Validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in Portugal

The recognition, validation and certification of competences process (RVCC)

Portugal, along with Finland, France, the Netherlands, and Norway, was among the countries classified by the European Commission with the highest assessment scale for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, primarily due to its RVCC[1] system. RVCC is an integral part of the National Qualifications System, grounded in specific methodological principles (such as competence auditing and an autobiographical approach). These principles facilitate the identification, recognition, validation, and certification of competences acquired by adults throughout their lives in formal, informal, and non-formal contexts. The process incorporates a range of assessment tools and activities designed to construct a portfolio containing evidence and proof of adults' competences within a particular framework.

The RVCC process aligns with frameworks found in the National Qualifications Catalogue (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações - CNQ), with academic RVCC structured by key competence areas and professional RVCC structured by competences. This process is overseen by specific accredited entities known as Qualifica Centres and primarily aims to attain mandatory schooling levels or professional certificates. Therefore, it may not be directly relevant to non-formal training within GreenerAge, where Europass credentials currently appear to be a more suitable tool.

Introduction to the Portuguese Education System

In April 2008, the European Parliament and Council approved a Recommendation (2008/C111/01/CE, 6 May 2008) to establish the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. The objective was to create a shared reference framework serving as a bridge between member states' qualification systems. This initiative aimed to promote lifelong learning and enhance the comparability and transferability of qualifications for EU citizens.

In Portugal, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was established in 2007 and formally regulated in June 2009, coming into effect in October 2010 (Ordinance No. 782/2009, July 23). The NQF was designed with reference to the principles of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), particularly concerning the description of national qualifications in terms of learning outcomes.

The creation of the NQF, integral to the Education and Training System reform and the formation of the National Qualifications System, was guided by several key principles, including the need to integrate and harmonize qualifications from various education and training subsystems, emphasize the value of skills acquired in non-formal and informal settings, enhance the clarity, transparency, and comparability of qualifications, promote dual certification, especially at the secondary level, and ensure alignment with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for the purposes of lifelong learning.

The design and structuring of the NQF were made to address these aspects, encompassing qualifications from all levels of the education and training system, adopting an 8-level qualification structure that covers all qualifications within the Portuguese educational and training system. It employed a learning outcomes-based methodology for characterizing each qualification level, emphasizing the domains of "knowledge, skills, and attitudes," and adopting learning outcomes descriptors from the EQF.

The Portuguese levels of qualification

Upon approval of the NQF, the National Agency for Qualification, IP (current National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education, ANQEP, IP), was designated as the national coordination point for the implementation of the EQF. The exercise of these functions is done

[1] https://certifica.dgert.gov.pt/arquivo-de-noticias/validar-aprendizagens-informais-e-nao-formais-classificacao-de-portugal.aspx

in coordination with the Directorate-General for Higher Education, specifically concerning levels 5 to 8 within the NQF structure.
In this context, ANQEP, IP initiated the process of aligning the qualification levels of the QNQ with those of the QEQ in 2010. This referencing process adhered to the criteria and procedures established by the Advisory Group for the Implementation of the European Commission's European Qualification Framework (EQF Advisory Group), which comprises representatives from member states and European social partners.

The Portuguese NQF is structured as follows:

Qualification Levels	Qualifications
Level 1	2nd cycle of Basic Education
Level 2	3rd cycle of Basic Education obtained in general education or through dual certification pathways
Level 3	Secondary education aimed at pursuing higher level studies
Level 4	Secondary Education obtained through dual certification pathways or Secondary Education aimed at pursuing higher level studies plus professional internship - minimum of 6 months
Level 5	Non-tertiary post-secondary level qualification with credits for continuing higher education studies
Level 6	Graduation
Level 7	Master's degree
Level 8	Doctorate

Source: Ordinance No. 782/2009, of July 23

Structuring the NQF according to the EQF simplifies the comparison of qualifications acquired in various countries, thereby promoting not only labor market mobility but also mobility in education and training.
In January 2011 it was established that all certificates and diplomas that confer a qualification listed in the QNQ and which were issued from October 1, 2010 must include a reference to the respective level of qualification (Order No. 978/2011, 12 January), which allows for greater readability and transparency in the reading of the qualifications obtained in the system.