

The Qualifica Programme

Portugal

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The Qualifica Programme aims to increase adults' skills and qualifications levels in Portugal.

Short summary paragraph

The Qualifica Programme offers tailored training pathways for low qualified adults, based on a process to recognise their prior learning. This process is known in Portugal as RVCC, which means Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences.¹ The Qualifica Programme is combined with the RVCC process, tailored training opportunities are offered to ensure individuals achieve a higher level of qualification. Hence, the Qualifica Programme also makes lifelong learning opportunities more attractive and accessible for low skilled adults. The Qualifica Passport, an online tool to record completed education and training as well as training units and qualifications, supports the process.

The programme is implemented in dedicated Qualifica Centres where face-to-face guidance and support is provided. The Qualifica Centres are also responsible for the validation of prior learning, training provision or signposting individuals to other training offers.

ECVET principles such as the identification, individual assessment, accumulation and transferability of learning outcomes² are used as instruments for enhancing the flexibility of learning pathways. These principles help increase the qualification and skill levels of adults'. The Qualifica Programme is also in line with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation,³ which suggests that low-skilled adults are encouraged to acquire an EQF level 3 or 4 qualification through three consecutive steps: skills assessment, tailored training, and validation and recognition.

Scope of project/initiative

National

When was the project/initiative implemented?

Since 2017

What were the source(s) of funding?

The initiative is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) together with national resources.

Why was/is the project implemented?

In 2016, 53% of adults in Portugal had not completed upper secondary education and only 33% of the population aged 25-34 completed secondary education. According to the census⁴ carried out in 2011, almost 500,000 adults are illiterate.

As a consequence, this group faces several obstacles in accessing (or re-entering) the labour market and tend not to participate in lifelong learning opportunities, such as up-skilling and re-skilling activities (the so-called 'low-skill trap'). The Qualifica Programme was introduced to address these challenges and increase the level of adults' qualifications.

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

Three primary target groups are identified for this programme: low qualified adults, unemployed, and NEETs (not in education, employment or training) aged 18 or older.

¹ In Portuguese this means 'Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências'

² Training units/ units of competence

³ Council of the European Union, "Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 of Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults", 2016/C 484/01, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ-JOC_2016_484_R_0001

⁴ https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESpub_boui=73212469&PUBLICACOESmodo=2

What were the practice's main objectives?

The Qualifica Programme intends to align Portugal to the Education and Training 2020 benchmarks in lifelong learning.⁵ Specifically, by 2020 it aims to:

- ▶ Guarantee that 50% of the active population will have completed upper secondary education;
- ▶ Guarantee that at least 40% of those aged 30-34 will have completed higher education;
- ▶ Increase the number of adults involved in lifelong learning opportunities (at least 15% by 2020, extended to 25% by 2025);
- ▶ Further expand the network of Qualifica Centres.

What activities were carried out?

The Qualifica Programme is implemented, face-to-face, in Qualifica Centres and via an online tool, the Qualifica Passport.

Qualifica Centres were introduced in 2017. Currently there are 294 Qualifica Centres established across Portugal. They provide information and advice to adults - NEETs aged 18 and over - regarding the recognition of prior learning process (RVCC) and provide guidance on education and training pathways. They also supply complementary vocational trainings to cover competence gaps that individuals may have in their training profile.⁶

Qualifica Centres lead on the RVCC process. This process provides individuals with an opportunity to go through a skills assessment leading to the recognition of prior learning from formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. The RVCC process is based on competences standards available in the National Catalogue of Qualifications⁷ and has three main stages: recognition of knowledge, know how and skills; validation of skills through a standard assessment; and, certification via issuing a certificate. Depending on the decision of a jury carrying out the assessment, there can be either: partial award of certain units or credits, or the full award of a certification. In case of partial certification, a Personal Qualification Plan is established, which lists the units that need to be completed in order to obtain the diploma (i.e. the full qualification).

Qualifica Centres help to motivate adults to get engaged in lifelong learning opportunities with dedicated guidance and support from the Qualifica Centre staff. Their guidance is at the core of the Qualifica Programme as they - together with other practitioners - provide practical guidance, support and tailored information to help adult learners to make the best decisions possible about the planning and next steps they need to take to acquire a qualification. The Qualifica Centre staff also play an important role in coordinating local networks to ensure links with other partners in education and employment.

The work of the Qualifica Centres is supported by an online tool, the Qualifica Passport, that captures an individual's learning pathway. The Qualifica Passport shows the education and training undertaken by an individual as well as the units achieved and those required to complete a full qualification. The Qualifica Passport belongs to the individual, who can request access to it via the login details. If needed (e.g. in case of a job interview) the individual can grant access to companies or third parties. For quality assurance purposes, only VET providers and Qualifica Centres can update information in the Qualifica Passport once education and training units are completed.

What specific ECVET principles were/are used?

The Qualifica Programme uses the following ECVET principles:

▶ Principle 1: Qualifications should be composed of clearly defined groups of learning outcomes:

Qualifications available in the National Catalogue of Qualifications are composed of units of learning outcomes.⁸ These smaller units of learning outcomes are provided via the training offered by the Qualifica Centres.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en

⁶ As part of the RVCC process, a minimum of 50 hours of complementary training is mandatory.

⁷ The standards are:

(a) Basic level standards: this covers language and communication; mathematics for life; citizenship and employability; and ICT;

(b) Secondary level standards: this covers culture; language and communication; society, technology and science; and citizenship and professionalism;

(c) Professional standards: there are currently 154 professional qualification standards in the National Catalogue of Qualifications.

⁸ In the Portuguese system one unit can be either 25 hours or 50 hours. Note that 25 hours of training corresponds to 2.5 credit points.

What specific ECVET principles were/are used?

▶ **Principle 2: Groups of learning outcomes within a qualification should be capable of independent assessment.**

The groups of learning outcomes can be assessed separately, they are then recorded in the Qualifica Passport. This shows which units an individual has completed, which show progresses made in achieving a qualification.

▶ **Principle 4: Provision of learning opportunities should be arranged to facilitate individuals to achieve groups of learning outcomes.**

Qualifica Centre staff help individuals to identify any gaps in their learning and which units may be needed to complete a full qualification. As a follow on, Qualifica Centres deliver vocational training in small groups that may provide individuals with an opportunity to achieve the necessary learning outcomes.

▶ **Principle 5: Individuals should have the opportunity to have their learning outcomes validated, irrespective of how and where they have acquired them.**

This principle is at the heart of the RVCC process, which allows individuals to have formal, informal and non-formal learning that has been previously acquired recognised.

▶ **Principle 6: Individuals should have the opportunity to accumulate their assessed groups of learning outcomes towards a qualification.**

Groups of learning outcomes are acquired and assessed, and they are accumulated towards a qualification. The Qualifica Passport is updated by VET providers and this can show the progress an individual has made towards a qualification.

▶ **Principle 7: Individuals should have the opportunity to transfer their groups of learning outcomes validated in one context to other contexts (such as programmes, qualifications, national/regional systems or countries).**

The RVCC process is an integral part of the Qualifica Programme. This means that individuals can have their prior learning recognised and thus groups of learning outcomes can be transferred from one context to another.

What was/is the added value of ECVET?

The ECVET principles mentioned above are important concepts within the Qualifica Programme. The Qualifica Programme is an important vehicle that provides low-skilled adults with an opportunity to recognise their prior learning and to subsequently upskill or re-skill, following a tailored pathway unique to them. The RVCC process provides opportunities for low-skilled adults to transfer groups of learning outcomes to other contexts and for them to be recognised. Recognising and validating such learning achievements will help to increase the chances of low-skilled adults in the Portuguese labour market today and in the future.

Website

<https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/> (in Portuguese only)

<https://www.passaportequaifica.gov.pt/cicLogin.xhtml> (in Portuguese only)

Other useful sources of information include:

[European Monitoring Centre on Change at Eurofound, Qualifica Centres](#)

[Related article on the Qualifica Programme in Issue 34 of the ECVET Magazine \(May, 2019\)](#)



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