



Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives

Where we are in recognizing non-formal and informal skills

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb trees, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid (Einstein)

“Skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation” (New Skills Agenda for Europe)

A migrant who manages to achieve a good degree of integration into the labour market is certainly someone able to demonstrate his or her individual skills.

The question of migrant workers’ skills can be addressed starting from two distinct concepts: their “qualification”, i.e. a diploma of education recognized in terms of national and international equivalence, and competence acquired by “experience”.

In postponing everything to do with the issue of recognizing qualifications to the specific study carried out by the editorial staff of the Migrant Integration Portal in 2015, this focus, without claiming to be exhaustive, sets out to take stock of the recognition of skills, seen as the entire cultural and professional heritage acquired by a person in his or her life story, in terms of both study and work, i.e. to use European terminology, in formal, non-formal and informal learning.



All the institutional decision-makers concerned, including operators and users of the Migrant Integration Portal can help to improve and integrate this focus by sending comments and contributions to the following email address: redazioneIntegrazione@lavoro.gov.it.



The European Common Reference Framework

The recognition of skills, however and wherever acquired, has been an extremely vexed issue at the European Union level for many years. Below is an overview of the main stages of the development of EU policy on the matter.

The Europa 2020 strategy places the development of knowledge, skills and competence as a prerequisite for economic growth and employment in order to improve integration and progress in the labour market, to facilitate transitions between the phases of work and learning, and to promote occupational and geographical mobility. To this end, the need asserts itself to build a system to recognize, validate, and certify skills that allows individuals to enhance and exploit the skills they have acquired in a particular geographical context within the European labour market and in education and training systems. Equally crucial is the need to enhance the skills acquired through every kind of learning occasion, even those that take place outside the places traditionally dedicated to this (schools and universities). The need to recognize and validate non-formal and informal learning was already recognized as an integral part of the **European Lisbon Strategy of March, 2000**. The European Council of 2000 recognized that “every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in the new information society” and that “a European reference framework should define the new basic skills to be acquired through learning in the course of life: skills relating to information technologies, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills.”

At a European level, the document on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning - **Council Conclusions on Common European principles - May 2004** - laid down certain key criteria which member states were invited to take into consideration, on a voluntary basis, to allow the processes of recognition and validation. The European principles were important to promote and guide the development of standardized approaches and systems regarding the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, thereby contributing to make the different approaches and systems already existing in member states comparable.

In the years that followed, the European Commission and CEDEFOP worked on the development and constant updating of the “**European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning**” a tool that gathers, illustrates, and shares various systems, processes, devices and approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in use in different European contexts. The Inventory (last updated in 2016) describes the methods of application and best practices of the member states of the European Union regarding the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and also identifies the main stakeholders involved in the validation system in various ways and to different ends.

The Recommendation on Key Competences adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 18 December 2006 set out a common framework, the necessary skills that all European citizens should be able to acquire and constituted a starting point for the subsequent definition of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) of 2008, a benchmark framework for the various national systems.

With the **Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008**, by now repealed and replaced by the recent **Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017**, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was constituted.

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) is a common reference framework that allows comparison of qualifications from different countries¹. This instrument uses a grid divided into 8 levels of qualification, to unscramble the knowledge and skills acquired independently by the system that certifies them. Each level describes the learning outcomes (a combination of knowledge, skills and competence) of the qualifications relevant to that level. It starts from Level 1 which indicates a minimum complexity up to a maximum complexity (level 8) of the learning outcomes. Through the grid, the countries can relate the national qualifications issued on the conclusion of any type of learning pathway (formal, non-formal and informal), thus making it understandable and comparable at national and international levels.

In 2017, with the new EQF recommendation, the 8 levels of reference were joined by an approach that favours learning outcomes (LO) over learning inputs. Each of the 8 levels is then expressed and made to dialogue through the LOs, i.e. “the description of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do at the end of a learning process.” In practice, a key concept is introduced that transforms

the way qualifications are seen, no longer as a certification of what has been transmitted by the teacher, but a certification of what has been learned by the student.

What the European framework intends to do is not to standardize the content of qualifications but to make them understandable, overcoming the diversities that are the expression of the cultural, social and environmental complexity of the participating countries. The ultimate aim is to increase the portability of qualifications and to facilitate comparison of the levels of qualifications acquired in other countries and various kinds of learning areas, to support geographical and occupational mobility among different territorial contexts and different systems of learning.

The EQF neither replaces nor defines national frameworks or systems of qualifications, since it does not describe specific qualifications or skills attributable to the individual. Each single qualification must therefore be proportionate to the level of EQF membership through the national systems of qualifications. In practice, for a specific title to be compared with another, it is necessary that it is part of a National Qualifications Framework to then be compared to the corresponding EQF level.

The site - Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe (<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/compare>) offers the possibility to understand and compare the qualifications issued in different countries and by different educational systems.

1) Currently, 39 countries participate in the EQF, i.e. the 28 member states of the European Union in addition to: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Switzerland.

In 2009 the first guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning were adopted **“European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning”**, updated in **2015**, with the aim of acting as a support for the institutions responsible for the development and implementation of operations to validate skills. These Guidelines can be taken as a reference by individual countries on the basis of the differing and quite specific requirements for the development of methods and systems to validate non-formal and informal learning among the various member states.

The 20 December 2012 saw the publication of the EU Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in which member states were urged to establish national systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018 in order to give people the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned outside formal systems of education and training - also through mobility experiences - and to make use of this learning for their professional career and further learning, with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity.

On **10 June 2016** the European Commission adopted the **New Skills Agenda for Europe** which was announced in the Commission's work programme for 2016. The objective of the Agenda is to foster European human capital and promote employability by offering citizens residing in Europe an instrument to develop their skills.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe

To help resolve critical issues linked to skills, the Commission proposes ten concrete initiatives to make skills more visible, and to improve recognition at local, national and EU level, from schools and universities to the labour market:

1) ***a guarantee of skills to help poorly qualified adults to acquire a minimum level of alphabetic, mathematical and digital competence and to progress towards the achievement of an upper secondary education ([Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on “Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults”](#));***

2) a revision of the European Qualifications Framework, for a better understanding of qualifications and a more advantageous use of all the expertise available in the European labour market ([Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017](#))

3) the “[Digital Skills and Job Coalition](#)”, which brings together the member states and interested parties in the sectors of education, employment and industry to develop a large pool of digital talent and to ensure that individuals and the workforce in Europe are equipped with adequate digital skills;

4) The “[Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills](#)”, to improve the analysis of skill needs and to remedy the lack of skills in specific economic sectors;

5) a “[Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals](#)” for the timely definition of skills and qualifications of applicants for asylum, refugees and other migrants ([Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals - online since 2017](#));

6) a revision of the Europass scheme, to offer better and easier tools to present individual skills and obtain useful information in real time on the skill needs and trends in the field that can support career and learning choices ([Commission Proposal definitively approved on 12 April 2018](#));

7) making Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice, improving the opportunities available to learners to create a learning experience based on work and providing greater visibility to the good results of VET in the labour market;

8) a Review of the Recommendation on Key Skills, to help a greater number of people to acquire the basic skills necessary to work and live in the twenty-first century, with particular attention to the promotion of the entrepreneurial spirit and skills focused on innovation ([Proposal for a Recommendation of 17 January 2018 - COM\(2018\) 24 final](#))

9) an initiative monitoring the career paths of graduates to improve information on how graduates progress within the labour market

10) a proposal to continue to analyse and exchange best practices on the most effective methods to combat the “brain drain”.

The **Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on “New Opportunities for Adults”**, (Upskilling Pathways initiative) is one of the political actions envisaged by the New Skills Agenda for Europe. The Recommendation on Upskilling says that “*In today’s society everyone needs to have a wide set of skills, knowledge and competences, including a sufficient level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence, in order to achieve his or her full potential, play an active part in society and undertake his or her social and civic responsibilities. Such skills, knowledge and competences are also crucial for accessing, and progressing in, the labour market and for engaging in further education and training*” and adds, looking to the future, that “*A large majority of jobs will require some level of digital competence, and an increasing number of elementary jobs require some core or generic skills (such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork and emotional intelligence)*”.

In particular, the Recommendation includes three objectives:

1. improving the preparation of people with insufficient skills;
2. making skills visible and comparable even when moving from one country to another;
3. making skills professionally portable.

The reference targets are low-skilled workers whether employed, unemployed or inactive, including migrants for whom it becomes essential to identify, evaluate and certify the skills possessed for the purposes of integration processes. No additional financing by the EU is envisaged, but it is rather a matter of re-

directing for these purposes a part of the resources that the European Social Fund allocates to governments, and in Italy to the regions, to promote skills, training, and employability.

Again with a view to implementing the contents of the New Skills Agenda, **from 20 June 2017 the Skills Profile Tool for third country nationals, is available online.** This is an instrument dedicated to identifying the skills of citizens with a migration background and focused, therefore, on facilitating their socio-work integration. This is a multilingual on-line programme that allows third-country nationals to submit their skills, qualifications, and experience in a manner that makes them comprehensible throughout the European Union.

In March 2017, at the request of the European Commission, the prototype of the EU Skills Profile Tool was tested - in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior - on a group of beneficiaries of international protection in the context of the activities of the project INSIDE.

Lastly, the **Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning**, repealed and replaced the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (see above).



THE NATIONAL SKILLS CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

The National Skills Certification System is a set of subjects, rules and services to recognize skills acquired in any way by a person in their study, life and work. In transposing the EC indications, Italy has aimed to understand, within a unitary framework, both the certification of the formal pathways of each order, degree and territory, and the validation of skills acquired by people in the contexts of their life or work. The regulatory framework has been reconfigured in recent years to adapt the training systems by introducing an approach centred on the comparability of learning outcomes rather than learning pathways, through the updating of the previous institutions and the introduction of new institutions, such as validation.

Here is a brief summary of the Italian legislative framework in the field.

Strategic framework: Law no. 92/2012

Law no. 92 of 28 June 2012 laying down provisions with regard to the reform of the labour market with a view to growth. Law no. 92 of 28 June 2012 laying down “Provisions relating to reform of the labour market with a view to growth” laid the foundations for the construction of a comprehensive national system to certify skills.

The text of the law establishes in Article 4, the themes of the validation of non-formal and informal learning (paragraphs 51 to 57) and of the National Skills Certification System (paragraphs 58-61 and 64-68) as two fundamental elements to ensure and actualize lifelong learning as a function to maintain citizens’ conditions of employability. The Government is delegated to adopt one or more legislative decrees to define the general regulations and essential performance levels, [...], to identify and validate non-formal and informal learning with reference to the National Skills Certification System[...].”

Lifelong learning is recognized as a person’s right at every phase of life (lifelong-learning) and in the context of a shared and territorially integrated system of education, training and labour services that allows recognition of the cultural and professional heritage accumulated in a personal, educational and professional history.

The territorial networks are the organizations through which the integrated lifelong learning system is constituted. The services must be organically connected to strategies for economic growth, access to work, the reform of the welfare state, active ageing, and the exercise of active citizenship, also by migrants.

Institutional framework: Legislative Decree no. 13/2013

Legislative Decree no.13 of 16 January 2013 contains a package of rules aimed at promoting the growth and development of the cultural and professional heritage acquired by a person in his or her life, study and work, ensuring recognition, transparency and portability. The Decree implementing the delegation contained in Law no.92/2012 defines the general rules and lays down the essential performance levels for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as minimum service standards of the national certification system.

Legislative Decree no.13 of 16 January 2013 foresees the State's commitment to promoting lifelong learning as a person's right and to ensure equal opportunities for the recognition and development of the skills acquired in line with individual abilities and choices and from personal, civic, social and employment perspectives (Art.1).

The decree defines a package of rules aimed at promoting the growth and development of the cultural and professional heritage acquired by a person in his or her life, study and work, ensuring recognition, transparency and portability. In practice it seeks to promote so-called "lifelong learning", i.e. the activities undertaken by a person in the various stages of life, in order to improve knowledge, skills and competence, in a perspective of continuous growth of the individual and for a "portability" in the labour market.

The Decree, consisting of 11 articles, contains a long section devoted to building a common linguistic and conceptual terrain, i.e. a clear institutional glossary on concepts such as: **skills; formal, non-formal and informal learning; the issuers and the qualified within the framework of the public certification system; validation of learning; certification of skills.**

It is thus made clear that the distinctive element between identification, validation and certification is the goal. **The identification and validation of skills** is a process of analysis, reconstruction and recognition of the skills possessed by a person, with priority given also to those acquired outside the formal pathways of education and training and may, but need not, be followed by certification.

Certification is a procedure to formally recognize the skills acquired by a person in formal contexts (school, university etc.), also in cases where the pathway was interrupted, or those acquired in non-formal contexts (internships, voluntary work, etc.) or informal contexts (family activities or leisure time). The procedure to certify skills concludes with the issuing of a certificate.

In short, the Legislative Decree includes:

- Three types of standard validation and certification services:

1. process standards: how the services of certification and validation are dispensed
2. attestation standards: what is issued in the certificates, what information "travels" and how it can be traced;
3. system standards: "who does what" and with what guarantees of appropriateness, quality and protection for the beneficiaries

- The establishment of the National Repertory of Educational and Vocational Qualifications which constitutes the unitary reference framework for the certification of skills.

The work site appointed to implement the system is the National Technical Committee consisting of bodies issuing qualifications, i.e.:

1. **The Ministry of Education, University and Research**, for qualifications in the school and university systems;
2. The **Regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano** for qualifications issued within their remit;
3. **Ministry of Employment and Welfare**, for qualifications of professions that are not organized into orders or associations or otherwise regulated;
4. **The Ministry of Economic Development** and other authorities for the qualifications for regulated professions.

By setting up a technical skills group, the regions committed to creating a National Qualification Framework (QNQR).

Operational Framework : the Interministerial Decree of 30 June 2015

With the **Decree of 30 June 2015**, a **National Qualification Framework (QNQR)** was established, which defined a common reference framework to operate services to identify, validate and certify skills at a regional level, and launched a first line of action to construct the National Repertory of Educational and Vocational Qualifications. The National Repertory established, as envisaged by Legislative Decree 13/2013, a **national reference framework of regional qualifications** and related skills (QNQR), which represents a national reference in terms of professional content.

The definition of a reference framework for the operation of services to identify validate and certify skills at a regional level, aims to:

- 1) encourage transparency regarding learning and the adherence of education to the needs of businesses and professions in order to facilitate the matching of labour demand and supply while increasing the productivity and competitiveness of the production system;
- 2) extend the portability of qualifications at national and European levels in order to facilitate occupational and geographic mobility, also in view of the internationalization of enterprises and professions.

The framework is organized on the basis of a classification system that combines the economic activity codes (ATECO) and those of professions (CP) and **aggregates** the set of activities and professions that operate in the labour market **in 24 sectors**.

Each of the 24 sectors is represented through identification of the **production processes** of goods and services, the identification of **areas of activities (ADA)** and the **activities** involved.

This descriptive representation of each sector becomes the **unitary national reference** for regional qualifications and makes it possible to:

- Check and compare the professional contents (skills and profiles) described in the various regional repertories;
- Enable their readability and recognition on the basis of a common representation of the work;
- Have a parameter for professional performance to construct appropriate assessment tests.

The QNQR allows regional qualifications to be correlated. This correlation is a process to progressively standardize regional qualifications. It is possible to correlate those regional qualifications which, in terms of skills, refer to the same work activities. Regional qualifications that can be correlated are automatically considered equivalent.

The Framework came into force on 30 June 2016 and is accessible on the site <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/index.php>.

The Framework is updated regularly following scheduled maintenance procedures based on requests made by the issuing bodies or stakeholders of the system.

Qualifications Framework: Min. Dec. 8 January 2018

The Decree adopted by the Ministry of Employment and Welfare on 8 January 2018 established a National Qualifications Framework (QNQ), a system to classify qualifications in line with a series of criteria based on achieving specific learning levels. The QNQ constitutes a link with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) coordinating the Italian qualification system with those of other European countries.

The QNQ aims to integrate and coordinate the national subsystems of qualifications and to improve transparency, accessibility, and permeability, facilitating the portability of qualifications at national and European levels. The QNQ therefore constitutes a link with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) coordinating the Italian qualification system with those of other European countries.

The National Qualifications Framework represents the national system to reference Italian qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework.

This referencing is a national process necessary to assign the EQF level to the various kinds of national qualifications and thus allow comparison between qualifications from different countries. Referencing the national qualifications to the EQF adds an international value to them since it makes them clear to users from other countries. For example:

The Decree of 8 January illustrates the composition of the national framework and offers explanations on the procedure and criteria for referencing. The procedures for referencing to the QNQ are managed by the national coordination point of the EQF at ANPAL, availing itself of the INAPP for independent evaluation of proposals for referencing. The referencing process is divided into four phases: initiation, investigation, independent evaluation, approval and publication.

In line with the European Qualifications Framework, the QNQ involves three descriptive dimensions of skills in terms of: knowledge; ability; autonomy and responsibility. Eight levels have also been identified that characterize the growing complexity of learning (*See Table A*)

The referencing to the QNQ of qualifications from the public lifelong learning offering allows inclusion of qualifications in the **National Repertory of Educational and Vocational Qualifications** presenting itself as an enhancement of the provisions of Leg. Dec no. 13 of 16 January 2013.

The Atlas of Labour and the National Repertory of Educational and Vocational Qualifications

(<http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/>)

The Atlas of Labour and Qualifications, online by the end of 2016, constitutes the main source of information on the National Repertory of Qualifications.

The Atlas of Labour and Qualifications consists of two sections. The first - the actual Atlas of Labour, describes the contents of a job in terms of activities (tasks, duties,...) and products or services potentially deliverable in the carrying out of the activities described.

Instead, the second section of the Atlas contains the repertories encoded at national and regional levels collected in the National Repertory of Educational and Vocational Qualifications, and is divided into six sections.

The Atlas of Labour is a detailed map which describes the world of work and qualifications. The Atlas describes the contents of a job in terms of activities (tasks, duties,...) and products or services potentially deliverable in the carrying out of the activities described. The contents of the jobs are represented and made navigable through a classification scheme consisting of 24 professional economic sectors (PES)^[1].

The objective of describing the content of each job in terms of the process, with the consequent possibility of arriving at the fine detail of the activities, has allowed the allocation of individual qualifications contained in the regional repertories, and in areas of activity (ADA), creating potential conditions for comparability^[2].

Born mainly to ensure the national recognition of regional qualifications, the Atlas can support the execution of several other functions such as: recognition of training credits, validation of skills acquired from experience, certification of skills acquired in diverse contexts. In addition, in the processes of vocational orientation, in counselling services, and in skills assessment services, the Atlas can be a useful tool in beginning to read and codify a subject's resources, and at the same time to better gauge future professional projects. In the same way, for consultation, the Atlas constitutes an essential reference point for training projects (evaluating the manner in which the working environments of a training project are described, verifying the existence of qualifications and skills already described for those activities,...), both for paths to access the labour market and continuing education for vocational development and retraining.

The Repertory of Qualifications

Already envisaged by Leg. Dec. no. 13/13, the establishment of the National Repertory of Educational and Vocational Qualifications constitutes a unitary reference framework for the certification of skills.

Only skills relating to qualifications included in the national repertory can be certified, so that qualifications issued in the following areas of the national lifelong learning system should be gathered within the same framework: school, university, vocational education and training, regional vocational training, skills acquired through apprenticeships, the standardized and regulated professions.

For the moment, only two of the four sections envisaged by the National Repertory can be consulted, i.e.:

1. Education and vocational training, which encompasses 3-Year and 4-year courses (IEFP), Higher Education and Technical Training (IFTS) and Higher Technical Education (ITS);
2. The National Framework of Regional Qualifications (for the moment the repertories of 18 regions are available).

Every qualification entered in the Repertory refers to an area of activity (ADA), a process, and a sector of the Atlas of Labour.

In the context of the Repertory, the section dedicated to qualifications issued within the context of regional vocational training systems constitutes the National Framework of Regional Qualifications. All the repertories formally adopted by the Regions and Autonomous Provinces have been imported into this section. Associating each regional qualification to the areas of activities and the expected results, has produced a table of equivalences or correlations (intended as partial equivalences) which constitutes the foundation for nationwide recognition of regional qualifications, for their certification (also under the form of individual skills) and for the recognition of credits.

^[1] More precisely, the PES classification consists of 23 sectors plus a sector called the Common Area. The Common Area collects all those work activities not characterized in specific ways by a sector, including: Administration, Marketing, Communication And Public Relations, General Affairs, Human Resource

Management, etc. In this sense, the Common Area is therefore to be considered a sort of addendum with respect to the other 23 sectors making up the classification.

[2] Each area of activity (ADA) displays in detail the contents of the job including a list of the individual activities making up the ADA and the products and services expected, as well as references to the statistical codes of the above-mentioned ISTAT classifications. Overall, the Atlas contains descriptions of: 80 work processes, 830 areas of activity and about 6,000 activities.

PROJECTS, STUDIES AND OPERATING MANUALS

The issue of the validation of skills acquired by migrants in their home country or in landing countries, in non-formal and informal learning contexts has become key for their integration, both in Italy and in the rest of Europe.

For this reason, recent years have seen the emergence of numerous major initiatives dedicated precisely to this issue. This is the case of several projects co-financed within the framework of national or Europe-wide initiatives, and several international studies. In this section is an overview of the most recent projects and studies on the matter. This is not a systematic and exhaustive collection, but a recognition, whose aim is to provide ideas and practical notions first and foremost for sector operators.

Go to the section

DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND OTHER USEFUL LINKS