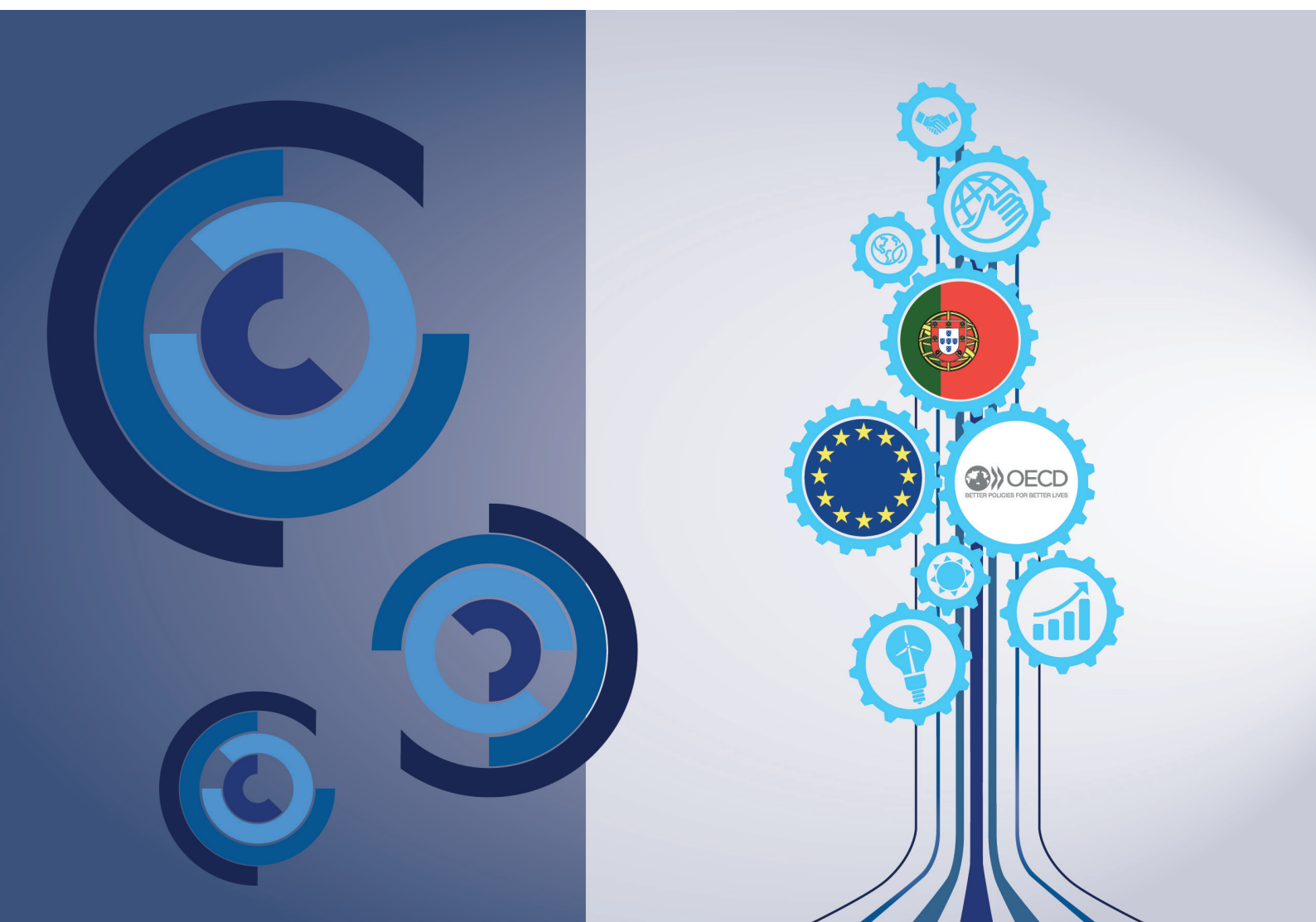# Strengthening Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

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Strengthening Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Foreword

A highly skilled workforce is crucial for Portugal's ability to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world.

Although Portugal has made great strides in boosting its educational and training performance, Portugal is still facing a number of complex challenges. The population is ageing rapidly and the skills gap between educated youth and older adults remains wide. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, has caused a significant contraction in gross domestic product (GDP), and the unemployment rate is forecasted to increase in 2021. At the same time, participation in adult education and training, which will be indispensable for equipping the population with relevant skills to expedite faster socio-economic recovery, remains below the European Union (EU) average.

To address these challenges, it will be vital for Portugal to bolster the coherence and quality of its adult education and training system, in order to guarantee relevant and rewarding adult education and training opportunities for all. In this context, strengthening quality assurance of the adult education and training system is indispensable, as it serves as key building block in Portugal's strategy to provide its population with the skills to facilitate sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Upon request from the Government of Portugal through the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme (the Technical Support Instrument, as of January 2021), the European Commission has partnered with the OECD Centre for Skills to provide technical support to Portuguese authorities to aid the development of a National Plan, which foresees the implementation of concrete reforms for strengthening the quality assurance of Portugal's adult education and training system. This project has involved detailed analysis and widespread engagement with stakeholders and international experts, and has led to concrete policy recommendations and technical guidance for the implementation of the proposed reforms, supported by lessons learned from other countries in addressing similar challenges.

The OECD stands ready to support Portugal as it seeks to build resilience into its skills system by implementing effective and targeted skills policies.

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Acronyms

The main acronyms used in the report are listed below. The list includes the English term and original language term (where applicable) corresponding to each abbreviation.

Acronyms	English term	Original language term
ACS	Slovenian Institute for Adult Education	Andragoški center Republike Slovenije
ACSS	Central Administration of the Health System	Administração Central do Sistema de Saúde
ACT	Authority for Working Conditions	Autoridade para as Condições de Trabalho
AISC	Australian Industry and Skills Committee	
ANACOM	Bank of Portugal, National Communications Authority	Autoridade Nacional de Comunicações
ANQ	National Agency for Qualification	Agência Nacional para a Qualificação
ANQEP	National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training	Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional
AQF	Australian Qualification Framework	
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority	
BRON	Basic Register for Education	Basis Register Onderwijs
CAF	Common Assessment Framework	
CASS	Centre for Applied Social Sciences (Estonia)	
CCP	Certificate of Pedagogical Competence	Certificado de Competências Pedagógicas
CIMs	Intermunicipal Communities	
CNDP	National Data Protection Commission	Comissão Nacional de Protecção de Dados
CNQ	National Catalogue of Qualifications	Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações
COAG	Council of Australian Governments	
CPCS	Permanent Commission for Social Concertation	
CPR Number	Central Person Register Number	
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training	
DGAL	Directorate General of Local Authorities	Direção-Geral das Autarquias Locais
DGAE	Directorate-General for School Administration	Direção-Geral da Administração Escolar
DGAM	Directorate General of the Maritime Authority	Direcção-Geral da Autoridade Marítima
DGEEC	Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics	Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência
DGERT	Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations	Direção-Geral Do Emprego E Das Relações De Trabalho
DGES	Directorate General for Higher Education at the Ministry of Science	Direção-Geral de Ensino Superior
DgesTE	Directorate-General for Schools	Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares
DGPJ	Directorate General for Justice Policy	Direção-Geral da Política de Justiça
DGREFORM	European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support	
EAER	Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research	Eidgenössisches Departement für Wirtschaft, Bildung und Forschung
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training	
EFA	Education and Training Courses for Adults	Cursos de educação e formação de adultos
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management	

Acronyms	English term	Original language term
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework	
ESF	European Social Fund	
EU	European Commission	
FCB	Basic Skills Training	Formação em Competências Básicas
FMC	Certified Modular Training	Formações Modulares Certificadas
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation	
IEFP	Institute for Employment and Vocational Training	Instituto do Emprego e da Formação Profissional
IGEC	Inspectorate-General of Education and Science	Inspecção Geral De Educação
IMF	International Monetary Fund	
IRCs	Industry Reference Committees	
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education	
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training	
KEBÖ	Conference of Adult Education in Austria	Gegründete Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung Österreichs
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	
MCTES	Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education	Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior
ME	Ministry of Education	Ministério da Educação
MTSSS	Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security	Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social
OQEA	Offering Quality Education to Adults	
OQEA/POKI	Offering Quality Education to Adults	Pristop k samoevalvaciji Ponudimo odraslim kakovostno izobraževanje
OTES	VET Student Trajectory Observatory	
PFOL	Portuguese for Speakers of Other Languages Courses	Português para Falantes de Outras Línguas
POCH	The Human Capital Operational Programme	Program Depracional Capital Humano
POISE	Social Inclusion and Employment Operational Programme	Programa Operacional Inclusão Social e Emprego
QMS	Quality Management Certificate	
QNQ	National Qualifications Framework	Quadro Nacional de Qualificações
RTOs	Registered Training Organizations	
RVCC	Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences	Sistema Nacional de Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências
SANQ	System for the Anticipation of Qualifications Needs	Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificações
SGFOR	IEFP Training Management System	Sistema de Gestão da Formação do IEFP
SIGO	Integrated Information and Management System for Educational and Training Supply	Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa
SNQ	National Qualifications System	Sistema Nacional de Qualificações
SRSS	Structural Reform Support Programme	
SSB	Social Statistical Database	
SSOs	Skills Service Organizations	
SVEB	Swiss Federation for Adult Learning	Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung
VET	Vocational education and training	
WeBig	Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training	Weiterbildungsgesetz des Bundes

Executive summary

OECD-DG REFORM-Portugal collaboration on strengthening quality assurance in adult education and training in Portugal

The Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) of the European Commission provides support for the preparation and implementation of growth-enhancing administrative and structural reforms by mobilising EU funds and technical expertise.

Portugal has requested support from the European Commission under Regulation (EU) 2017/825 on the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP). The European Commission has agreed to provide support to Portugal, together with the OECD, in the area of adult education and training, with the purpose of involving the relevant actors to develop a plan to improve quality assurance in the adult education and training system. More specifically, this collaborative effort seeks to create expertise and deliver technical guidance for implementing concrete reforms in quality assurance in adult education and training by the Portuguese authorities.

Methodology

The analyses, recommendations and implementation guidance included in this report were developed with substantial input from stakeholders. During a fact-finding mission to Lisbon, two workshops, a virtual study visit, and several working group sessions and bilateral meetings between December 2019 and November 2020, the OECD engaged with a range of ministries, government agencies and over 70 stakeholders (see Annex A). Therefore, the project integrates first-hand insights of a wide variety of stakeholders and local experts working in close proximity of the Portuguese quality assurance system, as well as from several international experts and practitioners.

In order to facilitate the analysis of a system as complex as quality assurance in adult education and training, the OECD has developed a simple analytical framework. The analytical framework conceptualises quality assurance as a set of policies and practices needed to ensure minimum quality standards in adult education and training, which should be maintained and improved over time, and distinguishes:

1. Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers; from
2. Monitoring of adult education and training providers and of adults' outcomes.

Key recommendations for strengthening quality assurance in adult education and training in Portugal

In each of the two key dimensions of quality assurance in adult education and training, the OECD identified two main recommendations for strengthening quality assurance in adult education and training in Portugal.

The recommendations are summarised below and elaborated in subsequent chapters, which also provide detailed implementation guidance, supported by examples of relevant international practices.

Quality assurance dimension 1: Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers (Chapter 5)

Ensuring a certain level of quality among adult education and training providers starts with their recognition and the award of the relevant certifications.

Portugal's certification system is complex, with many certifying entities responsible for providing different certifications to adult education and training providers or specific courses. The certification requirements are often overlapping, which results in inefficiencies in certification processes. At the same time, insufficient co-ordination between the certifying entities creates transparency challenges. Stakeholders also noted that there is room to improve the effectiveness of certification processes, especially their ability to effectively guarantee important aspects of quality (such as pedagogical excellence).

Portugal should strengthen the recognition and certification of adult education and training providers by:

- Developing a quality label to verify core, common certification standards
- Centralising all the relevant information about certification processes.

Quality assurance dimension 2: Monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes (Chapter 6)

In order to support the effective functioning of the adult education and training system, while ensuring its continuous improvement, the providers interacting with adults on a daily basis have to be monitored and evaluated regularly. Equally, it is important to monitor the outcomes of adults who have participated in the education and training.

There is a large number, and a great variety of adult education and training providers in Portugal. However, the technical and human resource capacities for monitoring their performance and continuous quality improvement are constrained, giving rise to questions about the effectiveness of existing monitoring practices. At the same time, Portugal's capacity to monitor outcomes of adults beyond course completion is limited. Privacy concerns relating to the sharing of data between key quality assurance entities have limited the use of administrative data for tracking outcomes. Providers equally face challenges in tracking student employability outcomes and satisfaction.

Portugal should strengthen the recognition and certification of adult education and training providers by:

- Developing a common monitoring framework
- Tracking outcomes in adult education and training.

Note

[1] A full list of participating organisations and stakeholders is included in Annex B.

1 Key insights and recommendations

This chapter introduces the context and objectives of the project on Strengthening Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal. It provides an overview of the key challenges of Portugal's system of quality assurance in adult education and training, and summarises the proposed recommendations and implementation guidance for its improvement.

Context

A highly skilled workforce is critical to help countries meet the challenges of an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. Although Portugal has made great strides in boosting its educational and training performance, the population is ageing rapidly and the skills gap between educated youth and older adults remains wide.

Several reforms and initiatives relating to skills have been implemented in Portugal in the past two decades, as skills policies have become a top priority for policymakers (see Chapter 3 for details). In 2016, the Qualifica Programme was launched to reboot the country's strategy to upgrade the education and skills of adults. The Government together with social partners within the Permanent Commission for Social Dialogue *(Comissão Permanente de Concertação Social)*, are currently also discussing a Strategic Agreement on Vocational Training *(Acordo Estratégico sobre Formação Profissional)*, that aims to introduce substantial reforms to modernise the vocational training system and make it more responsive (see Chapter 3 for details).

Portugal has made substantial progress in raising the educational attainment of its population: The share of young adults aged 20 to 24 years with at least upper secondary education has increased from 49.4% in 2005 to 82.5% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020[1]). Similarly, the number of early leavers from education and training has decreased dramatically from 38.3% in 2005 to 10.6% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020[2]). Despite these improvements, Portugal still faces significant skills challenges.

Figure 1.1. Education attainment of Portuguese adults is low

Education attainment rate of adults (25-64 year-olds) in Portugal and selected countries, 2019
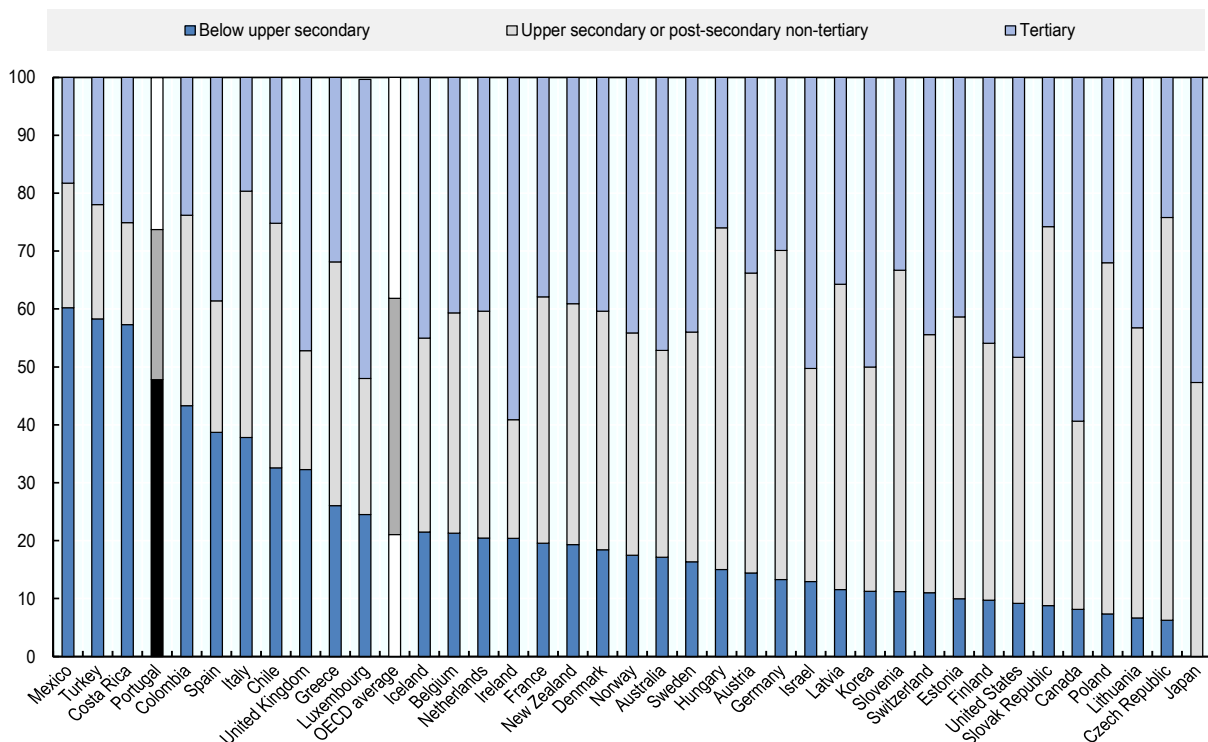
Source: OECD (2020[6]), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en.

Portugal's educational attainment rates are still among the lowest among OECD countries. In 2019, 47.8% of Portuguese adults aged 25 to 64 had not attained upper secondary education (Figure 1.1). Educational attainment is particularly low for older adults. In 2019, 70% of 55- to 64-years-olds had not reached upper secondary education (Eurostat, 2020[4]), compared to roughly 25% amongst the people aged 25 to 34 (Eurostat, 2020[5]).

To address these challenges, it will be vital for Portugal to strengthen its adult education and training system. In particular, raising the accessibility and quality of adult education can help adults, especially those with low skills, acquire the necessary skills to remain in or re-join the workforce, and facilitate a faster socio-economic recovery.

As a result of significant efforts undertaken by Portugal over the past decades, the country has managed to significantly increase its population's participation in adult learning (Figure 1.2). In 2010, only 5.7% of Portuguese adults reported having participated in learning in the previous four weeks, whereas the European Union (EU)-27 average was 7.8%. By 2019, the participation rate was close to the EU average: 10.5% of adults responded that they had participated in some adult learning in the previous four weeks, compared to an EU-27 average of 10.8% (Eurostat, 2020[7]).

Figure 1.2. Participation in adult education and training in Portugal has increased, but room for improvement remains

Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) amongst 25-64 year-olds in Portugal and selected countries, 2019 and 2010
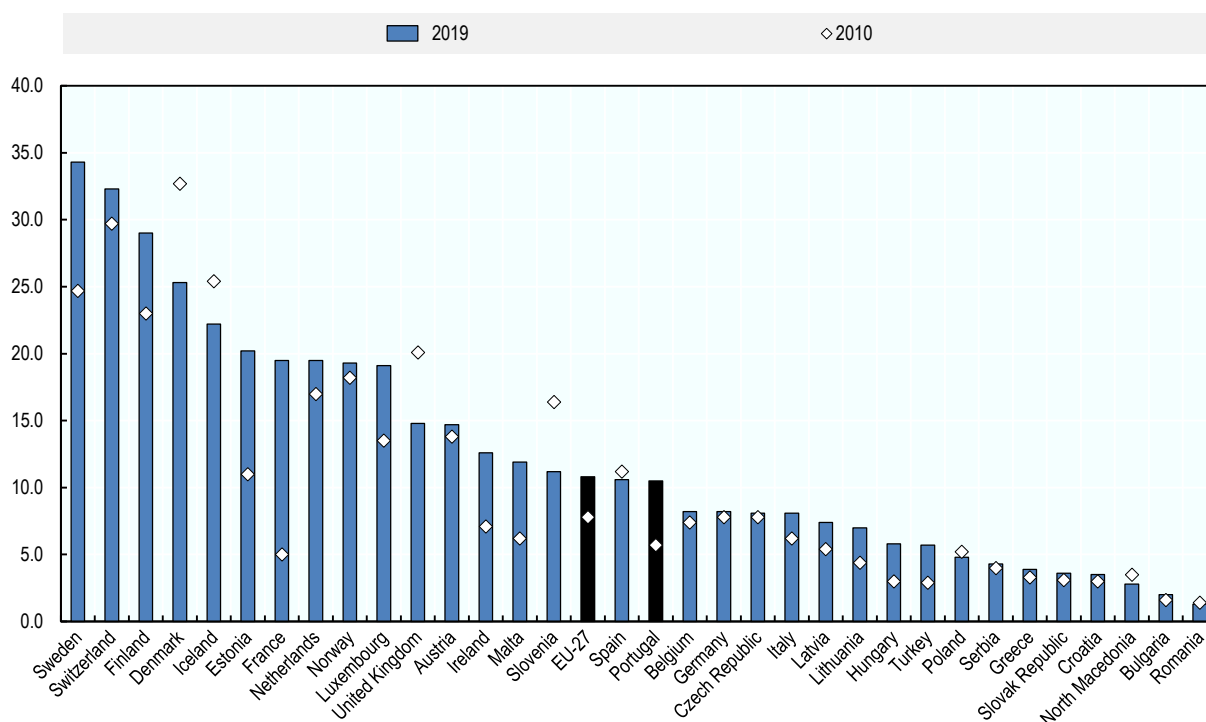
Source: Eurostat (2020[7]), *Participation rate in education and training (last four weeks) by sex and age*, https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_lfse_01&lang=enc.

Despite this progress, more remains to be done. Although participation in adult education and training has improved, it remains weak compared to other European countries, such as the Nordics. At the same time many adults in Portugal, but especially the low-educated and low-skilled, face significant barriers to participation in adult education and training.

The OECD *Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Portugal: Strengthening the Adult-Learning System* (OECD, 2018[8]) recommends that Portugal improve pathways to, and the coherence of, the adult education delivery network and improve the quality of the adult education and training system. OECD (2018[8]) argues that improving the coherence and quality of the adult education and training system will require measures to strengthen quality assurance, including by developing a performance monitoring and evaluation system and a set of key performance indicators. It will also require strengthening the governance structures and arrangements that help coordinate the actions of multiple ministries and government agencies as well as social partners and other stakeholders, and it is positive that Portugal is already discussing these issues under the Strategic Agreement on Vocational Training. Finally, OECD (2018[8]) argues for reinforcing existing local networks at the municipal level to ensure that the quality of the adult education and training system responds not only to national needs, but also to local needs.

In order to address these challenges, Portugal has requested support from the European Commission on the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSS). In particular, it has requested support from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM), which mobilises EU funds and technical expertise for the preparation and implementation of growth-enhancing administrative and structural reforms. This report is the final deliverable of this project, which was commissioned to the OECD.

Objectives

This project seeks to develop expertise and give support to Portuguese authorities to identify and implement strategies to strengthen quality assurance in adult education. In order to achieve these objectives, it assesses the Portuguese system of quality assurance in adult education and training, makes concrete policy recommendations and provides technical guidance for the implementation of the proposed reforms by taking into account the lessons learned by other countries in addressing similar challenges. Box 1.1 explains what is understood as adult education and training in the context of Portugal in this report.

Box 1.1. What does adult education and training include in Portugal?

Adult education and training courses (EFA)

Adult education and training courses (*Cursos de educação e formação de adultos, EFA*) offer academic and dual certification (academic and vocational/professional) at the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. EFA are delivered by a variety of different providers, including vocational education and training (VET) schools, Centres of the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (*Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional, IEFP*) and other accredited training providers.

Certified modular training courses (FMC)

Certified modular training courses (*Formações Modulares Certificadas, FMC*) are aimed at adults looking for training options outside of full-time courses for (re)insertion or progression in the labour market. FMC are divided into short, "stackable" modular units, and allow learners to acquire a recognised certification at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Portugal's National Qualifications Framework (*Quadro Nacional de Qualificações, QNQ*) and the EQF. FMC are delivered by the same type of providers.

Other courses

Other programmes at the lower- and upper-secondary level available to adults in Portugal include, but are not limited to: Host Language Courses (*Cursos de Português Língua de Acolhimento, PLA*), and Basic Skills Training (*Formação em Competências Básicas, FCB*) for adults who never completed primary education.

Throughout this project, the OECD, in collaboration with National authorities, the European Commission and stakeholders, assessed Portugal's current legislation and other regulations, governance arrangements, processes and actions taken to ensure that the quality of education and training meet certain minimum standards, and that the quality of the system is systematically monitored and improved over time.

This report is the final deliverable of the project on *Strengthening the Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal*. It builds upon the discussion paper prepared for the Policy Recommendations Workshop, and the background paper produced in support of the Good Practices Workshop. It incorporates insights from multiple workshops, working group consultations, interviews with key stakeholders, direct inputs from local experts in Portugal working in the field, and knowledge gathered through desk research drawing upon OECD's comparative and sectorial policy expertise. This report serves to provide technical support to Portuguese national authorities for the development of a National Plan to implement reforms to improve the quality assurance of adult education and training. More specifically, this report:

- Provides an overview of the Portuguese adult education and training system.
- Provides a description of the quality assurance system governing adult education and training in Portugal.
- Introduces an analytical framework presenting key quality assurance dimensions, which was used to analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall quality assurance system.
- Analyses key challenges of the Portuguese system of quality assurance in adult education and training.
- Makes policy recommendations to address the identified challenges.
- Delineates concrete guidance for the implementation of the proposed policy recommendations.
- Complements the implementation guidance by drawing on lessons learned from five international best practice case studies.

Key challenges and recommendations

Recommendations and implementation guidance for strengthening quality assure in Portugal's adult education and training system are provided in two key quality assurance dimensions:

- Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers.
- Monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes.

A high-level overview of the challenges and recommendations for strengthening quality assurance in adult education and training in Portugal in the key quality assurance dimensions is presented in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3. Key challenges and recommendations for strengthening quality assurance in adult education and training in Portugal
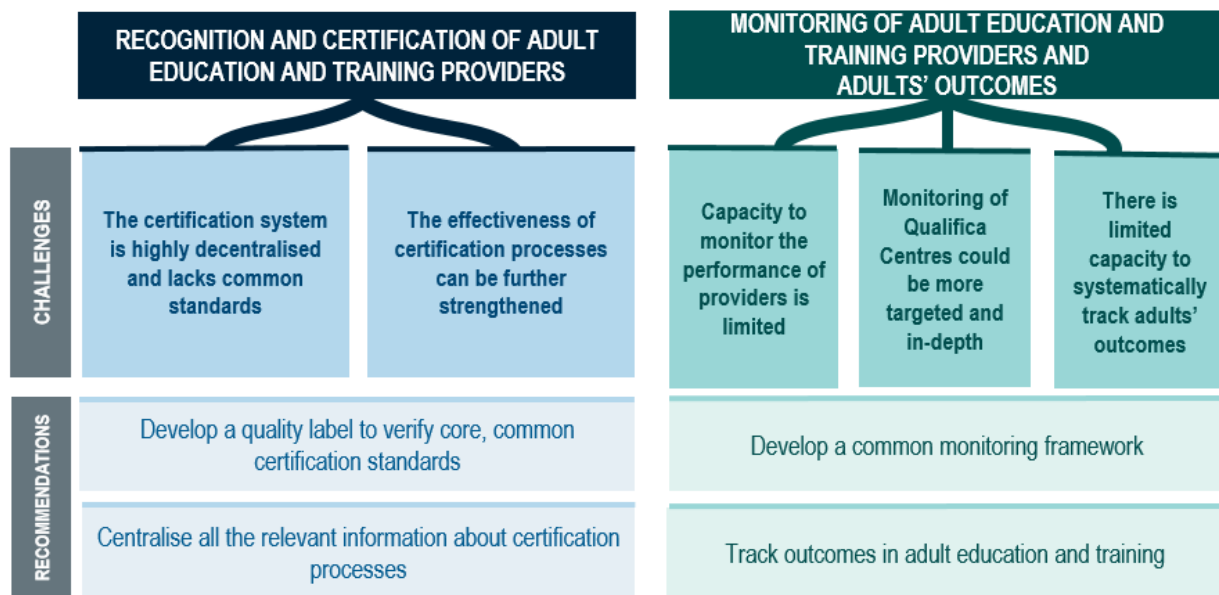
Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers

Challenge 1: The certification system is highly decentralised and lacks common standards

Portugal's certification system is complex, with many certifying entities responsible for providing different certifications to adult education providers or specific courses. The Ministry of Education, through the Directorate-General for Schools (*Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares*, *DGEstE*), certifies public schools and teachers; the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional, ANQEP*) certifies the establishment of new Qualifica Centres on the premises of private or public entities; Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (*Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho, DGERT*) provides a certification of general quality and capacity; Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (*Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional, IEFP*) covers certification of its own network of providers and trainers; and sectoral public institutions ("*entidades setoriais*") regulates the provision of specific courses for regulated professions. The certification requirements are often overlapping, which results in inefficiencies in certification processes that could be avoided. At the same time, insufficient co-ordination between the certifying entities creates transparency challenges.

It is difficult to compare the quality of providers across the system because the different certification bodies carry out their respective certification processes without adhering to certain common minimum quality standards. Portugal has not yet defined such minimum quality standards for certification of adult education providers to be applied by all bodies. As a result, it is challenging to compare the quality of providers operating within the system.

At the same time, the multiplicity of bodies and certification procedures that lack common minimum quality standards translates into a highly complex certification system which is difficult for providers navigate. In Portugal, there is presently no "one-stop-shop" clearly outlining which providers need to possess which specific combination of licences from the different actors, explaining how these interact and complement each other, or specifying the application deadlines and fees.

Challenge 2: The effectiveness of certifications processes can be further strengthened

Several stakeholders interviewed in this project noted that there is room to improve the effectiveness of certification processes of adult education providers in Portugal, and especially their ability to effectively guarantee important aspects of quality (such as pedagogical excellence). The certification processes are primarily viewed as burdensome procedures focused on verifying administrative aspects of providers' operations.

The existing certification process that is used to verify the pedagogical competences of trainers who lead adult education courses is seen as a necessary but insufficient tool to ensure the delivery of high quality training. All trainers who want to deliver training within the framework of the SNQ need to possess the Certificate of Pedagogical Competences (*Candidaturas ao Certificado de Competências Pedagógicas, CCP*) awarded by IEFP. However, stakeholders have identified the potential to further improve its strictness and comprehensiveness, especially in setting a sufficiently high standard for prospective trainers' professional pedagogical experience.

At the same time, certification processes often fail to ensure that trainers have adequate field-specific qualifications. The guidelines delineating the type and combination of qualifications that trainers need to possess are too vague to meaningfully support certification entities in assessing the trainers' portfolios. In practice, officials have to complement this assessment by subjective judgement, which limits the systematic nature and rigour of the process.

There is also room to improve the quality standards within the process by which DGEstE authorises public schools to become adult education providers. The certification requirements primarily focus on verifying courses' financial sustainability, and the number of adults interested in attending the course.

Recommendation 1: Develop a quality label to verify core, common certification standards

In order to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the certification process, and foster quality improvements among adult education providers, Portugal should consider developing a quality label based on a set of common certification criteria, and operationalised through common quality guidelines.

Given the diversity and heterogeneity of adult education providers operating in Portugal, prescribing the same quality requirements across the board could be counterproductive, because it would mean setting standards that might be unreasonably high for some or, conversely, insufficiently high for others. For example, the requirements imposed by the different sectoral public institutions certifying courses in regulated professions need to be much more stringent and area-specific than those imposed on private providers of broader areas of general adult education. Therefore, it is preferable for Portugal to adopt a "two-tier" quality framework, with two levels of certification criteria.

The first tier would consist of minimum criteria reasonable to ask of all providers, regardless of the size, type of training provided or groups of adults targeted. Based on the commonalities in certification requirements across key quality entities in Portugal, the first-tier of Portugal's proposed quality label is detailed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. First-tier certification criteria, which Portugal can streamline under its quality label

Four macro-dimensions of first-tier certification criteria, with their respective requirements listed in bullet points

Macro-dimensions and specific requirements			
Organisation	Staff	Training	Outcomes
Registration and legal constitution • Formal proof of entity registration and legal constitution	Pedagogical and non-pedagogical human resources • IEFP's Certificate of Pedagogical Competences (CCP) or pedagogical competences assessed by the Ministry of Education • Presence of at least one "experienced trainer" • Provision of continuous professional development to trainers • Brief description of management policies (contracts, allowances, etc.)	Planning and management of training • Verification of course connection to QNQ and EQF • Brief description of course regulations • Brief description of course objectives and desired outcomes (qualitative and quantitative)	Presence of tools and mechanisms for measuring learners' satisfaction and labour market outcomes
Facilities and equipment • Brief description of spaces dedicated to learning activities and pedagogical equipment		Design and development of training • Policies for evaluation of training • Policies in place to ensure in-class inspections	
Operational processes • Brief description of providers' quality assurance process			
General administration • Health and safety • Finances • Complaints handling			

Recommendation 2: Centralise all the relevant information about certification processes

In order to reduce the administrative burden and confusion among Portuguese adult education providers and mitigate inefficiencies between regulatory agencies, Portugal should establish a centralised online information centre and application portal.

The information hub would clearly describe the timelines, costs, and application guidelines for obtaining the common quality label as well as the second-tier certifications. The common application portal would be especially effective in operationalising the two-tier certification system outlined in Recommendation 1. The application portal would allow providers to apply for the common quality label through a standardised first-tier application system, outlining all the common certification requirements. Where necessary, the portal could automatically direct each training provider to relevant second tier certification processes, which would still be overseen by each of the relevant certification entities (sectoral institutions, DGERT, DGEstE, ANQEP, and IEFP). However, each of these entities would use this common portal rather than maintain their own individual certification portals.

Monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes

Challenge 3: Capacity to monitor the performance of providers is limited

There is a large number, and a great variety of adult education and training providers in Portugal. However, the technical and human resource capacities for monitoring their performance and continuous quality

improvement are constrained, giving rise to questions about the effectiveness of the monitoring exercises in place.

The responsibility to monitor the quality of public providers falls on the bodies that grant their corresponding certification. Once certified by DGERT, private providers obtain the official approval to develop training activities in the areas for which the certification was granted. However, DGERT's capacity to ascertain whether providers deliver training with the expected quality is limited. The main instrument for DGERT to monitor the quality of private providers is an audit. Because of the large number of providers certified by DGERT – 3000 as of 2019 – it is not possible to audit all providers on a regular basis. One challenge preventing large-scale auditing from taking place is DGERT's limited capacity and human resources, currently counting a team of no more than 10 people. For this reason, only approximately 2% of providers are audited each year.

IEFP obliges providers of apprenticeship courses to regularly complete self-assessment exercises. DGERT also used to require a self-assessment from providers in the past, but the practice was discontinued. Similarly to DGERT's experience, IEFP's providers do not attach great importance to the process. According to stakeholders, providers do not see the process as an opportunity to improve but rather as an additional layer of administrative burden. In addition, IEFP struggles to manage the analysis of the self-assessment forms it receives from providers, and lacks the capacity to furnish providers with meaningful feedback.

Finally, the regional services of DGEstE monitor the activity of public schools offering adult education. However, stakeholders have reported that course planning for adult education programmes provided through schools is not informed by the results of previous inspection results assessing course quality. This means that even when the quality of a course has been assessed as being low through the inspection process, it may continue to remain part of schools' offer for adults.

Challenge 4: Monitoring of Qualifica Centres could be more targeted and in-depth

There are 310 Qualifica Centres scattered across Portugal. Four inter-institutional (ANQEP-IEFP-DGEstE) regional monitoring teams are in charge of monitoring the performance and providing guidance to the Centres during in-person site visits. Over the last two years, ANQEP has implemented several measures to reinforce the monitoring of the Qualifica Centres: i) the number of human resources dedicated to Qualifica Centres' monitoring has increased and the coordination with IEFP and DGEstE was reinforced; ii) significant improvements were made to the monthly monitoring of Qualifica Centres with new data and indicators being introduced and delivered to regional teams and Centres; iii) important changes were made to the SIGO information system, which helped improve the level of autonomy and accountability of Qualifica Centres; iv) specific guidelines, especially concerning digital online activities, were introduced to respond to the COVID-19 crisis; and v) monitoring and training activities with Qualifica Centres were maintained despite the pandemic situation (in 2020, training sessions were carried out by regional teams and 1089 professionals from Qualifica Centres were involved).

Still, the activities of the monitoring teams during the site-visits at Qualifica Centres could be made more meaningful, and their role as monitoring entities of Qualifica Centres better acknowledged and supported. Some members of the monitoring teams have raised concerns about the capacity of the regional teams, as groups, to carry out the monitoring of Qualifica Centres. The four monitoring teams, each consisting of no more than five people, are often under-resourced to carry out meaningful in-person site visits to more than the 300 Qualifica Centres. In addition to this, disparities exist with respect to the number of centres covered by each team. While in some regions, the number of Qualifica Centres per team is around 50, the team covering the North region oversees almost 120 centres. Moreover, the members of the ANQEP-IEFP-DGEstE regional teams are not exclusively dedicated to this job and must accomplish other tasks in their respective agencies. Finally, despite the fact that ANQEP produces guidelines and provides data on performance levels of each Qualifica Centre helping the monitoring teams to carry out the site-visits and

evaluations, there is no reference framework that allows the teams to measure quality against a clear benchmark.

Providing the regional teams with more guidance on how to better help Qualifica Centres improve the quality of their services based on the data collected has been highlighted as an area with room for improvement.

Challenge 5: There is limited capacity to systematically track adults' outcomes

Portugal's capacity to monitor the outcomes of adults beyond course completion is constrained. Privacy concerns relating to the sharing of data between key quality assurance entities have limited the use of administrative data for tracking outcomes. At the same time, providers equally face challenges in tracking student employability outcomes and satisfaction.

To date, only IEFP and the Human Capital Operational Programme (*Programa Operacional Capital Humano, POCH*) are able to link data from some of their courses with graduates' labour market outcomes (employment status, salaries, etc.). POCH is able to do so under a protocol established between it, the *Directorate-General for Statistics of Education and Science (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, DGEEC)* and social security services (*segurança social*), while IEFP (under the Ministry of Labour) can also access social security data (Law no.71/2018). Still, IEFP faces challenges in tracking outcomes of learners in the training Centres providing apprenticeship courses that it oversees because social security data does not provide, for example, information on whether VET learners end up working in areas related to their completed training. Similarly, POCH's monitoring efforts are made difficult by the fact that the data is generally fragmented and incomplete.

Portugal also faces challenges in assessing other outcomes, such as whether course participants enrol in higher education institutions after having completed their training, or improve their on-the-job performance. With respect to the latter, stakeholders have underlined that it is largely impossible to obtain feedback from companies that had arranged for their workers to participate in training as firms usually do not respond to requests for this sort of information. Stakeholders also reported that tracking student satisfaction through online or email surveys is equally challenging for providers.

Portugal needs to establish protocols to share social security data with other ministries for the purposes of assessing adult learners' outcomes and to extend this practice to the entire adult education system. There is a strong agreement on the potential benefits of this practice to improve the quality of the system. Moving in this direction would not only require strong data protection and privacy standards but also collaboration between the Ministries of Education and the Ministry of Ministry of Labour.

Recommendation 3: Develop a common monitoring framework

Portugal has invested considerable efforts into developing various mechanisms to monitor the quality of its adult education system. For example, ANQEP distributes monthly reports with selected quantitative indicators to Qualifica Centres, and the Qualifica Centres' regional monitoring teams alongside other certification entities perform formative site visits and audits respectively. In order to improve the effectiveness of these efforts and increase Portugal's capacity to carry out more informed and informative monitoring exercises, Portugal should establish a common monitoring framework based on quantitative indicators gathered by the Information and Management System of the Education and Training Provision (*Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa, SIGO*) and qualitative indicators as proposed for the self-assessment component of the framework. The proposed structure of such a framework is detailed in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Common monitoring framework

Quantitative and qualitative components of the monitoring framework

	Quantitative indicators (SIGO and other data sources)	Qualitative indicators (self-assessment)
Organisation		• Description of leadership (managers/co-ordinators) • Description of facilities management (management of spaces dedicated to learning activities and pedagogical equipment) • Description of internal quality assurance processes
Staff	• No. of trainers/teachers • No. of "experienced trainers" • % of staff enrolled in continuous development • % of staff having completed continuous development	• Description of goals and objectives that staff professional development is helping achieve • Description of challenges in staff professional development processes
Training	• No. of certifications awarded • Course completion rates • No. of internal in-class inspections	• Description of strengths and weaknesses of pedagogical practices • Description of policies for pedagogical assessment and evaluation • Description of the results from pedagogical evaluation
Outcomes	• Employability of learners • No. of courses and course hours • No. of adults enrolled	• Results from satisfaction surveys

Recommendation 4: Track outcomes in adult education and training

Successfully tracking outcomes in adult education and training is complex, and the challenges inherent in the process are not unique to Portugal. In order to initiate the effort in a systematic way, Portugal could establish a formal mechanism specifically devoted to improving the system for monitoring of adults' outcomes.

The mechanism for monitoring adults' outcomes could take the form of an inter-institutional working group that would convene multiple times a year to make recommendations for: i) making the most out of the existing administrative data; and ii) enriching the data collected through systematic student surveys, which could be combined to develop a formal graduate tracking system in the longer term (European Commission, 2020[9]). With respect to both recommendations, the outcome tracking process should focus on employment indicators (e.g. employment status, employment type, salary), while student surveys could be used to collect self-reported information on adults' progression into further education as well as on subjective impressions of the quality and relevance of the training. As a first step, the working group could focus on leveraging administrative data to track adults who completed initial vocational education and training (IVET), before enlarging the focus to include continuing education and training (CVET).

Given their responsibilities in this areas, the working group should thus encompass representatives with technical expertise in monitoring adults' outcomes from IEFP, DGERT, DGEstE, DGEEC, and the Directorate General for Higher Education at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (*Direção Geral do Ensino Superior, DGES*).

Structure of the report

This remainder of this report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 explains the methodology used to guide the analysis and arrive at the recommendations and the implementation guidance presented in this report. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the adult education and training system in Portugal, in order to introduce

the specific discussion of its quality assurance dimensions. Chapter 4 then provides a description of the quality assurance system in adult education and training in Portugal by outlining the roles and responsibilities of its key actors.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyse the key challenges, and outline concrete recommendations, implementation guidance and relevant international case studies for two key quality assurance processes of Portugal's adult education and training system respectively: i) recognition and certification of adult education providers, and ii) monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes.

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2 Methodology

This chapter details the methodology that guided the analysis and recommendations developed in Chapters 5 and 6. The methodological approach consists of two facets: i) stakeholder consultations, and ii) development of an analytical framework. Stakeholder consultations were key for obtaining first-hand insights from a wide variety of Portuguese stakeholders and international experts with in-depth knowledge of the local context and quality assurance processes. The analytical framework allowed for a structured analysis of Portugal's system of quality assurance in adult education and training, identifying two key quality assurance dimensions: i) recognition and certification of adult education and training providers, and ii) monitoring of adult education providers and adults' outcomes.

Stakeholder consultations

This project seeks to develop expertise and deliver technical guidance in support of the implementation of concrete reforms in quality assurance in adult education by the Portuguese authorities. The analyses and recommendations included in this report were developed based on substantial stakeholder inputs. Therefore, the project integrates first-hand insights of a wide variety of stakeholders and local experts working in close proximity of the Portuguese quality assurance system as well as from several international experts and practitioners.

To facilitate a close alignment and smooth, practical integration of this report with the realities of the Portuguese quality assurance system in adult education, the project has included several activities. These comprise a fact-finding mission to Portugal and a number of workshops, working groups, stakeholder interviews and study visits to three European countries.

During the fact-findings mission to Lisbon, the OECD team, together with the European Commission representatives?, participated in ten bilateral meetings with representatives of key public bodies integral to the field of quality assurance of adult education and training, as well as the members of the Project Advisory Group.

The Good Practices Workshop was carried out in an adjusted format due to COVID-19 developments. Instead of a standard workshop, the OECD team organised a series of Zoom interviews with more than 50 stakeholders, including representatives of Ministerial departments, public agencies, Qualifica Centres, higher education institutions, adult education providers, associations and platforms, independent experts, and confederations. These interviews helped identify and raise awareness about the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance of adult education arrangements in Portugal, improve understanding of good practices internationally, and stimulate discussion about actions Portugal might take to improve its performance.

The Policy Recommendations Workshop was held online and re-convened over 50 stakeholders in the plenary session, and over 30 participants in each of the four thematic sessions. It permitted the discussion of the preliminary identified recommendations for improving Portuguese quality assurance system in adult education, and of the challenges related to implementing the preliminary recommendations. The Policy Recommendations Workshop also counted on participation of three experts working in the field of quality assurance from Austria, Finland and Portugal respectively. Their insights allowed participants to learn about international experiences with different quality assurance models in adult education, and draw lessons for the Portuguese context. In order to refine the specifics of this report and to clarify outstanding issues, four further working groups with key selected stakeholders were held in the project's final phase.

Finally, a two-day virtual study visit to Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland was organised for a select group of key Portuguese quality assurance actors. This visit provided concrete international implementation guidance lessons for Portugal.

The objectives and activities of each project activity, together with a list of participating entities, are further detailed in Annex B.

Analytical framework

This section will introduce an analytical framework through the perspective of which the Portuguese system of quality assurance will be defined and assessed, as well as explain how the framework internalises the inherent complexity of the concept of "quality" in adult education. The framework will allow for detailed appraisal of the different dimensions of the quality assurance system of adult education and training in Portugal, and hence for the identification of the main areas for improvement.

Quality and quality assurance are multifaceted and complex constructs, with most of academic literature resisting to put forward single definitions(Sousa & Voss, 2002). Quality assurance (of products or services) relates to the planning and development of formal activities and managerial processes in an attempt to achieve the desired objectives. Hence, quality assurance includes all the planned and systematic actions which guarantee that a certain product or service will meet certain requirements, at the same time it assures continuous improvement and enhancement (ISO, 2015[1]).

Quality in learning and education is a holistic and multidimensional concept demanding constant attention and continuous development, to be achieved and maintained through concrete and well-defined steps (European Commission, 2019[2]; UIL, 2010[3]). It is also a relative concept, since it means different things to different stakeholders: learners, teachers and trainers, employers, government, funding agencies, auditors (Harvey & Green, 1993). More specifically, "quality in adult learning requires relevant content and modes of delivery, learner-centred needs assessment, the acquisition of multiple competences and knowledge, the professionalisation of educators, the enrichment of learning environments and the empowerment of individuals and communities" (UIL, 2010[3]). It is consensual amongst academics, researchers and adult education and training stakeholders that regularly assessing the quality of providers and of the adult education and learning that they provide is crucial to understanding the effectiveness and efficiency of any adult education and training system and contributes to its continuous improvement (UIL, 2019[4]).

This report defines quality assurance as a set of policies and practices needed to ensure minimum quality standards in adult education and training, which should be maintained and improved over time. Therefore, the analytical framework introduces the conceptualisation of quality assurance process on a temporal dimension (Figure 2.1). More specifically, the framework distinguishes: i) recognition and certification of adult education providers; from ii) monitoring of adult education providers and of adults' outcomes. The framework is in line with the four stages of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) (Planning-Implementation-Evaluation-Review) (EQAVET, 2020[5]), to which Portuguese VET providers are already legislatively obliged to align their quality assurance systems (European Commission, 2019[6]). Therefore, Portugal should consider EQAVET principles at the level of quality assurance in adult education and training as well. The framework is also in line with the concept and criterion of excellence of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model, and with the quality management principles of the ISO 9001 Standard (ISO, 2015[1]). Similarly to these quality assurance models, the framework broadly mirrors a 'Plan-Do-Check-Act' logic, aiming at quality continuous enhancement and focusing on stakeholder ('customer') needs and expectations.

The section below details the two main quality assurance processes integrated in the analytical framework:

- Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers.
- Monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes.

Figure 2.1. The Quality Assurance Framework
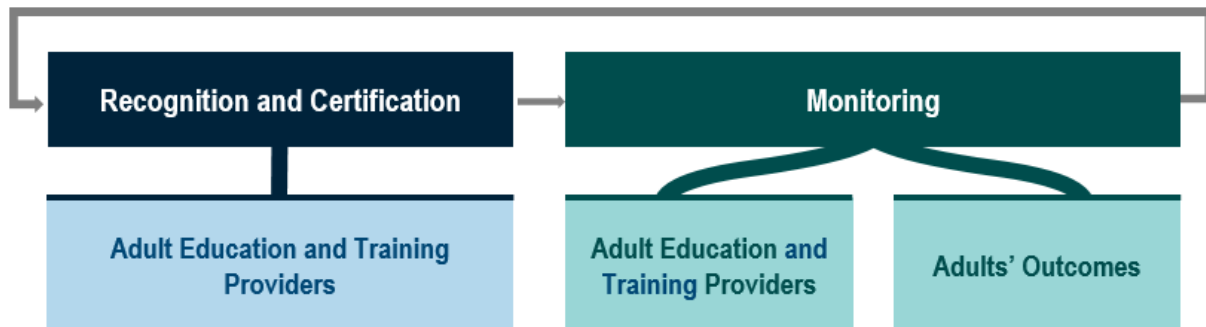
Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers

The process of recognition and certification of providers is a tool extensively used in the process of quality assurance in VET or adult education for examining the quality of an institution or a person that aims to provide training (Barabasch, 2017[7]; Hobson et al., 2008[8]; Masson, Baati and Seyfried, 2010[9]; Navaratnam and O'Connor, 1993[10]; OECD, 2021[11]). The certification recognises that the institution provides a quality training service to society (e.g., labour market, students, the community in general) (Hanh, 2020[12]), carries out internal quality assurance processes, and acts as a signaling device that helps to establish trust in the certified providers. Accreditation also ensures the training programmes meet the expectations of their related professional areas (Bowker, 2017[13]). In addition, accreditation assesses whether the institution develops mechanisms to ensure that quality standards are enhanced and improved over the time (Ibrahim, 2014[14]).

Recognising and certifying adult education and training providers involves the assessment of an educational institution or a training programme by a certification body that subsequently grants to the provider an official recognition to operate. In this process, the certification body certifies that the institution or programme meets minimum pre-established quality criteria and standards (Vlasceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea, 2007[15]; Ibrahim, 2014[14]; de Paor, 2016[16]; Hanh, 2020[12]). The standards defined by the certification body can vary according to specific local context, while detailed information on their content is not always publicly available. However, a clear and concrete definition of the main objectives and criteria to be assessed by the certifying agency is a condition of an effective and efficient quality assurance system.

The recognition and certification process is normally carried out by a (non-) governmental or private body. As mentioned above, the institution can evaluate the quality of an education institution or the quality of a specific educational programme. The objective is to signal that the provider or the training course has met certain pre-determined minimum standards. Moreover, different bodies can be responsible for different types of accreditation such as general accreditation, specialised accreditation, and professional accreditation (Vlasceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea, 2007[15]).

The recognition and certification process could involve several steps: (i) definition of criteria/standards required; (ii) institutional self-evaluation against the criteria defined and application; (iii) external assessment that can involve on-site visits, expert consultations and validation of self-reported information; (iv) examination of the evidence and a development of report with recommendations; and (v) follow-up procedures (Vlasceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea, 2007[15]; de Paor, 2016[16]). The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision) of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited period of validity. When the provider receives a positive decision, it is commonly awarded with a label that can be used as a sign of quality. Finally, the process typically entails monitoring during the period within which a license is held, with its renewal understood as a pre-condition for a provider's continuing operation as a formally recognised entity.

Drawing on an illustration from the higher education field, two types of certification exist: institutional accreditation, and specialised or programme accreditation (Ibrahim, 2014[14]; Hanh, 2020[12]). As mentioned above, in adult education and training, distinct certifications exist for providers, as well as specific training courses or programmes. The former intends to assess the entire institution, considering both institutional dimension and students' learning experience and outcomes (Ibrahim, 2014[14]). It normally evaluates the physical facilities, human resources, services, financial sustainability, management and governance, relationship with community and also internal policies and procedures (Hanh, 2020[12]; Prisăcariu, 2014[17])). The latter looks at whether training programmes meet the specific quality requirements for a certain level of qualification.

Once awarded, the certification is valid for a certain period of time specified by the certification agency, which generally holds the right to suspend or to renew this license, upon the satisfactory performance or resolution of any identified issues. Self-assessment is an important step during the certification process. It is often suggested that external quality assurance should be enriched by self-evaluation processes in order to aid the development of a system based on an internal culture of voluntary and conscious quality improvement (Masson, Baati and Seyfried, 2010[9]; Pescaru, 2019[18]).

There are several clear advantages of awarding, as well as being awarded a certification to provide adult education and training, for institutions, learners, the labour market and the society in general. It is an opportunity to involve a variety of stakeholders in setting the requirements and the criteria for accreditation, allowing to better prepare learners for eventually joining the labour market. It also stimulates competition that can foster accountability and continuous improvement, improves transparency in the sector and allows providers to receive feedback on their quality (de Paor, 2016[16]; Hanh, 2020[12]). Finally, it enables providers to access public funding, as in many countries training providers whishing do deliver government-funded training programmes need to be certified (OECD, 2021[11]).

However, the literature also points out some drawbacks of the certification process, especially if poorly administered and implemented. First, it can be a highly bureaucratic, time-consuming and complex process requiring the provider to dedicate significant resources to ensure having met the pre-defined criteria (Allais, 2009[19]). The need to follow a set of a requirements may equally encourage the provider to produce a set of documents only with the purpose of meeting the pre-defined criteria necessary for obtaining certification, while paying little attention to quality improvement in practice (Ibrahim, 2014[14]).

Monitoring of adult education and training providers

Monitoring and evaluation processes in adult education are multifunctional and complex. First, they are processes of continuous improvement, and need to be designed to encourage enhancement of the learning process through a range of outcomes (Harvey and Newton, 2004[20]). Second, monitoring and evaluation processes are instruments for fostering accountability (to students, funding entities and the society), compliance (with internal and external standards as well as with governmental policy) and, in some countries, control (of the growth of adult or higher education systems) (Harvey and Newton, 2004[20]).

Monitoring can be defined as "an ongoing process by which stakeholders obtain regular feedback on the progress being made towards goals and objectives" (UNDP, 2009[21]). Monitoring is an important source of information for the evaluation of training courses and programmes. In turn, evaluation is understood as "the systematic collection of information to make judgments, improve programme effectiveness and/or generate knowledge to inform decisions about future programmes" (Patton, 1997[22]). Evaluation may be formative (providing feedback for improvement) or summative (assessing merit or worth). Furthermore, evaluation may be conducted by outside evaluators who provide third party validation or examine questions of special interest (external evaluation); or internally by programme staff (internal evaluation). External evaluation can be defined as "the process whereby a specialised agency collects data, information, and evidence about an institution, a particular unit of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, in

order to make a statement about its quality" (Seto and Wells, 2007[23]). It usually requires an analysis of a self-evaluation report, a site visit and finally the drafting of an evaluation report.

Self-evaluation can be an alternative strategy to monitor and evaluate the performance of training providers. This can be a challenging task, as it requires credible information on many different areas of quality. Self-evaluation can be extremely relevant to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the training providers and of the adult education system as a whole. Examples from several OECD countries, such as Sweden, show that the self-evaluation exercises can be especially useful when 'guided' and supported externally, namely by the national entity or entities responsible for quality assurance of adult education. An important success factor also relates to the extent to which they integrate concrete follow-up actions, so that continuous improvement is assured (OECD, 2021[11]).

Nevertheless, using the results of monitoring and evaluation exercises to improve quality is very challenging in practice. First, these exercises do not account for all the relevant factors impacting on quality. Second, the relationship between quality monitoring, on the one hand, and changes in the quality of provision on the other, are not linear. Most impact studies reinforce the view that quality monitoring and evaluation are about compliance and accountability, and have contributed little to any effective transformation of the quality of education provision and, in particular, of the student learning experience (Harvey and Askling, 2003[24]; Harvey and Newton, 2004[20]).

According to the OECD (2021[11]), there are two 'strategies' which can help boost the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation in assuring quality of adult education and learning. First, best practice sharing and guideline provision can be useful. Training providers should be able to benefit from robust support in implementing quality assurance measures for monitoring and evaluation, either in the form of access to best practices examples of other countries, or in the form of concrete guidelines, criteria and quality standards, provided by national (or even international) entities. Second, publicising the results of quality evaluation and monitoring exercises can be key useful, so that individuals, employers and institutions can make informed choices about which training to invest in.

Monitoring of adults' outcomes

Although monitoring of adult education and training providers is an important element of quality assurance, individuals, employers and institutions can further benefit from more in-depth information on quality of the education and training offering provided by monitoring adults' outcomes (OECD, 2019[25]).

Learning outcomes are the "statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning as well as the specific intellectual and practical skills gained and demonstrated by the successful completion of a unit, course, or programme" (Seto and Wells, 2007[23]). Learning outcomes should be clearly defined, in a form which enables learners to know at the commencement of a course or a module what it is that they are expected to achieve in relation to subject content, individual transferable skills and outcomes (Allan, 1996[26]).

As stated before, one of the major challenges of quality assurance monitoring procedures is to assess their impact on student learning experience and on student learning outcomes. In fact, one of the areas in which quality assurance at different educational levels may have less impact than intended is that of its impact on the core processes of learning (Stensaker, 2014[27]).

Nevertheless, the interest in learning outcomes is being integrated internationally into existing quality assurance procedures, opening up for yet another set of criteria for quality assurance bodies to use in their monitoring processes (Harvey and Williams, 2010[28]). In addition to the monitoring of institutions and training programmes, many quality assurance bodies, especially in Europe, are increasingly interested in understanding how training impacts on learning outcomes (Stensaker, 2014[27]). The measurement of the learning outcomes of students is the new goal of accountability-driven policy initiatives in a number of countries (Shavelson, 2010[29]).

Several indicators can be used to monitor and assess adult learning outcomes. The monitoring of completion rates is one of the most common indicators, and is widely used, for example, in Denmark and in the United Kingdom. Learner dropout rates are also common indicators, which can signal students' dissatisfaction and demotivation, or the low quality or relevance of training. In addition to completion and dropout rates, countries, such as the United Kingdom, make use of additional indicators such as, for instance, employment status (employee, worker, self-employed), or progression towards achieving the learning aims of the programme.

Furthermore, skills assessment, namely, literacy and numeracy proficiency, are also conventional indicators of education and training outcomes. Several countries, such as Italy, Ireland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, draw on these assessments for monitoring and evaluating outcomes (OECD, 2019[25]; European Commission, 2019[2]). Interestingly, certain countries (such as Belgium and Finland) are using not only quantitative data, but also qualitative data, in order to understand wider benefits and unexpected impacts of adult education and training (OECD, 2019[25]).

With respect to measuring economic outcomes, and especially those linked to labour market inclusion, different approaches have been implemented internationally. The most straightforward approach is to survey learners at the time of their training completion. However, this and other alternative approaches, such as follow-up surveys, face several limitations. For example, often the employment status is unknown at the time of, or shortly after training completion, In addition, response rates to follow-up surveys can be low, and tracking participants over time may prove particularly demanding (OECD, 2019[25]). This is why several countries, such as Ireland and Sweden, are currently experimenting with an alternative strategy, which is matching the information contained in participation data with other administrative datasets (OECD, 2019[25]). For instance, in Ireland, administrative data from the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is being supplemented with data from adult learners' surveys. Similarly, in Sweden the database collected in the context of municipal adult education has been linked with the longitudinal integrated database for health insurance and labour market studies (LISA) to obtain yearly information on employment outcomes (OECD, 2019[25]).

The impact of adult education and training on other types of outcomes (e.g. social, civic, and socio-emotional) is extremely difficult to monitor. Even though the evidence suggests a strong association between these outcomes and participation in adult education and training, it is complex to identify a causal relationship and most surveys or dataset do no cover these outcomes (OECD, 2019[30]). Despite these challenges, Norway's Directorate for Lifelong Learning of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (*Kompetanse Norway*) evaluates participants' self-confidence, self-esteem, communication competencies, and cooperation, among other social and emotional outcomes Participants are asked to fill out a questionnaire at the end of the first day of the course, on the last day of the course and one year following the course completion. Using the survey data, *Kompetanse Norway* can monitor and evaluate both short-term and long-term effects of the training based on the changes in participants' self-reported social and emotional outcomes (OECD, 2019[25]). The Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), provides good examples of questions that can be asked of participants before and after course completion in order to capture the change in social and civic outcomes post-training. For example, PIAAC collects information on the level of trust in others; participation in associative, religious, political, or charity activities (volunteering); the sense of being able to influence the political process (political efficacy); as well as health conditions.

In general, there are several pre-conditions for monitoring and evaluating learning outcomes successfully. First, there is a 'definition challenge', meaning that there must be a clear definition of the intended learning outcomes (cognitive, and non-cognitive skills, and competencies) for each training course, and the intended learning outcomes must be known to learners. Second, there is an 'alignment challenge', i.e., learning outcomes must be aligned with teaching and training, learning and assessment methods. Third, there is an 'assessment challenge'. This means that it should be clearly defined which "tools" are selected to monitor individual learning outcomes, among the many on offer: direct assessment of learners'

knowledge and skills, or indirect self-assessment (student surveys and questionnaires, after completing the training and/or after a few years of work experience) (Nushe, 2008[31]). Finally, it should be made clear who is to perform the external assessment (e.g. academics, or other external stakeholders).

Governance of quality assurance

It is important to underline that beyond some of the technical challenges detailed above, there is a governance aspect to each of the three quality assurance processes (recognition and certification of adult education providers, monitoring of adult education providers, monitoring of adult education providers and adults' learning outcomes) encompassed in the analytical framework. Assessing the extent to which these three quality assurance processes are supported by strong governance arrangements will importantly inform the analysis of the forthcoming chapters (Chapters 5 and 6).

The importance of adequately calibrated governance processes in policy making has been well documented in the literature (Ansell, 2012[32]; Hill and Hupe, 2014[33]; UIL, 2019[4]). In the field of adult education and training, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2010[3]) underlines that "good governance facilitates the implementation of adult learning and education policy in ways which are effective, transparent, accountable and equitable.

The governance of quality assurance in adult education and training is characterised by a considerable level of complexity, as shown by the plethora of actors involved in the functioning of the quality assurance system (see Chapter 3). This diversity may hamper effective coordination between and with ministries, and other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, ultimately diminishing the efficiency, effectiveness and rigour of the quality assurance processes.

Assessing the extent to which quality assurance of adult education and training can rely on a robust governance structure is a vital component of the analytical framework employed here to identify the system's main challenges. In assessing the robustness of the governance structure, the report applies the Governance Framework of the *OECD Skills Strategy 2019* (OECD, 2019[30]) to the context of quality assurance. Specifically, the framework highlights four building blocks of strong governance arrangements: 1) promoting co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across the whole of government; 2) engaging stakeholders throughout the policy cycle; 3) building integrated information systems; and 4) aligning and co-ordinating financing arrangements.

The forthcoming analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 will therefore involve assessing how each quality assurance process identified in the analytical framework (Figure 2.1) performs with respect to one or more dimensions of the OECD Governance framework. For instance, Chapter 5 will examine, among other things, the extent to which the process of recognition and certification of adult education and training providers rests on the bedrock of strong co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across the relevant government actors and agencies.

The next chapter provides an overview and an assessment of the adult education and training system in Portugal, in order to introduce the examination of its quality assurance processes, which follows in subsequent chapters.

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3 Adult education and training in Portugal

This chapter provides an overview of Portugal's adult education and training system. It outlines recent key reforms, the system's main actors and their roles and responsibilities. The chapter also provides a comprehensive mapping of Portugal's adult education and training offering, and describes Portugal's pathways for re/upskilling of adults.

Overview of the adult education and training system in Portugal

Recent developments in Portugal's adult education and training system

Successive governments in Portugal have placed strong focus on addressing the problems of low educational attainment, especially among adults, and of high rates of early school leaving by promoting opportunities in adult education and training and in vocational education and training (VET).

With the 2007 VET reform, supported by a social dialogue agreement, the government decided to prioritise VET. It drew up plans to bring the different parts of the VET system together into a single national framework under the joint supervision of the Ministries of Education and Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and in connection with the Ministry of Economy. The law created common objectives, tools and structures in order to ensure that VET qualifications would better match labour market needs and to reinforce the recognition, validation and certification of competences. Box 3.1 summarises the major innovations of the 2007 reform, together with key updates introduced since.

Box 3.1. Key innovations of Portugal's 2007 VET reform and recent updates

The extensive reform of Portugal's VET system in 2007 entailed two major innovations. It created:

- National Qualifications System (SNQ, *Sistema Nacional de Qualificações*).
- National Agency for Qualification (ANQ, *Agência Nacional para a Qualificação*).

The National Qualifications System (SNQ) was established to create common national standards for VET courses, regardless of the provider. The National Agency for Qualification (ANQ), now called the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP, *Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*) was created to co-ordinate the implementation of education and vocational training policies for young people and adults, and ensure the development and management of the system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC).

Since 2007, the National Qualifications System (SNQ) has been subject to several modifications, and now includes the following instruments and structures:

- National Qualifications Framework (*QNQ, Quadro Nacional de Qualificações*) (2007)
- National Catalogue of Qualifications (*CNQ, Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações*) (2007)
- Sectoral Councils for Qualifications (*Conselhos Setoriais para a Qualificação*) (2007)
- Qualifica Centres (*Centres Qualifica*) (2017)
- Qualifica Passport (*Passaporte Qualifica*) (2017)
- National Credit System for VET (*Sistema Nacional de Créditos do Ensino e da Formação Profissional*) (2017).

The National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNQ) integrates more than 390 qualifications. These qualifications correspond to levels 2, 4 and 5 of the National Qualifications Framework (QNQ). The QNQ is a reference tool classifying all qualifications of the Portuguese education and training system into eight levels. The QNQ is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In order to regularly update the CNQ, 18 Sectoral Councils were created in which stakeholders discuss the creation of new qualifications and the updating or abolishment of existing ones.

The Qualification Needs Anticipation System (SANQ) has been established by ANQEP to evaluate which qualifications are needed in the Portuguese labour market. Through SANQ, ANQEP can determine the demand for each qualification in the CNQ at the regional level (NUT II).

The Qualifica Programme established three concrete goals to be reached by 2020: i) 50% of the workforce should have finished upper secondary education; ii) 15% of adults should take part in lifelong learning activities; and iii) 40% of 30-34 year-olds should have obtained a higher education certificate. To operationalise these goals, 310 Qualifica Centres have been set up across Portugal. They provide information, guidance and referral of adults to relevant training, and are responsible for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts (Figure 3.1).

The Qualifica Passport is an online tool, which allows adults to record their qualifications and skills and identify further learning pathways. In addition, the Qualifica Programme established the National Credit System for VET, on the basis of key principles of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

Source: OECD (2020[1]), *Strengthening the Governance of Skills Systems: Lessons from Six OECD Countries,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/3a4bb6ea-en; Government of Portugal (2020[2]), *Qualifica,* https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/programaQualifica.

In July 2018, the Portuguese Government launched a consultation process with civil society and policy makers to draft a National Plan for Adult Literacy. The plan will propose specific measures to address low literacy levels of different population groups contributing for the implementation of the targets of the Qualifica Programme. Moreover, the Government and social partners within the Permanent Commission for Social Dialogue *(Comissão Permanente de Concertação Social)*, are currently also discussing the Strategic Agreement on Vocational Training *(Acordo Estratégico sobre Formação Profissional),* which foresees substantial reforms to modernise the vocational training system. This Strategic Agreement should i) improve the regulation and governance of the vocational training system, ii) introduce greater flexibility and innovation into training modalities, iii) strengthen the Qualifica Programme, and iv) bolster the distance learning system, with emphasis on the use of digital technologies.

Main actors in Portugal's adult education and training system

The Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação, ME) and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social, MTSSS)

The Ministry of Education (ME) is responsible for general, non-higher education in Portugal, including the provision of education and training opportunities for adults. VET pathways are a joint responsibility between the ME and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS). MTSSS maintains close relationships with employers and unions. The roles and responsibilities of the respective services and public bodies under the auspices of the ME (Directorate-General for Schools) and the MTSSS (Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations, and the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training), or agencies under the joint supervision of the two Ministries (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education) in adult education, are detailed below.

National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional, ANQEP)

Since the creation of the National Qualifications System (SNQ) in 2007, ANQEP has acted as its main co-ordinating body. ANQEP operates under the supervision of the ME, MTSSS, and the Ministry of State, Economy and Digital Transition. ANQEP's General Board comprised of both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders plays an important consultative role.

ANQEP's co-ordination role includes a number of different elements. First, ANQEP co-ordinates the continuous updating of the National Catalogue of Qualifications, with the involvement of the sectoral councils. ANQEP is also responsible for developing and managing the recognition, validation and certification of competences. In this capacity, it oversees 310 Qualifica Centres, whose main task is the provision of lifelong guidance to adults, as well as the certification of prior learning experience to help adults improve their levels of qualifications. In order to ensure that the same standards apply across the whole country, ANQEP provides training to Qualifica Centre staff and oversees the National Credit System for VET. In addition, it manages the Qualifica Passport, which records the qualifications and skills acquired by individuals. Second, ANQEP has established the System for the Anticipation of Qualifications Needs (*Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificações, SANQ*) to evaluate which qualifications are needed in the labour market. SANQ uses a variety of data sources and indicators to rank qualifications according to priority levels.

Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional, IEFP)

IEFP is the Portuguese Public Employment Service. Following the guidelines of the government, its mission is to promote the creation and quality of employment and to combat unemployment by implementing active labour market policies (ALMPs), in particular vocational training measures.

IEFP provides a variety of dual-certified training courses, and certified vocational training. These courses include several modalities, including apprenticeships. While apprenticeships are mainly targeted to youths, the IEFP also promotes courses specially targeted to adults, such as Education and Training Courses for Adults (EFA) and, the Certified Modular Training. These are provided by the 30 Centers of Employment and Vocational Training managed directly by IEFP and by 23 Vocational Training Centers established through agreements with Professional Associations and Trade Unions. IEFP's governance model includes a tripartite Board of Directors, composed of public representatives and social partners with a seat on the Permanent Commission for Social Consultation.

Directorate-General for Schools (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares, DGEstE)

DGEstE is a central service of government administration with administrative autonomy. DGEstE ensures the execution of regional administrative process and the exercise of peripheral purviews of the Ministry of Education. Among its many functions, DGEstE: i) supports the implementation of educational policies; ii) monitors and co-ordinates the organisation and functioning of schools (including those that provide adult education and training courses) and supporting their modernisation; iii) provides support and information to learners, and iv) collaborates with other entities in the field of education and vocational training (European Commission, 2021[3]).

Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho, DGERT)

DGERT is a part of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS). DGERT's mission includes: i) supporting the design of employment policies and vocational training, ii) co-ordinating the certification of training providers; iii) co-ordinating the national recognition system for professional qualifications; iv) promoting social dialogue and collective bargaining; and v) monitoring industrial relations and protecting working conditions, including health and safety at work. In the field of vocational training, DGERT participates in defining policy and legislation (in conjunction with ANQEP, in the case of training leading to double certification), and partakes in the definition of strategies for the development of workers' training in national and European contexts (DGERT, 2021[4]).

The Directorate-General for Statistics of Education and Science (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, DGEEC)

DGEEC is one of Portugal's "Other National Authorities" (ONA), tasked with the production and dissemination of official statistics. DGEEC operates under the purview of the Ministry of Education (ME) and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES). DGEEC's work is divided into five main work streams: statistical production, technical support in policy formulation, oversight and maintenance of information systems, production of education results indicators, and institutional articulation. With respect to statistical production, emphasis is placed on the annual publication of the reports Education Statistics, Education in Figures, and Regions in Figures. With respect to oversight and maintenance of information systems in adult education and training, DGEEC is responsible for the Integrated Information System and Management of the Formative Offer (*Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa, SIGO)*, which is connected to the *Qualifica Passport*. Through the SIGO-Qualifica Passport connection, individuals can view their obtained qualifications and skills, and simulate possible paths for obtaining further qualifications in the future.

The Management Authority of the Human Capital Operational Programme (Programa Operacional Capital Humano, POCH)

The Management Authority of the Human Capital Operational Programme (POCH) is a temporary mission structure responsible for implementing the EU Human Capital Operational Programme in Portugal. Created and approved by the European Commission in 2014 and revised by an European Commission Implementing Decision in 2018 and in 2020 (POCH, 2020[5]), roughly 85% of the POCH's budget comes from the European Social Fund (ESF) (European Commission, 2020[6]). POCH contributes towards achieving the EU's agenda for growth and jobs, Europe 2020, through the fulfilment of five main objectives supported by five funding axes. The improvement of the qualifications of adult population is defined as Objective 4, and supported by funding allocated under POCH's Axis 3 (POCH, 2020[5]). The total budget for Axis 3 is approximately EUR 845 million for 2014-2020 is split between the ESF (85%) and a national contribution (15%) (POCH, 2020[7]). With respect to adult education and training, Axis 3 funding prioritises Portuguese adults who have not completed secondary education and/or who lack professional qualifications. POCH finances Qualifica Centres (and thus RVCC processes), and adult education and training (EFA) courses. If a training provider is a public or a private body, 15% of the funding it receives is covered under a national contribution, while POCH supplies the remaining 85%. However, there is an obligation for both public and private providers to deduct any earned revenue from the support received. Under Axis 4 of the Operational Programme, POCH also funds actions related to teacher and trainer continuing professional development. In order to allocate the funding, POCH organises calls for tenders to support projects for up to a duration of 36 months. POCH's 2023 goals include ensuring 60% of adults are certified in training courses with school certification and/or vocational training, and 61% of graduates are in double certification courses at secondary level (ISCED 3) in Portugal (POCH, 2020[7]).

The Management Authority of the Operational Programme Employment and Social Inclusion (Programa Operacional Inclusão Social e Emprego, POISE)

The Management Authority of the Operational Programme Employment and Social Inclusion (POISE) is a temporary mission structure created to implement the EU Employment and Social Inclusion Operational Programme in Portugal. Created and approved by the European Commission in 2014, up to 85% of the POISE's budget comes from the European Social Fund (ESF). POISE contributes to achieving the EU's agenda for growth and jobs, Europe 2020, through its four funding axes. Promoting Sustainability and Employment Quality (Axis 1), Youth Employment Initiative (Axis 2), and Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty and Discrimination (Axis 3), and their corresponding thematic objectives 8 and 9, constitute the basis for funding adult education and training initiatives that target young people not in

education, employment, or training (NEETs), long-term unemployed or vulnerable groups. More specifically, POISE provides funding for adult education and training organisations that provide certified modular training (FMC). Similar to POCH, POISE organises calls for tenders to allocate the funding. There have been two rounds of the calls since POISE's establishment. The 2020-2021 round is expected to make available funding within the range of EUR 100-150 million. By 2020, POISE aimed to ensure that the employment rate of 20-64 year-olds reaches 75%, and that more than 135 000 NEETs are involved in qualification or education programmes by 2023. POISE's activities are especially important in the context of Portugal's current unemployment rate, which has been elevated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3.1. Overview of Portugal's key adult education and training actors

Institutions and their key responsibilities in adult education and training summarised

Institution	Key responsibilities in adult education and training
Ministry of Education (ME)	• Responsible for general non-higher education, including the provision of education and training opportunities for adults • Responsible for VET pathways together with the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS) • Supervises ANQEP together with the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and the Ministry of State, Economy and Digital Transition
Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS)	• Responsible for VET pathways together with the Ministry of Education (ME) • Supervises of ANQEP together with the Ministry of Education (ME)
National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP)	• Main co-ordination body of the National Qualifications System (SNQ) • Manages the system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) by overseeing the network of Qualifica Centres • Plans the supply of VET courses together with inter-municipal communities (CIMS) based on data from the System for the Anticipation of Qualifications Needs (SANQ)
Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP)	• Operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS) • Fulfils the role of a public employment service • Provides apprenticeship courses in a work-based format targeting young adults aged 18-24
DGEstE (Directorate-General for Schools)	• A Directorate of the Ministry of Education (ME) • Responsible for the orientation, co-ordination and monitoring of schools that provide adult education, as well as private providers, unions or associations that have agreements with schools to provide adult education courses
Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (DGERT)	• A Directorate of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS) • Supports the design of employment policies and vocational training • Co-ordinates the certification of training providers and of the national recognition system for professional qualifications
Directorate-General for Statistics of Education and Science (DGEEC)	• Operates under the purview of the Ministry of Education (ME) and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES) • Responsible for statistical production, and oversight and maintenance of information systems, among others • Oversees the Integrated Information System and Management of the Formative Offer (*Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa (SIGO)*
The Management Authority of the Human Capital Operational Programme (POCH)	• Responsible for implementing the EU Human Capital Operational Programme in Portugal • Provides funding for Qualifica Centres, which includes the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) and for adult education and training (EFA) courses
The Management Authority of the Operational Programme Employment and Social Inclusion (POISE)	• Responsible for implementing the EU Employment and Social Inclusion Operational Programme in Portugal • Provides funding for certified modular training (FMC) courses

Portugal's adult education and training offer

Figure 3.1 summarises Portugal's adult education and training offer, the different groups it targets, and the offer's connection to the National Qualifications Framework (QNQ) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Figure 3.1. Overview of Portugal's adult education and training offer
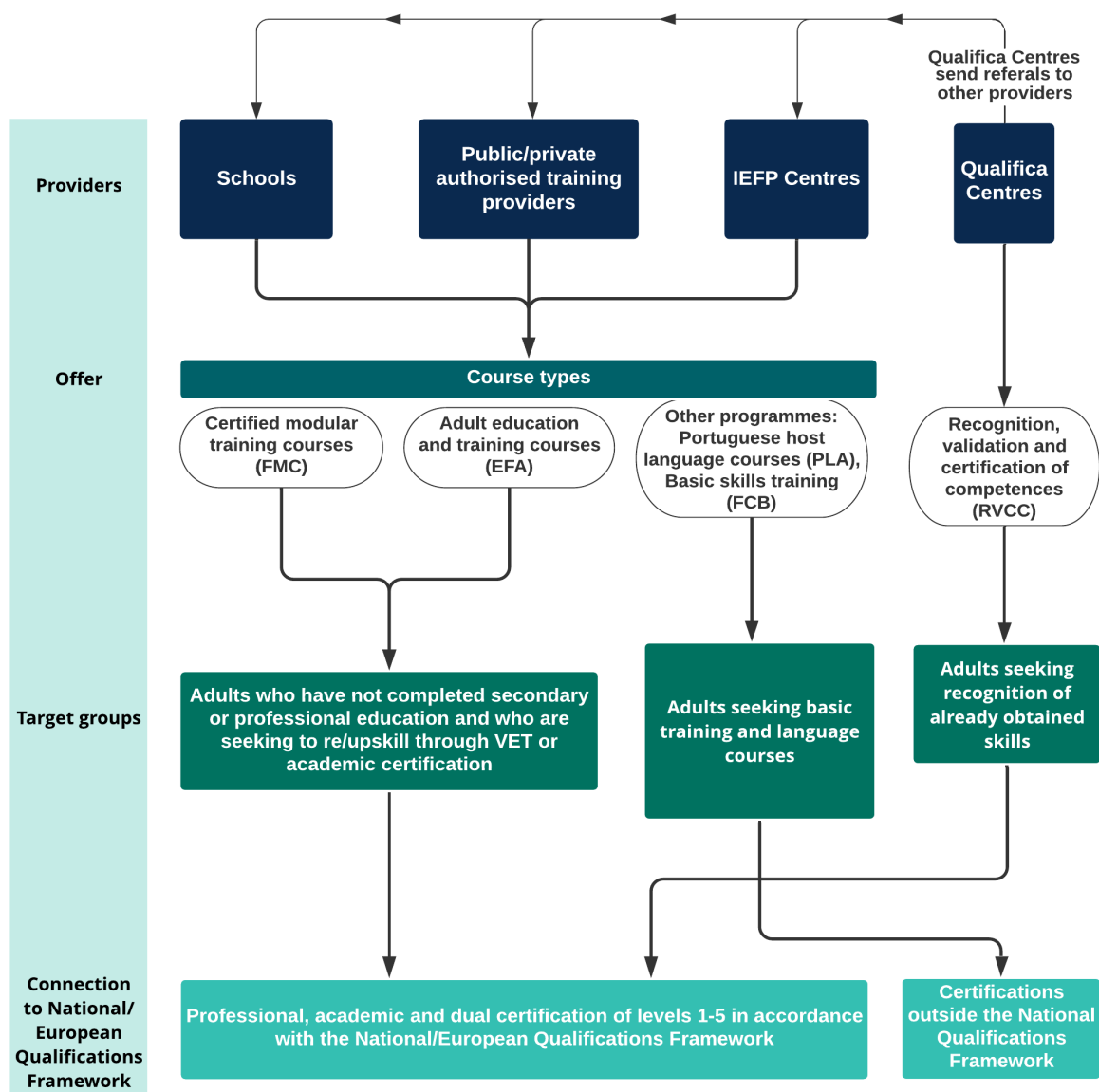
Figure 3.2 describes the system from the point of the adult learner, detailing the contents and results from completing the main course offerings.

Figure 3.2. How can Portuguese adult learners re/upskill, or get their skills recognised?
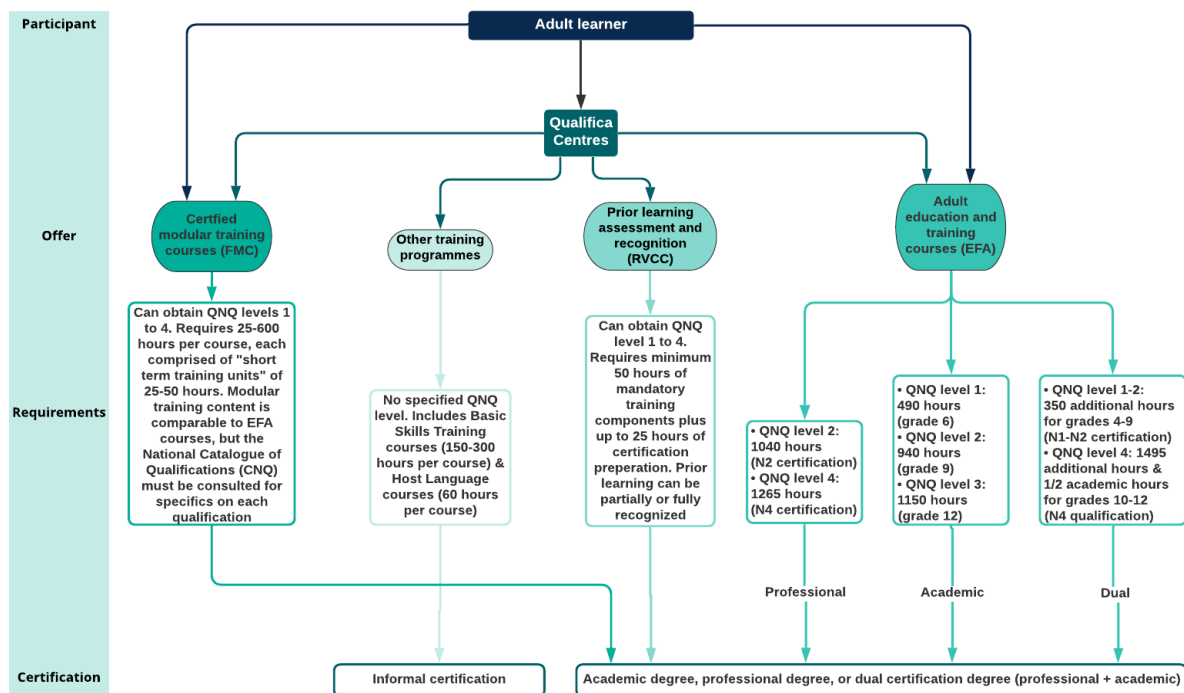
Both Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 illustrate how the system guarantees the provision of courses targeted to adults of all ages through the Education and Training Courses for Adults (*Cursos de educação e formação de adultos, EFA*), and the Certified Modular Training (*Formações Modulares Certificadas, FMC*) (both Order no. 230/2008, 7 March). In place since early 2000s, EFA courses offer dual certification (academic and vocational) at EQF Levels 1, 2 and 4. Conversely, FMC courses are based on shorter, transferable and "stackable" units allowing learners to acquire a recognised certification (OECD, 2018[8]), but do not automatically lead to the award of a qualification level. FMC courses can be delivered by a variety of different providers, and are well integrated with the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) so that participating adults only need to complete training required for the skills that they have not yet developed. Since FMC are offered as short modular units, they make it easier for adults who have not obtained a full qualification after a RVCC process or an EFA course to complete their partially completed qualification pathway. Other courses available to adults include: Portuguese Host Language Courses (*Cursos de Português Língua de Acolhimento, PLA*); Basic Skills Training (*Formação em Competências Básicas, FCB*), which targets adults who have never completed primary education; and other specialty courses that respond to the specific needs of different groups of adult learners.

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[5]

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[7]

The Government of Portugal (2020), *Qualifica*, https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/programaQualifica (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[2]

4 Quality assurance in adult education and training in Portugal

This chapter provides an overview of Portugal's system of quality assurance in adult education and training. It describes the system's main actors and outlines their roles and responsibilities.

Description of the main actors and their responsibilities

The adult education and training system in Portugal is complex. This holds both with respect to the number of actors involved, and the division of competences between them. The system of quality assurance of adult education and training is no different in that regard. Figure 4.1 maps out the relationship between its key entities with regard to responsibilities and oversight.

Figure 4.1. Key actors of Portugal's adult education and training quality assurance system
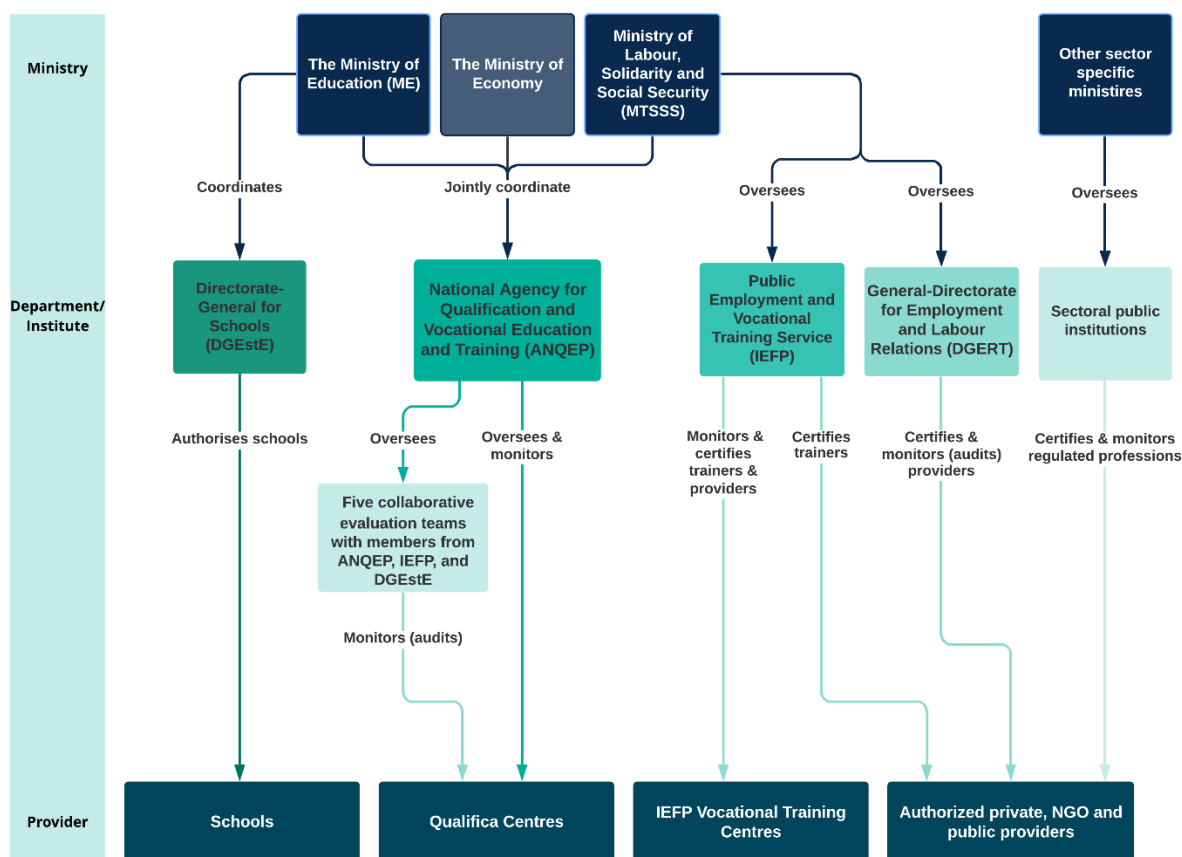
The Ministry of Education (ME) and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS)

As described above, the Ministry of Education (ME) and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS) are central organisations of the Portuguese adult education system, which carry out co-ordination and supervisory roles. ME's and MTSSS' respective agencies, departments and services (ANQEP, IEFP, DGEstE, and DGERT) described in greater detail below carry out specific duties in relation to quality assurance.

National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP)

ANQEP is tasked with assuring the quality of courses and RVCC processes provided by Qualifica Centres. ANQEP does so by various means. First, ANQEP requires all Qualifica Centres to register in the Ministry of Education's SIGO system (Information and Management System of the Education and Training

Provision). Qualifica Centres register the learning pathways of adults from the moment they are enrolled until they leave, providing information such as the number of completed hours of work with the Centre. ANQEP uses the SIGO system to provide monthly reports to the Qualifica Centres by email. The reports are based around selected key indicators, including data on enrolment, the number of certifications awarded through RVCC processes, and other training modalities. At the end of the year, Qualifica Centres would therefore have a collection of twelve reports from ANQEP, providing them with a global view of their performance. Qualifica Centres can use these data to monitor and improve their own performance, while ANQEP monitors overall activity against planned goals (OECD, 2018[1]). Second, ANQEP regularly convenes representatives from Qualifica Centres for training sessions in small groups in different regions of Portugal. In addition to providing Qualifica Centres with training, ANQEP also supplies them with necessary competence standards and guidelines. Feedback on the quality of this training is provided via questionnaires filled out by participants on each training occasion and is collected by ANQEP. Third, four teams co-ordinated by ANQEP and including representatives from IEFP (see below) and DGEstE (see below) monitor the Qualifica Centres' operations and activities. The teams perform in person site-visits, asking to see the Centre's documentation or meet the relevant Centre co-ordinators. The end-result of such "field work" is a collection of qualitative insights and recommendations to centres.

Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP)

IEFP supervises and monitors the activity of its own training Centres. IEFP monitors the employability of participants in training for each modality they manage, using a tracking system that monitors social security data such as employment status, job occupation, job change, and individual salaries. Upon the conclusion of training, IEFP also systematically gathers feedback from participants.

IEFP is also responsible for assuring the pedagogical quality of all trainers of courses for adults under the National Qualifications System (NQS). Trainers must acquire a certification (*Certificado de Competências Pedagógicas* (CCP)) issued by IEFP, unless they are teachers certified by the Ministry of Education.

IEFP and ANQEP co-operate on various fronts with respect to quality assurance. IEFP provides ANQEP's SANQ with data about job vacancies at the regional and occupational level. Moreover, as mentioned above, IEFP together with DGEsTE officials, similarly participate in ANQEP-co-ordinated in-person audits of Qualifica Centres. Based on data from the SIGO system, ANQEP and IEFP closely co-operate with respect to the monitoring of Qualifica Centres, one third of which are overseen by IEFP.

Directorate-General for Schools (DGEstE)

DGEstE assures the quality of schools that provide adult education and training (both EFA and FMC, levels 2 and 4 of the QNQ). To do so, DGEstE first assesses applications of schools that wish to provide adult education. The applications are assessed according to different criteria, such as regional coverage, school experience, previous work with Qualifica Centres, and promoting social inclusion within the course design. DGEstE relies on its regional services (offices) in each of the five regions for this assessment, based on data entered into the SIGO system. The schools certified and included in the official network receive funding from the national budget. As of more recently, a minor portion of their needs are covered by funding from POCH (see below).

As for monitoring, regional teams of DGEstE visit schools selected on the basis of data from the SIGO system, to support Qualifica Centres as part of a formative process. Given that at times Qualifica Centres might be located within schools, DGEstE is also part of the four IEFP-ANQEP teams engaged in in-person site visits monitoring the work of Qualifica Centres, as mentioned above. To plan these visits, DGEstE co-ordinates and meets with IEFP and ANQEP on a regular basis.

Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (DGERT)

As mentioned above, DGERT is the co-ordinator of the certification system of adult education providers in Portugal, and is in charge of awarding certification of general quality to providers. Governed by Law no. 851/2010 and revised by Law no.208/2013, DGERT provides quality recognition of adult education providers' capacity to deliver VET activities in specific areas of education and training in which they operate, according to a specific quality standard defined by law.

DGERT's goal is to increase VET quality, the credibility of the VET system and the external recognition of VET providers, as well as to guarantee an appropriate use of public funds. This is because DGERT certification is one of the necessary pre-conditions for providers if they wish to deliver certified training in the context of the National Qualification System, obtain national or EU funding, or deliver training in regulated professions or be eligible for tax benefits (OECD, 2018[1]). However, the DGERT certification is not to be confused with a certification for designing and running specific courses in regulated professions, awarded by sectorial public institutions, introduced with the revision of the law in 2013.

To obtain the DGERT certification, providers must satisfy certain legal and quality requirements related to human and material resources, policy and strategic planning, pedagogical practices and training management procedures. The certification is demonstrated and publicised by the provider, through a certificate and a specific logo provided by DGERT. From 2011 to the end of 2019, there were more than 2 600 providers certified by DGERT. Once obtained, DGERT certification lasts indefinitely, unless revoked as a result of regular in-person audits performed by DGERT officials. In 2019, DGERT carried out 44 audits. In the case of unsatisfactory performance and certification withdrawal, the provider is removed from an official list of all certified providers available on DGERT's website.

The Directorate-General for Statistics of Education and Science (DGEEC)

DGEEC plays a key role in the quality assurance of adult education and training by managing the SIGO information system, which uses administrative data to generate statistical indicators related to adult education and training. A large number of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders rely on SIGO. For instance, POCH relies on SIGO to verify that the courses it provides financing for are duly authorised, in accordance with the regulations applicable to each type of training within the National System of Qualifications. At the same time, Qualifica Centres are required by ANQEP to regularly input information (e.g. registering each adult who seeks the Qualifica Centres' services) into SIGO.

SIGO is a complex system, which can be difficult and burdensome for end-users to navigate. As a result, DGEEC, together with ANQEP, have been investing significant efforts to improve SIGO's user-friendliness and strengthen its links to other information systems. For example, recent improvements to SIGO's functioning have made it easier for DGEstE's regional and central offices to analyse applications for providing adult education courses by schools, while newly established links between SIGO and POCH's information systems have allowed for faster allocation of funds to EFA courses supported by POCH (see below).

The Management Authority of the Human Capital Operational Programme (POCH)

POCH conditions the award of funding for the type of adult education courses and actions it supports (EFA courses, RVCC processes in Qualifica Centres) on fulfilling several requirements. First, as mentioned above, unless already recognised by the Ministry of Education (ME), the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES) or other Ministry, any private adult education provider wishing to obtain POCH funding needs a DGERT certification as one of the pre-conditions in the application process. Second, on top of a DGERT certification, POCH requires all courses to have the proper authorisation to operate, in accordance with the national regulations applicable to them. POCH uses the SIGO system to check whether a specific provider possesses the necessary authorisations.

As an ESF obligation, POCH also tracks the employability or progression into further studies of participants six months after the completion of the courses it funds based on data obtained from the Social Security services (for employability) and DGEEC (progression into further studies). POCH relies on DGEEC indicators to monitor whether the supported courses are completed in a timely manner and whether adults participate in further education. Finally, POCH conditions the provision of final payment, as well as future funding upon the satisfaction of these targets, usually with a 5-10% tolerance. In the case of unsatisfactory performance, POCH can re-open the problematic projects and work with providers to improve their performance.

The Management Authority of the Operational Programme Employment and Social Inclusion (POISE)

Similarly to POCH, POISE makes the award of funding for FMC courses conditional on providers fulfilling specific requirements. In order to apply for POISE funding, private adult education providers need DGERT certification as a necessary precondition for eligibility. The contracts concluded also contain certain key performance indicators (KPIs), one of them being a licence obtained by ANQEP to operate a Qualifica Centre on their premises, or in other words, being a Qualifica Centre "promoter". POISE works with its information system SIIFSE to gather and access the relevant information regarding providers. POISE's technical team evaluates and scores all the providers who apply according to flexible criteria, which tends to result in roughly 50% providers being immediately eliminated. The criteria can change from one call to another, reflecting the labour market needs and advantaging certain areas of training when the need arises. All providers scoring above a certain threshold get access to POISE's funding until it is exhausted, with nearly 600 projects approved in each call. Up to a certain threshold, POISE awards a lump-sum to the selected providers, with the remainder based on real and unit costs.

Reference

OECD (2018), *Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Portugal: Strengthening the Adult-Learning System*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264298705-en. [1]

5 Recognition and certification of adult education and training providers in Portugal

Ensuring a certain level of quality among adult education and training providers starts with their recognition and the award of the relevant certifications. Therefore, this chapter analyses the extent to which effective processes of recognition and certification of adult education and training providers are in place in Portugal, and suggest recommendations and implementation guidance for improving them.

Challenges

Based on consultations with key Portuguese stakeholders and OECD desk research as well as country visits, the following challenges to improve recognition and certification of adult education providers have been identified:

Challenge 1: The certification system is highly decentralised and lacks common standards

Portugal's certification system is complex, with different certifying entities responsible for providing certifications to adult education providers or specific courses. However, the certification requirements are often overlapping, which results in inefficiencies in certification processes that could be avoided. At the same time, insufficient co-ordination between the certifying entities creates transparency challenges.

The responsibility to certify adult education and VET providers in Portugal is scattered across several public bodies (Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4). First, the Ministry of Education (ME), through DGEstE, and the Directorate-General for School Administration (DGAE), respectively certify public schools and teachers, to deliver adult education programmes. Second, DGERT provides a certification of general quality and capacity to provide training to any legally established private or public entity that meets its requirements (Cedefop, 2018[1]). Third, IEFP covers certification of trainers. Fourth, the provision of specific courses, for example courses for regulated professions, is regulated by sectoral public institutions ("*entidades setoriais*"). Fifth, ANQEP certifies the establishment of new Qualifica Centres on the premises of private or public entities, labelled as "Qualifica Centre promoters" (Decree no. 232/2016). In addition, the entities are bound by different legal frameworks. While ANQEP, DGERT, IEFP and DGEstE are regulated under the legislative scheme of the National Qualifications System (NQS), sectoral public institutions are regulated under the legal framework for regulated professions. However, if sectoral public institutions certify training providers to develop specific regulated training to access regulated professions, they are also covered by the NQS, through Law no. 208/2013.

Despite the fact that there are historical reasons that explain the system's complexity, which can be to some extent justified to better address the specificities of each sector, the wide variety of public bodies responsible for the certification of adult education providers poses several challenges.

First, it is difficult to compare the quality of providers across the system because the different certifications bodies carry out their respective certifications processes without adhering to certain common minimum quality standards. Portugal has not yet defined such minimum quality standards for certification of adult education providers to be applied by all bodies. As a result, not only is it challenging to contrast the quality of providers operating in the system, but efficiency of the monitoring processes is also jeopardised (see Chapter 6). At the same time, the multiplicity of bodies and certification procedures and their lack of common minimum quality standards translates into a highly complex certification system which is difficult for providers navigate. In Portugal, there is presently no "one-stop-shop" clearly outlining which providers need to possess which specific combination of licences from the different actors, explaining how these interact and complement each other in practice, or specifying the application deadlines and fees. Information on provider training requirements are spread out across a multitude of individual certification agency websites and key points of information are often difficult to locate on these websites. Moreover, each certification entity has different application timelines and application portals (see Table 5.1). These variations result in redundancies and overlaps between certification processes (see below), as well as administrative perplexity. In some cases, such as DGERT and IEFP certifications, one certification must be acquired before the other, yet application timelines for either process are not made explicitly clear.

Table 5.1. Certification timelines and platforms of certification entities for adult education and training

Certification entity	Provider types regulated by the entity	Purpose of certification	Certification timeline	Certification platform
DGERT	Private, NGO and public providers	Required for: NQS recognition, tax benefits and funding, sectoral certification and IEFP requirement for training entities	Registration time: rolling application, Decision time: 90 days from submission, Valid for: indefinite/undefined	Online portal: https://certifica.dgert.gov.pt
IEFP	Private, NGO and public providers; IEFP Centers	Authorisation for trainers; Authorisation to operate (for providers that train trainers)	Registration time: rolling application, Decision time: unspecified, Valid for: indefinite unless inital terms are violated	Online portal: https://netforce.iefp.pt/pt-PT/WPG/Home/FPIFAutorizaFunc
ANQEP	Qualifica Centers (can be private/public/NGO/IEFP/etc.)	Authorisation to operate (for Qualifica Centers)	Registration time: application window determined by ANQEP, Decision time: unspecified, Valid for: 3 years	The application is available via an electronic form made available on the institutional website of ANQEP
DGEstE	Schools	Authorisation for professional schools (EPP) and professional business reference schools	Registration time: Rolling application, Decision time: 90 days following the completion of the process, Valid for: unspecified	Online portal: http://cts.dgeste.mec.pt/home/index

Note: NGO refers to non-governmental organisation

Second, there is room for increasing the efficiency of the certification system. The current system (Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4) requires providers to obtain various "layers" of certifications For example, there are entities that have DGERT, IEFP as well as a Qualifica Centre certifications at the same time. Some of these certifications have overlapping requirements (Table 5.2). For instance, almost all training providers that want to be certified by sectoral institutions to provide training in regulated professions need to obtain DGERT certification in the first place, although the two certification standards are almost identical (see more below). The certification requirements of the above-mentioned entities are further detailed in Annex A

Table 5.2. Certification requirements of Portugal's key certifying entities

Areas of overlap	ANQEP	DGERT	DGEstE
Registration and legal constitution	Must be regularly constituted and registered. Must be certified by the certification system of training providers or be recognised as a training entity within the framework of the respective diploma, authorisation of operation, or other applicable special regime.	Must be a registered entity and not be in a situation of judicial or administrative suspension, tax or social security restriction, or unresolved debt.	Must submit documents verifying registration, and legal records, address, legal codes, contact information etc.
Facilities and equipment	Must offer guarantees of sustainability and stability, regarding the team, equipment and facilities of the Qualifica Center. Must have adequate location and accessibility, taking into account the adults served.	Must provide description of space and equipment.	Must list licensing, ownership status, conditions; describe classrooms, their capabilities; the type of coursework they are designed for and the number of students they can hold. Must describe the type and number of equipment provided.

Areas of overlap	ANQEP	DGERT	DGEstE
Operational processes	Must submit a plan of strategic intervention that structures and guides the center according to the guidelines defined by ANQEP. Must implement systematic self-assessment devices to assess the quality of interventions and candidate satisfaction	Must outline operating conditions, such as registration, selection, course scheduling and logistics, roles and responsibilities of participants, trainers and all staff, and give that information to the participants.	Must provide a brief description of quality assurance processes and monitoring tools.
General administration (health and safety, finances, complaints handling)	Must comply with the current rules on prevention of occupational risks and safety.	Must have forms for complaints and document system for incorporating feedback. Must have a technical infrastructure for recording all course activities and administrative meetings and decisions as well as to support the previously mentioned requirements including grading, evaluations, or scheduling.	Must submit financial documents to prove sustainability of courses.
Human resources (pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff)	Must offer guarantees of sustainability and stability, regarding the team of the Qualifica Center. Trainers must possess IEFPs Certificate of Pedagogical Competences.	Must provide curriculum, certificates and contracts of training manager, pedagogical co-ordinators and trainers, to evaluate their pedagogical and technical competences for the training projects. Trainers must possess IEFPs Certificate of Pedagogical Competences.	Must list trainers and course co-ordinators and their education, experience, and working relationship with the provider. Teachers are accredited by the Ministry of Education.
Planning and management of training	Must submit a plan of strategic intervention that structures and guides the center according to the guidelines defined by ANQEP.	Documentation must clearly articulate the provider's mission, objectives and goals to be achieved, training to be provided and resources needed for this training.	Must list how each course fits into the NQF, state the course purpose, list number of courses offered and to how many students, describe economic sector it contributes to and provide a detailed diagnosis of economic contribution and demand for the course.
Design and development of training	Must offer guarantees of sustainability and stability, regarding the team, equipment and facilities of the Qualifica Center.	Must document pedagogical resources, pedagogical practices to be followed, and pedagogical evaluation processes. Also, must show the results evaluation process, including the post-training contacts with the participants, and the continuous improvement practices.	

Note: NGO refers to non-governmental organisation.

Stakeholders have highlighted that the different certifying entities might therefore ask for the same information but using different terminology and formats, resulting in unnecessary duplication of processes. As a result, providers find themselves in situations where they have to prove previously certified aspects of quality more than once, facing at least double the amount of paperwork. This leads to perceived waste of time, resources and efficiency. For instance, DGERT awards certification for providers to operate in different training areas using the quality standard for VET providers. At the same time, sectorial public bodies use the core elements of the same quality standard as the basis for certifying specific courses in regulated professions. Stakeholders have noted that the National Authority for Labour Conditions and the Institute for Mobility and Transport, among other sectorial bodies, rely on very similar core elements in their certification process as those outlined in the DGERT certification. Nonetheless, most of sectoral public institutions still require a DGERT certification. Therefore, providers seeking sectorial certification need to document having satisfied essentially the same requirements they had previously proven to DGERT, among other things. Moreover, DGERT, ANQEP, DGEstE and IEFP all ask providers for nearly identical

registration documentation and background information, but because each certification agency has its own portal, these documents must be submitted separately to each entity.

Stakeholders have also pointed out that meeting essentially the same requirements as set out in the DGERT quality standard is one of the necessary conditions for obtaining the IEFP certification for apprenticeships. Such duplications add extra time to providers' efforts to become certified. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the specificities of many certification requirements is not clearly communicated, and providers are left to interpret what is intended. For instance, certification applications often ask providers to list descriptions of equipment and facilities used for training, but the information demanded is generally very basic, without requiring justification for or reference to functionality of equipment and facilities. Also, there is little clarification in the applications or supporting documents as to what proper equipment and facilities would entail, so providers are often left guessing. Ambiguity and redundancy in the current application process make it difficult for all institutions that provide certification to truly determine the quality level of many providers applying for certification. Further, stakeholders have admitted that even the more clear-cut aspects of applications are not reviewed very closely, often owing to lacking human resource capacities.

As a side-effect of the system's complexity and constrained human resource capacities to thoroughly review applications for certifications, it is likely that some providers avoid proper certification requirements. For instance, some providers claim exemptions to various certification requirements (on their website), but without providing clear or verifiable grounds for their exemption. Furthermore, many provider websites do not openly state which certifications they have received and some smaller providers do not have websites at all. Even though DGERT's public listings make it possible to determine which providers are at least partially certified, the lack of one centralised and well-marketed quality label makes it very difficult to determine which providers are not in fact properly certified (even if they market themselves as such). Admittedly, with over 2 700 certified providers at the close of 2020, DGERT faces a steep task and some providers will likely fall through the cracks. However, because there is no single quality label (and rather a confluence of different certifications), there remains a general lack of transparency surrounding which providers are properly certified.

The certification system would also benefit from a higher degree of co-ordination and transparency. As highlighted in by the Strategic Agreement on Vocational Training, the co-operation between DGERT, as the co-ordinator of the certification system, and the bodies awarding sectoral certifications ("*certificação setorial*"), seems underdeveloped. DGERT has limited insights about the certifications of training providers that develop specific courses with regards to "regulated professions" awarded by sectoral public institutions, or the quality assurance processes these entities undertake to monitor or evaluate providers they had certified in this way. This is in spite of the fact that under Decree no.851/210, amended by Decree No.208/2013, DGERT as the co-ordination body responsible for the certification system for providers, has the obligation to disclose information on training entities holding sectoral certifications, which should be communicated to DGERT by the respective responsible sectoral certifying entities. However, DGERT's website only mentions six sectoral institutions: the Bank of Portugal, National Communications Authority (*Autoridade Nacional de Comunicações, ANACOM*), the Directorate General for Justice Policy (*Direção-Geral da Política de Justiça, DGPJ*), Directorate General of the Maritime Authority (*Direcção-Geral da Autoridade Marítima, DGAM*), Authority for Working Conditions (*Autoridade para as Condições de Trabalho, ACT*) and the Directorate General of Local Authorities (*Direcção Geral das Autarquias Locais, DGAL*). Still, stakeholder consultations have made it clear that the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, for instance, also belongs among sectoral certifying entities. Further, the website also lists the providers certified to deliver specific courses, but they are not all up to date. Portugal lacks a National Registry consolidating in one place the different types of sectoral certifications, their requirements, or the training institutions, which hold, acquire or lose them every year.

Finally, there is limited co-ordination in reviewing providers' applications between the different certification agencies. They do not actively share information on the stringency with which they interpret their respective

(yet overlapping) certification requirements, or best practise on carrying out the review process efficiently. And accordingly, some certification bodies appear to be more rigorous in their review of applications than others. However, once certification has been granted, neither DGERT nor IEFP require recertification unless an audit (see Chapter 6) determines a provider is no longer meeting certification requirements.

Challenge 2: The effectiveness of certifications processes can be further strengthened

Several stakeholders interviewed in this project noted that there is room to improve the effectiveness of certification processes of adult education and training providers in Portugal, and especially their ability to effectively guarantee important aspects of quality (such as pedagogical excellence). The certification processes are primarily viewed as burdensome procedures focused on verifying administrative aspects of providers' operation.

First, the certification used to certify pedagogical competences of trainers leading the adult education and training courses is seen as a necessary but insufficient tool to ensure the delivery of high quality training. As mentioned in Chapter 4, all trainers who want to deliver training within the framework of the SNQ need to possess the Certificate of Pedagogical Competences (CCP) awarded by IEFP. However, stakeholders have indicated the potential to further improve its strictness and comprehensiveness. The CCP does not set a high bar for prospective trainers in terms of required professional pedagogical experience, and mandates completing 90 hours of pedagogical training. The ability of this certificate to ensure a certain quality of trainers is directly connected to the effectiveness of the whole system of certification of providers. For instance, in order for providers to be certified by ANQEP to operate in the context of Qualifica Centres, the Pedagogical Skills Certificate of the trainers is one of the requirements.

Second, and related to the point above, DGERT's certification process aims to guarantee the presence of qualified pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff. DGERT requires IEFP's CCP as proof of trainers' or pedagogical co-ordinators' pedagogical competences, in spite of its limits highlighted above. The DGERT quality standard also tries to verify the trainers' field-specific qualifications, but stakeholders do not perceive these standards as a guarantee of quality. This is partially due to the difficulties that DGERT faces in assessing the field-specific qualifications of providers' pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff, though the challenges associated with reviewing providers' applications is not one that is specific to DGERT (see Challenge 1). The publicly available guidelines which should help DGERT implement the quality standard defined by the law are very general, while supplementary internal DGERT guidelines are not sufficiently comprehensive. As pointed out by stakeholders, the latter are meant to provide DGERT's technical experts with an idea of the minimum requirements to be sought from trainers in terms of type and mix of qualifications they need to possess so that the provider can be certified. However, even these internal guidelines sometimes fail to support rigorous assessment, and often have to be complemented by the judgement of DGERT's staff.

Third, as underlined by the Strategic Agreement on Vocational Training *(Acordo Estratégico sobre Formação Profissional)*, DGERT's certification process is seen as a lengthy administrative process largely focused on verifying certain legal requirements and indicators only indirectly connected to quality. In some certification areas, DGERT's requirements are also redundant, for instance, requiring multiple descriptions of learning plans and pedagogical practices followed. As a result, the certification process is often seen as too bureaucratic and being granted a certification often does not always constitute a good indicator of quality. In the same vein, it has been pointed out by stakeholders that the limited comprehensiveness across the different certification processes has allowed the number of certified providers operating in Portugal to grow substantially with little control.

Finally, there is also room to improve the quality standards within the process by which DGEstE authorises public schools to deliver adult education and training courses. Stakeholders have commented that some schools are discouraged from applying for DGEstE's certification in the first place, due to the relatively long duration and a large number of hours required for adult education and training courses, especially those

leading to a dual certification. If a school decides to apply, the decision on whether a certain course can be offered falls on DGEstE's regional offices. The primary drivers for that decision are the course's financial sustainability, and the number of adults interested in attending the course. In order for a course to be authorised, it would need a minimum class size of 25 students, a condition which stakeholders reported can be hard to meet in certain regions of the country, preventing certain relevant courses to be taught. In each case, an exceptional permission by DGEstE has to be therefore granted.

Implementation plan for improving the recognition and certification of adult education and training providers in Portugal

Recommendation 1: Develop a quality label to verify core, common certification standards

In order to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the certification process, and foster quality improvements among adult education and training providers, Portugal should consider developing a quality label based on a set of common certification criteria, and operationalised through common quality guidelines.

Certifications ensuring that an entity meets certain minimum binding quality criteria, also called "quality labels", are commonly used in several European countries (OECD, 2021[2]). However, given the diversity and heterogeneity of adult education providers operating in Portugal, prescribing the same quality requirements across the board could be counterproductive, because it would mean setting standards which are unreasonable for all providers to meet, standards that might be too high, or conversely not high enough and therefore less meaningful. For example, the requirements imposed by the different sectoral public institutions certifying training providers of courses in regulated professions need to be much more stringent and area-specific than those imposed on private providers of broader areas of general adult education. As a result, it might be preferable for Portugal to consider and adapt a "two-tier" quality framework, with two levels of certification criteria (OECD, 2019[3]).

The first tier would consist of minimum criteria reasonable to ask of all providers, regardless of the size, type of training provided or groups of adults targeted. Therefore, the first-tier certification would cover private providers of general adult education, providers delivering courses in regulated professions, schools providing adult education and training, IEFP Centres, as well as Qualifica Centres. The transparency hereby introduced into the system would foster a higher degree of comparability. For instance, it would become possible to contrast the "performance" of an IEFP Centre with that of a private adult education provider, together with the "value" of their respective courses and awarded certifications. Based on the commonalities in certification requirements across key quality assurance actors identified in Table 5.2, following OECD (OECD, 2019[4]) and Broek and Buiskool (Broek and Zoetermeer, 2013[5]), Portugal may consider streamlining four macro-dimensions as part of the common certification standards: i) organisation, ii) staff, iii) training, and iv) outcomes. This first-tier of Portugal's proposed quality label is detailed in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3. First-tier certification criteria, which Portugal can streamline under its quality label

Four macro-dimensions of first-tier certification criteria, with their respective requirements listed in bullet points

Macro-dimensions and specific requirements			
Organisation	**Staff**	**Training**	**Outcomes**
Registration and legal constitution • Formal proof of entity registration and legal constitution	Pedagogical and non-pedagogical human resources • IEFP's Certificate of Pedagogical Competences (CCP) or pedagogical competences assessed by the Ministry of Education • Presence of at least one "experienced trainer" • Provision of continuous professional development to trainers • Brief description of management policies (contracts, allowances, etc.)	Planning and management of training • Verification of course connection to QNQ and EQF • Brief description of course regulations • Brief description of course objectives and desired outcomes (qualitative and quantitative)	Presence of tools and mechanisms for measuring learners' satisfaction and labour market outcomes
Facilities and equipment • Brief description of spaces dedicated to learning activities and pedagogical equipment		Design and development of training • Policies for evaluation of training • Policies in place to ensure in-class inspections	
Operational processes • Brief description of providers' quality assurance process			
General administration • Health and safety • Finances • Complaints handling			

Source: This table was informed by OECD (2019[4]), *Improving the quality and monitoring of basic skills education for adults: Assessment and Recommendations.*

Overall, the standards should be simple, practical, and easily operationalised through well-defined quality guidelines helping providers interpret them. For example, Austria's quality framework for adult education providers (Ö-Cert) outlines five basic certification requirements (including a quality management system certificate, (QMS)), while Switzerland's quality label (eduQua) defines six common certification criteria operationalised through 22 quality standards (guidelines) for adult education providers (see more in Section on Relevant international case studies). Requiring a QMS certificate (such as the International Standardisation Organisation's "ISO" certificate) from all providers in Portugal might not be feasible, given its costliness. However, with certain improvements and revisions, DGERT's quality standard may be well-placed to become adapted for the purposes of a common quality label in Portugal. DGERT already seeks to certify general organisational quality. Also, DGERT certification is already demanded from a large number of adult education providers, specifically all providers wishing to deliver certified training in the context of the SNQ or in regulation professions, obtain state or EU funding, or be eligible for tax benefits (OECD, 2018[6]).

Furthermore, stakeholders in Portugal have commented that the requirements relating to the quality of adult education trainers (Column 2 in Table 5.3) should also be among the certification criteria common to all providers, and that these should be made more demanding than at present. Effectively incorporating requirements related to competences of adult education trainers into the common quality label will require more than IEFP's CCP, which is currently required by all certifying institutions (See Chapter 4). The award of the common quality label could be made conditional on providers ensuring that adult education trainers

possess higher levels of professional pedagogical experience than the 90 hours currently required by IEFP's CCP. In Austria, Ö-Cert requires the presence of at least one staff member with a minimum of two years of professional pedagogical experience in order to award a certification (Ö-Cert, 2012[7]). Portugal could equally consider adopting this requirement, as put forward in Table 5.3. Moreover, providers' capacity to ensure continuous professional development of trainers (e.g. regular assessment of trainers' continuous education and training needs and provision of advice on available training options) could be examined (Table 5.3) To support the goal of increasing the quality of pedagogical practices, the planning, management and design of training (in-class inspections, polices on training evaluation, as outlined in Column 3 of Table 5.3) could also be included as part of the first-tier of Portugal's quality label (OECD, 2019[4]).

Building on the first tier of common minimum quality requirements, the second-tier of certification criteria should be inclusive of the large variety of types of adult education and training providers operating in Portugal. Therefore, the criteria should be specific to each certifying entity, whose technical experts should be in charge of carefully defining the key relevant requirements. For instance, while the first-tier of the quality label would focus on teachers' and trainers' capacity to teach and train (pedagogical experience and options for professional development), the field-specific qualification requirements would be examined by respective institutions as part of the second tier. Moreover, the second-tier certification requirements imposed by sectoral institutions would reflect the specificities of different regulated professions. In the case of providers applying for a certification to run a Qualifica Centre, the first-tier certification requirements would assess their capacity to operate (e.g., facilities and equipment) and to deliver and co-ordinate high quality training (in this case, carried out within the framework of RVCC) by qualified teachers, trainers and co-ordinators. Whereas, the second-tier would assess the presence of guidance, recognition and validation technicians (specific to the RVCC process), following Law no.232/2016. Following this logic, should a provider certified with a first-tier quality label apply to open a Qualifica Centre on the training facility's premises, only its capacity to comply with second-tier requirements would be additionally examined when applying for certification. The duplication of processes would thus be avoided. In this way, the second tier of certification requirements would accommodate the diversity of adult education providers while adding an additional level of stringency (OECD, 2019[4]) specific to provider types. Together, both tiers of the quality label should aid the certifying entities in assuring providers' and courses' quality even in the context of a large degree of heterogeneity, yet do so in an efficient and effective manner.

Implementation guidance for Portugal

Successfully developing and implementing common certification guidelines with a common set of quality indicators requires thorough design and implementation.

First beyond the suggestions made in Table 5.3, the stringency of each common certification criterion should be carefully defined and adapted to the local context by convening education, andragogy and technical experts from key public quality assurance institutions (ANQEP, DGERT, DGEstE, IEFP), as well as independent experts and representatives from academia. For instance, these experts would jointly determine what specific criteria related to facilities and equipment it would be reasonable to ask from all providers, based on the experts' respective experiences within different certifying entities. Successful implementation will also depend on the capacity of the certifying entities to judge whether providers have really complied with the specified common requirements. Therefore, it is important that the institutions have sufficient technical expertise, and that clear guidelines are available to allow them to operationalise these standards in practice.

The proposed higher pedagogical standards for the quality of staff that are to be included within the common criteria might lead to capacity issues. Stakeholders have underlined that in certain fields it might prove challenging to find adequately experienced trainers. Often, there might be professionals with relevant experience in private enterprises well-suited to become trainers, but without the necessary pedagogical

experience. In this context, IEFP is piloting a project that will provide further pedagogical training to facilitate the development of the competences required to become trainers. In light of the recommendation to develop a common quality label with more stringent requirements related to trainers' competences, such efforts to foster the acquisition of more extensive pedagogical training for trainers should be further encouraged.

Third, there is potential to further expand the number of "macro-dimensions" to include the quality of outcomes (Column 4 in Table 5.3), such as the presence of tools and mechanisms for measuring learners' satisfaction and labour market outcomes. Portugal could possibly consider including this criterion in the baseline standards, given that VET providers are already required by law to track their learners, while ANQEP requires Qualifica Centres to monitor learners' satisfaction, and qualification pathways. However, in light of providers' difficulties of tracking adults' outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 6, sufficient support should be provided should this become a common requirement for all providers. A plan to gradually integrate the monitoring of adults' outcomes into the process for certifying adult education providers in Portugal is introduced in Chapter 6.

Finally, given that the current varying certification standards of ANQEP, DGERT, DGEstE and IEFP are all connected to the SNQ, streamlining a minimum level of certification criteria across the board should not require radical legislative changes. However, in order to equally extend the first-tier common quality standards to sectoral public institutions, points of contact between the SNQ' legal framework and the legal framework for regulated professions will need to be established. In other words, the necessary legislative basis in the legal framework for regulated professions might need to be identified to facilitate making revisions triggered by changes to the legal framework of the SNQ.

Relevant international case study: Ö-Cert certification system in Austria

Background

Austria's adult learning system is primarily managed by three federal ministries: the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (Department of Adult Education) deals with general adult education and schools for employed persons; the Ministry of Science, Research and Economy deals with University education and on-the-job training; and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection deals with further education related to the job market. Working alongside these ministries are two important organisations, the Conference of Adult Education in Austria (KEBÖ) and the Ö-Cert system.

The legal basis for adult learning in Austria comes from the 1973 Adult Education Promotion Act (amended in 1990 and 2003). The Adult Education Promotion Act has made 13 associations of adult education providers eligible for federal funding, 10 of these associations are members of the umbrella organisation KEBÖ. KEBÖ partners with the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs and provides organisational, curricular and quality assurance support to its 10 members. Its member associations are independent non-NGOs that are among the largest adult education providers in Austria reaching more than 3 million people as of 2013.

Outside of KEBÖ, there are hundreds of NGOs, private organisations, state partner organisations and other types of organisations that provide a wide array of adult learning services. Since 2012, these providers (as well as KEBÖ providers) have been co-ordinated by the Ö-Cert system. The Ö-Cert system reports to the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research and provides a national certification system for adult education providers that is recognised throughout Austria (unlike past Austrian certification systems which were only regional). The Ö-Cert website listed 1 107 providers (349 providers with 758 local branches) with the Ö-Cert quality seal as of 30 June 2015.

Certification

Certification of adult learning providers is carried out through the Ö-Cert certification system. The system is used to certify both KEBÖ and non-KEBÖ member organisations. The 2016 Federal Act on the National Qualifications Framework established a national qualifications framework (NQF) that was in line with EU standards and made it the responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research and the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs to ensure the involvement of all national stakeholder and interest groups in the NQF. Thus, Austria's NQF is connected to the Ö-Cert certification process inasmuch as they are both administered by Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research and it is the Ministry's mandate to ensure all adult learning providers provide offerings that co-ordinate with standards in the NQF.

The application process and requirements of the Ö-Cert system are relatively simple. Ö-Cert requires that prospective organisations file an application online with the appropriate paperwork (which it estimates will take less than two hours). After the application is received, it will be reviewed and a final decision will be made in an accreditation group meeting that is held five to six times per year. The accreditation process can be expected to take several months from the time when an online application is filed until when accreditation is received. This time frame is determined, in part, by the cycle of when accreditation group meetings are held. The application process is also free, but if an organisation's application is successful, they must pay EUR 100 for use of the Ö-Cert recognition.

Ö-Cert has five basic certification requirements for providers (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1. Ö-Cert's five basic certification requirements

To receive Ö-Cert, providers have to fulfil the Ö-Cert-basic requirements:

- General basic requirements concerning corporate mission and responsibility

  e.g.: provider has to agree on the definitions of LLL, meaning of adult education.

- Basic requirements concerning the organisational structure

  e.g.: their main task must be adult education, the provider has to be in business for three years, the educational managers must have a corresponding education and practice and so on.

- Basic requirements concerning the course offer

  e.g.: the offers must be open to the public, not accepted are offers, which are solely orientated in leisure activities. If a provider is mainly working in the field of therapy or consulting or the offers are primarily esoteric it's not possible to get Ö-Cert.

- Basic requirements concerning ethical principles and democracy

  e.g.: provider has to agree on the human rights.

- Basic requirements concerning quality

  Provider must submit a Q-Certificate according to the Ö-Cert-list.

Source: Ö-Cert (2021[8]), *What is Ö-Cert?*, https://oe-cert.at/meta/english-overview.php.

The first requirement is that providers must provide at least one offering in the field of adult education and training in Austria, which is regular, planned, systematic and communicated publicly (for transparency). Second, the provider must have formally operated for at least three years. Third, it must accept the Ö-Cert general qualifications which require the organisation to have a range of general standards including democratic principles and an agreement to provide services publicly. Fourth, the head of the organisation or at least one employee must have undertaken thorough pedagogical education or further training and

have appropriate work experience of two years. Fifth, it must have a quality management system (QMS) from an organisation recognised by Ö-Cert (which type of certificate the organisation has would depend on the nature of its activity). Ö-Cert recognises a number of European QMS agencies as well as a number of Austria-specific QMS agencies. In this way, Ö-Cert outsources the technical, sector-specific quality assurance procedures to qualified certification agencies while still acting as a common quality label across all providers. Ö-Cert's first four requirements provide general organisational quality assurance, while its fifth requirement (obtaining a QMS certificate) ensures technical, sector-specific quality assurance.

If a provider's application is accepted, and they pay the EUR 100 fee, they are placed on the Ö-Cert website list and are allowed to advertise that they are in possession of an Ö-Cert certification. If an organisation's application is accepted conditional to better compliance with the previously mentioned application requirements (as decided by the accreditation group), they must make those changes in the timeframe given by the accreditation group or they will be required to wait six months' before applying again. In the case of rejection by Ö-Cert, the organisation is also required to wait six months' before applying again. Once successful, the Ö-Cert recognition is valid for up to six months after the provider's QMS certification is valid. Then, the process for extending Ö-Cert recognition is essentially the same as the initial accreditation process.

The Ö-Cert programme only recognises 11 QMS certification agencies, all of which must conduct external audits and issue certificates with a limited validity period. Should an organisation not receive approval from a QMS certification agency following an audit or the recertification process, their Ö-Cert recognition is rejected and they must wait at least 12 months before reapplying to Ö-Cert.

Monitoring of outcomes varies by sector-specific certification agency, but it is generally the case that QMS certification agencies require any organisation applying for certification to define what success is for their learning programme and to measure and assess outcomes according to this definition of success. Depending on the certification agency, it is also generally encouraged to conduct learning assessments along the lines of the organisation's defined learning goals.

There are two primary benefits for organisations seeking Ö-Cert recognition. One is that organisations with Ö-Cert certification are listed on the Ö-Cert website, which makes them more easily visible to companies, groups and individuals looking for adult education services. Second, an organisation with Ö-Cert recognition is formally eligible for a number of regional government and private funding opportunities. For instance, previous to the Ö-Cert system, funding was often linked to the various quality labels particular to each Austrian federal state, resulting in funding being sliced within each region. But with a common quality label, providers from any region have much broader access to funding from all over the country.

Relevant international case study: EduQua quality label in Switzerland

Background

The most relevant legislation governing (publicly funded) adult education in Switzerland is the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training (WeBig) which only came into effect in 2017. WeBig has five principles: 1) Responsibility, emphasising that each individual bears responsibility for continued education but that employers and government should support and subsidise training; 2) Quality, ensuring transparency and quality of publicly promoted continuing education through improving qualifications of instructors, learning programmes, the qualification process and the promotion of course offerings; 3) Acknowledgment, providing better recognition of continuing education and informal learning for formal diplomas and certification; 4) Equal opportunities, across gender, people with disabilities, foreigners and people re-entering the labour market; and 5) Competition, ensuring that subsidised continued education and training does not distort competition.

EduQua, founded in 2000, is Switzerland's first and primary certifier for adult education. It is managed by the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB), along with five other adult learning associations. Although

eduQua operates independent from state agencies, it is an Educational Quality Label recognised by the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER). A primary goal of eduQua is to promote "transparency and comparability of adult learning for the benefit of consumers and contribute to safeguarding the quality of adult education programmers in Switzerland". Over 1 000 schools, institutes and academies across Switzerland are eduQua certified. Roughly 80% of these providers are private and 20% public. All together they represent 75% of all adult education hours provided and one-third of all institutions that offer continuing education (non-formal education, structured programmes, etc.) including Switzerland's largest adult education providers.

EduQua certification plays an important role facilitating access to funding for providers. Adult education in Switzerland is predominantly privately funded, both by individuals and especially companies. Although funding from Cantons and the national government is not reliably measured, these funding sources also play a significant role in total funding for adult education. Receiving the eduQua label is important for adult learning providers because first, it is the most well-respected quality label in Switzerland, making it very important for attracting private funds, and second, because it is required for state funding in a growing number of Cantons. EduQua estimates that 80% of all providers that receive public subsidies are eduQua certified. These include providers of labour market measures, basic skills, and integration services (e.g. language teaching, etc.).

Certification

As part of eduQua's certification requirements, eduQua requires adult training providers to be certified by an independent sector-specific certification body (very similar to Ö-Cert in Austria) that is recognised by eduQua. EduQua itself is not qualified to undertake in-depth technical certification procedures of adult learning organisations. For independent certification bodies to be recognised by eduQua, they must become authorised by Swiss Accreditation Services (SAS), Switzerland's regulator of conformity/certification agencies. There are currently seven such certification agencies that are recognised by eduQua, namely IQB-FHS *(Institut für Qualitätsmanagement und Angewandte Betriebswirtschaft)*, ProCert, ProFormations, SCEF *(Servizio di certificazione di enti di formazione continua),* SGS (*Société Générale de Surveillance*), SQS *(Schweiz. Vereinigung für Qualitäts- und Management-Systeme)* and Swiss Safety Center AG. It is the responsibility of these independent certifiers to provide a more technical vetting process tailored to differing types of adult education providers. It is also their responsibility to monitor the providers they certify on an annual basis, which in extreme cases of non-compliance can result in the withdrawal of eduQua certification.

EduQua certification is valid for three years before it must be renewed and certification is available to virtually all continuing education providers outside of primary schools, high schools and universities (which are regulated separately). The certification process looks at six key criteria: i) courses; ii) information; iii) education; iv) trainers; v) quality management systems; and vi) leadership. The six criteria (blue numbering in Figure 5.1) can be organised into three broad areas, as shown in the three infographics of Figure 5.1. They either pertain to the i) institution; ii) learning; or iii) teaching. Furthermore, the six criteria are operationalised through the 22 success factors (black numbering in Figure 5.1) organised according to the Plan-Do-Act-Check approach. The 22 success factors give guidance to providers on how to "operationalise" the six success criteria.

Figure 5.1. EduQua quality standard, criteria and success factors
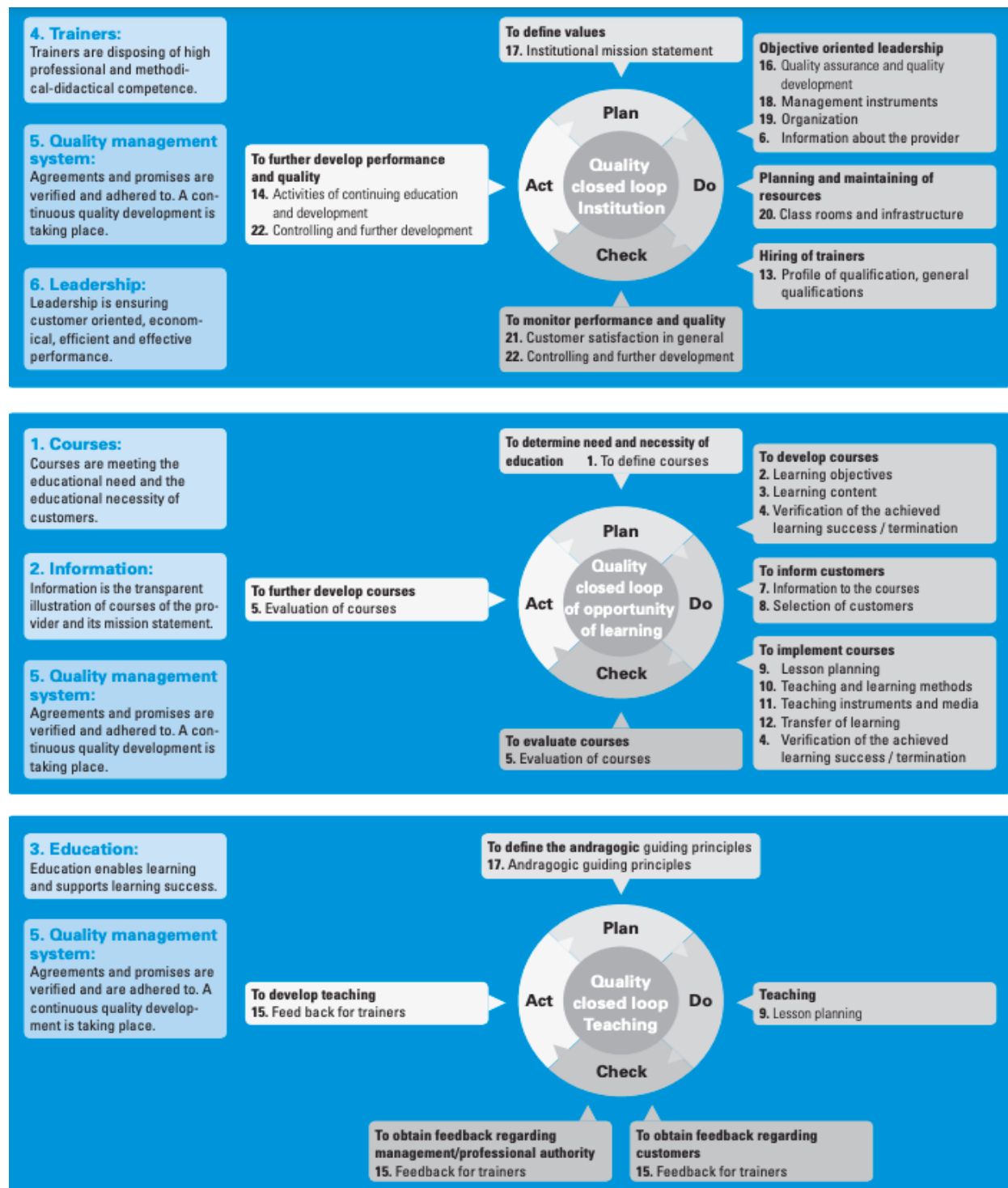
The certification process is detailed at length on eduQua's website including all required documents and certification procedures. These procedures include signing a contract with one of the seven recognised certifying agencies (which certifier a provider chooses is generally determined by linguistic and

geographical convenience), undergoing an audit, completing a self-evaluation, and submitting all documents that verify compliance with eduQua's 22 standards. Though certification is granted to the organisation providing adult learning opportunities (rather than for individual courses themselves), the length of the certification process varies significantly depending on the type of courses that the organisation provides. Certification costs are divided into three categories depending on the size of the training institution, as determined by the number of participant course lessons held annually. For providers with less than 25 000 participants there is a cost ceiling of CHE 3 950, for 25 000 to 100 000 participants or over 100 000 participants costs are higher, but depend on the recognised certification agency through which the provider certifies. Regardless of which category the provider falls into, the total certification cost per course includes a fee of CHE 400 for eduQua.

The eduQua certification system has largely succeeded in creating a standardised quality assurance system for adult education in Switzerland. The eduQua quality label has only one level of quality (there are not multiple levels of quality within eduQua and is highly important for any provider to attract learners or obtain public funds). Although the certification process is rather time consuming and expensive compared to certification processes in other European countries (and this may be linked to a broader issue of equal opportunity to adult education in Switzerland) the eduQua system is simple and very clearly defined (as laid out in Figure 5.1 and the eduQua website). This makes it relatively straightforward for providers to apply, while maintaining a thorough vetting process carried out by independent sector specific certification agencies.

Recommendation 2: Centralise all the relevant information about certification processes

In order to reduce administrative burden and confusion among Portuguese adult education and training providers and mitigate inefficiencies between regulatory bodies, Portugal should consider establishing a centralised online information centre and application portal. Australia's adult education and training regulator, Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), provides a good example of such a centralised information hub (See Section on relevant international case studies).

ASQA's website clearly explains each type of certification offered, who requires each certification, and how to apply. The certification process is described in clearly articulated steps and is supported by detailed materials (timelines, expected costs, application guides, etc.), all of which is publicly available. Portugal could adopt a similar style information hub that clearly distinguishes which type of training providers require which type of certifications, accompanied by a breakdown of timelines, costs, and application guides. This would offer many advantages over the current system in which certification information is segregated into each agency's own website and much of the application information is only accessible after making an account through each agency's own portal (thereby preventing it from being publicly available).

Alongside a centralised information hub, Portugal could effectively implement a more consolidated certification process through a common application portal. Again, Australia's adult education regulator ASQA provides a good example of a centralised application portal that is well integrated with its information hub. ASQA uses one application portal to certify training entities, register courses, pay fees and provide supporting services. A similar one-stop-shop application portal could be adapted to Portugal to simplify certification processes for training providers and help facilitate the formation of a common set of certification guidelines and standards.

The proposed application portal would be especially effective in operationalizing the two-tier certification system outlined in Recommendation 1. The application portal would allow providers to apply for the common quality label through a standardised first-tier application system, outlining all the common certification requirements. Based upon the information provided in the tier one application process, the portal could then automatically direct each training provider to the required tier two certification steps relevant to their particular training offer. These tier two certification processes would still be overseen by each of the relevant certification bodies (sectoral institutions, DGERT, DGEstE, ANQEP, and IEFP)

depending on the type of training provider applying, but each of these bodies would work through the common portal rather than their own individual portals. Working through this common portal would make it easier for the various certification agencies to share data and co-ordinate their requirements according to a common standard. As for the training providers, the common application portal could incorporate a simple dashboard that allowed providers to visualize their progress on tier one and (provider specific) tier two application requirements, as well as view which certification bodies were linked to each certification requirement, what the timeline was for various certification requirements and how certification costs across requirements added up.

Third, a common application portal (and the associated common standards put forth in Recommendation 1) could be associated with a common quality label. Australia, Austria and Switzerland all have one primary quality label that makes it much easier to determine which providers meet the necessary standards, as compared to Portugal, where there are a variety of quality labels associated with each certification body and no uniformity across these quality labels. A common quality label would clearly signal to learners which providers provide high quality services and as the label gains a reputation – as has happened in other countries – becoming certified might become more competitive resulting in fewer but higher quality providers.

In summary, Portugal's information hub and common portal would work in tandem, like ASQA in Australia, so that training providers and the public could go to one website to see all application requirements and then apply for certification. Unique to Portugal, given its variety of certification bodies and training providers, the application portal would act as a co-ordination point between certification bodies that gave individualised certification requirements to each provider. Lastly, the common application could be associated with a quality label that would make it easier to identify high quality providers and promote continual quality improvements among providers.

Implementation guidance for Portugal

Creating a centralised information hub and application portal will require both co-ordination between the certification bodies and technical expertise.

DGERT, DGEstE, ANQEP, and IEFP should be carefully consulted to ensure that detailed application information is available from each certification body on the information hub. Prior to acquiring this information, the analysis found in the Challenges section above (see Table 5.2 in particular) and further consultation with the aforementioned bodies can assist in consolidating certification processes so that the information hub is simple and streamlined.

Following the example of Australia, Austria and Switzerland, it may be easiest to have one entity responsible for overseeing the centralised application portal and information hub and managing the process of consolidating each certification body's certification process and online portal. This leading entity might build the common application portal and information hub around one of the certifying bodies' websites and application portals already in place or create an entirely new website and application portal. The ministries overseeing DGERT, DGEstE, ANQEP, and IEFP – namely, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security – should co-ordinate in determining which entity would be best fit to take on this leading role, and how outside experts and researchers might be engaged in assisting the consolidation process. ANQEP could assume this role as the leading entity since they already act as a co-ordinating agency of sorts between the different ministries. Alternatively, a team combining members from each of the certification bodies could be formed (as has been done in the past to co-ordinate monitoring efforts – see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4) to lead the effort. For either scenario, technical constraints will be an important consideration.

Consolidating portals and building the information hub will require the input of technical experts including web designers and software engineers. Technical experts who helped create the current portals of certification bodies may be ideal candidates for helping to create the new common portal, but at least two

other groups should be consulted as well. First, are the technical experts who have made effective similar online portals in the past. For example, Austria's Ö-Cert portal centralises all the information concerning the certification process and has a dedicated intranet in which providers can submit and track the status of their applications. Australia's website and portal are also particularly impressive, so reaching out to ASQA about the technical expertise they received in creating their website may be a good starting place. Second, training providers (who will be using the portal) should be consulted to ensure that the information hub is comprehensive and that the common portal is user friendly. ASQA's website provides a good example of a user-focused information hub with feedback mechanisms incorporated into every webpage and a user-centric layout with easy-to-access help links, user guides, website search functions and multiple points of contact for troubleshooting.

Lastly, transferring account information from the various portals currently in existence and creating data sharing and co-ordination mechanisms within the new common portal will require some flexibility on the part of training providers and perhaps some compromises on the side of certification agencies. However, this process is certainly feasible and transition costs can be minimised.

Relevant international case study: Australia's certification portal for adult education providers

Background

The Australian VET system comprises many stakeholders that work closely to ensure a high-quality provision of vocational training. Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are responsible for delivering vocational training and education. These providers are regulated and accredited by ASQA.

ASQA is the entity responsible for regulating and ensuring high quality in the VET sector. The quality framework and regulatory standards are defined by two other governmental bodies: The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Industry and Skills Council and the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC). The first COAG, is an intergovernmental forum, comprising state and territory ministers with responsibility for skills, which aims to increase the competitiveness of industry. Meanwhile AISC involves not only government members but also industry leaders and has the role of approving training packages, which are a set of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications for recognizing and assessing people's skills in a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise.

Training packages are developed by Industry Reference Committees (IRCs) that provide a forum to collect industry inputs on emerging needs, with the support of independent profession service organisations SSOs (Skills Service Organisations). The RTOs are authorised to deliver training package qualifications and units of competency. ASQA's role is to ensure RTOs meet the training packages requirements. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of the VET sector in Australia is the close link between the training offer and the skills required by industry. VET courses are based on an "established industry, enterprise, education, legislative or community need".

In this context, ASQA works with the stakeholders through a collaborative approach. The close relationship established among all of these entities enables effective regulation of the VET sector and a rapid adjustment to the needs of the market and industry. ASQA operates under the Australian Government and is responsible for regulating 90% of the VET providers in Australia, including VET English-language courses (ASQA, 2021[10]).

Certification portal

The ASQA website (www.asqa.gov.au/rto/become-rto/prepare-your-application) clearly outlines which entities require their certification, how much certification costs, and the timeline of certification timeline. The website also lists the four-step certification process for RTOs. First, applicants must ascertain they

understand Australia's VET systems and ASQA's quality standards as outlined in the Standards for Registered Training Organisations. Second, applicants must demonstrate financial viability by submitting their financial information with the assistance of ASQA's financial viability risk assessment tool. Third, the RTO must complete a self-assessment to verify the organisation's operational readiness to deliver training and manage recruitment, enrolment and support of students in line with the ASQA Standards for Registered Training Organisations. And fourth, the RTO must make a "fit and proper persons" declarations to assure that all RTO personal are qualified for their respective duties.

By clearly dividing the certification process into four components, each of which ASQA is well equipped to evaluate, ASQA is able to oversee the entire certification process as a single entity. Furthermore, ASQA has developed a few key guidance documents that make the certification process much more palatable for both providers and ASQA. This includes the previously mentioned Standards for Registered Training Organisations which outlines quality standards for providers as well as the Initial Registration Guide which gives in depth step by step guidance on how RTOs should apply using the asqanet, ASQA's online web portal. All of these guidance documents are easy to find and publicly accessible on the ASQA website.

The asqanet portal is a one-stop-shop for RTOs to become certified. Asqanet registration is simple (requiring no more than a few minutes), and each of the four registration steps are clearly visible in the portal with detailed explanations as to how to complete each step. Documentation can be uploaded to the portal as well as all information that the certification process requires. This centralised portal design minimizes administrative burden for providers and makes evaluating certification applications much less unwieldly for ASQA.

Alongside certification of RTOs as an organisation, the ASQA website distinguishes the need for RTOs to certify each course they provide. Again, ASQA simplifies the certification process, but this time into five simple steps. First, the RTO must submit a VET course concept, in which it demonstrates that it has identified and consulted relevant stakeholders and established a need for developing the course. This course concept must provide information on the student target group and projected enrolment data. The second step is course development. Using the template on the ASQA website, RTOs must demonstrate their course complies with the Australian Qualifications Framework and ASQA standards for training packages. The last three steps are more procedural, namely course submission, application assessment and a final decision.

Unlike RTO certification, course certification documents are just emailed to ASQA rather than uploaded through an online portal. However, because ASQA is the sole receiver of applications materials, the process is similarly streamlined. Furthermore, the ASQA website provides all necessary forms alongside step-by-step guidance and links to relevant compliance documents.

In summary, the certification process for providers in Australia is divided into simple steps that are all overseen by one centralised agency: ASQA. The ASQA website is organised and articulate in providing information to providers on how to become certified and what certification they need. And finally, the asqanet portal is a one stop shop where providers can complete the entire certification process in just a few steps.

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6 Monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes in Portugal

In order to ensure continuous improvement of the adult education and training system, adult education and training providers, as well as adults' outcomes, have to be adequately monitored. This chapter assesses whether mechanisms for monitoring Portugal's adult education and training providers and adult's outcomes are well-developed and mutually reinforcing, and proposes recommendations and implementation guidance for strengthening these mechanisms.

Challenges

Based on consultations with key Portuguese stakeholders and OECD desk research as well as country visits, the following challenges to strengthen monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes have been identified:

Challenge 3: Capacity to monitor the performance of providers is limited

There is a large number, and a great variety of adult education and training providers in Portugal. However, the technical and human resource capacities for monitoring their performance and continuous quality improvement are constrained, undermining confidence in the effectiveness of existing monitoring exercises.

The responsibility to monitor the quality of public providers falls on the bodies that grant their corresponding certification (See Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4). Once certified by DGERT, private providers obtain the official approval to develop training activities in the areas for which the certification was granted. However, DGERT's capacity to ascertain whether providers deliver training with the expected quality is limited. The main instrument for DGERT to monitor the quality of private providers is an audit. Because of the large number of providers certified by DGERT – 2 745 as of 2020 – it is not possible to audit all providers on a regular basis. As highlighted by OECD (OECD, 2018[1]), a data-driven, systematic and risk-based auditing approach, which would allow to better target which providers are in need of audit, is currently not in place in Portugal. Instead, DGERT mainly selects providers to be audited based on a number of dimensions defined internally, including i) the age of their certifications, ii) the number of complaints received, or iii) the geographical area in which they are based, with areas with a higher concentration of providers being targeted.

Providers selected for audits are notified in advance and are required to send relevant information to DGERT for its analysis. The audits entail a two-day visit in which members of the DGERT audit team meet with providers' staff. In the case of unsatisfactory performance and certification withdrawal, the provider is removed from an official list of all certified providers available on DGERT's website and loses access to public funding.

One challenge preventing large-scale auditing from taking place is DGERT's limited capacity and human resources, currently counting a team of no more than 10 people. For this reason, only approximately 2% of providers are audited each year, which is much less than what interviewed stakeholders deemed necessary.

The monitoring of private providers carried out by DGERT is completely independent from that of the providers certified by other bodies awarding sectorial certifications ("*entidades certificadoras*"). Not only has there not been collaboration between DGERT and these bodies, but DGERT is largely unaware of who these bodies and whether or not they monitor the quality of the providers under their system. As a result, stakeholders have highlighted that apart from lacking depth, the plethora of audits carried out in different formats by different institutions is a burdensome and time-consuming process for providers to prepare and go through frequently. For instance, a provider of adult education and training in regulated professions might be in theory audited by both DGERT (to check its general organisational quality), and sectoral public institution (to check its sector-specific certification).

In recognition of these concerns, DGERT is currently taking steps to implement a more risk-based approach to audits. Currently, DGERT is piloting a project similar to a self-assessment exercise, which will ask providers to report on a few select quantitative and qualitative quality indicators, such as the number of trainers, description of the training offer, or employability results. This information should complement DGERT's own data on providers' performance, and help better identify which providers to audit, as well as to better plan the audits themselves. Before full implementation, DGERT will test this monitoring approach

on a group of selected providers, and also try to provide feedback with suggestions for improvement based on the assessment of providers' performance according to the indicators. This cautious approach to the introduction of self-assessment as a tool to monitor and evaluate of providers' performance is due, in part, to previous mixed experiences with the method (Box 6.1).

Box 6.1. DGERT's experience with the self-assessment process

In 2004, when the process of renewing DGERT's licenses was not automatic, a self-assessment exercise was introduced to help manage the growing number of applications for renewal. In its content, the self-assessment was based on an adjusted version of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) developed by the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN, 2020[2]).

However, DGERT soon found that providers were not filling out the self-assessment forms with much care, which made it difficult to trust the validity and credibility of the provided information. Stakeholders have indicated that providers found the CAF too complex, and burdensome. Despite having made efforts to promote the objectives of the self-assessment exercises and the nature of the supporting guidelines through workshops and presentations across Portugal, providers still understood the process as punitive rather than formative in nature. This led in many cases to providers describing their performance in much more positive light than it was in reality, as was evidenced by the data collected by DGERT. At the same time, it was difficult for DGERT to use the obtained results to compare providers and measure their performance, because in spite of their heterogeneity and the different contexts in which they were working, the providers completed the self-assessment according to the same general quality standard, which could not capture their diversity. As a result, the practice did not generate meaningful insights. Another challenge was the DGERT's lack of capacity to provide feedback to providers, based on the self-assessment which they had completed. Although providers demanded receiving guidance on what to improve on the basis of the self-assessment forms they had submitted to DGERT, it was not possible for DGERT to reflect upon the forms in detail and provide it.

The practice was discontinued after six years.

IEFP also obliges the providers of apprenticeship courses to regularly complete self-assessment exercises. However, similarly to DGERT's experience (Box 6.1), providers do not attach great importance to the process. According to stakeholders, they do not see the process as an opportunity to improve but rather as an additional layer of an administrative burden. As in the case of DGERT (Box 6.1), IEFP struggles to manage the analysis of the self-assessment forms it receives from providers, and lacks the capacity to furnish providers with meaningful feedback.

Finally, the regional services of DGEstE monitor the activity of public schools offering adult education in their region with the goal of helping schools improve their performance and prevent low levels of attainment. To this end, DGEstE makes recommendations to schools, or informs the Inspectorate-General of Education and Science (IGEC), if needed. IGEC plays a role in the process of regular evaluation of schools by analysing school performance. IGEC is also mandated to evaluate the procedures of curriculum operationalisation and certification of learning in adult education and training with respect to schools and Qualifica Centres. However, when it comes to schools, stakeholders have indicated that IGEC's inspection largely concentrates on general education, and concentrates little on the quality of adult education that schools are also providing. At the same time, stakeholders have reported that course planning for adult education provided through schools is not informed by the results of previous inspection results assessing course quality. This means that even when the quality of a course has been assessed as being low through the inspection, it can continue to remain part of schools' offer for adults.

In addition to IGEC's monitoring activities, each DGEstE service has a dedicated team that selects, assesses, and visits schools exhibiting low performance, as measured by schools' completion rate

reported in SIGO. During these visits, the monitoring teams assess the main obstacles and challenges and give advice for improvement. However, DGEstE lacks centralised guidelines or a unified strategy to carry out these monitoring activities to be better supported during the school visits. School visits are planned and conducted regionally and there are neither official guidelines to inform the criteria by which schools should be selected nor to clarify what the visits should entail. Monitoring teams provide the advice they deem relevant based on their own personal and professional experiences. However, similarly to IGEC, DGEstE's regional teams' school visits tend to concentrate on evaluating the quality of general rather than adult education. Beyond keeping a list of schools that provide adult education, stakeholders have reported that DGEstE's capacity to monitor them is limited. The neglect of adult education courses is similarly reflected in the self-assessment exercises that schools are obliged to participate in. The self-assessment exercises are focused on prompting schools to self-assess the quality of education they provide to the youth, rather than the quality of adult education courses, which they also offer. DGEstE, similarly to IEFP, has difficulties to analyse the content of the self-assessment forms. In the past, DGEstE's capacity to meaningfully engage in monitoring activities was bolstered by the operation of DGEstE's local, not just regional, services (offices), however the former have now been discontinued.

Challenge 4: Monitoring of Qualifica Centres could be more targeted and in-depth

There are 310 Qualifica Centres scattered across five Portuguese continental regions. Four inter-institutional regional monitoring teams are in charge of monitoring the performance and providing guidance to the Centres during in-person site visits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ANQEP has invested considerable resources into continuing with the monitoring of Qualifica Centres at distance. Still, the activities of regional monitoring teams during the site-visits could be made more meaningful, and their role as monitoring entities of Qualifica Centres better acknowledged and supported.

As discussed above, among Qualifica Centres' main activities are the recognition and validation of competences (RVCC process) and the provision of guidance and counselling to adults. ANQEP is the body responsible for the monitoring of these activities in the network of Qualifica Centres across the country and has four teams, with participation by ANQEP, IEFP and DGEstE officials, which carry out the monitoring of Qualifica Centres (see Chapter 3). The monitoring teams are distributed across four Portuguese regions: i) North, ii) Centre, iii) Lisbon and Tagus Valley, and iv) Alentejo and Algarve. The monitoring teams develop annual plans to visit all Qualifica Centres in their respective regions.

During these visits, the monitoring teams assess the main challenges faced by Centres and examine their capacity to carry out the validation and certification of adults' competences. The discussions are partially based around the monthly reports ANQEP provides to Qualifica Centres (See Chapter 3 for details) indicating the extent to which the centres are meeting the goals of the Qualifica Programme (i.e. the broader impact of the centre on adult education in the region). Through qualitative analysis exploring *how* (e.g. the effectiveness of pedagogical and recognition processes) Qualifica Centres are managing to reach the quantitative indicators included in the monthly reports, the work of the regional teams on the ground complements ANQEP's oversight and co-ordination role. Nonetheless, certain team members have raised concerns that often the regional teams lack full capacity to carry out this work and the necessary expertise to analyse the data collected. Providing the regional teams with more guidance on how to better help Qualifica Centres improve the quality of their services based on the collected data, as well as developing efforts to better understand the needs of the regional teams, has been highlighted as an area with room for improvement.

Before visiting a centre, the monitoring team also requests random samples of the portfolios that adults – with the support of the centre – develop to have their competences formally recognised. The monitoring team assesses and provides feedback on the quality of the selected portfolio. To prepare for each visit, only a few Qualifica Centres, with capacities to do so, voluntarily carry out a simple self-assessment process. However, insights from more systematic self-assessment by Qualifica Centres could help the

monitoring teams to carry out more informed and targeted visits. At the end of each visit, the monitoring team gives the staff recommendations for improvement and drafts a report of the visit that is sent to the centres.

ANQEP has made further improvements to the model of monitoring Qualifica Centres' performance. For instance, the monthly reports sent to Qualifica Centres have been made more elaborate, and now include more indicators extracted from SIGO (e.g. number of adults registered, referred to training, or certified), which allows Qualifica Centres to get a better picture of their performance over time and in comparison to other centres. The reports are also regularly shared with relevant secretaries of state, IEFP, DGEstE, or DGERT. ANQEP's updated website now also includes a dashboard summarising key results from the monitoring of Qualifica Centres, which have been made public (ANQEP, 2021[3]).

Still, the regional monitoring teams face a number of challenges that prevent more effective monitoring of the activity of the Centres. The first challenge relates to the lack of a framework to assess the quality of Qualifica Centres. Despite the fact that ANQEP produces guidelines for monitoring teams to carry out the visits and evaluations, there is no reference framework that allows the teams to measure quality against a clear benchmark. As a reference framework would also contribute towards making the regional plans for visiting Qualifica Centres by the different regional teams more meaningful. Beyond mentioning what Centres to visit and where, it could outline the quality benchmarks that each centre should be reaching, Finally, apart from the approval of an annual plan at the beginning of each year, additional mechanisms for monitoring the work of the monitoring teams themselves, as well as systematic feedback on their work, need to be further developed. The second challenge faced by the four monitoring teams, each consisting of no more than five people each, are under-resourced to carry out meaningful in-person site visits to more the 310 Qualifica Centres. In addition to this, disparities exist with respect to the number of Centres covered by each team. While in some regions, the number of Qualifica Centres per team is around 50, the team covering the North region oversees almost 120 centres. Moreover, the members of the ANQEP-IEFP-DGEstE regional teams are not exclusively dedicated to this job and must accomplish other tasks in their respective agencies.

With additional resources the current monitoring processes could be more targeted and in-depth. For example, because of the high number of centres under their responsibility, the monitoring activities often end with the site visits. As noted by stakeholders, monitoring teams sometimes do not have the capacity to adequately follow up with centres facing greater challenges to monitor what they do with the feedback received by the team. Follow-up activities are carried out by ANQEP, which provides ongoing support to all Qualifica Centers on an on-demand basis through email exchanges and phone calls as much as capacities permit. Moreover, stakeholders have also pointed out that monitoring teams often do not have the time or the capacity to assess the performance of the centres in providing guidance to adults and training to adults as part of their validation process.

Interviewed stakeholders agreed that it is positive that ANQEP has further fostered co-operation arrangements through the ANQEP-DGEstE-IEFP regional monitoring teams especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that these diverse teams are able to bring different views on how to improve the quality of the centres' work. However, there is still room to improve the communication between regional teams and their hierarchy. For example, in the past regional teams used to hold regular meetings and seminars to exchange information and learn from each other. However, as stakeholders have pointed out, these meetings have become less frequent in recent years, which was further compounded by the outbreak of COVID-19. As a result, the existing channels of communication to exchange information and best practices between the monitoring teams remain largely informal.

Challenge 5: There is limited capacity to systematically track adults' outcomes

Portugal's capacity to monitor outcomes of adults beyond course completion is limited. There are challenges related to data sharing between key quality assurance entities resulting from privacy concerns,

which make the use of administrative data for tracking outcomes more difficult. At the same time, providers equally face challenges in tracking student employability outcomes and satisfaction, amplified in the context of the obligation to comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

To date, only IEFP and POCH are able to link data from some of their courses with graduates' labour market outcomes. POCH's ability to link data from the courses it finances to graduates' labour market outcomes, such as employment status and salaries, is facilitated by a protocol signed between it, DGEEC and relevant social security services. Similarly, IEFP is able to link its datasets with social security data (decree law no.71/2018), which allows for monitoring of relevant outcomes. IEFP's access to social security data is facilitated by the fact that this data is collected and managed by Ministry of Labour, and IEFP is the ministry's subsidiary body. Still, IEFP faces challenges in tracking outcomes of learners in the training centres providing apprenticeship courses that it oversees as social security data does not provide information on whether VET learners end up working in areas related to their completed training. Such insight would be valuable to help IEFP assess the extent to which the courses benefited learners and the economy. In a similar vein, POCH's monitoring efforts are made by difficult by the fact that the data is generally fragmented and incomplete. For its part, DGERT requires that the providers it oversees establish a mechanism to track learners' employability and satisfaction with the training. However, interviewed stakeholders have commented that roughly 80% of VET providers do not have the capacity to comply with this requirement. Moreover, the lack of information on student trajectories at level of secondary education makes it difficult to identify individuals who could benefit from adult education and training. For example, adult education providers such as IEFP or Qualifica Centres cannot easily identify students who had dropped from upper secondary education and might require further training.

Portugal also faces challenges in assessing other outcomes, such as whether course participants enrol in higher education institutions after having completed their training, or improve their on-the-job performance. With respect to the latter, stakeholders have underlined that it is largely impossible to obtain feedback from companies that had arranged for their workers to participate in training as firms usually do not respond to these types of requests. According to stakeholder insights, this is partially related to the lack of culture of co-operating with public entities on the part of employers, as well as the administrative burden that it entails, especially for SMEs and micro-enterprises, which account for a majority of Portugal's employment. Stakeholders also reported that tracking student satisfaction through online or email surveys is equally challenging for providers. For example, a large share of low-skilled adults who enrol in training courses do not use email regularly, making it difficult to establish a stable and reliable communication channel to gauge their satisfaction with the training once it has been completed. In this context, Estonia's student satisfaction surveys, could serve as a useful example for Portugal (see section on relevant international case studies).

Several interviewed stakeholders have expressed strong agreement on the potential benefits of tracking adults' outcomes for improving the quality of the adult education and training system, and to extend this practice to the entire system. Therefore, there is a need to establish protocols for sharing data between the social security services and ANQEP, DGERT and DGEstE for the purposes of tracking adult learners' outcomes. Moving in this direction would require strong data protection and privacy standards. At the same time, it is important that the protocols do not preclude accessing the data in a timely manner. DGEEC is currently working on linking data from SIGO with social security data to help POCH improve the monitoring of its programmes. However, the current version of SIGO has not been designed for the purpose of tracking adults' outcomes and may therefore require further update of its functions. In addition, ANQEP is also working with DGEEC on ways of improving SIGO data for the purposes of tracking adults' learning pathways, in order to provide targeted support and guidance to those who have not concluded a qualification.

There are a number of other efforts in Portugal to track student outcomes. Some adult education and training providers have put in place informal mechanisms to track the outcomes of their graduates, such as online surveys by emails. Similarly, the VET Student Trajectory Observatory (OTES) follows VET students after their graduation from secondary school using online surveys, the results of which are

published on DGEEC's website. In addition, certain Qualifica Centres with capacities to do so have started tracking adults who had used their services out of their own initiative, but without any guidelines to follow or systematic results-sharing. The results of this tracking are mostly used on different communication platforms to better illustrate the value-added of Qualifica Centres to the public, and are used by providers on an ad-hoc basis.

Implementation plan for strengthening the monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' outcomes in Portugal

Recommendation 3: Develop a common monitoring framework

Portugal has invested considerable efforts into developing various mechanisms to monitor the quality of its adult education system. For example, ANQEP distributes monthly reports with data on selected quantitative indicators to Qualifica Centres to support their self-assessment, and the Qualifica Centres' regional monitoring teams alongside other certification entities perform formative site visits and audits respectively. In order to improve the effectiveness of these efforts and increase Portugal's capacity to carry out more informed and informative monitoring exercises, Portugal should establish a common monitoring framework with a targeted self-assessment component. The proposed structure of such a framework is detailed in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Common monitoring framework

Quantitative and qualitative components of the monitoring framework

	Quantitative indicators (SIGO and other data sources)	Qualitative indicators (self-assessment)
Organisation		• Description of leadership (managers/co-ordinators) • Description of facilities management (management of spaces dedicated to learning activities and pedagogical equipment) • Description of internal quality assurance processes
Staff	• No. of trainers/teachers • No. of "experienced trainers" • % of staff enrolled in continuous development • % of staff having completed continuous development	• Description of goals and objectives that staff professional development is helping achieve • Description of challenges in staff professional development processes
Training	• No. of certifications awarded • Course completion rates • No. of internal in-class inspections	• Description of strengths and weaknesses of pedagogical practices • Description of policies for pedagogical assessment and evaluation • Description of the results from pedagogical evaluation
Outcomes	• Employability of learners • No. of courses and course hours • No. of adults enrolled	• Results from satisfaction surveys

This framework would help to make each step of the monitoring process more meaningful. At the same time, it would provide a coherent assessment framework for the common "first-tier" quality dimensions outlined in Chapter 5 (i.e. organisation, staff, training, outcomes), on the basis of selected quantitative indicators (Column 2 of Table 6.1). The framework would also help to organise the broader quality assurance process in Portugal according to a "plan-do-check-act approach". Restricted to monitoring the first-tier certification criteria, the framework could thus be applicable to both Qualifica Centres as well as

all types of adult education and training providers and their respective monitoring entities. The framework would seek to support the effective assessment of the common certification standards through the monitoring tools already in place (e.g. audits), or their improvement. For instance, should a provider score poorly on a pre-defined number of dimensions in the framework, this would signal a need to carry out an audit.

Second, the framework would include a targeted self-assessment tool (Column 3 of Table 6.1), which would complement the quantitative indicators through key selected qualitative insights. The self-assessment component of the framework would ask for qualitative elaboration related to each "first-tier" quality dimension (i.e. description of processes through which quantitative indicators were achieved and challenges encountered). In this way, the self-assessment tool could help make the monitoring of Qualifica Centres more in-depth, as the regional monitoring teams would be provided with further insights that would enrich the formative discussions between them and the centres during monitoring visits. If implemented effectively, the self-assessment component of the framework, could also improve the capacity of the monitoring institutions to audit providers. More specifically, the results of the self-assessment tool could provide auditors with useful information on low-performing providers ahead of site visits. However, in order to fully reap the benefits of the self-assessment approach, care must be taken in its implementation. In particular, special attention should be placed on supporting the monitoring entities in the design and analysis stages of the process, so that the tool is designed around a set of key, targeted questions, which permit meaningful and easy analysis of providers' responses (see Implementation Guidance section below).

The frequency with which providers will monitored should be carefully defined to avoid subjecting providers to multiple audits in a single year, otherwise providers might feel overburdened and discouraged from participating in the process in the first place, which could impact upon the quality of the information gathered through this process.

Finally, as foreshadowed above, the general monitoring framework would serve to inform the audits or formative visits of the monitoring entities to the providers. The outcomes of these visits and audits should be recorded by the monitoring entities and used to track providers' progress and inform further follow-up action (e.g. certification withdrawal), if needed.

Implementation guidance for Portugal

Successful implementation of the common monitoring framework that Portugal should introduce will require: i) careful design of a selection of quantitative and qualitative indicators that will allow policy makers to obtain a meaningful picture of adult education and training providers' performance without overburdening them administratively, and ii) buy in from the providers themselves.

The common monitoring framework should be based on key quantitative indicators and selected qualitative inputs gathered through the self-assessment tool, such as those proposed in Columns 2 and 3 of Table 6.1.The selection of quantitative indicators and qualitative inputs have been informed by desk research, expert consultations and stakeholder insights. Interviewed stakeholders have indicated that overall the framework should seek to capture:

1. key quality input factors (such facilities or staff, as suggested in Columns 2 and 3 of Table 6.1)
2. key quality output factors (such as employment outcomes or results from satisfaction surveys, as suggested in Column 2 of Table 6.1)
3. key quality process factors (such as pedagogical practices, as suggested in Column 3 of Table 6.1).

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education has developed comparable Quality Indicators to monitor quality of adult education providers, which mirror these three dimensions (inputs, outputs, processes). The Quality Indicators are part of Slovenia's effort to further strengthen their long-standing work on self-assessment of

adult education providers (see Section on relevant international case studies). The Slovenian Quality Indicators could serve as a further source of inspiration for Portugal's common monitoring framework.

The self-assessment tool would be an important component of the general framework. However, given the experience with self-assessment in Portugal previously (see Box 6.1), the design of the self-assessment tool, as well as the analysis of its findings, will require close attention. The self-assessment tool should have a limited number of key elements to ensure that it is short and easy to use (Table 6.1). In this way, the self-assessment can produce meaningful insights into the processes that providers have implemented to achieve the quantitative indicators mirroring the first-tier quality dimensions, but without unintentionally overwhelming them. The elements of the self-assessment should therefore be further fine-tuned in collaboration with technical experts in each of the monitoring entities. In turn, this would facilitate the analysis of the self-assessment forms, especially if accompanied by common guidelines allowing for the analysis of providers' qualitative inputs (Column 3 of Table 6.1). In this context, inter-institutional collaboration and best-practice sharing related to the use of the common monitoring framework, and specifically the self-assessment tool, will be important, and should be formally systematised by adjusting the internal institutional protocols of the respective monitoring entities.

Finally, as highlighted above, the success of the general monitoring framework will depend on the degree of care with which providers input the quantitative and qualitative data into the system, and the degree to which they are motivated to participate in it. Building a "culture of quality" will take a long time, but there are a number of activities that Portugal could actively undertake now to support this objective. For instance, strengthening a culture of quality is the objective of Slovenia's Offering Quality Education to Adults (OQEA) project. The Slovenian Institute of Adult Education has developed a complementary self-assessment instrument – a logo that adult education providers can obtain when they have systematically implemented self-assessment processes in the past three years (see the relevant international case study below).

Relevant international case study: Slovenia's monitoring framework for adult education providers

Background

The responsibility for quality assurance for adult education in Slovenia is dispersed among an array of public institutes, educational institutions, evaluation bodies and government ministries. Though Slovenia is unique in having such a variety of institutions involved in quality assurance, monitoring for adult education is primarily overseen by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (ACS).

ACS has been a key player in adult education in Slovenia since 1991, but its roles and activities have changed according to national and European strategic documents and legislation. Currently its roles include the training of trainers, providing pedagogical research support, promoting adult education in Slovenia, collaborating with international education bodies, and the monitoring of Slovenian adult education providers certified by the Ministry of Education.

Monitoring framework

ACS developed a framework to monitor the quality for adult education providers that consists of both internal and external monitoring approaches. Internal approaches include: self-assessment; training, information and communications technology (ICT) support and counselling; and a network of quality counsellors in adult education dedicated to helping providers implement regular self-assessment. External approaches include: expert external evaluations, peer reviews, and the awarding the "green quality logo".

Amongst the plethora of its initiatives, ACS is particularly well-known for its work on self-assessment of providers. Publicly recognised adult education providers in Slovenia are legally required to perform self-evaluations. Most organisations use a model developed by ACS in 2001 called Offering Quality Education

to Adults (OQEA) in Slovenian. The goal of the OQEA approach is for management and employees to reflect on their organisation's mission, vision and values in order to better define, assess, maintain and develop the quality of their work. Providers have to plan, prepare and implement a self-evaluation, a self-evaluation report and a quality development action plan on a regular basis. Through OQEA, ACS provides guidance on self-evaluation planning, methodology for the acquisition and evaluation of data, implementation of self-evaluation, evaluation of the acquired data, planning of measures of improvement, and evaluation of the action results.

OQEA relies on a number of adult education quality indicators elaborated by the ACS, which can be used to guide providers' self-assessment. These are summarised in Figure 6.1. Grouped into input factors, process factors and output factors, the criteria are important for achieving national and (institutions') own quality standards. The quality criteria can be equally used to guide external evaluation and monitoring. There criteria can be applied to both formal and non-formal adult education.

Figure 6.1. Slovenia's Quality Indicators in Adult Education

Quality indicators classified as input factors, process factors, and output factors
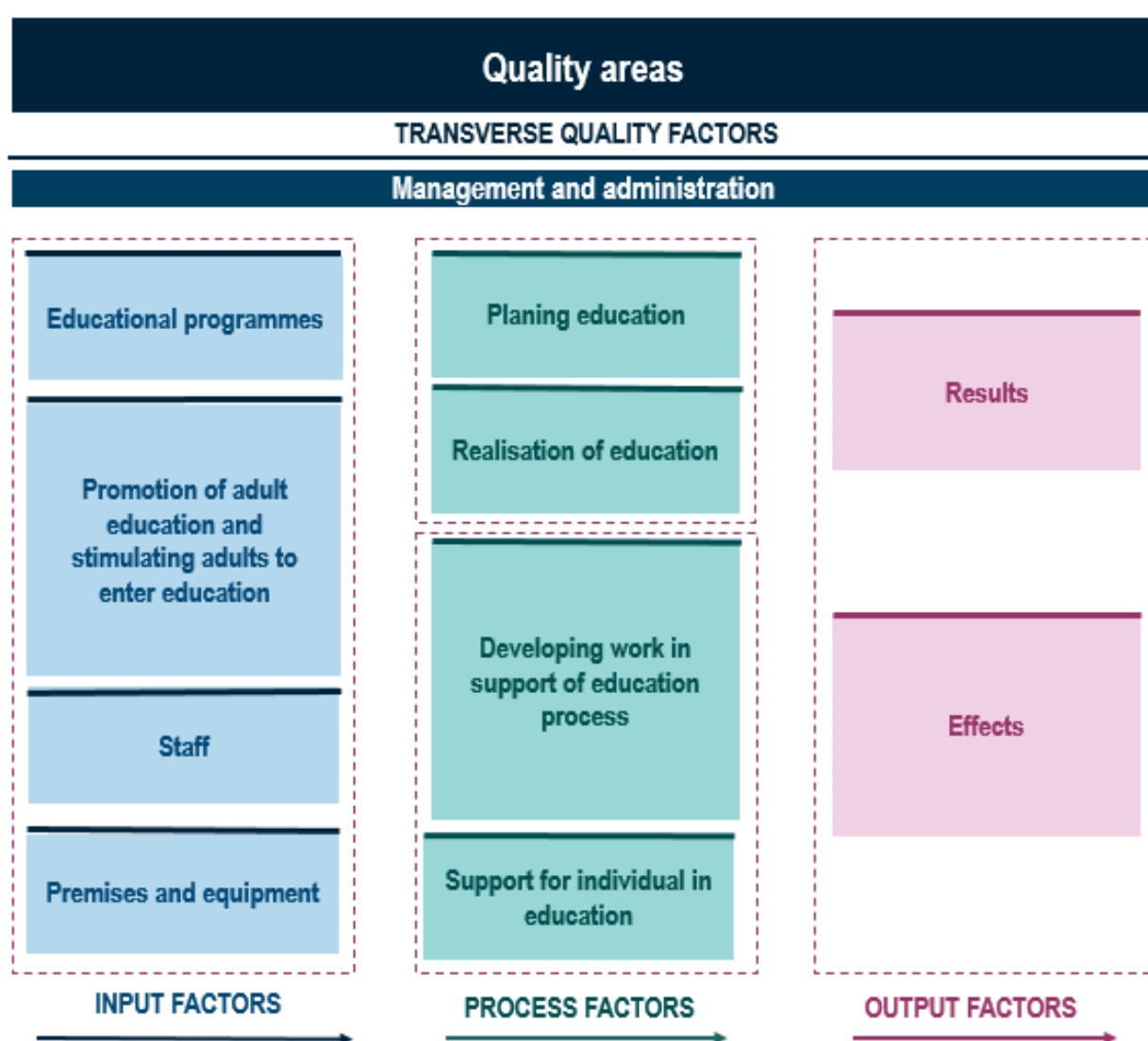
Source: Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (2013[4]), *Quality indicators in adult education*, https://kakovost.acs.si/en/bookshelf/quality-indicators-in-adult-education-1.

In order to help implement the OQEA methodology, ACS actively support adult education providers in their self-assessment efforts. For instance, ACS developed an online portal called the "Quality Mosaic" (*"Mozaik Kakovosti"*), which compiles self-assessment good practices, tools and guidelines (ACS, 2020[5]).

Complimenting internal monitoring through the OQEA self-assessment approach, ACS also oversees external monitoring through external evaluations and auditing. ACS states that the goal of its external evaluation programme is to provide a source of external feedback for providers, as well as help providers to improve their internal monitoring practices. ACS trains and organises external evaluation teams using its own staff, experts from the field of adult education and technical experts in the field of the providers they are evaluating. The external evaluation process includes a review of the provider's self-evaluation processes, an on-site visit to the provider, and preparation of an external evaluation report with feedback for improvement.

Finally, as mentioned in Recommendation 3, adult education and training providers can obtain a logo for implementing self-assessment processes conditional upon satisfying eight self-assessment quality standards (ACS, 2020[6]). The so-called "green quality logo" rewards adult training providers for caring about the quality of their work, and showing their eagerness to improve through monitoring the quality of their processes and implementing measures to make them more robust (OECD, 2019[7]). In 2020, 36 adult education providers were officially using the green quality logo, including public adult education centres, secondary schools and school centres; and private providers (ACS, 2020[6]).

Recommendation 4: Track outcomes in adult education and training

Successfully tracking adults' outcomes is complex, and the challenges inherent in the process are not unique to Portugal. In order to initiate the effort in a systematic way, Portugal could launch a formal mechanism specifically devoted to improving the system for tracking adults' outcomes.

The mechanism for monitoring adults' outcomes could take the form of an inter-institutional working group that would convene multiple times a year to make recommendations for: i) making the most out of the existing administrative data; and ii) enriching the data collected through systematic satisfaction surveys of trainees, which could be combined to develop a formal graduate tracking system in the longer term (European Commission, 2020[8]). The working group should initiate the outcome tracking process by focusing on employment indicators (e.g. employment status, employment type, salary). The satisfaction surveys could collect adult learners' subjective impressions of the training, as well as adults' self-reported progression into further education.

Stakeholders have highlighted that important synergies could be achieved by establishing links between the respective administrative databases of the key quality assurance actors (ANQEP, DGERT, DGEstE) and the social security database, as well as to the database of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education. The working group should thus encompass representatives from ANQEP, DGERT, DGEstE, as well as IEFP, POCH, DGEEC, and DGES. IEFP and POCH could contribute important insights based on their experience of tracking adults' outcomes thanks to having access to the social security database. DGEEC and DGES could draw on their experience of having successfully connected Portugal's upper-secondary (general and VET) and higher education information systems, which has allowed for tracking progress of students from upper secondary into tertiary education. As these actors interact with different groups of adult learners on an everyday basis and can contribute different perspectives (see Section above), a permanent mechanism should be established for sharing information and co-ordinating their efforts. At the same time, having these experts work together to reach a consensus on the importance of establishing system for tracking outcomes would help to raise awareness of the topic and create political momentum for implementing the necessary changes. Given that important considerations have to be given to data protection and privacy in the context of administrative data sharing, a representative of the National Data Protection Commission (*Comissão Nacional de Proteção de Dados; CNDP*), such as a data protection officer, should be included in the group. As stipulated by Law decree no. 58/2019, the CNDP is

mandated to provide non-binding opinions on legislative and regulatory measures concerning the protection of personal data, especially in the context of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Engaging representatives of employers would be equally important, especially in relation to tracking outcomes (such as improvement in on-the-job performance) of employed learners who had been signed up for training by their employers.

As a first step, the working group could focus on leveraging administrative data to track adults who completed initial vocational education and training (IVET), before enlarging the focus to include continuing vocational education and training (CVET). Adults' completion of initial education is attested by obtaining a formal qualification, which can be registered in administrative data records, allowing for tracking the learning outcomes of these adults. The experience of EU Member States with monitoring of learning outcomes indicates that focusing initially on tracking IVET outcomes of adults tends to be a popular approach (European Commission, 2017[9]; Cedefop, 2014[10]). Among 19 Member States with regular graduate tracking measures at national or regional levels, eleven initiated the efforts by focusing on IVET exclusively (European Commission, 2017[9]).

In order to enrich the administrative data used for the purposes of tracking outcomes of adults, the working group should consider fostering more wide-spread use of satisfaction surveys by adult education providers, as mentioned above. With a growing number of user friendly platforms allowing for surveying respondents, and increasing uptake of technology amongst the Portuguese population, the response rates to satisfaction surveys can be quite considerable, without entailing major costs. At the same time, satisfaction surveys would allow for enriching the collected administrative data, which tend to be limited to employment outcomes of learners, as mentioned above. For instance, Estonia has made use of online student satisfaction surveys, which cover adult learners among others, since 2018 (see the relevant international case study below). Surveys allow for combining specific factual information (e.g. type of completed studies, employment status, and salary information) with subjective insights (e.g. perceived value of completed training, ease of labour market insertion, etc.). The survey should use similar data structuring in their responses as administrative data collected, in order to allow for comparisons.

Overall, Portugal's progress related developing a better system for tracking leaning outcomes could importantly contribute to improving some of the existing tools of the National Qualifications Framework, and, by extension, further strengthen the overall quality assurance system for adult education. For instance, recording individuals' labour market outcomes into the *Qualifica Passport* (see Chapter 1) could help improve its relevance, and provide ANQEP with a more complete overview of individuals' learning pathways, and their labour market returns.

Implementation guidance for Portugal

Data protection and privacy will need to be safeguarded in order to facilitate the linking of administrative databases across institutions to support the tracking of adults' outcomes.

It is important not to underestimate the substantive nature of the legislative revisions that would be required, both at the level of the Portuguese and European legislation transposed into the Portuguese legal system (especially the GDPR). Therefore, the working group should concretely outline the legislative revisions that would be necessary to, for example, link DGERT and social security data (currently not permitted under decree law no.71/2018). It will be important to clearly define which exact categories of data will be needed and for what purpose. Clearly defining objectives from the start can help minimise unnecessary delays in the process, such as that which occurred when legislative proposal (no.156/XIII) was made to link the IEFP and Central Administration of the Health System (ACSS) (CNDP, 2018[11]). In order to facilitate linkages between the different databases, the inter-institutional working group should equally identify a consistent personal code to be used for tracking of learners across databases. Amongst the 15 EU Member States that have experience in combining distinct administrative data sources and registers (e.g. PES/unemployment registers, population registers, social security and pension registers, or

tax registers), different codes can be used for this purpose. For instance, Portugal could consider using: i) social security number, ii) student or education number, iii) other personal identification code or a citizen service number. In Denmark and the Netherlands, an individual number or code had been created for the specific purpose of combining information from different databases (European Commission, 2017[9]). In the Netherlands, a national dataset is released on an annual basis bringing together data from the Basic Register of Education (*Basisregister Onderwijs,BRON*) database of the Executive Education Agency, with the data of the Social Statistical Database (SSB) containing information on labour market participation. Both datasets rely on a unique number. The former uses an "education number" while SSB relies on a "citizen service number". While labelled differently, these numbers are in principle the same. Nevertheless, due to their sensitive nature, the government has created an encrypted personal identifier to facilitate the matching and linking of data while keeping privacy constraints in mind (European Commission, 2017[9]).

Portugal's ability to successfully complement administrative data by insights gathered through student surveys will depend on careful and realistic design and planning of such efforts. Given the challenges in using surveys to track adult graduates (especially those low-skilled) encountered by providers (see the Section on challenges), the working group should consider to put in place incentives rewarding providers who manage to stay in touch with adults. The incentives should be steered towards rewarding adult education providers who manage to track the outcomes of low-skilled adults, with low levels of digital competencies or residing in areas with limited broadband connectivity. The working group should decide whether such incentives ought to be of monetary (e.g. tax deductions) or non-monetary character (e.g. being eligible for a quality logo, see Recommendation 3 above).

Finally, although stakeholders have highlighted that restricting the scope of the outcomes monitoring exercises to IVET might be a good starting point, it is the outcomes of continuing education that are the most difficult to keep track of. In this respect, the working group could consider the example of Denmark, where mechanisms exist for monitoring the population's participation in adult and continuing education. The Danish "cross-sectional course register", managed by Statistics Denmark, collects data on publicly provided adult and continuing education programmes using a unique identification number for all citizens of Denmark (the civil registration number). The data are available through Statistics Denmark's online databank, which also determines which data should be published. Further, there is a possibility to buy access to the microdata through ministerial or researcher agreements, which also establish data security rules. For instance, in order to "de-identify" individuals, the level of disaggregation might be restricted. Such measures make it possible to combine the course register with other types of administrative data, and together to obtain detailed information on the outcomes of participants in the courses. In order to improve co-ordination and collaboration between Statistics Denmark and the data users, Denmark's Contact Committee for education statistics organises annual or biannual meetings where representatives from selected ministries, labour market organisations, and stakeholders from the education sector can provide feedback on data quality and any related issues (European Commission, 2017[9]).

Relevant international case study: Student Satisfaction Surveys in Estonia

Background

The Ministry of Education and Research is the primary body responsible for adult education in Estonia. Adult education includes formal education such as traditional higher education and vocational training as well as non-formal education provided by both the educational institutions providing formal education (vocational educational institutions, institutions of professional higher education and universities), the numerous private educational institutions providing further training and some educational institutions providing further training established by a local government.

Within the Ministry of Education and Research, the External Evaluation Department established the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 which details Estonia's external evaluation goals for 2014-2020 in adult education and training. In the strategy, the first key indicator listed is regular centrally administered

surveys of satisfaction with lifelong learning. No satisfaction data had been collected (at least centrally through the ministry) prior to the implementation of the strategy. However, the strategy set a goal of seeing improvements in satisfaction the end of 2020. To this end, the strategy developed a plan to assess the satisfaction of students across the lifelong learning system, which is well-grounded in scientific literature on both the importance of satisfaction surveys and best practice regarding how to effectively carry them out.

Student satisfaction surveys

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Research contracted the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) of the University of Tartu to design satisfaction surveys for students, teachers and parents covering pre-primary education to adult training. They are carried out by the Innove Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research and were piloted in 2016, before being fully implemented in 2018 (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, 2021[12]). The surveys are anonymous and confidential, are conducted electronically and take approximately 20-30 minutes. For added transparency, and to assist schools, the survey questions are made publicly available on the Ministry of Education and Research website.

The objectives of the survey are to expand feedback on the quality of education and create conditions for systematic monitoring of well-being and performance. Additionally, the survey aims at reducing the workload and resources spent by school in collecting data. The survey is managed centrally and takes advantage of large economies of scale in its design and implementation, providing school managers and teachers with a cost-effective solution to data collection (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, 2021[12]).

The results of the survey are school-specific and are made available all institutions with comparison at the state-level. The Ministry also offers schools analytical support to interpret survey results. The content of the survey varies by educational level. At the level of vocational and higher education, the Ministry also conducts a survey to school graduates. The survey collects information on:

1. background information on the studies of graduates (e.g. reasons for choosing particular fields of study, working during studies and study migration)
2. activities of graduates following their studies (further studies or employment)
3. assessments of graduates on the quality of vocational or higher education and qualifications acquired
4. feedback provided by foreign graduates on higher education in Estonia.

While general education institutions have begun collecting satisfaction data yearly, higher education, VET and adult education and training programmes are scheduled to gather data every three years.

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Annex A. (Re)certification dimensions and requirements of quality assurance entities in adult education and training in Portugal

Table A A.1. DGERT's (re)certification dimensions and requirements for adult education and training providers

Certification dimensions	Certification requirements	Recertification requirements
Registration	Must not be in a situation of judicial or administrative suspension, tax or social security restriction, or unresolved debt. Documented proof is required for each of the above.	There is no recertification requirement, once certified. However, the entity must maintain, at all times, the conditions that supported the attribution of the certification, and fulfil the duties associated with this recognition. Assessments of provider compliance with DGERT standards are carried out by DGERT through regular audits relying on the analysis of training indicators provided by the entity. If the entity ceases to operate or doesn't provide training for two consecutive years, certification is terminated.
Human resources	Must provide curriculum, certificates and contracts of training manager, pedagogical co-ordinators and trainers, to evaluate their pedagogical and technical competences for the training projects.	
Facilities and equipment	Must provide description of facilities and equipment (in few occasions, possibly followed by and on-site audit).	
Planning and management of training activity	Must have documentation that clearly articulates the provider's mission, objectives and goals to be achieved, training to be provided and resources needed for this training.	
Design and development of training activity	Must provide documentation of pedagogical resources, pedagogical practices to be followed, and pedagogical evaluation processes. This requirement is extensive and requires many documents.	
Operating rules	Must outline operating conditions, such as registration, selection, course scheduling and logistics, roles and responsibilities of participants, trainers and all staff, etc.	
Organisation of technical and pedagogical dossiers	Must have a technical infrastructure for recording all course activities and administrative meetings and decisions as well as to support the previously mentioned requirements including grading, evaluations, scheduling, etc.	
Training contracts	Must document any contracts or interactions with third parties.	
Complaints handling	Must offer forms for filing complaints and document system for incorporating feedback.	
Results analysis, post-training evaluation and continuous improvement	Must show the results of the evaluation process through documentation, including the post-training contacts with participants, and the continuous improvement of practices.	

Table A A.2. DGEstE's (re)certification dimensions and requirements for schools providing adult education and training

Certification dimensions	Certification requirements	Recertification requirements
Background information	Must provide documents verifying registration, legal records, legal codes, contact information, leadership, mission, etc.	Certification does not need to be renewed.
Course information	Must list how each course fits into the QNQ, state the course purpose, list the number of courses offered and to how many students, describe the economic sector it contributes to and provide a detailed diagnosis of economic contribution and demand for the course.	
Descriptions of quality assurance procedures/processes	Must provide brief description of monitoring tools.	
Descriptions of community involvement and partnerships	Must describe school's contribution to the community, community partners, and community involvement in the school.	
Description of facilities	Must list licensing, ownership status, condition, and; describe classrooms, their capabilities, the type of coursework they are designed for and the number of students they hold.	
Description of technical provisions for courses	Must describe the type and number of equipment provided.	
Description of human resources	Must list trainers and course co-ordinators and their education, experience, and working relationship with the provider.	
Description of finances	Must provide financial documents to prove sustainability of courses.	

Table A A.3. ANQEP's (re)certification dimensions and requirements for Qualifica Centres

Certification dimensions	Certification requirements	Recertification requirements
Registration	Must be regularly constituted and registered before the administration of taxation and social security and the European Social Fund	A request submitted by the promoting entity, at least 60 days in advance regarding the end of the initial authorisation or renewal authorisation, accompanied by the documents that attest to the same requirements of initial certification.
Sustainability	Must offer guarantees of sustainability and stability, with respect to the team, equipment and facilities of the Qualifica Centre. A Qualifica Centre team requires: a) a co-ordinator who is responsible for ensuring institutional representation, as well as guaranteeing its regular functioning in terms of pedagogical management, organisational and financial; b) technicians responsible for guidance, recognition and skills validation; and c) trainers or teachers from the different areas of education and training for the development of recognition, validation and certification processes school and professional skills.	
Safety	Must comply with the current rules on prevention of occupational risks and safety.	
Location and accessibility	Must have adequate location and accessibility for students.	
Integration into local, regional or national networks and partnerships	Must make the necessary information available (including SIGO records) to the monitoring and external evaluation bodies according to the guidelines of ANQEP.	

Certification dimensions	Certification requirements	Recertification requirements
Strategic intervention plan	Must submit a plan of strategic intervention that structures and guides the Centre according to the guidelines defined by ANQEP. The provider should implement systematic self-assessment mechanism to assess the quality of interventions as well as candidate satisfaction.	

Table A A.4. IEFP's (re)certification dimensions and requirements for adult education trainers

Certification dimensions	Certification requirements	Recertification requirements
Pedagogical training course for trainers (*Formação Pedagógica Inicial de Formadores, FPIF*)	Must successfully complete initial pedagogical training course for trainers (FPIF), or be recognised for equivalent pedagogical competences through the RVCC, or possess a certificate of higher education qualifications that confers pedagogical competences recognised by the IEFP as equivalent to FPIF.	Certification does not need to be renewed.
Registration of trainer's entity	Must belong to an entity that is not in a situation of judicial or administrative suspension, tax or social security restriction, unresolved debt.	
DGERT certification of trainer's entity	Must belong to an entity that is DGERT certified.	
Technical-pedagogical team at trainer's entity	Must belong to an entity with a technical-pedagogical team that has two trainers and one co-ordinator. The team members must have pedagogical skills certificates and a written contractual relationship with the training entity.	

Annex B. Engagement

Project activities

The project on Strengthening the Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal was structured around several key activities between December 2019 and November 2020. Throughout this period, the OECD, together with the European Commission, met with a broad range of Portuguese and international stakeholders, including representatives of ministries, public agencies, adult education providers, association and platforms, higher education institutions, confederations and independent experts. These meetings took the form of interactive online workshops, in-depth thematic sessions, working groups, a virtual study visit and bilateral discussions.

Fact-finding mission

During the fact-finding mission to Lisbon from 9 to 12 December 2019, the OECD team met and conducted interviews with Portuguese officials and key stakeholders to better understand Portugal's current legislation, governance arrangements, processes and actions with respect to quality assurance.

Table A B.1. Institutions participating in bilateral meetings during the fact-finding mission, 9-12 December 2019, Lisbon

Institutions
Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho)
Directorate-General for Schools (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares)
Human Capital Operational Programme (Programa Operacional Capital Humano)
Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional)
Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação)
Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social)
National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional)
Social Inclusion and Employment Operational Programme (Programa Operacional Inclusão Social e Emprego)

Good practices workshop

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Good practices workshop was replaced by a series of online interviews held between 7 April and 15 May 2020. The main objective was to promote shared awareness and understanding among Portuguese government officials and stakeholders about the areas for improvement in the Portuguese quality assurance system and provide them with relevant good practice examples from other countries having addressed similar challenges. Participants were invited to identify and discuss Portugal's challenges and opportunities, and provide feedback on how performance could be improved.

Table A B.2. Institutions participating in online interviews held in lieu of the Good practices workshop, 7 April -15 May 2020

Institutions
Agrupamento de Escolas de Almodôvar (Grouping of Almodôvar Schools - Qualifica Centre)
Beja Schools Grouping (Agrupamento de Escolas de Beja - Qualifica Centre)
Business Confederation of Portugal (Confederação Empresarial de Portugal)
Caixa de Mitos
Confederation of Portuguese Farmers (Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal)
Confederation of Tourism of Portugal (Confederação do Turismo de Portugal)
Directorate-General of Education and Science Statistics (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência)
Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho)
Directorate-General for Schools (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares)
European Association for the Education of Adults
Institute of Education (Instituto de Educação)
Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional)
National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional)
Polytechnic Institute of Porto (Instituto Politécnico do Porto)
Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal (Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal)
Portuguese Industrial Association (Associação Industrial Portuguesa)
School of Higher Education of Coimbra (Escola Superior de Educação de Coimbra)
University of Evora (Universidade de Évora)
University of Lisbon
Universidad de Coimbra

Policy recommendations workshop

The main objective of the Policy recommendations workshop, organised online between 8 and 9 July 2020, was to further improve, prioritise and add to the hitherto identified recommendations for improving Portugal's quality assurance system of adult education and training. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Workshop was held online. It consisted of a plenary session, and four thematic working group sessions. Participants were invited to discuss the roles and responsibilities, resource requirements, timelines, and challenges related to implementing the preliminary recommendations, and learn from international experts from Austria and Finland working in the field of quality assurance in adult education and training.

Table A B.3. Institutions invited to the Policy recommendations workshop, 8-9 July 2020

Institutions
Agrupamento de Escolas de Almodôvar (Grouping of Almodôvar Schools - Qualifica Centre)
Beja Schools Grouping (Agrupamento de Escolas de Beja - Qualifica Centre)
Business Confederation of Portugal (Confederação Empresarial de Portugal)
Caixa de Mitos
Confederation of Portuguese Farmers (Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal)
Confederation of Tourism of Portugal (Confederação do Turismo de Portugal)
Directorate-General of Education and Science Statistics (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência)
Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho)
Directorate-General for Schools (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares)
European Association for the Education of Adults
Finnish National Agency for Education (Finland)

Institutions
Institute of Education (Instituto de Educação)
Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional)
National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional)
Ö-Cert (Austria)
Polytechnic Institute of Porto (Instituto Politécnico do Porto)
Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal (Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal)
Portuguese Industrial Association (Associação Industrial Portuguesa)
School of Higher Education of Coimbra (Escola Superior de Educação de Coimbra)
University of Aveiro (Universidade de Aveiro)
University de Coimbra (Universidade de Coimbra)
University of Evora (Universidade de Évora)
University of Lisbon (Universidade de Lisboa)

Working group sessions

In a series of four online Working group sessions, the OECD team met with selected key stakeholders in Portugal's system for quality assurance in adult education and training. The discussion focused on further elaborating the recommendations of the implementation plan, and clarifying outstanding issues.

Table A B.4. Institutions participating in the working group sessions, 21 September – 3 November 2020

Institutions
Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho)
Directorate-General for Schools (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares)
Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional)
National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional)

Study visit

During a two-day virtual study visit, selected Portuguese stakeholders representing key quality assurance entities in adult education and training were invited to learn from the exchange of international experiences with implementing quality assurance processes, from the discussion of their transferability to the Portuguese context. Concrete implementation challenges, and lessons learned were discussed with international experts from Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland.

Table A B.5. Institutions participating in the study visit, 23 – 24 November 2020

Institutions
Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho)
Directorate-General of Education and Science Statistics (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência)
Directorate-General for Schools (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares)
Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional)
National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional)
Ö-Cert (Austria)
Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (Slovenia)
Swiss Federation of Adult Learning, (edQua office, Switzerland)

Strengthening Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

Provision of high-quality adult education and training opportunities is crucial to Portugal's capacity to successfully respond to the rapidly changing world of work as well as recover swiftly from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Portugal has requested support from the European Commission to improve its system of quality assurance in adult education and training. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) has partnered with the OECD Centre for Skills to provide technical support to the Government of Portugal to aid the development of a National Plan, which aims to implement concrete reforms for strengthening quality assurance in Portugal's adult education and training system.

This report on Strengthening Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training in Portugal identifies recommendations and develops detailed implementation guidance in two core dimensions of quality assurance: i) recognition and certification of adult education and training providers; and ii) monitoring of adult education and training providers and adults' learning outcomes.

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