



# VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN PORTUGAL



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### Introduction to the Portuguese Education System

In April 2008, a Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council ( [2008/C111/01/CE](#) , of 6 May 2008) was approved , concerning the institution of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

The objective was to create a common frame of reference that would act as a translation device between the qualification systems of the member states. The aim was thus to contribute to the promotion of lifelong learning and to increasing the comparability and portability of qualifications of EU citizens.

In Portugal, the [National Qualifications Framework](#) (NQF) was created in 2007 and regulated in June 2009. It entered into force in October 2010 ( [Ordinance No. 782/2009, of July 23](#) ), having as reference the principles of [the European Qualifications Framework](#) (EQF) as regards the description of national qualifications in terms of learning outcomes.

The creation of the NQF, carried out within the scope of the reform process of the [Education and Training System](#) and the creation of [the National Qualifications System](#) , was based on a set of premises:

- The need to integrate and articulate the qualifications obtained under the different education and training subsystems (education, vocational training, higher education) in a single framework;
- the importance of valuing and considering skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts;
- improving readability, transparency and comparability of qualifications;
- the enhancement of double certification associated, above all, with secondary level qualifications;
- the guarantee of articulation with [the European Qualifications Framework](#) (EQF), namely in the use of the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different systems from the perspective of lifelong learning.

The choices made regarding the design and structuring of the NQF aimed to respond, above all, to the following aspects:

- The NQF covers the qualifications produced at the various levels of the education and training system, regardless of the access routes (primary, secondary, higher education, vocational education and training and the processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences whether obtained non-formally whether informal);
- the structuring into 8 qualification levels that cover all the qualifications currently produced in the Portuguese educational and training system;
- the adoption of the methodology based on learning outcomes to characterize each level of qualification - the use of learning outcomes in the definition of qualification levels reflects an

important change in the way of conceptualizing and describing qualifications, enabling their comparability according to competences and not as a function of learning processes;

- the adoption of the domains “knowledge, skills and attitudes” to define the learning outcomes for each level of qualification;
- the adoption of the learning outcomes descriptors contained in 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 in coordination with the [Directorate-General for Higher Education](#) with regard to levels 5 to 8 of the NQF structure.

In this context, ANQEP, IP started, in 2010, the process of referencing the qualification levels of the QNQ to the levels of the EQF. This referral process followed the criteria and procedures defined by the Advisory Group for the Implementation of [the European Commission's European Qualification Framework](#) (EQF Advisory Group), which includes representatives of 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

The structuring of the NQF according to the EQF makes it easier to compare qualifications obtained in different countries, facilitating not only mobility in the labour market but also mobility in terms of 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.

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

Portugal was one of the countries classified by the European Commission in the highest assessment scale in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning, along with Finland, France, the Netherlands and Norway, because of its RVCC system. RVCC<sup>1</sup> is part of the National Qualifications System and is based on a set of methodological assumptions (competences audit, autobiographical approach) that allow the identification, recognition, validation and certification of previously acquired competences by adults throughout life in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. The process involves a set of assessment tools and activities, in order to build a portfolio (containing evidence and/or proof of competences adults possess in relation to a particular framework).

The RVCC process is based on frameworks that are part of the National Qualifications Catalogue (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações - CNQ), with the academic RVCC divided by areas of key competences and the professional RVCC by competences.

This is a process that needs to be led by a specific type of structure accredited to do so, a Qualifica Centre and it is mainly aimed to achieve mandatory schooling levels, or a professional certificate and it is thus not relevant for the type of non-formal training within STEP\_UP. To this aim, Europass credentials seem for now to be a more useful tool.

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