European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Portugal

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

In Portugal, the validation of non-formal and informal learning has been taken up as a relevant political issue. The Portuguese government has developed measures to reduce the qualifications deficit among the adult population and the reinforcement of a national system of validation is one of the axes of the general political framework.

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

In 2001 a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning was created — the National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (Sistema Nacional de Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências, SNRVCC) by the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (Ministério do Trabalho e da Segurança Social), under the coordination of the National Agency for the Education and Training of Adults, (Agência Nacional para a Educação e Formação de Adultos, ANEFA), which launched the first network of Centres for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies in 2000. From 2004, responsibility for the SNRVCC was held solely by the Ministry of Education, but it became a joint initiative of both Ministries again in 2007, under the responsibility of the National Agency for Qualifications (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, ANQ).

The New Opportunities initiative, launched in December 2005 by the ministries mentioned above — and managed by ANQ — defines a strategy for national education and training in Portugal, aiming to raise the qualifications level of the population to secondary level (12th grade). This initiative has two main goals: to reinforce vocational and technical paths as real options for young people and to develop basic and secondary education and vocational training for the working population. Validation processes are an important axis of the measures in place to meet these goals, as will be explained below.

For young people, the initiative aims to implement measures to stop the flow of young people leaving the education and training systems without achieving secondary-level education. The National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ) has set an objective that 50% of those enrolled in secondary level should achieve a vocational qualification. For adults, the New Opportunity is given to all the people who have not completed secondary education, either those seeking their first job, already employed or unemployed. The initiative incorporates actions such as expanding Adult Education and Training Courses and expanding the National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences.

In the framework of the Bologna Process and also in response to the OECD recommendations on tertiary education, the Portuguese government has implemented reforms to encourage Higher Education institutions to be more responsive to the needs of society and economy. In 2006 a new law was approved (Decree-Law No. 64/2006 of 21 March 2006), increasing the flexibility of access to Higher Education through a new path for students aged over 23 who do not meet the standard admissions requirements (‘non-traditional students’). The new law states that these candidates can claim for credits, based on the recognition of prior learning. It is a general law which refers only to the right to validation in HE – individual institutions are given the autonomy to determine their own procedures, for example the amount of credits which can be awarded through validation. This increasing concern to widen the access to HE to adults has been developed in parallel with the rise in the level of Portuguese qualifications, since in Portugal, enrolments in tertiary education are still below the European average (OECD, 2010).
1.2 Relationship with the existing/developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

The National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) is integrated in the National Qualification System (see 1.3).

The RVCC system integrates two main processes:

• the School Process — aiming to improve the qualification levels of adults who do not have basic or secondary education certificates, and

• the Vocational Process — for adults who do not have formal qualification in their occupational areas, aiming to improve vocational qualifications levels of beneficiaries (at basic and secondary level).

The standard used for validation in the School Process is the Key Competences in Adult Education and Training Reference Framework — which is composed of two different standards: one is specific to the basic level (i.e. corresponding to 4, 6 or 9 years of schooling) and the other is specific to the secondary level of education (Gomes et al, 2006). Individuals can thus acquire formal qualifications through validation, which are equal in value to those awarded through formal education and training. The qualification levels given by validation and the formal qualification levels of the education system correspond: the School Process of validation leads to a basic level certification (a qualification certificate corresponding to the 1st, 2nd or 3rd cycle of basic education — i.e. 4, 6 or 9 years of schooling — and a basic education diploma), or a secondary level certification (corresponding to the secondary education level — 12 years of schooling — and a diploma of the secondary education level).

Through the Vocational Process of validation, individuals can acquire a vocational qualification. The reference framework used is the National Catalogue of Qualifications. In March 2010 the Catalogue included 254 vocational qualifications from 39 educational and training areas¹ in accordance with the National Classification of Education and Training Areas (Ministerial Order 256/2005 of 16 March). For each qualification a Professional profile is identified, as well as the Training standards and the framework for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences process (basic and technological components).

1.3 National institutional framework

The National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ²), created in 2007, is now the body responsible for the coordination of the national system of validation, as well as the development of young and adult education and training policies. ANQ was created following the launch of the New Opportunities initiative as a central structure for the Vocational Training reform. From the political perspective, this was considered a significant step forward for the implementation of the vocational training reform. ANQ's activities are developed in strong cooperation with the Employment and Vocational Training Institute (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional, IEFP), with social partners and other organisations from civil society. The underlying principle is that these stakeholders should work together and share responsibilities according to their own aims and missions.

One of the main components of the ongoing reform is the National Qualifications System (Sistema Nacional de Qualificações, SNQ), created in 2007 (by Decree-law nº 396/2007), which adopted the principles agreed by the Social Partners. The SNQ has restructured vocational training within the education system and the labour market, in order to form a national qualifications framework integrating the existing qualifications and the European orientations, namely the EQF principles. One of the main policy concerns was to introduce

¹ Further information at: www.catalogo.anq.gov.pt,
² Further information at: www.anq.gov.pt
the principle of the ‘double certification’ in all public investment in VET. All forms of VET, including RVCC, should serve to strengthen the educational and occupational levels of the workforce. According to government goals, the SNQ will ensure that all Portuguese citizens will achieve education at 12th grade level. The NQS aims to integrate all qualification systems and all sectors, and to establish a national qualifications framework to improve access to qualifications and progression, in order to respond to the needs of civil society and the labour market. The main axes of the NQS are:

The national System for Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (SNRVCC), which was reorganised in order to integrate adult education and training policies that were recently implemented;

- The New Opportunities Centres (Regulation no. 370/2008, by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity on 21st May);
- The National Catalogue of Qualifications (NCQ) – Regulation nº 781/2009, by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity on 23rd July – managed by ANQ, one of the main instruments to raise the level of qualification possessed by the Portuguese population within the National Qualifications System (Decree-Law 396/2007 of 31st December). The NCQ classifies qualifications based on competences, training and the level of qualification in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework;
- The National Qualifications Framework (Quadro Nacional de Qualificações) (created by Portaria nº782/2009 by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Min. of Education and the Min. of Labour and Social Solidarity of 23rd July, will be implemented in October 2010), defines the structure of qualification levels, based on the European Qualifications Framework;

Under the coordination of ANQ, the New Opportunities Centres develop processes for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC processes). The centres were created in 2007 and were restructured in terms of their scope and areas of intervention in 2008 (by Regulation nº 370 /2008). The current network integrates the former centres of RVCC. By April 2010, the national network of New Opportunities Centres was composed of 454 centres. The New Opportunities network of centres is constituted by a large range of institutions: national organisations of education and training, such as vocational training centres, basic and secondary schools, professional schools, entrepreneurial associations, enterprises, local and regional associations, and local authorities. The initiative has expanded rapidly in Portugal since 2005 when there were only 98 centres in place.

The National Skills Certification System (Sistema Nacional de Certificação Profissional, SNCP) is a system that regulates the access to professional activities in the labour market. The SNCP is being reformulated under the developments of the ongoing Vocational Training reform. Skills certification aims to contribute to the improvement of professionals, recognising and certifying skills already gained and identifying skills that are still needed in order for professional improvement to take place. The SNCP certifies independently the way in which the professionals acquire the skills — vocational training, work experience or training in another country for example. The Vocational Aptitude Certificate (Certificado de Aptidão Profissional, CAP) is the certificate that allows people to perform a specific occupation; it certifies that a person has the necessary skills to pursue a specific occupation. A Certifying Body issues the certificate for a set period of time (established case by case). In order to renew the certificate, individuals have to prove that they have up-to-date skills. Individuals with professional experience can get a CAP through the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning (RVCC). An example of a Certifying Body is IEFP, which is responsible for the certification of trainers who develop their activity in vocational training on the labour market. Trainers can obtain the certification — Certificado de Aptidão Pedagógica de Formador (CAP) — according two different paths: a formal path, through the diploma of a
trainers’ course, or through the experiential path, proving that they already have the experience do be a trainer.

According to a recent law (Decree-law n°64/2006), adults can apply to Higher Education without having previous diplomas, since the knowledge and competences gained in other contexts of life — through professional and personal experience —, and the motivation to pursue studies, are the factors valued in the selection process. HE institutions are allowed to organise special access procedures for these students, to validate prior non-formal and informal learning and to allocate credits in the context of formal learning. In order to pursue studies and to obtain an academic degree or a diploma, HE institutions recognise professional experience and post-secondary training, through the allocation of credits.

Also according to the legal system of tertiary education degrees and diplomas, those who have a scientific or professional curriculum vitae that is recognised by the scientific department of the higher education institution, may apply to the cycle of studies leading to Masters and Doctorate degrees.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The New Opportunities Centres deliver validation at a local level, as described in the box below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Opportunities Centres</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New Opportunities Centres were created in 2007. Their role is to provide qualifications to the Portuguese population, through the development of processes for the recognition, validation and certification of competences’ (RVCC processes – the previous RVCC centres were integrated into the NO network) and through qualified training. By April 2010, the national network of New Opportunities Centres was composed of 454 centres. The network is made up of a large range of institution types: national organisations of education and training, such as vocational training centres, basic and secondary schools, professional schools, entrepreneurial associations, enterprises, local and regional associations, and local authorities. The initiative has expanded rapidly in Portugal since 2005 when there were only 98 centres in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In terms of validation activities, the NO Centres provide counselling and guidance, and undertake assessment and certification at a local level. In April 2010, there were more than 1 million adults enrolled in the New Opportunities Centres; and nearly 150 000 were attending Adult Education and Training Courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A New Opportunities Centre team is regulated by decree: a centre must have a director, a pedagogical coordinator, a specific number of RVC counsellors (between three and five), trainers/teachers (from five to eight), guidance staff (one or two), and administrative staff (one or two). The external evaluators, who are people with social relevance at regional/local level, are acknowledged in a specific list accredited and managed by ANQ (Bolsa de Avaliadores externos).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The national financing programme POPH (Programa Operacional Potencial Humano) - partly supported by the ESF structural funds - is the main source of funding for the NO Centres. This financing covers most of the expenses of a NO centre (human resources, facilities and equipment and current expenses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Charter for Quality Assurance was created in 2007 for NO Centres (Gomes e Simões, 2007). The charter introduces the mission, the guiding principles, the requirements for work and the stages/dimensions of the processes. It presents the reference indicators for self-assessment, of which there are 16. The CAF — Common Assessment Framework — has been used for the evaluation of NO centres since 2009. As a result of the self-evaluation procedure, a report is made by each NO centre and a development plan is established, in order to be implemented in the following year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANQ is responsible for the design of the national procedure/approach for validation and shares the responsibility for information, promotion and awareness-raising with the NO
centres and the regional structures of the Ministry of Education and IEFP. Providing counselling and guidance, and undertaking assessment and certification, are the responsibilities of NO centres at a local level. Quality assurance, evaluation and review are shared between ANQ and NO centres. A 4-year external evaluation is being developed by a team of experts in the adult education field aiming at on-going assessment of the results and dynamics of the adult axis of the New Opportunities Initiative.

At the level of Higher Education, the responsibility for validation is devolved to the universities and polytechnics themselves. According to a recent law, institutions have autonomy to develop their own strategies and methodologies in order to give credits to non-formal and informal learning.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

There are several projects in development across Portugal which aim to exchange information on validation practices. One such project is the Project AUTONOMOUS-Reinserção, funded by the Equal Community Initiative, which was developed by ANOP (Associação Nacional de Oficinas de Projecto) during 2008 and 2009. The aims of AUTONOMOUS were to create technical, methodological and institutional tools in order to promote social inclusion and development, using a networking collaborative approach. The project was developed in the shoe sector, using an intervention methodology oriented to the double certification integrated process — school and vocational certification through RVCC — based on integrated and complementary processes. The project developed a manual to support the validation process, based on the construction of an ‘integrated portfolio’, which integrates general (school) competences and vocational competences. The stage called Investigation / Exploration helps candidates to make a self-evaluation, develop their Life History and promotes reflection; the following stage is based on the identification of candidates’ interests and competences, gathering evidence from their personal and professional life; the final stage is the final self-evaluation and the demand for demonstration and validation. Candidates are presented to a RVC Jury that decides on the certification to be awarded. The double certification process uses two main standards: the school (Referencial de Competências-chave) and the vocational (according to standards of the professional activity developed by the candidate).

1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

As stated previously, RVCC processes are based on the national standards for education and training which are integrated in the National Qualifications Catalogue (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações) at the basic and secondary level of education and in professional areas.

The RVCC system is based on dual qualification pathways for adults, particularly Adult Education and Training courses (EFA courses) and modular certified training. Although all provide access to unit-based qualifications it is not possible to accumulate and transfer credits. A credit system like ECVET is not implemented in Portugal so far.

At the Higher Education level, validation is generally linked to the credit system and unit-based structure of the courses and degrees, within the framework of Bologna process. Students who are successful in their validation application are given credits (ECTS), related to a specific diploma (first, second or third cycle of Bologna degrees). These credits are portable across HE institutions.

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3 Partners of the project are AEPF/PROFISOUSA, Associação Raul Dória, Câmara Municipal de S. João da Madeira, CFPIC, Comoiprel, FESETE, IDIT, INDE, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Oliveira de Azeméis, de S. João da Madeira, SOCIAL – Sindicato dos Operários da Industria de Calçado, Malas e Afins dos distritos de Aveiro e Coimbra.

Further information can be found at: [http://www.autonomus.eu/](http://www.autonomus.eu/)
1.7 Funding framework

The national financing programme POPH (Programa Operacional Potencial Humano) - partly supported by the ESF structural funds - is the main source of funding for validation processes at the basic and secondary level, developed in New Opportunities Centres under the national coordination of ANQ. This financing covers most of the expenses of a NO centre (human resources, facilities and equipment and current expenses). It was not possible to obtain specific information about the budget allocated to validation within the POHP – it is simply part of the work of the NO centres and is not allocated ring-fenced funding.

The second period of New Opportunities Initiative (2011-2015) is being prepared so there is no information available on financing decisions, but we know that one of the future challenges, within the ESF limitations, is to assure the continuity of the validation processes.

Higher Education institutions use their own financial budget to develop validation processes. According to their own priorities and strategies, they allocate financing for validation.

A 2004 report (CIDEC, 2004) identified the main barriers faced by RVCC centres (many of which have now become NO centres) as being a shortage of human resources, cash flow difficulties and the nature of the process; other obstacles were identified, such as administrative difficulties, shortages of or inadequate facilities, poor target group engagement and demanding targets.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

According to ANQ data, by April 2010, 324,370 adults had been granted a certificate through RVCC processes (i.e. as a result of validation processes and complementary learning). Since 2007 55 % of those granted certificates were women and 45% were men. The age-group 35-44 years is the most represented (39%), followed by the age-group age 45-54 years (25.8%) and by 25-34 years (23.2%). People older than 65 (7%) and between 18 and 24 years old (4.3%) are less represented. Regarding their situation in the job market, data show that 74.2% are employed and 21.5% unemployed; 4.3% are considered in another situation. In April 2010, there were more than 1 million adults enrolled in the New Opportunities Centres; and nearly 150 000 were attending Adult Education and Training Courses.

In the HE sector, and according to the National Report of the Bologna Process (2008), the widening of tertiary education to new sectors of the population through the new access regime students aged over 23 years is increasing: the number of adults entering tertiary education (mainly at first degree level) by this means has risen to 11,775 in the academic year 2007-2008, compared to 10,850 in 2006-07 (around 900 adults started tertiary education in 2005). Although we have data on adults entering H.E. through the new access regime, there is no centralised data available on the flow of candidates to validation processes. Exploratory studies have shown that only a few institutions have recently started the implementation of validation processes.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

The formal education and training sector is strongly involved in validation. NO network centres integrate national organisations of education and training belonging to the public, cooperative and private sector, such as vocational training centers (87), basic and secondary schools (196), professional schools (42), training enterprises (15), private
education institutions (6), schools under other Ministries than the Ministry of Education (8) and Higher Education Institutions (7) (provisional data from ANQ, April 2010). In addition to hosting NO Centres, the formal education sector is also involved at structural level and staff from the sector help to deliver validation (e.g. administrators, teachers and trainers).

In the HE sector – which encompasses universities and polytechnics, both public and private - there is considerable diversity regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. This ranges from institutions with a formal policy and concrete practices regarding validation, to institutions with no current policy or practices. HE institutions have autonomy to develop their own procedures to validate prior non-formal and informal learning, and to allocate credits. Research shows that HE institutions do not have a strong tradition of teaching non-traditional students, and they are not yet prepared for the educational and organisational challenges presented by adult students. There are very few examples of institutions that have implemented a coherent organisational strategy (such as the implementation of a strategic policy on validation, creation of a specific unit, legislation, staff, methodological guides, etc.) to support practices of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The Polytechnic Institute of Setubal (IPS) has set up a Unit for the development, recognition and validation of competences, as described in the box below.

### Unit for the Development, Recognition and Validation of Competences at the Polytechnic Institute of Setubal (UDRVC-IPS)

In Portugal, the new law in Higher Education (HE) (decree law nº64/2006) established a policy of widening access to HE for mature students, and opened the possibility to develop validation processes in HE.

Following the approval of the new law, some universities and polytechnics started their own projects on validation of prior learning.

The Unit for the Development, Recognition and Validation of Competences (Unidade de Desenvolvimento, Reconhecimento e Validação de Competências, UDRVC) was set up at the Polytechnic Institute of Setubal (Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal, IPS) in 2007. In 2008 a validation process was implemented on an experimental basis across five colleges within the institute and in 2009, the UDRVC-IPS commenced delivery of validation processes in four of its five colleges, the colleges of Education, Technology (Setúbal e Barreiro), Management and Entrepreneurial Sciences.

The stages of the project included drawing up of legislation, methodological guides and several types of documentation to support the process. In the five Colleges of IPS where the validation process was piloted information campaigns were launched in order to raise the awareness of students about the project, seminars and workshops were carried out with teachers and staff, and portfolio workshops were given with candidates for the process.

Applicants for the RVC project went through an assessment process that was carried out as follows: the portfolios and relevant documentation presented by candidates were submitted and analysed by a jury, the candidates were then interviewed by the jury. Based on the evidence provided at the portfolio and interview stage, the jury made its decision either to award validation or to recommend further methods of assessment if the evidence provided was insufficient. The jury was made up of a President and other members who were selected according to the subject.

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5 For further information: http://www.ips.pt/ips_si/web_base.gera_pagina?p_pagina=27407
2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

Information, advice and guidance networks were developed under the current political measures. The Integrated System of Information and Management of Education and Training Offer (Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Formativa, SIGO), created within the NO initiative, gives updated information on the education and training offers and the validation processes at national level.

Advice and guidance is provided locally, at NO Centres. Advice and guidance are the first stages in the validation process (described below in 6.1), aiming to establish the candidate’s profile and to determine adequate follow-up steps as part of the intervention (guidance towards education and training offer or towards a validation process).

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

The private sector is involved in the delivery of validation, but at different levels. ANQ has established several protocols of cooperation with the private sector, in order to respond to their needs. The NO initiative has developed more than 500 protocols linking private enterprises, associations and federations, including public entities and enterprises. These protocols are cooperation agreements established with the aim to improve the qualification of workers within the framework of the SNQ, specifically through qualified training developed at the NO level; to identify training needs in enterprises and to improve the content of National Qualifications Catalogue; and to facilitate the professional insertion of young people in the labour market.

A group of large enterprises — mainly belonging to tourism, telecommunications and distribution sectors — have created internal validation centres under the NO initiative. By April 2010, 6% of NO centres (28 centres) were launched by entrepreneurial associations and 1% by enterprises (6 centres), according to data from ANQ. An example of an NO centre internal to an enterprise is SONAE — a large enterprise in the distribution sector — where 559 workers have already achieved certificates (between 2008 and August 2010) (ANQ data).

In large enterprises, the external evaluation reports on the NO initiative (six individual reports and one synthesis report, published in 2009 – see bibliography for references) have shown that validation is perceived as a benefit for the organisation, since workers raise their level of motivation and commitment. Workers are encouraged to join the validation processes and the results are recognised by the organisation. But in small enterprises the situation is different: employers generally perceive validation only at the individual level; validation is understood as an individual initiative, individuals are the main beneficiaries of the process, with few benefits for the organisations themselves.

Evaluation studies began in 2008 and are due to take place over four years. Therefore, the full impact of the initiative on the labour market is not yet known.
2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

The third sector is also involved in validation under the NO initiative. There are several entities that have partnerships with NO centres. In the national network of centres, 6% of promoters (25 centres) are local development associations and 3% are non-profit organisations (14 centres) (ANQ, April 2010). In Loco Association is a good practice example from this sector. The association created its own NO centre in 2002 (by Despacho conjunto 804 / 2002 de 28 Outubro). In Loco association and its NO centre have significant experience in Adult Education and Local Development and contributed significantly for the development of the inner Algarve region.

2.5 Costs to organisations

New Opportunities Centres are financed by POPH funding, but some costs are not covered (in public organisations only three quarters of the staff salaries are covered, the remainder must be covered by the institution involved. If this is a public institution, the funding will be allocated from the public sector). Organisations have to support the remaining costs of the process. Private centres receive 100% funding for the main expenses of the process from POPH funding.

According to ANQ information, the cost of an adult certification in a NO centre increased from 1000 Euros in 2008 to 1600 Euros in 2009, approximately. The difference is due to several factors: the increasing complexity of the NO centres mission (certifications were extended to secondary level, which demands more time and resources), the enlargement of centres at national level, the enrichment of human resources / teams and the increase in number of certifications awarded, amongst others.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

In the last two years the Portuguese government has made a big effort to raise awareness among the public through an extensive media campaign, which included television, newspapers, radio, internet and outdoors publicity of the NO initiative. Information and recruitment channels are widespread, through the NO initiative information system and campaigns. However, the campaign had both positive and negative effects, and public opinion is divided. Some individuals are aware of the existing opportunities, but public expectations about RVCC processes and the social value of the results are under the media spotlight. While a media campaign has raised the public awareness of validation and the benefits it brings to individuals, there has however been some questioning in the media of whether validation can facilitate the process of achieving a qualification and thus whether it can bring social benefits.

Regarding recruitment, individuals are engaged in the validation process through the NO centres. Guidance and support are provided before, during and after validation in the framework of the SNRVCC.

Nowadays demand is also generated by private companies that have established cooperation agreements with the ANQ and IEFP, including specific aims for the qualifications of their workers.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

In Portugal, guidance is provided by NO centres. Updated information is given by the Integrated System of Information and Management of Education and Training Offer 6 Further information about In Loco Association at: http://www.in-loco.pt/
(Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Formativa, SIGO), a national database which all NO centres are linked to. It was created within the NO initiative and gives updated information on the education and training offer and the validation processes at a national level.

The New Opportunities Centres have a specific phase to their interventions, dedicated only to the provision of guidance and support for each individual who decides to enrol in a qualification path. This guidance is based on a methodology designed specifically for adults (Gomes e Simões (coord.), 2008).

3.3 Costs to individuals

There are no financial costs for RVCC candidates within the national system of validation.

At the Higher Education level, there are some costs for candidates. Institutions determine specific fees for the validation and crediting processes, which vary largely. Since HE institutions are autonomous, they can determine their own procedures and fees. There are institutions where candidates pay on a basis of number of credits awarded and others where candidates pay for the process as a whole, regardless of the number of credits claimed.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

The RVCC initiative targets adults with low or no qualifications.

There is also a specific system of guidance for immigrants, implemented in cooperation with ACIDI (the public body which manages policies relating to immigrants) in national and regional centres of support for immigrants. In recent years, foreign workers arriving in Portugal have used the NO initiative to upgrade their qualifications through the NO Initiative. Since 2007, 34.138 adults were registered at NO centres and 6.264 acquired a certificate; in 2010 (up to August), 6.432 adults were registered at NO centres and of those, 1.509 acquired a certificate.

There is a specific RVCC procedure for the disabled, at the basic level (9th year of schooling), in the “Inclusive New Opportunities” centres. A specific methodological guide\(^7\) was created for practitioners to develop the RVCC process for disabled candidates. The “Inclusive New Opportunities” centres aim to provide to disabled people an adequate service adapted to their specific situation, by a qualified team. At national level there are six centres oriented to specific disabilities: mental disability, sensorial disability, blindness and deafness, neurological diseases, mental health, and learning difficulties. According to ANQ data, since 2007 2.362 candidates were registered at these centres, and 706 acquired a certificate. In 2010 (until August), 357 were registered and 166 acquired a certificate.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

The survey carried out by CIDEC in 2007 reinforces the results of the 2004 CIDEC survey\(^8\) — essentially the positive effects of the RVCC process on the individual self-esteem, self-worth and self-knowledge, reconstructing life plans, facilitating employability (the process seems to reduce discouragement and has an impact on the motivation to find work, bringing the unemployed closer to the labour market) and raising motivation to continue studies. The influence of having a diploma on the transition from unemployment to employment is limited, more specifically in the lower group of certification (6th grade of

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\(^7\) Guia metodológico para o acesso das Pessoas com Deficiências e Incapacidades ao processo de RVCC – Nível Básico, ANQ, Maio 2009

Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and informal learning
Country Report: Portugal

Although the percentage of people that returned to formal studies is very low, the RVCC process seems to motivate people to pursue formal education, at least in terms of raising expectations. In the group of lower level certification, RVCC also seems to be associated with pay rises (for 25% of employees).

According to Fernandes (2009) the results of the two CIDEC studies emphasised the capacity of the RVCC process to activate the unemployed: around one third of unemployed adults who acquired a certificate found a paid job after six months of completing the process. According to the econometric model used in study, this was achieved by strengthening personal variables (already referred above).

Case studies developed in the external evaluation published in 2009 (Valente et al.) provide further and up to date evidence of the benefits to individuals: the development of competences (such as literacy and ICT competences) with impact on their personal and social lives, the reinforcement of self-esteem and motivation towards future learning. Individuals acknowledge the features of the validation process itself and its impact in their lives. The improved sense of responsibility and participation in civic life is also a perceived benefit for individuals. However, individuals certified at the basic level do not have expectations towards a professional improvement, while individuals certified at the secondary level have developed expectations towards new educational pathways (in H.E. or specialised training) and towards new professional opportunities (mainly greater professional mobility).

Other academic research also reinforces the evidence that the main benefit of the process is related to the personal dimension.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

ANQ is responsible for the design of the New Opportunities evaluation framework. Responsibility for the implementation of the procedures, quality assurance, evaluation and review are shared between ANQ, the centres and the regional structures of Ministry of Education and IEPF. The external evaluation currently being carried out by the Catholic University expert’s team is a crucial tool for the development of the initiative.

At HE level, institutions are able to create their own quality assurance framework. Universities and Polytechnics have to publish annual reports that summarise the evaluation of the impact of the Bologna Process. Although validation processes are not addressed specifically in the report, innovations in accordance with the approach the Bologna process are encouraged and there is a need to create clear and transparent procedures.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

A Charter for Quality Assurance was created in 2007 for New Opportunities Centres (Gomes e Simões, 2007). The charter introduces the mission, the guiding principles, the

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requirements for work and the stages/dimensions of the processes. It presents the reference indicators for self-assessment, of which there are 16. The CAF — Common Assessment Framework — has been used for the evaluation of NO centres since 2009, as it is a common methodology used for the self-assessment for public services and it is articulated to European practices. As result of the self-evaluation procedure, a report is made by each NO centre and a development plan is established, in order to be implemented in the following year.

4.3 Evaluation Framework

In 2008 ANQ launched a system aiming for the external evaluation of NO centres in cooperation with national Higher Education institutions. The aim of this evaluation was “to assess the political measure, its intervention structures and the procedures implemented, as well as the quality of the outputs and the satisfaction level of adults involved” (ANQ, 2008). The external evaluation will be developed annually and longitudinally, up to the year of 2011. The first round of evaluation reports were published and discussed in 2009.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

The methodology used in NO centres integrates several phases. The global process is developed through the following intervention stages (ANQ):

Reception: candidate clarification on the mission of the NO centres, the working process stages, guidance for education and training, or for the process of recognition, validation and certification;

Diagnosis: candidate profile analysis, based on clarifying sessions, curriculum analysis, individual and collective or interviews; identification of the following steps, based on the analysis of adult characteristics, education and training trajectory, life experience, motivations, needs and expectations;

Guidance: the candidate is given information relating to the appropriate qualification, this could involve guidance on educational and training routes external to the NO centre, or to a process of recognition, validation and certification. The guidance implies an agreement between NO staff and the adult, based on diagnosis information.

Qualification recognition: Self-identification of know-how and qualifications obtained during the individual’s life; an activity set is used based on the methodology, several assessment tools are used, by which the adult identifies his know-how; construction of a learning reflexive portfolio.

Qualification Validation: assessment of the identified know-how by comparing it with the qualification standards. The validation process comprises the learning reflexive portfolio self-assessment, the assessment made by the RVCC professionals and trainers from the qualification areas.

*CAF in NO centres is one of the projects that the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) took into account in its project ‘CAF in Education’ (*in 2008 the CAF Resource Centre was informed that in a number of countries people had developed a CAF version specific to the education sector. In Belgium, Norway, Portugal and Italy CAF & Education pilots already existed*. http://www.eipa.eu/en/pages/show/&tid=141). *In Portugal, work on the development of CAF for the sector of education was done at university level by Hugo Caldeira, Rodrigo Queiroz e Melo and Sofia Reis* – CAF and Education. Available at http://www.eipa.eu/en/pages/show/&tid=141).
Qualification Certification: a certification jury is established, with the presence of the adult and an external assessor, in order to issue the certificate for the validated qualification.

When the candidate finishes the RVCC process with a full validation, he/she receives a Diploma (equivalent to the basic/secondary formal certificate); in the case of partial validation, the candidate will in general receive a Competences Certificate (identifying the validated learning) and a plan in order to achieve a full qualification:

- If the adult’s development needs require more than 50 hours of training, he/she will be given a partial certificate and a personalised qualification plan. He/she will be referred to a specific training course. If the certification process does not lead to the issuance of a full certificate or diploma, regarding the qualification of a competence, a special certificate will be issued identifying the validated qualification units.

- If the adult has recognised skills or needs only 50 hours of training, he/she will conclude a full certification at the New Opportunities Centre.

In the network of IEFP centres an innovative process is being used: an interactive e-learning platform to support the process of diagnosis, recognition and validation. NO centres are implementing their own e-learning platforms and e-portfolios.

Practices of validation in Higher Education institutions are diversified, and the great majority of national institutions do not have a specific department/unit and/or specific staff for validation processes. Juries are organised according to the nature of the claim — a Jury is often composed of a President and a variable number of members, with relevant scientific and academic experience, and methods vary from documental and CV analysis, to interviews, portfolios, practical or written examinations, depending on the specificity of the demand. It is also possible to get a full or a partial validation that is credited in terms of ECTS.

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

According to the 2007 CIDEC study, the diversity of practices “is one of the strongest points of the RVCC network”, because teams become more motivated and it is possible to adapt the process to the specific needs of the individual. However, it is also stated that this diversity has risks, related to the “loss of pedagogical quality” of the process. The report suggests that “flexibility involves the risk of loss of pedagogic quality. Efforts must be made towards articulation and exchange of information between the different players in order to guarantee a range of adult education and training (...”). The study also recommended a greater focus on the articulation and exchange of information between actors - specifically between RVCC centres and schools - in order to raise awareness of the range of adult education and training on offer.

Recent results of case studies (Valente et al, 2009) show that the differences between RVCC basic and secondary processes are significant and influence its impact, its implementation and actors’ perceptions of the processes: the secondary process was established very recently and it is considered by actors to be more complex, more difficult to implement and the language used is considered to be very dense. The basic process is perceived to be simpler and easier to implement. It is also considered to be clearer by the candidates and teams involved.

The aforementioned study also points to several difficulties within the RVCC process: the scarcity of training offers for the RVCC school process - referred to by the majority of the 15 NO Centres analysed - or the lack of adjustment between the training offer and the

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adult life, specifically if people are employed (concerning duration and schedules, amongst others).

The demanding efforts and input required from adults in order to evidence their competences are however supported by the efforts of the RVCC teams to meet the specific needs of candidates. This study values the teamwork efforts towards the development of diverse and personalised instruments, the elaboration of examples of competence evidences and the communication through e-platforms, among others, which are used to support the process. Group sessions between candidates are also valued as an important way of unveiling the implicit competences of the individuals involved. Methodological flexibility is identified as a benefit of the process, but if the flexibility goes too far, there is also the risk of losing the process specificities.

Also according to Valente et al (2009) the humanistic approach associated with personalised strategies is highly valued by professionals and candidates. However, technical options, quantitative goals and reduced timings established by the New Opportunities Initiative are also identified as conflicting aspects regarding the principles sustained by the humanistic approach. According to these results, the critical question is to achieve the balance between flexibility, innovation and quality.

Further studies have shown that validation is a complex function that demands complex methods, in order to be appropriate to the individual's needs. The use of a range of instruments is recommended in order to address the complexity of the process.

Tensions and critical issues arise from RVCC practices, irrespective of the contexts where they are developed, due to the different meanings, principles and underlying traditions associated with experiential learning and with the social practices aimed to make it visible (Pires, 2009).

5.3 Profile of validation practitioners

A New Opportunities Centre team is regulated by decree: a centre must have a director, a pedagogical coordinator, a specific number of RVCC counsellors (between three to five), trainers/teachers (from five to eight), guidance staff (one or two), and administrative staff (one or two). The external evaluators, who are people with social relevance at regional/local level, are acknowledged in a specific list accredited and managed by ANQ (Bolsa de Avaliadores externos).

Usually, members of validation Juries in HE institutions are teachers belonging to the institutions. Often the process involves a Jury, which is composed of a President and three or four members, depending on the nature and the scientific area in which validation occurs. They usually have a PhD or a Masters degree, and are scientifically recognised in the area of the claim.

5.4 Provision of training and support to practitioners

Provision of training for practitioners of the New Opportunities Centres is organised annually by ANQ, in cooperation with external institutions, such as Higher Education institutions, National Centre for Training of Trainers - IEFP, Ministry of Education, centres for Continuing Education of Schools, amongst others. New Opportunities Centres organise their own continuing training, generally in the format of seminars, conferences, national meetings, and so on.

This training is diverse and varies in forms of organisation, contents and duration. It could take one or several days, depending on its finalities and structure (from a workshop to a

full course). Since 2006 around 15,000 people — between staff, trainers, pedagogic teams, NO centres directors, — have attended to training (ANQ data).

Depending on the policy of each university and polytechnic, the investment in training and support of juries and staff is variable. In the last few years institutions became more aware of the emergence of this new domain of practices, and several conferences / seminars were organised to discuss it at national level, some with the collaboration of international experts.

5.5 **Qualifications requirements**

There are specific qualification requirements for validation practitioners: RVC professionals must have a degree in an area of Social Science and trainers/teachers must have a degree in a specific scientific area (related to the domain of competences in which they teach) and also experience in adult education. Guidance staff also must have a degree in the Social Sciences and often have a degree in Psychology.

There are no formal requirements for members of Juries in Higher Education, but they are usually career teachers, and their qualifications can vary from a degree to a Ph.D. in a large range of scientific areas and domains.
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Stakeholders consulted:
Agência Nacional para a Qualificação;
Training Departament, IEFP
External evaluator of the New Opportunities initiative