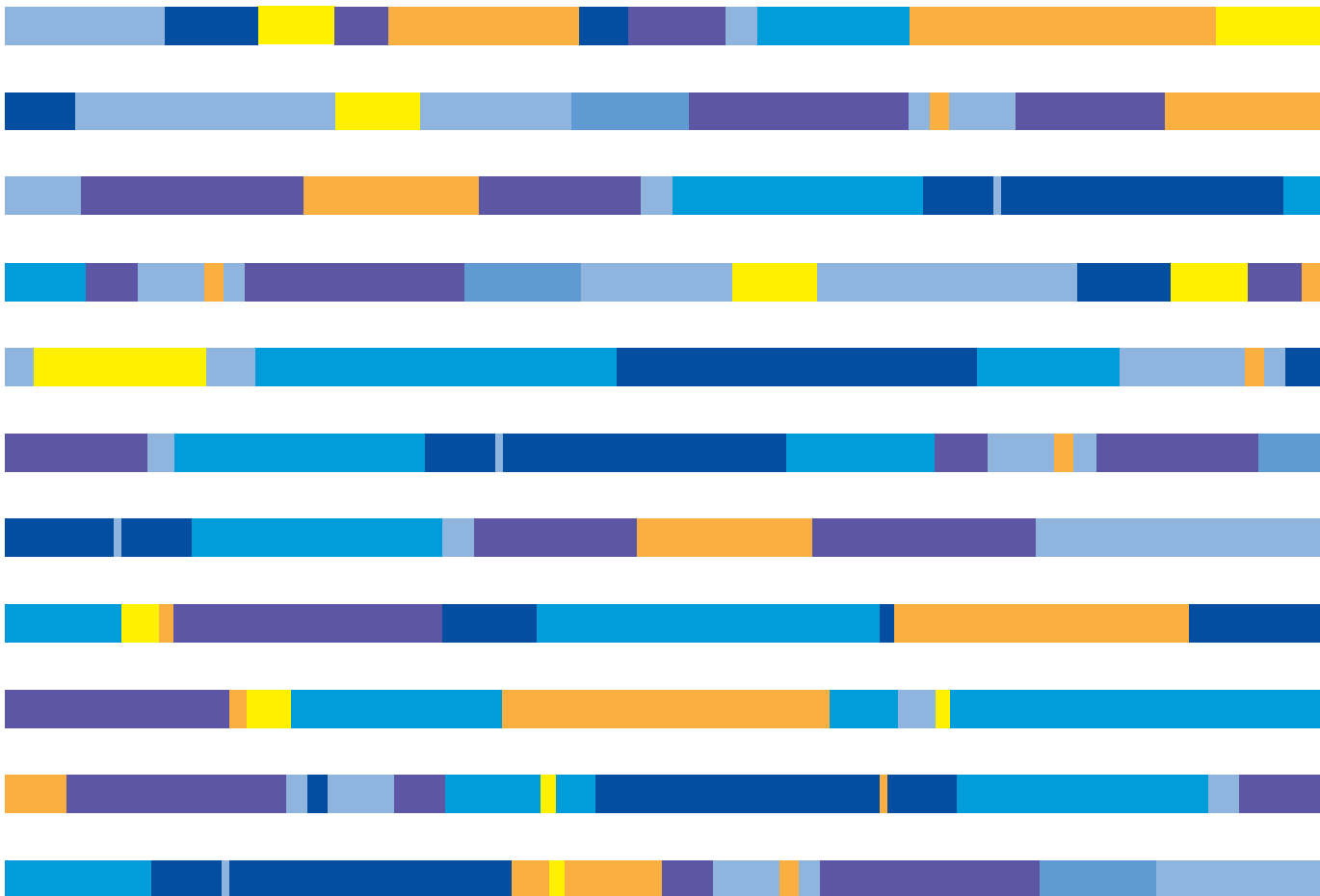
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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT:  
**PORTUGAL**

Author: Carla Menitra



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# 1 Abstract

Since 2017, Portugal has made significant efforts to improve its national validation of non-formal and informal (VNFIL) strategy, which corresponds to the Qualifica Programme. The COVID19 pandemic contributed to the reduction in the number of enrollments and referrals and the increase in the number of validation processes that remained unfinished during that period. Thus, one of the biggest challenges has been to bring back those who interrupted their processes and deepen the current national strategy, to attract more adults, especially those with very low levels of school and professional qualifications. For this purpose, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP, IP) revised and updated the qualifications and competences standards, and reinforced the relevance of validation, through the publication of new legal diplomas. Furthermore, to accelerate the digital and climate transition, the government has defined new priorities and guidelines in terms of qualifications and competences: the creation of new qualifying pathways, as well as the consortia that have been signed between various stakeholders, are important steps that have already been taken to leverage the upskilling and reskilling of the population and encourage the participation in validation. Reinforcement, in terms of funding, comes essentially from the Recovery and Resilience Plan: more funds were allocated to the national network of validation centres (Centros Qualifica) for the development of local projects aimed at adults with less school qualifications; specific funding lines were created to ensure the sustainability of partnerships for qualification; and a financial incentive was made available to adults who complete their validation processes (Acelerador Qualifica).

# 2 Introduction

Validation opportunities refer to the process of assessing, recognizing and certifying, by an authorized body, the learning and competences that an individual acquired throughout life (non-formal and informal education), against the national school and professional standards. Within adult education policies, in line with lifelong learning guidelines established by the European Union and supporting a specific policy agenda, the main goal of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Portugal, is to increase the levels of school and professional certification of the population, namely those of working age (over 18 years old, whether employed or unemployed) and with few years of schooling (Ordinance No. 61/2022, January 31<sup>st</sup>). In Portugal, this process is known as 'Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences' or RVCC (in Portuguese, 'Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências'), which has existed since 2001 but, as of 2017, became the flagship of the Qualifica Programme (Programa Qualifica). The Qualifica Programme is the national qualification strategy, which aims to revitalize adult education and training as a central pillar of the qualifications system. The validation model that underpins it (i.e., the RVCC) follows a generalist approach, since it is the same for all sectors of activity and it covers all levels of non-higher education.

One of the fundamental axes for the implementation of the Qualifica Programme was the activation of a national network of specialized centres for the qualification of adults (called Centros Qualifica), which are distributed throughout the continent and the Autonomous Region of Madeira. These local centres are promoted by a wide range of actors (such as, primary, and secondary education establishments, training centres, public employment services, municipalities, companies and associations or other entities with significant territorial or sectoral expression and installed technical capacity) and have the particularity of being the only structures authorized to carry out validation processes within the scope of RVCC. Since 2017, this network of centres has been resized and expanded, and currently also includes a set of centres

specialized in the qualification of workers in Public Administration (called Qualifica AP).

The fact that these specialized centers are hosted by entities that already have their territorial identity consolidated can be considered as a frankly positive aspect, facilitating the development of a work of proximity to the public, based on the constitution of partnership networks on a territorial or sectoral basis. Furthermore, the fact that they are the only structures that can carry out validation processes and their articulation with the national standards ensures that the education and training pathways followed by individuals constitute access routes that effectively allow the attribution of a qualification level 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 of the National Qualifications Framework, NQF (Quadro Nacional de Qualificações, QNQ).

The creation, organization and operation regime of the Qualifica centres, as well as the RVCC structure, were recently reinforced and clarified in specific diplomas<sup>1</sup>, so that all entities operating in this field follow the same rules and guidelines issued by the entity that coordinates the Qualifica Programme, which is the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP).

The school competences and qualification standards that support the RVCC were also revised and updated, namely: the Key Competences Standard for Adult Education and Training - Basic Level<sup>2</sup>, introduced a new guiding framework for the RVCC of basic level and constitutes a renewed base for the curricular design of adult education and training pathways; and the National Catalogue of Qualifications, NCQ (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações, CNQ)<sup>3</sup>, following a new design methodology of qualifications (NQF levels 2, 4 and 5) organized into competence units (Unidades de Competências), it includes new qualifications and competences considered relevant for the competitiveness and modernization of the economy and for the personal and social development of people (i.e. digital and soft skills).

Reinforcing the network and intervention of the Qualifica centers is aimed at accelerating the fulfillment of the goals set for increasing the qualifications of the adult population and is fundamentally the result of the investment that is being made within the scope of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (Plano de Recuperação e Resiliência, PRR) and in the commitments established between the government and the social partners. To achieve the settled goals, two recent measures should be noted: the creation of a financial incentive – Acelerador Qualifica - given to adults who complete a school or professional qualification through a RVCC process<sup>4</sup>; and the implementation of Local Projects Promoting Level B1/B2/B3 Qualifications<sup>5</sup>, which aim to increase the attendance and completion rates of qualification pathways for adults with very low qualifications.

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinance No 62/2022, Regulates the creation and organization and functioning of centers specializing in adult qualification; Ordinance No 61/2022, Regulates the recognition, validation and certification of competences

<sup>2</sup> Referencial de Competências-Chave de Educação e Formação de Adultos – Nível Básico. Last update in 2021-12-29. [https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/file/743/ANQEP\\_Referencial\\_Competicencias\\_Chave\\_Niv.pdf](https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/file/743/ANQEP_Referencial_Competicencias_Chave_Niv.pdf) [Accessed 15.3.2023]

<sup>3</sup> Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações (CNQ). Last update in 2021. Website: <https://catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/>

<sup>4</sup> The RRP is organized into three dimensions of structural intervention: resilience, transition climate and digital transition. Integrated in the resilience dimension, component 6 — Qualifications and Skills — is made up of a set of investments, including the investment RE-C06-i03 — «Incentivo Adultos». Included in this investment is subinvestment RE-C06-i03.02 — «Acelerador Qualifica», being the ANQEP, I.P., the entity responsible for its implementation. <https://files.dre.pt/1s/2022/10/20700/0000400005.pdf> [Accessed 15.3.2023]

<sup>5</sup> Projetos Locais Promotores de Qualificações de Nível B1/B2/B3 - this measure is also included in the RRP and it consists of a financial support to the Qualifica centers, in order to strengthen their local and regional networks, through the development of integrated education and training projects for adults within a territorial logic (RRP Investment RE-C06-i03.01-Incentivo Adultos-Component C06 - Qualifications and Skills) <https://files.dre.pt/1s/2022/09/18600/0001100012.pdf> [Accessed 15.3.2023]

Although the number of certifications has increased significantly since 2018, statistics show that adherence to the RVCC pathway is still relatively low (source: ANQEP)<sup>6</sup>. The COVID 19 pandemic contributed to many of the validation processes being pending, and although the Qualifica centres organized themselves to conduct online sessions, the situation highlighted contexts of high vulnerability that prevented many from completing their validation processes (e.g., family and health situations, lack of digital resources and literacy, low internet access, poverty). The financial ‘accelerator’ and the Local Projects are two measures that are already being implemented in order to mitigate this situation, boosting the conclusion of RVCC processes that were pending and reaching adults who are in conditions of greater vulnerability.

Additional work remains to be done regarding VNFIL of migrants and refugees. The generalist approach that supports RVCC is not suitable for these groups, since the educational and training pathways are, with rare exceptions, taught in Portuguese. The PLA (Português Língua de Acolhimento – Portuguese as host Language), which capitalizes and allows the enrolment of adults in the qualification pathways available in the National Qualifications System, according to the profiles and needs of the adults, has allowed to overcome some linguistic barriers. However, bearing in mind that the flows of people displaced from their country of origin are intensifying, it will be essential to match resources and strategies so that the Qualifica centres can meet the specific needs of these and other refugees and migrant populations.

With regard to VNFIL in higher education (HE), the Portuguese legislation in force gives candidates aged 23 or over the possibility to enroll in higher professional technical courses, degrees and integrated masters, even if they do not have access qualifications for the intended course (Programa ‘Maiores de 23 Anos’)<sup>7</sup>. The application is made through a special competition and is dependent on the analysis of the curriculum vitae and the educational and training path of individuals, as well as the performing of an interview and the completion of special assessment tests (Provas de Acesso Especial para Maiores de 23), which aim to validate the learning and experiences acquired throughout life and to attest the candidates’ ability to attend HE courses. Under this competition and within the scope of the HE autonomy regime, it is up to each HEI to organize the structure of the evaluation process and establish the rules and procedures for VNFIL. Until 2018, validation of professional experience could not allow obtaining more than one-third of the total number of ECTS in a degree. However, in order to encourage the academic qualification of professionals already in the labour market (upskilling and reskilling), the conditions for recognizing professional experience were extended to students of professional higher technical courses with more than five years of duly proven professional experience, allowing the crediting of up to 50% of the credits of this cycle of studies (Source: DGES)<sup>8</sup>.

This entry route into HE represents an important opportunity, especially for adults who have achieved valuable learning throughout their personal life and professional careers, but who, for whatever reason, have not had the opportunity to continue their academic studies. However, statistics indicate that there has been a steady decrease in the number of applicants over the past decade, but the factors behind this trend are still unknown (Fernandes et al., 2022). Reiterating what was said in the previous European Inventory of VNFIL, published in 2018, this measure requires special attention, given the small number of adults who enter HE through this access route. There is little evidence about the characteristics of the candidates and the impacts

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<sup>6</sup> Graphs can be consulted regarding the evolution of the number of registrations, referrals and certifications within the scope of the RVCC processes: link: [https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores\\_n1/](https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores_n1/) [Accessed 15.3.2023]

<sup>7</sup> Decree-Law No 64/2006, Regulates especially appropriate tests designed to assess the ability of those aged over 23 to attend higher education, as amended by Decree-Law No. 113/2014, of 16 July, and Decree-Law No. 63/2016, of 13 September

<sup>8</sup> Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior. Information about creditation in HEI. <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pagina/creditacao> [Accessed 15.3.2023]

generated by the 'Maiores de 23 Anos' Programme on their performance, as well as on the institutions and teaching-learning conditions that are offered to those who enter through this route (idem).

Another recent novelty, in the HE sectors, concerns the implementation of measures aimed at diversifying its training offer, through the creation of short courses that, although they do not award higher-level degrees, allow the capitalization of learning through the attribution of credits, in line with the European approach to microcredentials. Within the scope of the RRP, a line of funding (called 'Impulso Adultos') was created to encourage and support initiatives to be developed by HEIs, in partnership or consortium with companies, public and/or private employers and including municipalities and local, regional, and national public entities, for the development of such short and flexible learning paths<sup>9</sup>. This offer aimed at upskilling and reskilling active adults and is informed by the emerging needs of the labour market and the new employability requirements (e.g., energy and digital transition). The first training courses, resulting from these partnerships and consortia, the contracts with HEI for Impulso Adultos were signed in 2021, and some microcredentials started in the second half of 2021.

## 3 National perspective

### 3.1 Overarching approach to validation

In Portugal, the approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) corresponds to the National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (known as Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências or RVCC), which has started in 2001 and only covers non-higher qualifications. The RVCC aims to recognize, validate, and certify the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning, and leads to a qualification equivalent to the ones attained in formal education, thus allowing individuals to pursue further studies in other offers of the national education and training system and of the National Qualification System (NQS).

The RVCC is carried out by the Qualifica centres, which are specialized local centres that work with adults who have not completed basic or secondary education and/or who need to improve their qualifications. In addition to VNFIL, these centres offer various types of training, including vocational training, basic education, digital, literacy, language and numeracy pathways. They also provide information and guidance (IAG) services to help individuals choose the most appropriate training or education path to achieve their goals.

Since the 2018 update, the changes described in the previous section fit with the deepening of the integrated national strategy for the qualification of adults – Programme. This strategy aims to bring Portugal closer to the goals of convergence in terms of schooling and lifelong learning (LLL) with the average of European Union countries, giving a new incentive to the mobilization of the adult population in the search for qualifications. Funding is provided by the Portuguese government and the European Social Fund (ESF) and has been reinforced under the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP). The ANQEP is the public authority that coordinates the Qualifica Programme and is responsible for creating and regulating the network of

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<sup>9</sup> «Impulso Adultos» aims to support the upskilling and reskilling of skills of active adults, through short-term training in higher education, at initial and postgraduate levels, in all areas of knowledge, as well as continuous training (Source: DGES). [https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pagina/IMPULSO\\_Jovens%20STEAM\\_Adultos](https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pagina/IMPULSO_Jovens%20STEAM_Adultos) [Accessed 15.3.2023]

specialized centers in adult education and training, which covers the entire continent and the Autonomous Region of Madeira.

Over the past four years, the network of centres has been resized and expanded and, in 2022, was subject to a new legal framework aimed at clarifying and reinforce its operating and organization regime (Ordinance No. 62/2022). A new ordinance was also published in 2022, with the aim of reinforcing and regulating the role of the RVCC, as a double certification qualification pathway of the NQS (Ordinance No. 61/2022). The main changes introduced by these new legal frameworks, are: strengthening the flexibility of RVCC processes and other education and training pathways directed to adults, in order to attract and motivate more adults, especially the ones with low and very low qualifications; strengthening the flexibility of the intervention of the local centers, with less rigid steps and more tailored to the profile of each adult; introduction of the possibility of obtaining a qualification level 5 of the NQF (formerly, it was only possible to obtain up to level 4); and the possibility of attributing the financial incentive (Acelerador Qualifica).

The Qualifica Programme has been progressively aligned with other national strategies aimed at improving the qualifications of the population, such as the National Initiative for Digital Competences, known as INCoDe.2030 (Iniciativa Nacional Competências Digitais e.2030)<sup>10</sup>, and the 'Green Skills & Jobs' political initiative (Programa 'Competências Verdes').

In the scope of INCoDe.2030, the government has been promoting the acquisition and improvement of digital skills among citizens, with a focus on recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning. There are two important measures that are already in progress within this public policy, covering adults with different profiles, including those in validation processes:

- a) Certificado de Competências Digitais<sup>11</sup> (Ordinance No 179/2021)<sup>12</sup>, which consists of offering three new pathways for the acquisition of digital competences (basic, intermediate and advanced levels), giving access to a certificate aligned with the proficiency levels of the Dynamic Framework of Reference for Digital Competence (Quadro Dinâmico de Referência para a Competência Digital, QDRCD).
- b) Programa Jovem + Digital (Ordinance No 250-A/2020)<sup>13</sup>, which includes a diverse set of short or medium-term training pathways (up to 350 hours, with autonomous certification). The training units completed are credited towards obtaining a qualification in the digital area at level 4 or 5 of the NQF. These pathways are especially aimed at those who already have some skills in this area (with incomplete or complete secondary education or attending higher education).

The review and updating of the Key Competences Standard for Adult Education and Training (Basic Level) now includes a digital skills component, reorganizing the prominence of digital learning in the modern workplace and society. It provides a way of individuals to acquire and demonstrate their digital skills through professional training or through a RVCC process, giving access to the formal digital competences certificate.

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<sup>10</sup> Website: <https://www.incode2030.gov.pt/> [Accessed 15.3.2023]

<sup>11</sup> Portugal Digital. Certificado de Competências Digitais. <https://portugaldigital.gov.pt/en/training-people-for-digital/available-training-in-digital-skills/digital-skills-certificate/> [Accessed 15.3.2023]

<sup>12</sup> Ordinance No 179/2021. <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/portaria/179-2021-170322930>

<sup>13</sup> Ordinance No 250-A/2020. <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/portaria/250-a-2020-146244078>

Additionally, within the INCoDe.2030, the government launched a platform called Coalition for Digital Employability<sup>14</sup>, which is a collaborative network of public and private entities that work together to promote digital skills and training. This platform works as a repository of initiatives, good practices, studies, resources, events, news, training, jobs, funding opportunities in the field of digital skills, and makes a direct connection between Portugal and the European Union.

The 'Green Skills & Jobs' political initiative<sup>15</sup> is aimed at reinforcing the centrality and urgency of acquiring and deepening skills that help drive the energy transition and climate action. For this purpose, four new short and medium-term pathways were created with a maximum duration of 375 hours (Green Hydrogen – fundamentals and technologies, 300 hours; Renewable energies – Solar thermal, 325 hours; Renewable energies – Photovoltaic solar, 375 hours; Renewable Energy – Wind, 375 hours)<sup>16</sup>, in order to respond to specific skills in the area of environment and energy, namely the new green skills. These paths are specially aimed at the professional training and requalification of workers whose employers were directly or indirectly affected by the increase in energy costs, as well as unemployed people who have not completed the final year of the secondary-level training cycle or are undergoing an RVCC at secondary level (Source: IEFPP, IP).

These new pathways, which were designed with the aim of boosting the ecological and digital transition agenda, are already available in the NCQ and all the corresponding competences have also been integrated into the key competence standards that support validation and other forms of adult education and training.

In 2022, the Ordinance No. 61/2022 established the possibility to develop RVCC processes in qualifications of level 5. This did not happen until 2022. There are four types of certifications: the basic school RVCC (4th, 6th or 9th year of schooling/ISCED Level 1 and 2), the secondary school RVCC (12th year of schooling/ISCED Level 3); the professional RVCC and the double certification RVCC (in Portuguese, called 'dupla certificação'), leading to the attribution of a certificate of qualification level 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 of the NQF.

The RVCC pathway is recognized by employers of all sectors and by all educational institutions. It constitutes a particularly suitable alternative for adults who, having low formal qualifications, have acquired significant and relevant experience and skills in different contexts throughout their lives. More specifically, the RVCC is addressed to individuals aged 18 years old or over with a qualification level below level 5 and who, throughout their lives, have carried out learning and acquired relevant skills for validation purposes. This is also a particularly suitable access route for adults with non-continuous training paths, which allows valuing the individual path of acquiring knowledge and developing skills aligned with the qualification needs of each person, encouraging the completion of incomplete paths. In practical terms, the RVCC corresponds to a process through which an adult demonstrates skills acquired and developed throughout life, which are subject to validation and certification for obtaining a qualification of the NCQ.

Regardless of the path chosen, the validation process (RVCC) involves three stages that are carried out with the support of the guidance, recognition, and certification of competences technicians of the Qualifica centres (Técnicos de Orientação, Reconhecimento e Validação de Competências, TORVC) and trainers or teachers:

- a) Recognition: identification of competences developed by adults throughout life, in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, based on the national competences and qualification frameworks. For this purpose, the adult

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<sup>14</sup> Website: <https://digitalcoalition.pt/en/>

<sup>15</sup> Ordinance No 21/2023. <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/portaria/21-2023-205822993>

<sup>16</sup> These pathways have been available in the [National Catalogue of Qualification](#) since January 2023

prepares (and defends) a portfolio that, in a structured way, aggregates documents of a biographical and curricular nature (diaries, official documents, photos, graphic material, letters, among others) that unequivocally explain the evidence of the acquired skills, knowledge and professional experiences that the candidate holds.

- b) Validation: verification and assessment of the adult's competences against the competences defined in the respective standard (academic or professional standards). This stage is based on the use of assessment tools specifically designed for the purpose, formalized in a validation session convened and chaired by the coordinator of the centre, with the presence of team members involved in the respective process.
- c) Certification (academic, professional or both): award of a certificate by a certification panel. Certification can be partial or total, in which case it requires a test before the certification jury. The jury decides based on the assessment of the certification test, combined with the assessment of the portfolio and assessment tools applied during the recognition and validation stages.

The RVCC implies the mandatory attendance of complementary training modules that are designed to help individuals acquire the knowledge and skills they need to meet the adult education and training standards. This additional training is ensured by trainers of the Qualifica centres or by other training entities to which candidates are referred; it can be performed in person or at a distance, through self-training or on-the-job training, according to a roadmap of activities and performance criteria to be fulfilled by the candidate. The minimum number of hours of complementary training that candidates have to attend, associated with the units of competences of a qualification, is 50 hours (Ordinance No 61/2022). In addition to complementary training, the TORVCs and trainers or teachers have a maximum of 25 hours of training to support the candidate in preparing the certification test to be presented before the jury, which can be carried out in person or at a distance, subject to the existence of conditions for the effect.

As previously mentioned in the introduction of the present report, the intervention of the local centres specialized in adult education and training takes place in accordance with an integrated approach and a LLL perspective. Guidance and validation are closely connected and delivered in a unique way at these centres; guidance is provided from the enrolment to the conclusion of an RVCC process or another education/training pathway.

The scheme provided below (figure 1) aims to clarify the way the Qualifica teams intervene, whenever an adult seeks them out.

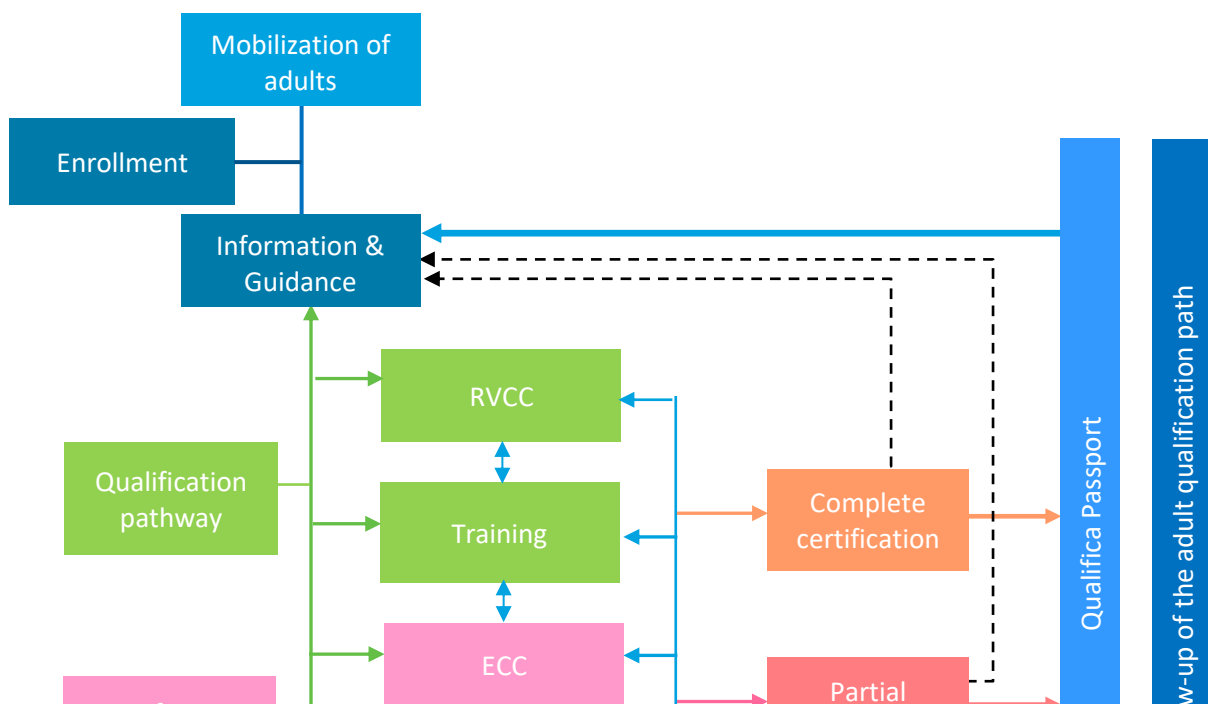


Figure 1. Stages of intervention at Qualifica Centres (ANQEP, 2022)

Within the scope of Guidance, the work of TORVCs mostly consists of an initial diagnosis with a view to clarifying the expectations, motivations, and potentialities of candidates, as well as to define a personalised career project (and/or plan of vocational reorientation or training project) and referral to a qualification pathway that should be available in the territory where each centre intervenes.

Guidance practices are developed according to a personalized and comprehensive approach (Cedefop, 2019: p.44)<sup>17</sup>. This means that despite being structured according to a sequence of predefined steps (Enrolment, Screening, Information & Guidance, and Referral), this process is carried out in a flexible way, in order to adapt it to the profile of the candidates. Furthermore, according to the functions formally assigned to TORVCs (Ordinance No 62/2022, Art. 4), they're intervention should go beyond the referral, i.e., guidance should be provided during all the validation process, including monitoring the candidates' path to obtaining the qualification, regardless of this is developed in Qualifica centres or in an external training entity (Guimarães & Menitra, 2018).

The work of TORVCs is supported by a specific methodological guide delivered by the ANQEP (ANQEP, 2017), which includes a set of facilitating guidelines, instruments, and methods, addressed to the teams that work at the Qualifica centres. During guidance, several techniques are mobilized, of which the following stand out:

- a) Individual interview – method used to access the education and professional path of the candidate, as well as motivations, expectations, interests, self-awareness and decision-making capacity. The methodological guide provides a list of topics that should be used to collect relevant information during the interview (ANQEP, 2017: p. 27)
- b) Balance of Competences (Balanço de competências) - method for analyzing knowledge, skills, competences and other personal characteristics of the candidate. This flexible and participatory process aims to help the candidate to get to know herself/himself better and to identify her/his potential and goals, leading to the elaboration of a reflective learning portfolio (Portefólio Reflexivo de Aprendizagem, PRA) and the development of an individual career plan (Plano Individual de Carreira, PIC). The PIC may include recommendations for further training, as well as suggestions for ways to build on existing competences.
- c) Autobiographical/life story approach – method currently used as a starting point in the construction of the PRA, with the purpose of encouraging reflection on the experiences that allowed the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Guimarães & Menitra, 2018).

Guidance - which includes analysis of the candidate's profile, evaluation of their path of life and professional experience, the identification of qualification objectives, the diagnosis of needs and the proposal of the most adequate qualification route - it results in the referral of the adult to RVCC, for training or to the Evaluation and Certification Commission (ECC). Whenever the result of the RVCC is a partial certification (academic or professional RVCC), the guidance technicians must prepare, with the candidate, a qualification pathway to be taken and follow her/him until its conclusion (see figure 1).

Although the Qualifica centres are the only entities that can develop RVCC processes, the network of employment centers (PES) of the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) also provide guidance services to those who seek them.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/5575>

Guidance takes place in person at local PES or through the online guidance space of the IEFP (Espaço de Orientação), for authenticated users<sup>18</sup>.

With regard to guidance provided to migrant and refugee citizens, both the Qualifica centres and PES seek to assist all citizens, regardless of their country of origin and social condition. The rapid increase in migratory flows and the massive arrival of war refugees from Ukraine and other non-Portuguese-speaking countries are bringing new challenges to the teams working in these centres, and the fact that these citizens do not speak Portuguese constitutes the first and greatest barrier to overcome.

Considering that the social and professional integration of these citizens largely involves learning the Portuguese language, the IEFP has been participating in the organization and implementation of Portuguese Host Language courses<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the same entity has been part of the service teams for Ukrainian citizens<sup>20</sup> who have already requested protection from Portugal, informing these citizens of the existing opportunities and giving support in terms of employment and professional training (Source: IEFP, IP).

Currently, attending Portuguese Host Language courses (PLA) is a mandatory step for submitting applications for Portuguese nationality, as well as for granting a permanent residence permit and granting long-term resident status<sup>21</sup>. PLA courses aim at developing the social and professional skills of foreign citizens with a regularized situation, or in the process of regularization, and should enable them to participate in training activities in Portuguese and technical Portuguese language and to certify the acquired knowledge, enhancing their employability and strengthening opportunities for their socio-professional and cultural integration.

According to their legal framework, the Qualifica centres, as structures specializing in the qualification of adults, must also provide a complement of responses to migrant citizens, namely the teaching of PLA courses and access to RVCC processes or other pathways leading to the reinforcement of their skills and qualifications. However, according to information obtained from the coordinator of a Qualifica centre located in the city of Lisbon, not all centres of the national network have the technical and human resources to assist migrants and refugees, namely, translators, since technicians do not master the mother tongue of the migrants and refugees who seek them. For example, regarding Ukrainian citizens, in general, they do not speak English, only the youngest and those with higher education. The interviewee points out the lack of human resources and the duration of the PLA courses, referring that the minimum number of hours may not be sufficient for the acquisition of basic skills that are necessary for attending the education and training pathway that the candidates select, especially taking into account that their choice is mostly limited to offers that are available in the region where they have settled.

The issue of language also interferes with the standards of accuracy and demand inherent in the validation processes carried out by these centres. The government has established exceptional measures within the scope of granting temporary protection

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<sup>18</sup> IEFP online guidance space: <https://iefponline.iefp.pt>

<sup>19</sup> Ordinance No 184/2022, Cursos de Português Língua de Acolhimento, PLA.

<sup>20</sup> This teams work at the National Migrants Support Centres (Centros Nacionais de Apoio aos Imigrantes, CNAIM) in Beja, Faro, Lisbon and Porto. Link to the website of the Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, which is the body that coordinates these specific network of centres <https://www.acm.gov.pt/-/cna-lisboa>

<sup>21</sup> Portuguese as Host Language (Português Língua de Acolhimento, PLA) courses (formerly known as Português para Falantes de Outras Línguas, PFOL, or Português para Todos, PPT), were formerly created in 2020 (Ordinance No. 183/2020). The new ordinance (Ordinance No 184/2022) expanded its target audience (previously it only covered people over 18 years old and currently includes people over 16 years old), as well as the citizens requesting international or temporary protection, citizens who are short-stay visa holders for seasonal work, temporary stay or residence, enhancing their integration in the labour market and in Portuguese society. In addition, it can now be carried out partially or completely at a distance.

to displaced persons from Ukraine, including the simplification of the procedure for recognition, validation, and certification of professional skills to work in the national territory (Decree-Law No. 24-B/2022), suppressing the need for certification and authentication in Portuguese of documents written in English. Although this measure aims to speed up the validation processes and integration in the labour market, it does not take into account that many refugees, especially those with greater integration difficulties and less qualified, rarely master the English language or have the financial resources to pay for translations in English (even if not authenticated) of the required documents. It will be essential to deepen the articulation between the Qualifica centres and the emigrants' associations and other relevant entities that are legally framed, as well as to invest more in the dissemination of relevant information among these publics, in their mother tongue (or graphically), in order to guide them better and prevent them from falling into illegal and fraudulent networks. In addition, more attention will have to be paid to migration flows from South Asia, which began in the last decade, and which have been increasing in the last five years - above all from India, Bangladesh and Nepal, but also from Pakistan - due to the fact that they are essentially linked to low-skill activities, such as work in agriculture.

Regarding instruments that support the RVCC, the Qualifica Passport (Passaporte Qualifica) stands out (Ordinance No 47/2017). This is one of the main features of the Qualifica Programme that allows integrating the qualifications obtained by the individual throughout her/his life and also simulate possible paths or organize others (carried out or to be carried out), depending on the qualifications that she/he can obtain and the educational and professional progression that can be achieved.

The Qualifica Passport is an online guidance and profiling tool that is supposed to be handled by the candidates, with the help of TORVCs; it can be updated at any time during the process of guidance, as well as during their education and training pathways. Thus, a tool that ensures that the outputs produced at a certain stage can be used as inputs for the next stage, since it collects and documents information about the candidates gathered during guidance procedures in a digital platform and can be updated anytime. This instrument also ensures that the path chosen by the candidates gives access to one or more valid qualifications, that is, qualifications that are suitable for their profile and that are integrated in the NQS, since it is connected with the National Catalogue of Qualifications (NCQ).

The Qualifica Passport belongs to the candidate and therefore gives her/him autonomy and responsibility to handle it. Access may also be provided to other entities participating in her/his training or to employers. Furthermore, until recently, only the centre where the adult had started his process could access her/his Qualifica Passport. However, in 2022, the ANQEP introduced a change in the platform, in order to allow the access and transfer of processes between centers. From the perspective of the coordinator of a Qualifica centre interviewed, it has some advantages as it allows the adult to resume her/his process in case it has been interrupted for any reason (for example, for personal reasons, lack of affinity with the centre where it started or for having changed the residence area).

It is important to highlight that, although the Qualifica Passport does not exactly correspond to an Individual Learning Account (ILAS)<sup>22</sup>, it is portable and allows individuals to continuously record the learning paths they undertake. In addition, the educational and training offer that is eligible for validation processes is provided by entities that are legally certified by the IEFPP, with free attendance. In some cases (long-term unemployed, young NEET and other more vulnerable groups, who are registered at employment centres), the training offer can give access to a grant, which can serve as a complement to the unemployment benefit and which is intended to be an incentive for qualification.

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<sup>22</sup> COM(2021)773

There is also a measure called 'Cheque-Formação' (Training Voucher) which constitutes a form of direct funding of training to be given to users registered in the employment centres of the IEFP, namely, employers, employed and unemployed assets (Ordinance No. 229/2015). The main objective of the referred measure is to encourage professional training, constituting itself as an instrument that enhances the creation and maintenance of employment and the reinforcement of qualification and employability. In accordance with the legal framework given to it, with regard to the assets employed, the measure constitutes the enshrinement of the individual right to training<sup>23</sup>, an instrument for partial costing of the charges resulting from attending training on an individual initiative (lasting maximum of 50 hours/year), making them responsible for building their individual qualification trajectory. Regarding the unemployed, the measure aims to reinforce the availability of professional training offers, and the consequent opportunities to reinforce employability, encouraging individual commitment associated with the choice of the qualification process (with a minimum duration of 150 hours). Whenever these candidates successfully complete a training course, the Educational Offer Information and Management System (known as SIGO) proceeds to issue a certificate of qualifications of the National Catalogue of Qualifications or a certificate of professional training.

Special attention should be paid to the updating and public disclosure of the Training Vouchers measure. Although it is a measure that has existed since 2015, it has not been properly publicized. The last update provided for the IEFP dates to 2018, and it is not possible to assess which values are currently assigned and whether the application requirements have changed. The deepening of this measure, as well as the possibility and suitability of creating a model in the logic of ILAS are two of the topics that are included in the professional training and qualification agreement that was signed between the Portuguese government and the social partners in 2021<sup>24</sup>, aimed at improving incentives for companies and individuals to participate in LLL. However, at the time of preparation of this inventory, there is no evidence concerning progress or concrete initiatives that have been carried out with the aim of deepening these two topics.

The National Catalogue of Qualifications (NCQ) is another instrument that have to be properly described, given its centrality in the RVCC. The NCQ is a strategic management tool for non-higher-level qualifications (levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF) aimed at regulating the respective dual certification training offers and the validation arrangements that exist in Portugal (Ordinance No 781/2009). It consists of a database that organizes and classifies all the qualifications, skills and competences recognized in the country, including those obtained in formal, non-formal and informal learning processes. The NCQ is a reference tool that allows individuals, employers, education and training providers, and other stakeholders to identify the qualifications and competences required for different professional areas and covers a wide range of areas. Also noteworthy is the fact that it serves as a tool for the recognition of professional qualifications obtained in other countries, through the comparison and alignment of the levels and competences with those of the Portuguese system. The references of training inserted in the NCQ are organized in short-term, capitalizable training units (Short Duration Training Units or Competences Units), that allow the autonomous certification of competences and allow greater flexibility in the design of qualification pathways.

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<sup>23</sup> The law determines that companies must grant hours of professional training each year to at least 10% of their workers. Based on this assumption, the worker is granted the annual right to have at least 40 hours of continuous training, as explained in point 2 of article 131 of the Labor Code.

<sup>24</sup> Acordo de Formação Profissional e Qualificação  
<https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/qc22/comunicacao/documento?i=acordo-de-formacao-profissional-e-qualificacao-assinado-entre-governo-e-parceiros-sociais> [Accessed 15.3.2023]

Over the years this database has been regularly updated, with the aim of including new qualifications that are consistent with the priorities settled by the government for the economic and social development of the country and in order to be more in line with European recommendations in the area of education and training<sup>25</sup>.

Finally, it is important to mention what measures the ANQEP has been implementing to ensure the quality of the Qualifica Programme. The creation, organisation and operation of the Qualifica centers have been legally framed since 2016 (Ordinance nº 232/2016) and recently new guidelines were issued in order to delegate them more responsibilities and flexibility in the guidance and monitoring of adults who seek them (Ordinance No 62/2022). These drivers serve, as well, to reinforce the need for articulation between the centres and local entities that can help bring more candidates to the Qualifica Programme and guarantee the completion of processes, namely, favoring itinerant guidance and the establishment of partnerships that promote greater reconciliation between working life conditions and investment in qualification. These guidelines were especially designed to reach adults with very low levels of qualifications or illiterate (below the 9th year of schooling, including without schooling, and with insufficient levels of literacy) (Ordinance No 62/2022). Regarding this last update, an order was also published (Order nº 14485/2022) which aims to authorize the centres to set up training groups with a number lower than the limit provided by the legislation (The minimum number provided for in Ordinance n.º 66/2022 is 15 trainees). This amendment aims to prepare the ground for the implementation of the Local Projects (Projetos Locais Promotores de Qualificações de Nível B1/B2/B3) and to avoid possible constraints to the formation of training groups within the Modular Certified Training modality, namely in low-density territories and/or when subgroups with characteristics of increased social vulnerability are involved.

The RVCC was also subject to a new legal framework whose main objective was to make it autonomous in a specific legal document (Ordinance No 61/2022). This normative systematizes and clarifies the characteristics of this modality of the NQS, also adding the eligibility of the financial incentive introduced by the RRP for individuals who successfully complete their RVCC processes.

The management and monitoring of the network of Qualifica centres, as well as the assessment of their activity and performance is ensured by the entity that coordinates the Qualifica Programme, the ANQEP. In accordance with the legislation in force (Ordinance No 62/2022), monitoring is based on the work carried out by the regional monitoring teams, which include, in addition to ANQEP, representatives of the regional services of the IEFP and the Directorate-General of School Establishments. The visits of the regional teams are aimed at collecting (and giving back) monitoring data and providing specific guidelines to the centres according to their particularities. Furthermore, they also have a strong informal training component (ANQEP, 2021).

In 2022, the ANQEP also published a quality assurance charter for the local centres specialized in adult education and training (Carta de Qualidade dos Centros Qualifica)<sup>26</sup>. This is a reference document for the work of the centres, which aims to ensure that they contribute to the implementation of public policies on adult education and training and for the good management of the public resources allocated to them. This reference document also aims to encourage self-assessment and the elaboration of improvement plans, in order to promote reflection, commitment and the autonomy of the centres.

As for the publication of data regarding participation, the only available evidence relates to the number and characteristics of adults covered by the Qualifica

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<sup>25</sup> The NCQ can be accessed online by everyone <https://catalogo.angep.gov.pt/>

<sup>26</sup> ANQEP, IP (2022). Carta de Qualidade dos Centros Qualifica. [https://www.angep.gov.pt/np4/file/875/CARTA\\_QUALIDADE\\_SITE\\_17\\_11.pdf](https://www.angep.gov.pt/np4/file/875/CARTA_QUALIDADE_SITE_17_11.pdf) [Accessed 15.3.2023]

Programme. The ANQEP makes available on its website some indicators that emerge from the SIGO Platform, allowing to observe the evolution in terms of the number of registrations, referrals and certifications, as well as the general characteristics of the population covered (gender, age, education and employment status) and data on the performance of the centres according to their typology<sup>27</sup>.

Among other quality assurance measures, reference should also be made to reviewing and updating some of the instruments that support the RVCC processes and ensure the relevance and timeliness of competences and training paths, namely, the already mentioned Key Competence Standards for Adult Education and Training - Basic Level (2021) and the NCQ database (2022). Although, it should be noted that the Key Competencies Standards for Adult Education and Training – Secondary Level, has not been revised since 2006.

As for the quality assurance of the education and training offer, the Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho, DGERT) is the body responsible for the certification of the education and training providers. Basically, this certification consists of recognizing the capacity of an entity to carry out training in accordance with certain standards. The certification templates are identical for all economic sectors and apply to a wide range of public and private entities. Although it is not mandatory (except for regulated professions), the certification of the education and training providers is in great demand since it brings some benefits to education and training providers, such as the recognition of training within the scope of the NQS, access to public funding, recognition of its quality in the market and tax benefits<sup>28</sup>.

It is important to highlight that there is still a lack of evidence of a qualitative nature regarding the opinion of adults who have gone through the Qualifica Programme, in order to assess feedback on aspects such as: whether the paths they followed effectively corresponded to their initial expectations and career projects; regarding the quality, adequacy of reception and guidance they received; constraints during the process (e.g. waiting time, availability of the chosen training pathway); benefits that the RVCC generated (or not) on their motivation for LLL and self-esteem; personal fulfillment; and impact that it had on their insertion or reintegration in the labour market or in their professional activity (in the case of those who were already employed), among other relevant indicators from the perspective of the program's recipients.

It will also be equally important to carry out studies that provide more precise indicators (quantitative and qualitative) about the professional profile of the communities of technicians, teachers, trainers and assessors who are involved in the RVCC processes, with the purpose of better understand the characteristics of this population and to identify gaps and training needs that can inform training pathways in adult education and training, in a LLL perspective. These indicators may include data about their basic training and specialized continuous training in the area, among others.

## 3.2 Validation in education and training

The Qualifica Programme is an integrated strategy that is intended to provide adults (over 18 years of age) who do not hold the minimum mandatory education (12<sup>th</sup> grade) or a professional certification, with the means and tools to achieve this goal. In this sense, it does not require a minimum school qualification. The initiative aims to be inclusive and therefore covers all types of adults regardless of their employment situation, gender, nationality and exceptionally NEET too. However, in the case of

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<sup>27</sup> These indicators can be consulted at the [ANQEP website](#). [Accessed 15.3.2023]

<sup>28</sup> Information gathered at the event A transformative RRP agenda for qualifications in Portugal – Qualifica: past, present and future, organized by ANQEP, on the 30th of November.

adults up to the age of 23, only those who provide evidence (of at least three years of professional experience) can participate in the RVCC. It is a free of charge pathway that is directed at all adults living in Portugal (Source: ANQEP).

The qualifications of the Portuguese population are still relatively low, compared to the European Union average, which is the main reason that justifies the delimitation of that target audience. The national system for RVCC is in line with the Council Recommendation on VNFIL and has been co-funded by the ESF and the State Budget. Reinforcing the Qualifica Programme is one of the main priorities of the RRP, with extra funding available for the next years.

The validation arrangement adopted in the country is a unique model whose structure is common to all sectors of activity and covers all levels of non-higher education. Recognition of prior learning can only be carried out by the Qualifica centers, which are certified entities of the NQS, whose creation and monitoring are the sole responsibility of ANQEP. The network of Qualifica centers covers the entire national territory and the autonomous islands of Madeira and is driven by a diverse range of entities that work with the target audience covered by the Qualifica Programme, namely: primary and secondary education establishments, professional schools, training centres, companies, municipalities, non-profit associations, among others. In order to become qualified centres, the entities covered must apply for the annual public tenders launched by ANQEP, taking into account the eligibility criteria that are published<sup>29</sup> and the legal regime in force (Ordinance No 62/2022). These centres provide information, guidance, and referral to individuals to validation (RVCC) and other education and training pathways.

The RVCC is based on competences standards and can be carried out in three pathways according to the profile of the candidates (see figure 1): the academic or school RVCC (RVCC Escolar), which is supported by two specific competences standards for adults (Basic/lower-secondary level and upper-secondary level standards); the professional RVCC (RVCC Professional) is based on professional standards linked to the NCQ; and the double certification RVCC, which is based in both academic and professional standards. These processes include stages of recognition and validation of the competences held by the adult and a stage of their certification, through taking a test, certified by a jury that establishes a relationship between the competences proven by adult learners and the key competence standards for the respective level.

Concerning academic/school certification (RVCC Escolar), several practitioners form this jury, such as the guidance, recognition and validation technician who accompanied the recognition and validation process and external trainers/teachers who did not accompany the recognition and validation steps. (Ordinance No 61/2022, art. 12). Regarding professional certification (RVCC professional), the jury is composed of trainers/teachers, as well as representatives of an entrepreneurial association and a trade union within the specific economic sectors. In the development of RVCC processes, adults must attend a complementary training component of a minimum of 50 hours, plus a maximum of 25 hours to prepare for the certification stage.

Completing an RVCC process allows obtaining a school certification at a basic level (4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grades) or at an upper-secondary level (12<sup>th</sup> grade), a professional certification or both (when they have proven that they possess all the competence units of the standard), designating in this case double certification, and confers the qualification level 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 of the National Qualifications Framework, which is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework.

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<sup>29</sup> Call for Proposals – Centros Qualifica. [file:///C:/Users/ThinkCM/Downloads/AAC\\_70-2020-11\\_prorrogaçao.pdf](file:///C:/Users/ThinkCM/Downloads/AAC_70-2020-11_prorrogaçao.pdf) [Accessed 15.3.2023]

Also, mention that the possibility of obtaining level 5 of the NQF through an RVCC process was introduced from 2022, in accordance with its new legal framework (Ordinance No 61/2022). Level 5 is equivalent to a post-secondary non-tertiary qualification with credits towards further study at tertiary level. In Portugal, these courses are also known as CET (Cursos de Especialização Tecnológica) and Higher Professional Technical Courses (Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais) and are ideal paths for those looking to obtain a higher education qualification than secondary education, regardless of whether they are interested in pursuing higher education courses or not. The changes that have been introduced in this education and training offers come as a result of a set of legislative measures that the Portuguese government has been implementing, in order to adapt and modernize professional training, both in its objectives and in training practices, in order to be prepared for the challenges of the future of work (Decree Law No 39/2022).

The recognition and validation stage during an RVCC process comprises the identification of formal, non-formal and informal competences developed throughout life, through the development of specific activities and the application of a set of appropriate assessment tools. As mentioned in the previous section, one of these tools is the reflective learning portfolio. It is a written record of the candidate's competences acquired throughout life and it presents a critical appraisal of their knowledge, competence development, prior experience, and education as well as all relevant supporting documentation linked to the different areas of the portfolio (Guimarães & Menitra, 2018).

COVID 19 had an impact on the RVCC processes and required the Qualifica centres to reorganize their intervention in order to adapt to the requirements imposed by the confinement. Since then, whenever possible, activities can be developed remotely and TORVC and trainers monitor remotely the development of adults' portfolios in academic RVCC, including the complementary training. In addition to email, the use of online resources that allow audio and/or video contacts gained more relevance since then. In professional RVCC processes, was given the possibility of applying distance assessment tools by the team and, in particular, by trainers, taking into account the specific nature of the qualification. The jury sessions for both types of RVCC can be held by videoconference, when possible (Source: ANQEP, IP).

### **3.3 Validation and the labour market**

Validation arrangements involve not only the education and training providers, but also those that represent the economic sectors and that have a fundamental role in identifying training needs, that is, the key skills and competences that are needed to embrace the new challenges of the labour market. With regard to the RVCC, this participation takes place, for example, at the level of the Sectorial Councils for Qualification, SCQ (Conselhos Setoriais para a Qualificação, CSQ), which are an advisory body that participates with the ANQEP in updating the NCQ (Dispatch No 6345/2020).

Updating the NCQ aims to carry out diagnosis studies regarding sectoral qualification and competence needs, as well as the design of the respective competence standards and instruments for vocational RVCC. The SCQ works as a platform bringing together multiple stakeholders according to a bottom-up approach. No qualification is integrated in the NCQ without being submitted to the respective sector council for analysis and approval by consensus. The SCQ has been renewed, including the creation of new ones for emerging sectors of activity or those of recognized strategic significance, and is currently composed of representatives of 18 sectors of activity. In addition to the usual types of members, this body now has

representatives from Competitiveness Clusters and Technological Centers from the sectors covered (Source: ANQEP, IP)<sup>30</sup>.

With the employers, the VNFIL has been disclosed as an opportunity to enhance their human resources, investing in their continuous qualification or requalification, especially at a time that is strongly marked by new demands arising from the agendas for Digital and Energy Transition. For instance, by collaborating in the vocational RVCC processes, companies have the opportunity to promote their team and employees to obtain professional certification, based on the demonstration of learning and skills they have acquired throughout their lives or to acquire new skills that has value to their business. Companies can collaborate in the development of RVCC processes for their employees in several ways, namely, allowing the processes to take place in the company itself, at a time to be agreed upon. All stages of the process can be carried out at the company/workplace.

Although specific guidelines have not been defined for each sector, or priority sectors have been identified, the provision of funding through the RRP to small and medium enterprises, as well as the commitments that have been assumed between the government and the various stakeholders, are indicators of the effort that has been made to encourage companies and training providers, among others, to participate in the upskilling and reskilling of human resources (see Box 1).

### **Box 3.1 Examples that illustrate the progress that has been made to deepen the articulation between validation and the labour market**

#### **Professional training and qualification agreement: a strategic plan for people, companies and the country<sup>31</sup>**

In 2021, the Portuguese government signed an agreement with the social partners aimed at developing and improving qualifications and training opportunities, in order to boost the economy and reach the European target of having, by 2030, 60% of adults between 25 and 64 years old in LLL every year. According to the text written in the aforementioned agreement, the government will provide an amount of EUR 5 billion exclusively dedicated to qualifications and competences, whose funds come mainly from the RRP (Source: Portugal Government Portal). This agreement focuses especially on training in strategic areas considered a priority, such as the digital, environmental, social area, linking supply to demand.

The agreement contemplates a broader set of measures, having been referred to by the prime minister as a 'broadband agreement', including:

- design of incentive mechanisms for active employees to participate in training;
- investment in the digital area and distance training for unemployed adults;
- launch of a special Qualifica training program aimed at entrepreneurs and managers (with low school levels) of micro, small and medium-sized companies;
- expansion of the offer of Higher Professional Technical Courses in order to promote stronger links between the polytechnic education network and the training and business dynamics in the different territories and regions;

<sup>30</sup> More detailed information and data about the SCQ can be achieved in the website of the ANQEP, through the following link [https://www.angep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores\\_n3](https://www.angep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores_n3)

<sup>31</sup> Acordo de formação profissional e qualificação: um desígnio estratégico para as pessoas, para as empresas e para o país. <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/documento?i=acordo-de-formacao-profissional-e-qualificacao-assinado-entre-governo-e-parceiros-sociais>

- reinforce the dimension of professional training in higher education, not only at the level of Higher Professional Technical Courses, as well as at postgraduate levels, with the promotion of micro credentials in undergraduate courses;
- committing to cooperation between higher education institutions, the public service training centers and associations and companies from different sectors, with a view to training and retraining professionals in sectors and strategic competences, namely in upskilling processes and short and medium-term reskilling.

### **Qualification for internationalization Programme<sup>32</sup>**

The Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), in partnership with the Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade of Portugal (AICEP) and the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP), launched the first training course of the 'Programa Qualificação para a Internacionalização' em 2021 (Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 20/2021).

The qualification in the field of internationalization aims to qualify and strengthen human resources in the fields of internationalization and international trade and to develop value chains in Portugal, namely in micro and small and medium-sized companies, reinforcing the professional skills of assets. This training action is already part of the NCQ, being included in the offer of short and medium duration pathways (Certified Modular Training); and its structure comprises a set of small modules (Short-Term Training Units), which have a maximum duration of 350 hours, with autonomous certification (modules: Internationalization - Fundamentals; Prospecting, attracting and retaining customer; International market and digital media; International logistics; Trends and market analysis; International business monitoring and control).

Eligible candidates are individuals over 18 years of age who are unemployed and enrolled in the IEFP or actively employed (on their own initiative or referred by the companies where they work), provided that they are in one of the following situations: hold a level secondary or higher; have not completed the final year of the secondary level training cycle; or that are carrying out processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) at secondary level (Source: ANQEP).

It is important to highlight that there are already some validation practices that also result from the companies' own initiative. This tends to happen mainly in the case of large companies, possibly because they have more resources, including human resources departments and policies that value the continuous training of their workers. An example of such practices is summarized in Box 2:

### **Box 3.2 Partnership between El Corte Inglés and the Qualifica Programme**

El Corte Inglés (ECI) awarded primary and secondary school completion diplomas to 99 employees of department stores between 2019 and 2022, through training (Training Units of Short Duration from the NCQ) and RVCC processes.

This action stems from the goals that this company has set for 2030, in the sense of increasing the levels of school education of workers by 10% and results from a partnership between the company, through its Estudar+ Program, created by the company's Education area, in collaboration with the ANQEP, through the Qualifica Programme, and partnership with 4 Qualifica centres (CECOA, AE Carvalhos, AE Montijo, Escola de Comércio de Lisboa).

The company carried out an internal diagnosis of training needs, which included, namely, the level of education of its employees and their professional category. At the end of the training, the education department also carried out satisfaction questionnaires for the beneficiaries.

<sup>32</sup> In Portuguese called Programa Qualificação para a internacionalização (Ordinance No 272/2021)

The training took place in a work context, during the employees' working hours and did not incur any costs for the company or for those who participated. The company also promoted some incentives, such as merit scholarships and study grants for the children of employees who completed their processes. In addition, it allowed them to acquire computers at more affordable prices and paid in parbuts.

Source: Annual Report El Corte Inglés (2022); interview with the coordinator for the education area of Corte Inglés

With citizens, the RVCC has been disclosed as an opportunity to improve their social condition and their integration in the labour market. Throughout the IAG stage (See figure 1), candidates receive support in drawing up their Individual Career Project (Projeto Individual de Carreira) that should help them to identify professional choices, including education and training paths, and may impact the adult learners' decisions in the future. According to the guidelines presented in the Methodological Guidance Manual, the Individual Career Project should have the following structure/information (GMOLV, 2017: p.45):

- a) how to implement the project; what qualification pathways, or others, are available;
- b) identification of future strategies, when the candidate's interests do not match the available opportunities;
- c) identification of constraints and overcoming strategies;
- d) schedule for the completion of the project.

At a later stage, using the Qualifica Passport, candidates have access to simulations of qualifying paths according to their profile, identifying the educational and training offers available. In turn, these available offers must be in sync with qualifications that are considered a priority in the territory or region where candidates intend to develop their professional activity.

The relationship between supply and demand is facilitated by the Qualification Needs Anticipation System (Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificação, SANQ)<sup>33</sup>, which is designed to collate data from the various skills anticipation exercises in order to inform government policymaking on skills and in planning education and training provision, both in the public and private co-financed sectors. Skills anticipation is also used by local and regional authorities to inform their skills policy decisions (Cedefop, 2022)<sup>34</sup>. This is a dynamic tool that is managed in coordination with the Social Partners, the IEFP and that has the technical support of the International Labour Organization, ILO (Source: ANQEP).

However, practical constraints may arise. Particularly in the case of RVCC processes, this may imply that the candidate has to attend more training modules in order to obtain a full certification, which has as its main consequence the fact that it makes the validation process even more time consuming and thus, not so attractive to them. If, on the one hand, the SANQ aims to contribute to the construction of a short and medium-term strategic vision in terms of investment in human capital, on the other hand, this instrument can highly limit and condition the choices of trainees and interfere with the duration of validation processes, since this diagnosis is commanded by the entities with authority to define criteria for delimitation of the network of qualification offers (such as ANQEP, the DGEstE or the IEFP) and others that are responsible for the distribution of funding (such as the Programa Temático para a Administração Regional of EU Funds).

<sup>33</sup> SANQ website. <http://sanq.angep.gov.pt/>

<sup>34</sup> Cedefop (2022). Skills anticipation in Portugal. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/skills-anticipation-portugal>

Still regarding the articulation of validation with the labour market, it is important to underline the launch of the Qualifica AP in 2022 (Qualifica for Public Administration), whose first steps had already been taken in 2019 (Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 32/2019, of February 14). This is an RVCC pathway aimed at qualifying workers in the exercise of functions in the Public Administration, allowing them to obtain a school and/or professional qualification, through adult education and training pathways and/or recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) acquired throughout life (Order No 12126/2021). The RRP provides funds for the training of civil servants, central and local administration, within the scope of the Qualifica AP Programme, and for this reason, the government decided to create this set of centres.

### 3.4 Validation and the third sector

Validation arrangements in the third sector are part of the validation arrangements that exist (academic or professional RVCC); they have no specific objectives or funding channels but have the same connection to the National Education and Training System and the Qualifica Programme.

Some recent developments should be highlighted. In January 2022, the IEFP, the ANQEP and partners in the social and solidarity sector signed an agreement – Acordo de Cooperação e Qualificação (Source: ANQEP, IP), which is addressed to the governing bodies of institutions, managers, workers and unemployed, with the aim of qualifying people who may come to work in this sector. Furthermore, it intends to increase management and digital skills as an inclusive factor, to promote the transformation and adaptation of social institutions to today's world and to the new challenges that institutions of this nature face on a daily basis.

The agreement comprises two initiatives: the Professional Training Program 'Valorizar Social' and the Partnership 'Qualifica Social'. The first is based on carrying out a set of training courses in the social area, which respond to the transversal needs of the associated entities. The second consists of a partnership with the Qualifica Programme, delegating to the Qualifica centres the responsibility of carrying out the diagnosis of competences in this field, with consequent referral to RVCC processes or to professional training (Box 3.3).

#### Box 3.3 'Valorizar Social and Qualifica Social'

A partnership between the government and the third sector - Acordo de Cooperação e Qualificação - lead to the creation of pathways that are already integrated in the NCQ, with a view to respond to the new demands in the management, finance, leadership and innovation areas. These training paths are intended to respond to new requirements in the area of management and finance, leadership, innovation and are made up of a set of Short-Term Training Units (UFCD), with a maximum duration of 350 hours (Source: [ANQEP](#)).

According to information obtained on the Portuguese Government Portal, the first protocol center for professional training for the Social Economy sector was created at the end of 2022 (Centro para a Economia e Inovação Social, CEIS). The CEIS is located in the district of Guarda and its creation was the object of an ordinance published in the Diário da República (Ordinance No 302/2022).

## 4 Links to credentials and qualifications

In Portugal, qualifications frameworks and validation are closely linked as they both play a crucial role in ensuring the quality and recognition of education and training qualifications. The National Qualification Framework (NQF) is a reference system that defines the structure of qualification levels, considering the access requirements and the school qualification to which they correspond, integrating and articulating the

qualifications obtained within the scope of the different national subsystems of education and training. It defines eight levels of qualification, having adopted the domains 'knowledge, skills and attitudes and the descriptors of the learning outcomes of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), in order to allow the comparison of qualification and training levels in the different Member States (Ordinance No 782/2009). Thus, while the NQF provides a guiding framework for classifying and comparing qualifications, the RVCC enables individuals to have their non-formal and informal learning recognized and certified within this framework. Together these tools help to ensure the quality and recognition of education and training in the country, including the existing validation arrangements.

The Portfolio helps the guidance technicians of the Qualifica centres (Técnicos de Orientação, Reconhecimento e Validação de Competências, TORVC) to identify the learning of adults, with a view to validating them in its relationship with Competence Units (Unidades de Competência, UC) of a given qualification reference, and its subsequent certification, with the issuance of a certificate and diploma, corresponding to the qualification obtained.

School certification (RVCC Escolar) corresponds to levels 1 (six years of schooling), 2 (nine years of schooling, or nine years of schooling and professional certification), 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), level 6 (Degree), level 7 (Master's) and level 8 (PhD).

If the adult obtains a partial certification within the scope of an RVCC process, the Qualifica centre will direct them to attend one of the adult education and training modalities to complete her/his pathway (minimum 50 hours). Furthermore, RVCC can cover part or all the Competence Units that integrate the qualifications of the CNQ, in a logic of flexibility of access to the qualification. It can also be mobilized to complete incomplete qualification paths, regardless of previous frequency of RVCC processes or education and training modalities. In these cases, certification is carried out with the support of the Evaluation and Certification Commission (see figure 1), which is designated by the centre.

There is no fixed maximum number of modules that can be obtained through validation in Portugal, as the number of modules required for a qualification will depend on the specific qualification or professional profile being pursued. The number of modules required for a given qualification or professional profile will vary depending on factors such as the level of qualification, the field of study, and the specific competences required for an occupation. The RVCC process is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the needs and circumstances of each individual, allowing them to obtain the necessary competences through a personalized and customized path, thus its duration is variable depending on the position of the candidate and the modality in which she/he is registered. According to the guidelines provided in the Qualifica Charter (ANQEP, 2022): school RVCC (basic level) can last between seven and nine months; school RVCC (upper-secondary level) can last between 9 and 12 months; professional RVCC can last between six and nine months.

In addition to the RVCC, individuals can obtain a school and/or professional certification by attending other forms of adult education and training, such as Adult Education and Training Courses (known by EFA courses), Certified Modular Training or Secondary Education Completion Routes (DL n° 357/2007).

In 2022, the education and training modalities aimed at adults were subject to a reform, in order to make them more flexible, with proposals for shorter qualification paths, as a way of encouraging adults who still have incomplete qualifications and also compatible for or those looking for a short and specialized training aimed at upskilling or reskilling resulting from the requirements of a job offer. Although in these last changes that were introduced in the offer of education and training for adults the

concept of micro credential was not identified, in essence, it is possible to establish some correlations with the RVCC approach that exists in the country. Namely, the RVCC process is structured in modules, which are designated to recognize specific competences; these modules are typically small, focused on a specific competence or knowledge area, and can be completed independently. When a participant completes a module, they receive a certificate that certifies their achievement.

For instance, regarding Basic Level Adult Education and Training Courses (Cursos de EFA de Nível Básico), the possibility of access to different typologies has been extended, depending on the level of education already held by the adult, allowing her/him to shorten her/his qualification path (Portaria n.º 86/2022). EFA courses are developed according to the competences' standards and/or training associated with qualifications included in the NCQ, which can be academic (basic or secondary level), allowing the achievement of the first cycle of basic education or level 1, 2 or 3 qualifications of the NQF. The duration varies according to the level of certification and these courses are organized into different types of training paths: basic education, upper-secondary education, double certification or paths related to the development of professional competences (i.e., IVET or CVET). Their curriculum may include the following training components:

- a) Basic Training - organized into key competences areas according to the key competences standards for adult education and training (basic or upper-secondary level). It aims at the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and attitudes for the empowerment of adults which are considered necessary to obtain a school qualification
- b) Technological Training - organized into Short-Term Training Units and or competence units. It aims at the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that respond to what is defined in the professional profile and in the competence standard associated with the corresponding qualification
- c) Work-based Learning - it aims at the application and consolidation of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired, through the performance of activities in a company or in the context of other employers.

Certified Modular Training (Formações Modulares Certificadas) is another education and training modality for adults; they are organised into Short-Term Training Units (Unidades de Formação de Curta-Duração) or Competence Units (Unidades de Competências), in order to promote access to qualifications through flexible and modularized paths, allowing the capitalization of learning, to obtain one or more than one qualification of level 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 of the NQF, which are integrated in the NCQ (Ordinance No. 66/2022). They can, as well, be developed based on the independent short and medium-term paths listed in the NCQ (such as the ones regarding Green Skills & Jobs, Digital Competences Certificate, Valorizar Social or Portuguese Host Language). Its duration may have a variable workload. Each Short-Term Training Unit/Competence Unit lasts for 25 or 50 hours. Whenever an adult successfully completes a modular training path, a certificate is issued, which lists all the successfully completed units of competence.

The qualifications are always registered in the Qualifica Passport and can be collected throughout life each time the adult completes new modules, through a credit allocation system. The National Credit System (Sistema Nacional de Créditos do Ensino e Formação Profissionais) allows the attribution of credit points to dual certification qualifications integrated in the NCQ and is aligned with the ECVET (European System of Credits for Vocational Education and Training). Its articulation with the Qualifica Passport aims at promoting the flexibility of qualification pathways, to capitalize individual training and LLL pathways and to favor the legibility and recognition of the VET system by the various actors, particularly by employers (Ordinance No 47/2017).

The development of the credit system is based on three complementary dimensions:

- a) the attribution of credit points to apprenticeships formally certified within the scope of the NQF, namely to the qualifications that integrate the NQC and respective units;
- b) the accumulation of credit points related to those same learning experiences;
- c) the transfer of credit points obtained within the scope of training courses.

It is expected that credit points will be attributed to the qualifications that make up the CNQ, according to the qualification level defined in the NQF, considering that one year of full-time formal education and training is equivalent to 60 points credit, as provided for in the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

Certificates and diplomas obtained through RVCC have the same legal value as any other way of obtaining a qualification. Diplomas obtained through RVCC or through training are the same and there is no limitation of the duration of validity of a qualification obtained through RVCC. Furthermore, all adults, who conclude upper-secondary level RVCC processes, can access higher education through the Maiores de 23 Program (Decree-Law No 2006) or by taking the national entry exams, according to the general access regime.

VNFIL in HE leads to credit awarding, via an accreditation process, involving the intervention of the scientific body and a jury may be appointed for this purpose. Accreditation must take into account the level of the credits and the scientific field in which were obtained. There are general rules that apply to all HEIs, but they must have formal internal rules on validation that are published in the government official journal. There will be a limit to the number of credits gained by validation processes, and this depends on what is being considered to credited:

- If it is training carried out within the scope of a degree-awarding study cycle, it has no limits.
- If it is training carried out within the scope of a professional higher technical course, it has a limit of 50% of the total credits of the study cycle.
- If it is training carried out within the scope of non-academic degree courses taught in higher education institutions, there is a limit of 50% of the total credits of the study cycle.
- If it is training carried out within the scope of a technological specialization course, it has a limit of one third of the total credits of the study cycle.
- Any other training has a limit of one third of the total credits of the study cycle.
- Professional experience, up to a limit of 50% of the total credits of a professional higher technical course when the student has more than 5 years of experience, or up to one third in any other case.

The award of credits in HE is only possible if the student has already been admitted to a course, with the goal of pursuing studies to obtain an academic degree. The legislation also clarifies situations where it is not possible to award credits (for example through partial crediting of curricular units or through training from unauthorized courses).

## 5 Standards

The standards used in RVCC are closely related to those used in formal education and training. There are two specific key competences standards for adult education and training that support all adult education and training pathways:

- a) Key Competences Standard for Adult Education and Training – Basic Level (Referencial de Competências chave para a Educação e Formação de Adultos – Nível Básico), which was reviewed in 2021 (ANQEP, 2021);
- b) Key Competences Standard for Adult Education and Training – Secondary Level (Referencial de Competências chave para a Educação e Formação de Adultos – Nível Secundário), whose last revision dates from 2006 (ANQEP, 2006).

These two standards are integrated in the NCQ and are used to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and competences of adults.

The design of the new Key Competences Standard for Adult Education and Training (Basic Level) is based on the organization of 4 + 1 areas of key skills, whereas the area of Personal, Social and Learning Skills can and should be demonstrated or developed crosswise when working with the other four areas, whether in RVCC processes or in education and training pathways, and is not considered mandatory for obtaining school certification at any of the basic levels. The key competence areas are as follows:

- a) Culture, Language and Communication
- b) Digital Competence
- c) Mathematics, Science and Technology
- d) Citizenship and Employability
- e) Personal, Social and Learning Skills

The Key Competences Standard for Adult Education and Training – Secondary Level, is organized in three areas of key competences:

- a) Citizenship and Professionalism
- b) Society, Technology and Science
- c) Culture, Language, Communication

The professional RVCC is based on professional qualification standards that integrate the qualifications of the NCQ, which is the tool that organizes and classifies all the qualifications, skills and competences recognized in the country, including those obtained in formal, non-formal and informal learning processes.

As mentioned before, the standards of training inserted in the NCQ are organized in short-term, capitalizable training units, allowing autonomous certification of competences and greater flexibility in the design of qualification pathways. Over the years this database has been regularly updated, with the aim of including new qualifications that are considered a priority for the economic and social development of the country, such as digital and green skills.

As of 2021, according to the ANQEP, in order to be more in line with European recommendations in the area of education and training, the review and update of the NCQ started to adopt a new methodology in the design of qualifications, attributing more emphasis to competences and learning outcomes, and less to training content (ANQEP, 2021). The changes that were introduced also aimed to make it a more understandable and accessible instrument for all audiences, including citizens, education and training providers, companies and organizations, social partners, and entities responsible for managing and regulating the National Qualifications System<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> The National Catalogue of Qualifications (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações, CNQ) can be accessed online by everyone (website: <https://catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/> )

## 6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Institutions, state bodies and other stakeholders involved in the design, implementation and execution of The Qualifica Programme are the same since it started in 2017.

The Qualifica Programme is coordinated by ANQEP, which is a public institute integrated in the indirect administration of the State, with administrative, financial and pedagogical autonomy. This agency has joint supervision with the Ministries of Education, and of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, in coordination with the Ministry of Economy and Sea. Its main mission is to contribute to improving the qualification levels of young people and adults in Portugal, promoting both a growing demand for academic and professional qualifications (double certification), at non-university level, and the provision of education and training pathways that should be relevant to the labor market.

The Qualifica centres are promoted by a diverse set of entities that operate in the fields of education, training and local development. These centres may integrate public basic and secondary education schools, vocational training centers connected to the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (with direct or participatory management), professional schools, and other entities such as sectoral associations, non-governmental organizations (among them local development associations, charitable institutions) and private enterprises. In this regard, there are Centros Qualifica in public entities (that depend on State bodies), in profit-making (private sector) entities and in non-profit entities. These are the only entities that are authorized to carry out validation processes; their creation, operation and organization are legally framed and depend on funds allocated by the entity that regulates them - the ANQEP.

To become Qualifica centres, candidate entities must meet the requirements published in the legislation (Ordinance No 62/2022) and in tenders that are published every three years. These tenders are public and involve no costs, however the authorizations (or authorization for renewals) require the fulfillment of targets and the production of monitoring reports, among other obligations which, if not fulfilled, may lead to their extinction. However, in the case of new centers or in the case of those located in territories with special demographic characteristics or aimed at specific target audiences, the ANQEP may define its own regime regarding the minimum annual results to be to achieve. Authorization is granted for a period of three years, and may be renewed for equal periods, based on the performance indicators presented, namely, number of registrations, referrals and certifications.

At the time of writing this report, 316 Qualifica centres were operational: 167 (53%) were based in public or private schools; 67 (21%) in training centres with protocols with the IEFP, IP; 63 (20%) are promoted by different types of entities (namely in third sector, social solidarity and local development associations, and also training enterprises, forming a wide and heterogeneous range of institutions); and only 10 (3%) are promoted by municipalities (Source: ANQEP, IP)<sup>36</sup>. Statistical data also allow characterizing the network of Centros Qualifica in terms of their distribution in the national territory: 120 (38%) North; 88 (28%) Centre; 55 (17%) Lisboa; 38 (12%) Alentejo; 12 (4%) Algarve; 3 (1%) Região Autónoma da Madeira.

In addition to these centres, those that have been most recently set up under the 'Qualifica AP' Programme should be highlighted (Dispatch No 12126/2021). Given their territorial vocation, the Qualifica AP centers are headquartered in the

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<sup>36</sup> These data are published on the ANQEP website and were also collected in communications that were presented by ANQEP members at the annual meeting of the Qualifica Program, which took place on November 30, 2022.

Commissions for Coordination and Regional Development (CCDR)<sup>37</sup>, however, their organization and operation follow the same legal provisions as the national network of Centros Qualifica.

VNFIL also involves other actors, albeit indirectly. For example, the already described Sectorial Councils for Qualification (SCQ) are important in identifying needs for qualifications and competences and in preparing standards for qualifications to be included in the NCQ. The ANQEP promotes periodic meetings with the represented sectors and invites new ones to join, when justified. The purpose of these meetings is to map, discuss and approve, based on sectoral studies, the competences, and qualifications to be added (or removed) from the NCQ.

## **7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance**

### **7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising**

The ANQEP provides updated information on the RVCC processes and the education and training modalities aimed at young people and adults through its internet page and on the specific website that was created for the Qualifica Program (including relevant legislation and links). Recently, it also started to make available an English version of its page.

In October 2022, it launched a campaign to promote the RVCC, 'Take hold of yourself and improve your future' - supported by PO CH (Programa Operacional Capital Humano), through the ESF - with the aim of encouraging and motivating adults to complete their training or school journeys. The first impacts that this campaign had in terms of registrations in RVCC processes are unknown, however, according to the coordinator of the Qualifica centre that was interviewed for the present study, the campaign had some effect especially in the month in which it was most reported. This campaign had as its motto the importance of LLL. However, it is important to note that this appeal comes precisely at a time when the middle and lower classes are experiencing great financial difficulties (e.g., rising rent prices, energy costs, basic goods and wages) that do not guarantee sustainability for families and young people, thus, involvement may fall short of the targets set by the government.

Direct awareness of the target public is carried out locally, either by the Qualifica centres or by PES, through the dissemination of information about the RVCC. More recently, the ANQEP has given guidelines to the centres to undertake more in the dissemination of the financial incentive (Acelerador Qualifica), in order to attract and retain more adults in RVCC processes, as evidenced in the Quality Charter (Carta de Qualidade dos Centros Qualifica, 2022), as well as the new legal framework regarding the Qualifica network (Ordinance No 62/2022).

This disclosure is made through actions, channels, and various contents, focusing on the program's target audiences and also on its networks and partnerships with other local actors. Furthermore, the centres may give information about VNFIL in information sessions that take place in working contexts, such as in companies, as well as in other social contexts, such as in non-profit associations etc.

In the HE sector, each institution is responsible for sharing information and providing support regarding the VNFIL opportunities. Due to its autonomy regime, there are many different practices, from administrative information available on the website of

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<sup>37</sup> The Coordination and Regional Development Commissions are decentralized services of the central administration, endowed with administrative and financial autonomy, responsible for carrying out beneficial measures for the development of the respective regions (Decree-Law 104/2003).

the HE institutions, to the support and guidance provided regarding compliance with the validation procedures, to supplying manuals and answering frequently asked questions online.

## 7.2 Information, advice and guidance

In the case of the Qualifica centres, guidance is closely linked to validation since it takes place before and during the validation process. The adults who are attracted to these centers receive information, advice and guidance on paths that allow them to raise and develop their qualifications in accordance with their preferences and potential and may be referred to adult education and training offers or to RVCC. However, given the mission of the Qualifica Programme, guidance ensures greater effectiveness in forwarding the adults to RVCC, making them aware of the opportunities and benefits of validation and offering them adjusted learning solutions.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the guidance process, candidates are expected to be able to develop their self-concept, interact effectively, manage information, manage change, decide and access qualifying paths and prepare for (re)insertion in the job market.

The Lifelong Guidance Methodological Guide, as well as the Quality Charter, contain specific guidelines on the strategies and instruments that the guidance practitioners should use with their target audience. Among others, they must present updated information on certain topics such as qualification modalities, job market trends, internships, among other options and measures that appeal to the continuation of studies and access to the labour market. This information must be inclusive, in order to reach different audiences (adults of different age groups, with different academic and qualification levels, in vulnerable situations, at risk of exclusion, with disabilities and others) and the strategies and tools used must be attractive enough to encourage an active attitude of seeking more information.

Varied activities are included, with preferential use of new information and communication technologies, namely multimedia, information systems supported by computer, mobiles, and internet, as well as written materials. All information provided must be factual, based on reliable sources, avoiding stereotypes, family and social prejudices that induce adults to have a distorted or limited image about the world of work and the different ways of learning (ANQEP, 2017: p.36).

Guidance can be provided face-to-face, by phone, online or through a combination of forms. As one of Qualifica's major challenges has been attracting adults who are in more critical circumstances, namely with very low levels of education and literacy, guidance can also be carried out on an itinerant basis, in partnership with other local entities.

Regarding PES, as already mentioned, they also provide IAG to those who are registered in any of the local centers of the IEFP network. The IAG may be related to the RVCC and Centros Qualifica, to the education and training offers that are available in the certified centers with whom they have protocols, or about existing job offers, according to each profile and preferred geographic area. This service is available face-to-face or via the internet through the IEFP Guidance Space (Espaço Orientação), for authenticated users. This online platform features a set of resources aimed at supporting individuals in career planning and management (e.g. if an individual is looking for a job, thinking about creating a business project, re-evaluating a professional project, going to move from a cycle of studies or training for another or, even, if intends to move to retirement) and includes a set of exploratory tools and

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<sup>38</sup> Cedefop (2019). *Coordinating guidance and validation*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 75.  
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/801290>

activities, such as questionnaires, reflection sheets, exercises, multimedia resources and dissemination of events (Source: IEFP).

In HE, each institution has information about the VNFIL which can be made available on its official website, as already mentioned, and is given to the learners who approach its academic services. The VNFIL should be based on official documents, approved by the Universities' and Polytechnics' scientific boards, and provided by learners when requested. Furthermore, few of these institutions have a student support office, which can share information and give guidance and counselling to learners who intend to engage.

All IAG services provided, whether by Qualifica centres, PES or HEIs (where available), are completely free of charge.

## 8 Validation practitioners

The team at each Qualifica Centre is made up of the following elements: a coordinator; guidance, recognition and validation of competence technicians (TORVC); and trainers or teachers from the different areas of key competences and from the different areas of education and training, respectively, for the development of academic and professional RVCC processes. This team can also be supported by an administrative technician who develops her/his tasks under the guidance of the coordinator and the TORVC Ordinance No 23/2023). As these centers develop other activities in addition to those related to validation processes, the legislation in force recommends that workers who are assigned to Qualifica centres must dedicate no less than 80% of their normal working hours at the entity (Ordinance No 62/2022).

In addition to the inclusion of the figure of the administrative technician, the composition of Qualifica teams has not changed since 2018. Some changes were introduced in the allocation of resources, namely, in the case of Qualifica centres promoted by basic and secondary education establishments, the role of coordinator can no longer be combined with that of director of the establishment. In addition, teachers who benefit from hourly credit must allocate at least 28 hours a week of their normal working period to the activity of the Qualifica Centres, of which 16 hours are for the teaching component to which they are obliged.

### 8.1 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The Qualifica centres are structures specialized in the qualification of adults that began to be created in 2016. These centres replaced the former Centros Novas Oportunidades (2007) which had identical characteristics. In many cases, the technicians who make up the current teams are the same ones who went through the Centros Novas Oportunidades and, therefore, already have several years of experience in the areas of recognition, validation, and certification of competences. According to data that was collected in 2018, within the scope of a case study that was carried out for Cedefop (Guimarães & Menitra, 2018), among the community of technicians from the Qualifica centres, training in Psychology, Sociology and Education Sciences stood out.

Continuous training is not mandatory. Practitioners working in these centres attend national conferences organised once a year by the ANQEP, which is a relevant event for those that started more recently to work in the VNFIL, as well as for those who are more experienced. More specifically, they facilitate the sharing of knowledge and successful practices between the centres that make up the national network. In addition to this annual event, the regional monitoring teams carry out informative sessions that are adapted according to the specificities and needs of each centre.

In 2022, 144 Qualifica centres were covered by follow-up actions and 1 307 elements of the centres have participated in informal sessions focused on the new legal frameworks introduced in the NSQ, RRP investments and in the Quality Charter, as well as discussion of real cases and the sharing of experiences between centres of different typologies, regions, and performances (ANQEP, 2022). However, more precise data on the duration and regularity with which these informal training sessions, of a specific nature, take place, were not identified.

One challenge faced by the centres' coordinators, TORVCs and trainers/teachers is the lack of initial and/or specific training when they are hired, due to the fact that there are no specific paths in HE regarding adult education and working with adult learners in places with certain characteristics like the Qualifica centres. However, in 2021, the ANQEP has signed protocols with two higher education institutions (Universidade Aberta and Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa), for the advanced and continuous training of adult education and training professionals in Portugal, including the ones that work in the Qualifica centres (ANQEP, 2022: p. 21). According to the information collected on the official websites of the aforementioned HEIs, the following offers of advanced and continuous training of adult education and training professionals were identified, regarding tenders opened in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023:

- a) Universidade Aberta. Course in Distance and Digital Education (4 Credits/ECTS, 64 hours of training<sup>39</sup>;
- b) Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto de Educação. Postgraduate Course in Digital Literacy in Adult Education and Training (30 Credits/ECTS, 1 semester)<sup>40</sup>.

These could be the first steps taken to promote the continuous training of TORVCs, valuing their knowledge, skills and experience and enabling their career development. Those new training offers consist of short and medium-term training paths that allow the accumulation of credits/ECTS, in the light of the micro credentials approach. At this time, it will be important to design a tracking system for the professionals who attend these pathways in order to get data such as: who are they, what impacts it has in their practices, what aspects can be improved (or do not work) and what other pathways might be appropriately designed for them.

## 8.2 Qualifications and experience

According to current legislation (Ordinance n<sup>o</sup> 62/2022, Art. 8), Qualifica centers team members must meet the following admission requirements:

- a) the coordinator must hold a higher education qualification and have experience in coordinating educational or training processes;
- b) the TORVC must hold a higher education qualification and have experience in at least one of the following areas: a) school or professional guidance; b) in different forms of education and training; c) methodologies for adult education and training, including the assessment of skills and the construction of portfolios;
- c) the Trainer or Teacher must hold the following qualifications: a) for the academic/school RVCC or training, qualification for teaching depending on the area of key competences in which they intervene and, preferably, professional experience in the field of adult education and training or in the field of recognition, validation and certification of competences; b) for the professional

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<sup>39</sup> Universidade Aberta. Microcredenciais: Educação a Distância e Digital.  
[https://portal.uab.pt/alv/en/cursos\\_alv/educ-dist-digital/](https://portal.uab.pt/alv/en/cursos_alv/educ-dist-digital/)

<sup>40</sup> Instituto da Educação, Universidade de Lisboa. Literacia Digital na Educação e Formação de Adultos.  
<http://www.ie.ulisboa.pt/ensino/cursos-pos-graduados-especializacao/literacia-digital-educacao-formacao-adultos>

RVCC or training, qualification to exercise trainer functions and experience in the targeted professional area, and preferably professional experience within the scope of recognition, validation and certification of skills;

- d) the administrative technician must hold a minimum academic qualification of secondary level.

No studies or evidence on the academic and professional profile of the community of practitioners working in Qualifica centres were identified.

## 9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

### 9.1 Funding and costs

The RVCC is a non-paid pathway for all adult learners in any of the existing Qualifica centres, regardless of being promoted by public or private institutions, as these are funded by the ESF.

The Qualifica network has recently been given more financial support through the RRP, within the scope of the priorities settled for Qualifications and Competences<sup>41</sup>. The Acelerador Qualifica is available for adults who complete their RVCC processes. In 2022, the value attributed to each adult corresponded to EUR 554. Regarding the training of Public Administration workers (Qualifica AP), funding is 100% guaranteed by the RRP, with an investment of EUR 2 million being foreseen until 2026<sup>42</sup>.

As mentioned in the 2018 Update to the European Inventory on VNFIL, since higher education 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.

### 9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

#### 9.2.1 Validation trends

Data disclosed by ANQEP, IP shows that between 2017 and 2022, the Qualifica centres have received 869 958 enrollments. So far, more than two-thirds of referrals made are for training, with a clear predominance of the Modular Training modality, which hinders the coherence of the paths taken and the completion of qualifications. In RVCC processes, the total certification rate has been quite significant (above 50%) but with limited impact due to reduced referral for these processes (ANQEP, 2022: p.19).

From the point of view of the results achieved since the beginning of the Qualifica Programme, the number of enrollments, referrals to qualification offers and school and professional certifications has been growing. It should be noted, however, that in 2019 there was a significant decrease in the number of enrollments and referrals - a phenomenon that was largely due to constraints resulting from successive periods of confinement due to the COVID 19 pandemic (ANQEP, 2021: p.19). Overall, it should

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<sup>41</sup> As part of the Portuguese RRP, two complementary instruments were introduced within the scope of the Qualifica Programme: the Local projects promoting qualifications at levels B1/B2/B3 by 2025, in the scope of the National Plan for Adult Literacy (EUR 40m) and the Qualifica Accelerator by 2025 (EUR 55m). <https://recuperarportugal.gov.pt/2021/06/13/investment-re-c06-i03/?lang=en>

<sup>42</sup> Source: Information portal on various issues of public resource management of the Portuguese State. <https://transparencia.gov.pt/pt/fundos-europeus/prr/beneficiarios-projetos/projeto/02-C19-i07.01-2022.P167/>

be noted that the number of registrations received in 2022 was still lower than that registered in 2019 but has been growing since 2020 as shown in the table below.

**Table 9.1 Enrollments, referrals and certifications RVCC – Centros Qualifica (2017-2022)**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<i>Enrolments</i>	125 893	151 373	162 862	127 504	145 742	156 584
<i>Referrals</i>	97 085	132 170	139 462	114 754	138 201	150 566
<i>Certifications</i>	10 157	157 975	191 170	203 318	266 099	284 316 <sup>43</sup>

Source: ANQEP, 2023

In HE, it was not possible to find data regarding trends in accreditation processes.

## 9.2.2 Validation users

According to data disclosed in 2022 in the Annual Activity Report of ANQEP (ANQEP, 2022: p.19), of the total subscribers (from 2017 to 2021), 57% have less than upper-secondary education and 58% are women. The most represented age group is between 30 and 44 years old (38%) and employed adults were those who are most represented (52%).

## 9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

At the time of writing this report, no indicators were identified regarding the participation of specific segments of the adult population, such as migrants, young people (NEETs) eligible under the reinforced Youth Guarantee, migrants, school and training dropouts and people with disabilities.

# 10 Validation methods

## 10.1 Methodologies and methods

The guidance and validation technicians (TORVC) build and mobilize various instruments, methodologies, and activities. The RVCC model values the paths, experiences, and individual stories of the subjects, based on the assumption that they have contributed to the development of not only professional competences, but also transversal ones such as adaptability, communication, initiative and resilience.

As already mentioned, the work of TORVC is based on a set of methodological proposals and guidelines that are presented in the guidance framework that was produced by ANQEP (GM-OLV, 2017). The guidance process is intended to help create or develop specific ways of establishing correspondence between competences and life experiences, study, and work activities. This includes, among others, the portfolio and balance of competences that help people in the decision-making process and to move towards the future in a more enlightened and confident

<sup>43</sup> The “certification” data appears to us to be cumulative rather than annual, but we were unable to confirm it. The statistical data presented here correspond to those that were officially released by ANQEP on its website, where there is no additional information that could support a more thorough analysis (ANQEP, 2023).

way. In this context, decision-making may include: the identification and analysis of the situation; anticipation of alternatives; weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives; evaluation and choice of alternative; selection and implementation; feedback and control.

Building a good reflective learning portfolio is the focus on guidance, that is, preparing a good collection of evidence that (self) portrays the candidate and her/his life path, as this is what will support her/his RVCC and further decisions about learning pathways. For this purpose, the TORVCs resort to different strategies and approaches that are selected according to the characteristics of the candidates and that should stimulate self-assessment and self-knowledge. There is no single or “one fits all” method. In principle, TORVCs, with its experience and sensitivity, will know how to choose the most appropriate approaches and techniques, mobilizing them in an articulated way, such as individual interview, autobiographical approach, inquiries, case studies, roleplaying, brainstorming, etc. (ANQEP, 2017; p.21).

Regarding the balance of competences, it is a methodology that has been widely used in Portugal, being linked to the first validation practices that began to be carried out at the beginning of the current century. The practice has the particularity of being centered on the subject, aiming to facilitate self-knowledge and reinforce the social implication for the action, through the development of autonomy. Within the scope of the RVCC processes, the balance of competences is based on carrying out self-knowledge activities, namely in the construction of an autobiographical narrative of a reflective nature, constituting itself as a diagnostic device and, simultaneously, of evaluation, whose purpose is to signal marks and evidence of competences that can be validated and certified in the light of a key competences standards and/or qualifications framework (ANQEP, 2017; p.50).

According to the legal framework, full certification in RVCC requires taking a test before a certification jury; the school certification test consists of the presentation by the adult, before the jury, of an exhibition that demonstrates their skills in the different areas of the school competence standards of the respective qualification; the professional certification test consists of a practical demonstration by the adult, before the jury, who demonstrates his/her skills against the professional standards of the respective qualification; the jury's deliberation is based on the assessment of the candidate's performance in the certification test, combined with the assessment of the portfolio and the results of assessment instruments applied during the stages of RVCC (Ordinance No 61/2022, Artº11).

## 10.2 Use of ICT in validation

There are two ICT-based tools that support guidance and validation: SIGO and Qualifica Passport.

SIGO is the Integrated Information and Management System for the Educational and Training Offer (Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa, SIGO). This Platform is used for managing the educational and training offer network and the educational and training paths of young people and adults. It covers the entire network of training entities of the NQS, including Qualifica centres.

According to the legal diploma of Qualifica centres, all adults who seek education and training courses or who want to undergo a validation process must register with SIGO. Personal data (name, date of birth, gender, identification document number, social security number, tax identification number, place of residence, postal code of residence and optional fields for email, telephone, mobile phone) are collected directly from electronic forms, by the General Directorate of Statistics for Education and Science (DGEEC) - which is the state body responsible for analyzing and producing statistics and studies to inform education and training policies in Portugal) -, by training entities and by Qualifica centres. This data is available to these entities and

can be accessed by the candidate himself/herself through his/her Qualifica Passport (which integrates the SIGO system).

The collection and processing of personal data on the SIGO platform has as its main advantages the fact that it allows the statistical and research treatment, which is the function of the DGEEC, and it helps to manage the enrollments and certifications of students and trainees in the training entities of the NQS, as well as RVCC process management.

The Qualifica Passport is a technological tool for recording qualifications and competences acquired or developed throughout an adult's life and guidance for learning paths. Based on the capitalization of the learning outcomes already achieved and the competences acquired by the adult, the Qualifica Passport simulates several possible qualification pathways for obtaining new qualifications and/or academic and professional progression. Since the increase in the qualification level of adults is a priority of the NQS, the Qualifica Passport prioritizes proposals for completing and/or increasing the qualification of adults, as well as for the double certification. Qualification pathways are suggested based on the highest possible capitalization of already certified training units and credits already obtained by the adult in previous training courses.

With the Qualifica Passport, adults have the possibility to access useful and relevant information in order to be able to organize the pathways already taken (however isolated and dispersed it may be) and, based on this, identify the options available to achieve educational and professional progression. The Qualifica Passport can be changed, updated and printed at any time, becoming an instrument that accompanies the individual in all phases of its active life. This instrument has proven to be very advantageous for TORVCs and users of the Qualifica centres, as it allows compiling useful information for the information, guidance, and referral stages.

Recently, an amendment to the Qualifica Passport was introduced, with a view to facilitating the transfer of processes between Qualifica Centres. This change seems to be bringing benefits, mainly because it is no longer necessary for candidates to start their process all over again in case they have to interrupt them or move to another city. However, in the opinion of the coordinator that was interviewed, it is necessary that the centres seek to safeguard the reasons that motivated the adults to interrupt or why they ask for the transfer of their processes. This involves, namely, a phone call or sending an email to colleagues at the center where the process started. It is necessary to cultivate standards of ethics and respect between centers, though, the pressure that has been exerted by the ANQEP, regarding the numbers (registrations, referrals and completed RVCC processes) may lead some centers to enter in a kind of competition and to see in these requests an opportunity to increase their statistics.

## **11 Quality assurance**

### **11.1 Quality assurance processes**

Public policies regarding education (not higher education) and professional training for young people and adults are implemented by ANQEP, including the Qualifica Programme and the management, monitoring, and regulation of the network of Qualifica centres. The validation processes can only be carried out by these centers, regardless of the sector, being legally framed in their own diplomas and following specific guidelines and standards that guarantee the quality of the RVCC. This mode of regulation has the main objective of ensuring that validation is carried out in accordance with national and European standards and guidelines and guaranteeing the effectiveness of the RVCC in terms of goals to be achieved, taking into account

that the increase in qualifications of the population is one of the great national political priorities.

Regarding the regular activity of the Qualifica centres, the ANQEP monitors and evaluates the centres, namely through the work carried out by the regional monitoring teams (which also include representatives of the regional services of the IEFP and the Directorate- General of School Establishments) and through the monitoring reports they produce in accordance with superior guidelines. These reports are fundamentally aimed at collecting quantitative data, such as the number of enrollments, referrals and certifications and general characteristics of the target population. To ensure the quality of the services provided by the centres, the ANQEP produced and disseminated two guiding documents – the methodological guidance framework, which is addressed to TORVCs and the Quality Charter of Qualifica Centres, which aims to encourage their self-regulation. The Quality Charter establishes the guiding principles for the intervention of the Qualifica centers and defines the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness criteria to be taken into account in the development of the centres' activities.

The RVCC processes are based on standards, namely, the key competence standards and the National Qualifications Catalogue, in order to guarantee the articulation of validation with the education and training offer and the trends and needs of the labour market.

Furthermore, the SIGO platform and the Qualifica Passport are the two ICT tools that ensure the central control and management of data relating to the validation processes. Any individual who registers at a job center or at a Qualifica center is obliged to register on the SIGO platform (in the case of RVCC processes, the SIGO data are automatically transferred to the Qualifica Passport, in order to carry out their referral). In this way, the same person will never be able to have more than one process open, since from the moment she/he has registered on the platform, data will be accessible to all authorized actors involved in RVCC processes, that is, the data can be transferred between centers and whenever adults complete training courses and the entities issue certificates that are registered in the Qualifica Passport.

Another quality measure that has been strengthened are the Assessment and Certification Commissions (Comissões de Avaliação e Certificação, Art.º 6, Ordinance No. 62/2022). It is intended that these commissions assume greater centrality and agility in the completion of incomplete qualification paths by adults who, throughout their training path, did not have the opportunity to complete them. The Evaluation and Certification Commission is made up of the Qualifica centre coordinator, who presides, and members of the same Centre's team, designated by the coordinator, with a minimum of three elements, at least one of which must be a trainer or teacher.

In the certification stage, the presence of a jury is mandatory, which is made up of various elements internal and external to the Qualifica centres. The certification jury is made up of: a trainer or teacher from each of the areas of competence in the school competences benchmark, who has not followed the respective process and the TORVC that has followed the candidate's process, when it comes to school certification; a trainer with technical qualification in the area of competences of the professional competences benchmark, the trainer who accompanied the candidate's process, the TORVC who accompanied the candidate's process, a representative of business associations with competence in the professional exit or of employers and a representative of the union associations of the sectors of economic activity in that area, when it comes to professional certification. When it comes to double certification, a single session of the certification jury can be held, which includes trainers from the areas of competence of the academic and professional competences benchmark and which must have a minimum of five elements to be defined by the coordinator of the Qualifica center (Artº12, Ordinance No 61/2022).

## 11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

As mentioned in the previous point, the monitoring and evaluation of the centers is carried out by the monitoring teams, through visits, and also stems from the monitoring reports that are regularly produced by the centers and obligatorily delivered to ANQEP. The evaluation focuses on three dimensions based on the specific criteria and indicators contained in the Qualifica Centers Quality Charter (Carta de Qualidade dos Centros Qualifica, 2022):

- Dimension A. Qualifica center operating conditions (input factors);
- Dimension B. Development of Qualifica center activity (process factors);
- Dimension C. Results of the center Qualifies/effectiveness of the intervention (output factors).

The evidence that is publicly disclosed by ANQEP in its website, is of a quantitative and generic nature and regards to the effectiveness of the system, that is, the number and evolution (monthly and annual) of registrations, referrals and certifications, data that allow characterizing the network of centers in terms of typology and personal data regarding the target population (age, gender, education and employment status).

## 12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

Since the last update of this inventory, there has been a clear effort to reinforce visibility and trust in validation of non-formal and informal learning, in order to cope with the reduction of participants that resulted from the COVID19 pandemic and, more recently, the rising of inflation that affects particularly the target population of the Qualifica Programme. The focus has been on motivating adults who have low and very low qualifications to participate in RVCC. Of particular note is the national campaign that took place in October 2021, the financial incentive (Acelerador Qualifica) and the recent launch of tenders for Local Projects (Projetos Locais Promotores de Qualificações de Nível Básico) (Dispatch No 14485/2022).

The signing of agreements with representatives of the economic sectors and the education and training sectors, as well as the financial incentives giving to them, can be considered as indicators that show the strategy being implemented by the government in order to raise the number of participants.

In terms of HE, some initiatives resulting from these agreements are already underway, which began to be implemented between the end of 2021 and 2022. There is some voluntary participation in the private sector, especially at the level of large companies. But these are still very specific situations that are possibly due to the fact that they have internal VET policies and human resources departments that value and invest in education and training from a LLL perspective. In a certain way, this can also be considered as indicators of the significance that validation has been gaining among several stakeholders.

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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

This report is part of the 2023 update of the [European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). The inventory provides a comprehensive overview of validation practices across Europe, covering 32 systems in EU-27 Member States and EFTA countries.

The European inventory is the product of a long-standing cooperation of the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF on the field. The inventory was endorsed by the [Council recommendation of 2012](#) on validation and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.

**CEDEFOP**European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

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Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE  
Postal address: Cedefop service post, 57001 Thermi, GREECE  
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: [info@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:info@cedefop.europa.eu)

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