This report and the audit proposal herein focus on third country nationals’ (TCN) skills, knowledge and competences (SKC) recognition and validation starting from an observation done in the Portuguese (Lisbon) context. It starts with the description of the existing institutional framework and procedures; second, comes the evaluation by TCNs and stakeholders of the existing institutional framework and processes. Our independent assessment follows and, in the last section, a social audit scheme for the recognition and validation tool is suggested, which includes the explanation of the underlying rationale adopted for building it. The report ends with an assessment of both the strengths and the shortcomings of both the framework and processes, and makes a link to the policy brief and its suggestion of a way forward to surpass these shortcomings.

1. **Main recognition procedures**

In Portugal there are two main procedures for SKC recognition, validation and certification: one centered around the challenge of qualifying adults’ experiences – the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) process –, and the other with the aim of recognizing foreign higher education qualifications.

a) **The RVCC process**

The RVCC process recognizes and validates lifelong acquired knowledge and skills, giving the adult a primary or secondary level certification. This RVCC process is directed to adults who have not completed compulsory schooling, enabling them to validate and certify lifelong acquired SKC – obtained in school, professional

---

1 Certification equivalent to 4th, 6th, 9th or 12th grades.
2 The Portuguese mandatory level is the 12th grade.
environments and others situations –, in different contexts (personal, social and occupational/professional). In order to have their SKC recognized, validated and certified, the candidate must register in one of the Centres for Training and Vocational Education (CQEP\textsuperscript{3}). The RVCC process is developed by teams composed by the coordinator of the CQEP, guidance, recognition and skills validation staff (ORVC\textsuperscript{4} professionals) and instructors (training). Each CQEP is managed by an accredited entity, where a team of professionals accompanies adults in the process of recognition, validation and certification of knowledge acquired in various situations along his or her path of personal, social and professional life.

The process starts with the reception and counselling by the multidisciplinary team of RVCC professionals (guidance, recognition and skills validation staff, instructors, social workers, vocational guidance counselors, etc.), which aims to ensure an integrated monitoring in the different dimensions of candidates lives (individual, social, family and occupational). During that phase, the candidate is interviewed and asked about issues related to the experiences of his/her everyday life relevant to the development of the RVCC process (Figure 1). If s/he does not meet the conditions necessary for the pursuit of the RVCC process, the candidate, according to his or her needs, is referred to the educational and training opportunities; later, s/he can resume the RVCC process. During the latter, the team of professionals accompanies the candidate throughout the RVCC process until s/he obtains the desired certification.

\textsuperscript{3} Centro para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional.

\textsuperscript{4} Orientação, Reconhecimento e Validação de Competências.
In order to obtain the certification, the candidate, with the validation request signed, presents himself or herself to a jury, composed by the RVCC professionals who accompanied him or her, and by an external evaluator, who will evaluate the candidate’s personal dossier (built along the RVCC process). According to institutional norms, skills certification is formalized by a certification jury, whose composition depends on whether it is the case of a school RVCC or a professional RVCC; it goes along the following lines:

a) Professional RVCC: 3 instructors with appropriate technical qualification in the field of education and training of the target frame and at least 5 years of professional experience; 1 representative of business or employers’ associations and 1 representative of trade unions of the relevant economic activity sectors;

---

5 Under the ordinance No. 135-A/2013.

6 The presence of members of trade unions and employers' organizations is a recent innovation - in the previous methodology, developed under the New Opportunities Centers, the presence of business associations and trade unions representatives was not expected.

7 According to the IEPF staff contacted, given that the work of these structures is still new and few candidates have reached the final stage of the process in which the jury participates, there is not enough information to enable us to assess whether the entities referred have difficulty to be represented systematically. Even so, we know that in some training areas and in some regions of Portugal these entities have difficulty in finding representatives.
b) Educational RVCC: 1 instructor who has the qualification for teaching in each of the areas of key competences.

After the jury session, if all areas of key competences were validated, the last stage of the RVCC process takes place, focused exclusively on the certification processes. These are the official and formal confirmation of lifelong obtained SKC, which were recognized and validated. Depending on the cases, the candidate will be awarded a Certificate and/or Diploma (basic education or secondary education).

A final note is in order on the actual TCNs participation in the RVCC processes. The values computed on TCNs’ RVCC processes conducted by IEFP show a very poor adhesion. For example, in 2013 and 2014, no record was not found of participation by TCN users. The last year that records some participation of TCN is the year 2012: only 44 people triggered a process of RVCC, as can be seen in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Intervention Code</th>
<th>Type of RVCC</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>ANGOLA</td>
<td>0207</td>
<td>RVCC - OUTRAS ENTIDADES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>ANGOLA</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>0207</td>
<td>RVCC - OUTRAS ENTIDADES</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>0214</td>
<td>RVCC - SECUNDÁRIO - IEFP</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>0218</td>
<td>RVCC PROFISSIONAL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>0219</td>
<td>RVCC INTEGRADO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CHILE</td>
<td>0214</td>
<td>RVCC - SECUNDÁRIO - IEFP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CAPE VERDE</td>
<td>0214</td>
<td>RVCC - SECUNDÁRIO - IEFP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CAPE VERDE</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>GUINÉ-BISSAU</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>MOZAMBIQUE</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>RUSSIA</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>SÃO TOMÉ E PRINCIPE</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>UCRAVIA</td>
<td>0215</td>
<td>RVCC - BÁSICO - IEFP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong>  </td>
<td>   </td>
<td>     </td>
<td>     </td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IEFP (personal communication, April 2015)

With the creation of the Centres for Training and Vocational Education (CQEP), the methodologies to develop a RVCC process have changed; the same occurred with the constitution of the technical and pedagogical teams of these centers. This gave rise

---

8 After the extinction of the New Opportunities Centers (CNO) and as its «successor» institutions.
to the need for readjustment of the teams, especially with regard to its constitution and the definition of their respective responsibilities. In this sense, the IEFP has adjusted its teams and work methodologies in compliance with the new legislative framework. According to some TCN interviewed, because of these changes it is now more difficult to obtain certificates, which is one of the reasons why the lack of interest has increased.

c) **Academic Recognition**

There are two main procedures of foreign higher education (HE) qualifications recognition (Figure 2). The first one is the General System of equivalence/recognition,\(^9\) which is based on the scientific re-evaluation of work carried out in view of obtaining the foreign degree and on a casuistic assessment of the merit of the foreign higher degrees/diplomas (according to this law, only HE institutions have the capacity to decide upon awarding the equivalence/recognition). The equivalences awarded under this law recognize to foreign degrees the same value as the Portuguese degrees. According to this norm, only Portuguese public HE institutions, which have the same or similar programme of studies, are competent to decide about awarding the equivalence/recognition or not.

Figure 2

---

\(^9\) Regulated by the Decree-Law No. 283/83, of 21st June, and by the Ministerial Order No. 1071/83, dated 29th December.
The second procedure is the Automatic System (registry/recognition). The law, in this case,\textsuperscript{10} established the automatic recognition of foreign degrees, converting them in the degrees awarded by Portuguese HE institutions.\textsuperscript{11} Foreign degrees are therefore given the same legal rights as the Portuguese ones. The list of degrees that can be registered/recognised by this system is published under decisions of the Commission for the recognition of foreign degrees (diplomas obtained in universities that are not in that list are referred to the general regime). The registration of these degrees can be made next to a Portuguese public HE institution or at the Directorate General for Higher Education.

The first system applies to foreign nationals of countries with which specific equivalency agreements were signed,\textsuperscript{12} or, if there are no such agreements, countries whose legislation gives to Portuguese citizens, under the principle of reciprocity, the rights laid down in that Regulation.\textsuperscript{13} In all cases of non-HE SKC, the above-mentioned RVCC process applies.

2. Evaluation of the recognition tool by TCNs and stakeholders:

2.1. The evaluation made by TCNs\textsuperscript{14}

2.1. 1. Social characterization of respondents

Carried out intensively around ten personal cases and assuming a markedly experimental nature, the interviews took place in a spatially well-defined context (central Lisbon), some in the office of the DIVERSE project, located at the University (FCSH/UNL), some in cafes, and still others (the majority) in the respondents’

\textsuperscript{10} Regulated by Decree-Law No. 341/2007, of 12th October, and by the Ministerial Order No. 29/2008, dated 10th January.

\textsuperscript{11} BA (licenciado), MA (mestre) and PhD (doutor).

\textsuperscript{12} Producing the effects specified in Decree-Law No. 283/83.

\textsuperscript{13} Exempted from presenting the reciprocity proof are the citizens coming from: EU countries, Brazil, and other countries that have ratified the Joint Convention of the Council of Europe/UNESCO on the recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region – Lisbon Convention; citizens from countries with whom there were already reciprocity agreements, namely Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Peru, Dominican Republic, Thailand, Turkey and Venezuela, are also exempted.

\textsuperscript{14} See table in appendix.
workplaces. Centered in the bureaucratic processes of access to the country, settlement (legalization), recognition of SKC, and of professional recruitment, the script of the interviews consisted of a dozen of questions, mainly retrospective, set out to lead the interviewees to speak freely about the themes presented, to explicit (objective and subjectively) their migratory experience, and to describe and evaluate the process (trajectory) of social and professional integration in Portugal.

In order to single out the trajectories, or to individualize the experiences (simultaneously seizing recurrences), we tried to vary the social characteristics within the TCN category. That said, among the ten respondents, six come from Latin America (three Brazilians, one Argentine, one Chilean and one Uruguayan), two from Africa (a Moroccan and a Tunisian) and two from Europe (both Turkish), making a total of seven different nationalities, four of which with dual nationality (Tunisian and Portuguese, Moroccan and Portuguese, Turkish and Portuguese, Uruguayan and Italian).

In terms of age, the respondents range between 27 and 53 years-old, with a preponderance (half of the cases) in the range 30-40; in terms of gender, six men and four women were interviewed, and with regard to the year of arrival at the migration destination country (Portugal), temporal distribution is concentrated in the first decade of this century (three in the first half and four in the second half of the 2000s), with only two arriving in Portugal in the 1990s (1993 and 1998) and one in the present decade (2013).

The level of education is undoubtedly the most homogeneous social characteristic of respondents: eight of them have higher education (HE) diplomas and two did not complete a HE degree. All the degrees were completed in their respective countries of origin, five in languages\textsuperscript{15} and three in Journalism/Social Communication. Two of them have master's degrees (Teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language, and Cultural Practices for Municipalities), one is currently enrolled in a PhD (in Comparative Literature) and two others are attending Masters Programs (one in Migration Studies, and the other in Supervision and Teaching of Mother Tongue).

With regard to the interviewees’ occupational status and activity, two are language teachers, two are advertisers, another one is a cameraman in one of the main

\textsuperscript{15} Arabic Language and Culture, French, French Language and Literature, Modern Languages, Linguistics and Translation (English/Portuguese).
Portuguese television channels, one is an administrative clerk, another one is an association leader (Luso-Turkish Friendship Association) and there is also a businessman; the remaining two are unemployed. Among the eight having a gainful occupation, five had stable employment contracts, two have temporary contracts (services provision), which are renewable every year or every six months, and the businessman is setting up his own service company, whose mission is to advise the import-export companies, helping them to consolidate their internationalization strategy.

2.1.2. TCNs’ experiences and views on the institutional framework:

Four of the ten interviewees have chosen Portugal to study, five of them to work and one left the country of origin (Argentina) to accompany her husband (but with the aim of looking for work in Portugal). In the first case, three did so with grants from Instituto Camões\(^{16}\) (IC) (two to attend the annual course of Portuguese for foreigners in Lisbon universities of and one to attend the Masters course). In the second case, four came at the employer's invitation and one on in its own initiative (the latter to take advantage of the opportunities generated by the privatization of Portuguese television). In terms of the type of authorization requested, the three who came to study in Portugal with the support of IC arrived with the corresponding document (a student visa issued by the embassy of Portugal in their country of origin) and the fourth did not need any special authorization because she had dual nationality, one of them from an EU country (Uruguayan and Italian). These student visas were renovated until two of them obtained Portuguese nationality,\(^{17}\) and the other turned it into a work visa.

The opinions about the process of the student visa renewal were generally positive in terms of the documentation required – simple and little bureaucratic, as only the identification document (passport) and the inscription at the university were needed –, with only one criticizing the prolonged waiting time at the entrance of Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF). One of the respondents who requested the dual nationality (in 2009) also noted that the process was simple, including the filling out of an online form and the completion of an exam (written and spoken) of Portuguese. The interviewee

\(^{16}\) Instituto Camões is a Portuguese institution whose main goals are cooperation and the Portuguese language development (http://www.instituto-camoes.pt).

\(^{17}\) One under the 2007 Nationality Act, which authorized all foreigners legally residing in Portugal for six or more years to apply for Portuguese nationality, the other because she married a Portuguese citizen.
who married a Portuguese drew a more complicated scenario: first, she had to apply for a residence permit – a painful process, she said, because it lasted over a year, during which she lost her freedom of movement, associated with the student visa, because the only document she possessed was the application for a resident permit (she only got the dual nationality five years after the marriage). The other interviewee mentioned problems only when she asked to change the student visa into a work visa, a process that seemed highly bureaucratic, complicated and boring; in his opinion, «convert» a student visa into a work visa is a complex proceeding where neither the services themselves seem to know well how to proceed (the SEF employees whom she contacted, for example, lacked the technical skills, the level of knowledge of the laws, and had no sensitivity to customer service, and sometimes were aggressive to immigrants). Also according to this interviewee, that scenario explains why many TCN prefer to return temporarily to their country of origin to request there, at the Portuguese embassy, the work visa. After that, finally, with that document, they return to Portugal.

Among the five who reported coming to Portugal for work reasons, two requested immediately a work permit, two began by applying for a tourist visa and subsequently obtained a work permit; and the fifth, who at first came to attend a traineeship at an advertising company, asked for a student visa. Regarding work visas, one of the interviewees (camera operator) said that the legalization process (in 1993) seemed fast. However, as we analyze the requested documentation, it seems to have been a highly bureaucratic procedure, as he had to hand out: employment contract, passport, photos, criminal records, rental agreement, house bills (water and electricity), certificate of residence in Lisbon (from the parish council and from a merchant of the same zone of residence). The process to achieve the so-called Blue Card (alien identification card issued by the Lisbon Identification Services)\(^\text{18}\) and the Residence Permit (issued by SEF, where he had to present the same documents referred above) lasted one year and a half, which did not seem to him very long, since at that time thousands of Brazilians had triggered this same process, and it wasn’t very expensive («It was not a fortune», he said). Every five years, he renewed these two documents, until 2010,\(^\text{19}\) when the process became simpler: the Blue Card disappeared and became

\(^{18}\)Arquivo de Identificação de Lisboa.

\(^{19}\)Following a visit to Portugal by the President of Brazil, Ignacio Lula da Silva, which resulted in an agreement with the by then Portuguese Prime Minister José Sócrates (Socialist).
exactly the same (same format and same appearance) as the Identity Card of most Portuguese citizens. However, with the introduction of the Citizen Card (issued as of 2007), the Identity Card lost validity and the respondent (as all Portuguese) had to restart the process, with new documents and paying new fees, a process that seemed to him quite fast, simple and non-bureaucratic (a month later he received in the mailbox a postcard to collect his Citizen Card).

The two respondents who came to work for an advertising company (a transnational firm – X) stated that the process of obtaining their visas was easy because their employer helped and oriented them. When the advertiser who came with a student visa to attend a traineeship at X wanted to get the work visa, he realized that the best thing to do was to return to Brazil and present the employment contract in the Portuguese embassy (a common practice among foreign students in Portugal that after finishing the bachelor's, master's or a doctorate find a workplace). Respondents who came to work but began by requesting a tourist visa – the case of the Turkish businessman and of the Turkish association leader – described different situations. The first hired a lawyer to help him convert the tourist visa into a residence visa, and the second, as he only had a work promise contract (insufficient at the time), had to twice renew the tourist visa until he signed the work contract: taking advantage of some opportunities introduced by the 2007 Aliens Act, which allowed to regularize some illegal or undefined situations – the SEF officials advised him to wait for this law20 –, the interviewee was finally able to apply for a work visa. For this he had to present, in SEF, the employment contract, the birth certificate and both his Turkish criminal record (all translated and with the apostille from the Hague Convention) and the Portuguese one. After about eight months, he was finally granted a work visa, which allowed him to enrol in the Revenue Service (Finance Ministry) and in Social Security. (Recently, the procedure stepped back to the former, more complicated process: the illegal immigrant or the immigrant holder of a tourist visa who gets an employment contract – as stated before – eventually returns temporarily to his/her country of origin to ask there, in the Portuguese embassy, for the work visa.)

The remaining two interviewees arrived in Portugal without a visa: the Uruguayan because she also had Italian nationality, and the Argentine did not need it

20 As an association leader, this interviewee was in regular contact with several institutions’ officials.
because she benefited from a bilateral agreement, under which the Argentine citizens don’t have to require a visa for the first three months of stay in the country. After that time, she asked for a tourist visa, which was granted without any problems and which was renewed in two other occasions. Then, as she had not got the tax identification number, nor the social security number, which allows to apply for a residence visa, she had to leave the European territory, went to Tangier and returned with the stamp customs of Morocco in the passport, which enabled her to get a new visa for another three months. On the contact with SEF and the management of the process, her opinion was quite negative: the officials who attended foreigners spoke only Portuguese and barely knew the labour laws (currently, she considers, the service has improved substantially; the introduction of the telephone service and the National Immigrant Support Centers – known as CNAI –, turned the process of renewing the visa easier). When her husband regularized his situation in Portugal, she finally asked for the residence visa for family reunification, a lengthy and bureaucratic process: she had to ask, in Argentina, the marriage certificate, her birth certificate and her criminal record (all translated); after two months, she got the first residence permit, initially for one year, renewable every two years and, currently, every five years. Each time she has to renew the visa, she has to restart the process (requesting the same documents in Argentina, paying certified mail rates and official translations of documents). In addition, when the visa expires, the Portuguese identity documents – Revenue Service and Social Security – also expire, which obliges her to file for new identification numbers and to inform her bank that her personal data changed. With the 2007 Law, she told us, the process has become less complicated and SEF officials are more informed and know the laws better.

2.1.3. TCNs’ experiences and views on RVC processes and their connection with labour market integration:

Seven respondents triggered processes of recognition of their degrees to pursue further studies (enrolment in Masters or PhD courses) and the other three never had to do it (they do not even know what the procedures or institutions for that matter are) to carry out their professional activities. Of these seven, three were covered by the General System, one by the Automatic System, two recognized their degrees only in the University where they would attend the Masters’ courses and the latter was not
recognized because the foreign higher education institution apparently was not included in the list of institutions authorized by the Commission mentioned above.

Those who were under the General System and requested equivalence to the 1st cycle (BA or licenciatura degree) – Moroccan, Tunisian and Argentine respondents – had to present the diploma certifying they hold a foreign degree; a document issued by the competent authorities of the foreign university which contained the disciplines in which the applicant was successful and which led to the degree or diploma, the number of hours per year and per discipline, the syllabus per discipline, the length of the studies and its final classification or, if not awarded, the partial classifications; two copies of the final year dissertation (if applicable); the curriculum vitae of the applicant and an identification document (passport). To those who asked equivalence to the master degree (Tunisian), they were required: diploma certifying the degree now being subjected to equivalence; document issued by the competent authorities of the foreign university, covering the subjects in which the applicant was successful and which fulfil the conditions to obtain the equivalence required; two copies of the dissertation and other works presented for the awarding of the degree whose equivalence was required; regulation laying down the conditions of admission and awarding of the foreign degree, at the time it was obtained; and, last but not least, the curriculum vitae of the applicant and the passport (works and dissertations had to include, signed by the competent authorities of the university or foreign higher education institution, the indication that the submitted works and/or dissertations were accepted for granting that degree or diploma). In addition, the documents of the foreign higher education institutions had to be recognized by the Portuguese consulate and/or legalized by the apostille from the Hague Convention. The Moroccan interviewee had to present, in addition to the original documents, an official translation certified by the Moroccan embassy in Portugal (the Tunisian interviewee was free of this condition because his two diplomas were passed by the University of Tunis in French, which is a language accepted by the Portuguese authorities; the same with Spanish language, so that the Argentine interviewee also did not need to translate her documents). In the end, all these processes were evaluated by a relevant scientific jury appointed by the universities, which recognized the academic qualifications under examination.

As Turkey was one of the countries that ratified the Joint Convention of the Council of Europe/UNESCO on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher
Education in the European Region (Lisbon Convention), and is also one of the countries with which reciprocity with Portugal already existed, the Turkish association leader could benefit from the Automatic System, so that he had to present, at the Higher Education Department (DGES), the following documents: original diploma or document issued by the competent authorities of foreign HE establishment that proved unequivocally that the degree has been conferred (when documents are written in a foreign language other than Spanish, French, English or Italian, translation into Portuguese is requested, certified by the competent authorities for the purpose - which was not his case, as the respondent, having lived in Belgium and Argentine before immigrating to Portugal, had the documents translated into French and Spanish); original or certified copy of the document attesting the final classifications issued by the competent authorities of foreign HE institution. In the end, the diploma was registered in the Higher Education Department.

The Turkish businessman, as he had not completed the final year of the degree at the University of Ankara but already had a post-graduate degree from a Portuguese university, he only requested – from the (other) university where he intended to make the MA course – the ability to attend that post-graduation. For this he was required: a document on the courses he followed, which contained the disciplines in which he was successful, all translated into English, certified by the Ministry of Education of Turkey and approved by the Embassy of Portugal in Ankara; the postgraduate diploma; the curriculum vitae; passport; and a letter of intent. Then, the process was evaluated by a faculty jury, which decided that the applicant was able to attend the Masters course.

The Chilean interviewed enrolled (in 2009) in a Portuguese University MA course; she only had to present the original document of the degree obtained from the University of Santiago de Chile (she was never asked to recognize or register the degree in DGES) and the passport. Meanwhile, having concluded her Master's degree, she ran for a place of Spanish teacher in public non-higer education and she found that her Masters diploma was not valid for teaching as she did not previously recognize the BA degree.

Finally, the Uruguayan interviewed tried (in 2010) to recognize the degree but DGES informed her that the university where she obtained the degree (UDELAR – University of the Republic Uruguay) was not in the list admitted by the Portuguese authorities, so that they could not recognize the degree and, hence, she would not have,
in Portugal, the status of licenciada (graduate). However, as the interviewed wanted to attend a Master's degree, the DGES could issue to her a letter stating that the UDELAR was a higher education institution and that, in Uruguay, the candidate had a degree. With this document (which she received after two months and had no costs), the interviewee could enrol in a Portuguese university Master’s program; once it was concluded, she became equivalent to any Portuguese holder of a Master's degree (so that the issue of recognizing the other degree was no longer important).

The seven evaluated positively the Portuguese procedures for recognition of their academic qualifications, considering them simple, little bureaucratic, quick and inexpensive, and this despite the appreciable differences between the two systems: the General System requires more documents, is more expensive (the translations and fees cost about 200 euros) and slower (it can take almost one year, as was the case with the Tunisian interviewee); on the other hand, the Automatic System requires fewer documents, costs about 25 euros and registration is obtained within one month (counting from the receipt of the application by the entity to whom it is requested).

As for the recognition of professional qualifications for the purpose of job offers, none of the respondents triggered such processes. In fact, they never felt the need to do so, because the employers for which they work or worked (private companies) never required them any certificate or supporting documents (except the Chilean respondent, whose application to be a Spanish teacher was refused for lack of recognition of her first cycle HE degree); the presentation of a curriculum vitae and conducting an interview, where the decisive factors were the domain of foreign languages and accumulated professional experience, were deemed as being enough.

Regardless of the type of employment contract involved in the job offer, our respondents were never faced with the requirement to submit any certificates of qualifications, it was always enough the CV and the conducting of an interview (in the case of invitations made by people who belonged to the networks of friendship or professional trust of respondents, not even the CV or the interviews were necessary). This is considered by respondents as a positive quality of the host country: to value what a person demonstrates in interviews, more than in certified documents, is a sign of

---

21 In particular Arabic and Turkish languages, sought by private companies – mainly for commercial reasons – and by institutions such as courts, security companies or congress organizers, especially for translations, written and simultaneous.
great trust in people and an important indicator of the flexibility of the Portuguese labour market, according to the interviewees.

Among the entities our respondents have worked for, in addition to the aforementioned courts and security companies (including the SEF), there are also foundations, public and private universities, public and private television channels, trade associations, large private companies, unspecified companies (eg. service or safety equipment companies). In all these institutions, professional experience reported in the CV and job interviews – most of our respondents (six) stated that they had professional experience previous to the migration process – was enough to get the job.

For example, the Turkish businessman, when he initially worked as a seller of a security equipment company and then when he moved to a transnational firm, never needed any other document besides his CV, and had to prove the knowledge of Turkish and English idioms in job interviews. Also in the cases of the interviewees from Argentine and Uruguay, the language was the most important element in hiring: the first, to teach at a HE institution in Porto (where she taught the disciplines of Latin American Literature, Spanish II and Spanish III), and the second, to work in a Portuguese transnational firm (oil company) and then in an Spanish insurance company (both to work in their call centers providing assistance to Spanish customers; despite having letters of recommendation and certificates of some of the training she had, she never needed them). On the other hand, the Brazilian cameraman brought a long and impressive experience in journalism – his photo-curriculum included works such as the national coverage of the first democratic election in Brazil (1982) and other political campaigns; reports for a TV channel from Federal Government of São Paulo, for a Venezuela TV channel or as a freelancer in a Spanish TV channel, in Madrid (through subcontracting by a Spanish news agency); filming in Rock in Rio concerts, football games, directing the Daily Evening News from a Brazilian media network (in this case, he joined some letters of recommendation of this network directors), etc. –, so that the employers of the Portuguese TV channel, after examining the candidate’s CV, only had to give him a camera to prove the quality of his work (the day after, he began to work). With the two Brazilian advertisers, the scenario was similar: the only document they had to present was the portfolio with the work already done. In their opinion, diplomas and academic education are not so important in advertising business, the most important remains the portfolio, professional experience and interviews. This method of
recruitment, according to both, is much more assertive and effective, for what is assessed is, basically, creativity.

The last topic of the interview had to do with the knowledge of respondents about Portuguese institutions responsible for the recognition of SKC – especially professional recognition. Apart from the recognition processes of academic diplomas made through DGES, the vast majority ignored the processes of professional recognition and the institutions that carry them out. The three Brazilian respondents, for example, did not know at all the Portuguese institutions that deal with the recognition of qualifications and never had any contact with offices aiming at supporting immigrants for the simple reason that they never needed (nor did they had any kind of professional training in Portugal, except the Brazilian advertiser, who did a traineeship in Portugal but for the purpose of his degree in Brazil). And apart from the Portuguese language courses, such as the program «Portuguese for All», too. This program, however, has a special status as it aims to increase the capacity of expression and understanding of the Portuguese language and of the knowledge of the basic rights of Portuguese citizenship, necessary for the integration of immigrants in Portuguese society.22

As for the RVCC process, widely referred to by the institutions and public policy programs, respondents said they had never heard of them and few have said to know about such institutions as the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), except for the interviewee from Argentina, who took the Pedagogical Aptitude Certificate in the Employment Institute of Oporto, and took a training course for trainers in CERTFORM, also certified by IEFP – diplomas that she was never requested to show by employers –; and the Chilean interviewee, who has a professional background in teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language in the European Centre for Languages, which is certified by the IEFP (although the interviewee did not know that). Only three respondents knew the National Support Centres for Immigrants (CNAI) (respondents from Chile and Argentina, and the Turkish association leader, the latter in the context of relations of the Portuguese-Turkish Association with Portuguese institutions), but at the

---

22 The «Portuguese for All» program can be attended by immigrant citizens over 18 years-old, employed or unemployed, living in a regular situation in Portugal. During the year 2014, a total of 2,348 trainees were covered by this program, in the network of IEFP centers (Source: IEFP).
same time, for example, they were unaware that this center has a Support Office for Qualifications.

2.2. The evaluation made by stakeholders

2.2.1. Social characterization of respondents

The stakeholders we considered relevant to the project were: National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP), the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), High Commission for Migration (ACM), Authority for Working Conditions (ACT), Lisbon City Hall (CML), Lisbon Municipal Assembly (AML), General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP-IN), General Workers Union (UGT), Directorate General of Higher Education (DGES)/NARIC, Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG), Embassy of Cape Verde in Portugal (ECV), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and the Portuguese Business Confederation (CIP/CEP). The last two never appeared in the projects’ initiatives. The State Secretary next to the Minister for Regional Development, in charge of supervising migration policy and the ACM, accepted the invitation to, and actively participated in, the last awareness seminar.

2.2.2. Stakeholders’ views:

Some opinions and remarks of the most active stakeholders expressed during the meetings carried out in the realm of the project (both during the first seminars with the stakeholders and during the awareness seminars) are worth mentioning:

- Strong criticism of the CGTP representative of the labour market liberalization policy, presented by the present Government and the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the former Socialist government with the “troika” (ECB, EC, IMF) as an instrument of the Portuguese labour market flexibilization, and which is, in this organization’s views, deregulating the labour market and incompatible with RVCC processes’ aim to help regulating the labour market;

---

23 Secretário de Estado Adjunto do Ministro Adjunto e do Desenvolvimento Regional.
- Complaining by the ACT representative about the lack of means of control and the consequent difficulty of monitoring and preventing the accidents and abuses in the labour market, some of them due to lack of training of TCN workers and to lowering of access barriers to some occupations;

- Criticism of ACM and CML representatives about the insufficient coordination between institutions dealing with TCNs;

- Remark of the Luso-Turkish Association representative on the lack of attention paid to qualifications and skills of foreign businesspeople to the ability TCN entrepreneurs have to build bridges outside the EU;

- The Cape Verdean ambassador was particularly interested on the issue of recognition of cultural production of Cape-Verdeans living in Portugal;

- An AML representative suggested there should be more information and more proactivity in order to achieve more participation by the business community;

- In his speech, the Secretary of State supported our argument, saying that it is important to invest, if we want to improve the levels of integration of TCN’s, in the local dimension and in a policy of proximity; likewise, he agreed that it is necessary to improve the coordination between institutions, something that could be done, precisely, by transferring more responsibility to local authorities, who know better the realities of immigrants.
3. **Independent assessment**

The main objective of our proposal, as stated in the next section, is to complement the existing recognition tools with a capacity dimension enabling TCNs to define working life objectives and actively participate both as producers and citizens.

This is not, in our view, fully taken into consideration in the present Portuguese TCNs’ RVC framework. A further effort should be done in order to achieve greater articulation between the institutions involved, with a much more proactive stance, and involving in a more routine way the stakeholders.

3.1. **Institutional settings**

In our opinion, any recognition tool on validation and certification of SKC must involve an audit to the process of access and settlement in the country (institutional context). For a substantive reason: a bad first experience of Portuguese institutions can negatively affect TCN attitudes towards the institutional framework, and permeate their attitudes towards the recognition process and institutions - i.e, a poor assessment of access and settlement can lead to distrust or even estrangement toward Portuguese institutions, and low expectations on the recognition process and institutions; and vice-versa: a positive perception of the first institutional experience can have a positive outcome in building positive expectations on specialized institutions. In a similar way, the first institutional experiences can also influence the behaviour of recognition institutions towards TCN – e.g. stereotyping groups of TCN and channelling them towards specific recognition pathways.
3.2. **Migratory backgrounds, description and characterization of SKC recognition processes and professional recruitment**

In order to create indicators to evaluate the correspondence between the objectives of public policies and its achievements on the ground, that is, to grasp the institutional dynamics and capture some singularities that may have escaped the models designed by institutions, the tool should aim at obtaining the following information: evaluation of SKC recognition processes and labour recruitment (in terms of bureaucracy, cost and duration) and knowledge or contact with Portuguese institutions of SKC recognition, validation and certification.

3.3. **Engaging diverse stakeholders**

Finally, a word on the purpose stated in the project to build a «shared multi-stakeholder audit scheme».

Both during the first stakeholders seminars and the awareness raising seminars, it was our intention to gather together different stakeholders with an interest in this issue. For obvious reasons, we were especially interested in having employers and the trade unions participating in this endeavour. In both events, however, this objective was not met.

Although both national trade union confederations sent representatives to the meetings, only one member of one such institutions did actively participate with concrete and grounded suggestions. Employers institutions were absent in all the events. The same must be said about some key players in the area of SKC, such as IEF, the “public agency of employment”, operating as an autonomous public institute, under the supervision and guardianship of the Ministry of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security: although it initially agreed to participate in the stakeholders seminars, IEF staff only attended one meeting, and just as observers, without any kind of intervention in the discussion; much later, by email, it was possible to obtain detailed information

24 Decreto-Lei n.º 143/2012 de 11 de julho.
about the role and actual operation of IEFP in the TCNs’ SKC process. In other cases, such as with the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP), the National Coordination Point (PCN) for the implementation of the EQF (in conjunction with Directorate General of Higher Education (DGES)), we had to follow (after several weeks of unsuccessful attempts to convince some responsible to receive us at the institution) the very bureaucratic and very slow system of formal letters between Portuguese public institutions. Apparently, they have no interest (or have difficulty) in collaborating with universities, which means that they don’t recognize the importance of an interaction between institutions (public or private). Confirming this, ANQEP never responded to our messages requesting information, for example, on who was responsible for choosing the representatives of trade unions and business associations in the juries of RVCC processes and if they actually send representatives, which clearly shows the lack of interest in participating in this project.

4. Provisional proposal

Apparently, the existing mechanisms for recognizing and validating SKC are designed in a rational and optimizing way, potentially useful for both the candidates and the economy and the society at large. Yet, there is mounting evidence of mismatch, and that TCNs are, more than average citizens, exposed to discrimination (see reports).

Our proposal is for building a social audit scheme, that is to say: an audit which views RVC not only as a technology to reduce or eliminate labour market mismatches, but rather as a capacity enabling people to better define working life objectives and to more actively participate both as producers and as citizens.

4.1. Proposal rationale

In concrete terms, this audit proposal aims to collect evidence on the recognition processes in Portugal and assess its consequences in terms both of personal satisfaction and in terms of its effectiveness in labour market integration, in order to provide the process which is now in place with two dimensions which are, in our view, missing:

– the users’ of these services perception of adequacy of the institutional framework targeting TCNs;
– and the users’ assessment of the effectiveness of the tool.

Concerning recognition, there are four steps mentioned in the project:

1 – Information/guidance: how do TCNs evaluate the information/guidance supplied by the Portuguese institutions;

2 – Collection of evidence: *idem* for the process of collecting evidence to build the dossiers;

3 – Assessment: *idem* for the assessment made of the evidence and of other information elicited during the process;

4 – Certification: *idem* for the final part of the process.

As stated previously, in the present proposal, the focus is mainly on the audit as social capacity. All the four situations mentioned in the project are acknowledged, but they are not separately dealt with. The audit proposal therefore involves questions revolving around information issues, but also includes an assessment of the costs, delays and effectiveness of different segments of the process and of the intervening actors.

A specific attention is paid to the perceived effectiveness of the process in terms of labour market integration.

Besides this, the social audit also incorporates questions on two other relevant topics:

– rebuild the migratory background of TCNs, as indicated in the project;

– and assess the general evaluation of the institutional framework and especially the way it is prepared (or not) to deliver quality service to TCNs.

Having in mind that Portuguese institutions value the life trajectory of TCNs (life experiences, competences, dispositions and expectations that were acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life), we think that our recognition tool should try to capture the social dimension of the migratory paths. In our opinion, it is important to know the TCNs professional experiences acquired before coming to Portugal (this is particularly important in the cultural sector, our laboratory of analysis), because that
influences and determines both the expectations they bring along with them and the relationship they will have with Portuguese institutions.

In this sense, we built a set of social indicators that were meant to allow crossing different migration backgrounds and different individual trajectories with their evaluation of social, institutional and professional integration in Portugal. As can be seen below, we asked the TCNs to describe various dimensions of their biography as immigrants, for example: the professional experience acquired before coming to Portugal; the reasons for choosing this country as migratory destination; the type of visa requested and the legalization process; the professional experience and the type of qualifications and skills obtained as they were already in Portugal.

As a final note, it should be mentioned that the strategic indicators presented below were built on a basic premise: they should be clear and easily understood.

### 4.2. Provisory proposal

The proposal includes indicators allowing to: characterize TCNs migratory paths; to assess their perception about social, institutional and professional integration in Portugal; to correlate that information with the objectives set by governments, with the way the institutions operate in Portugal, and the actual results obtained, in particular in terms of formal, non-formal and informal skills, knowledge and competences (SKC). In order to collect evidence and assess the effectiveness and quality of this interplay, as perceived by the actors involved, we chose, as stated in the project’s methodology, to interview 10 Third Country Nationals (TCN) who work and/or study, in Lisbon, in the cultural sector.\(^{25}\)

---

\(^{25}\) Understood here in its broad sense, i.e., as production of symbolic interpretations and theories about social reality.
### A. Rebuild the migratory background

1. **Why did you first come to Portugal?** (Please tick the appropriate box.)
   - a) To study
   - b) To work
   - c) For tourism
   - d) Other reasons

2. In which **status** did you first come: (Please tick the appropriate box.)
   - a) On a scholarship
   - b) With a work contract promise
   - c) With an employment contract
   - d) In none of the above statuses

3. What type of **visa** did you request first? (Please tick the appropriate box.)
   - a) Student visa
   - b) Work visa
   - c) Tourist visa
   - d) Investor visa
   - e) Didn’t need any of the above

### B. Contact with Portuguese institutions

4. Regarding the **process of obtaining the visa**:

4. a) how would you describe it in terms of the bureaucratic workload involved: (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not bureaucratic at all» and 5 means «very bureaucratic»)
   **Bureaucracy: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5**

4. b) how would you describe it in terms of the costs involved: (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not costly at all» and 5 means «very costly»)
   **Costs: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5**

4. c) how would you describe it in terms of the time involved: (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not time consuming at all» and 5 means «very time consuming»)
5. Do you consider you had, upon your arrival, enough information on which institution(s) to address in order to have your SKC recognized? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being «totally lacking information» on the institutions’ operation, and 5 being «pretty well informed».)

Information upon arrival: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

6. Which institutions did you actually contact upon your arrival? (Please tick the appropriate box.)
   a) IEFP
   b) ANQEP
   c) DGES
   d) CNAI
   e) Others (Write in: _____________________)
   f) None

C. Evaluation of institutions

6.1. How satisfied were you with the services provided by IEFP? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being «not at all satisfied», and 5 being «very satisfied»)

IEFP: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

6.2. How satisfied were you with the services provided by ANQEP? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being «not at all satisfied», and 5 being «very satisfied»)

ANQEP: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

6.3. How satisfied were you with the services provided by DGES? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being «not at all satisfied», and 5 being «very satisfied»)

DGES: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

6.4. How satisfied were you with the services provided by CNAI? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being «not at all satisfied», and 5 being «very satisfied»)
6.5. How satisfied were you with the services provided by other institutions you contacted? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being «not at all satisfied», and 5 being «very satisfied»)
Other institutions: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

D. Assessment of SKC recognition process

7. Have you engaged in a process of academic qualifications recognition?
Yes/No

8. If you did engage in such a process, how would you describe the process of foreign tertiary level qualifications or diplomas recognition in the case of a non-EU citizen, such as you, in terms of:

8. a) Bureaucracy (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not bureaucratic at all» and 5 means «very bureaucratic»): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

8. b) Waiting time (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not time consuming at all» and 5 means «very time consuming»): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

8. c) Costs (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not costly at all» and 5 means «very costly»): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

8. d) Other aspects you deem relevant (write in) _____________________

9. Are you familiar with the Portuguese system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (known as RVCC)? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not familiar at all», and 5 means «very familiar»)
Information on the RVCC system in Portugal: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

9.1. Were you ever engaged in a RVCC process?
Yes/No

9.2. If you were engaged in such a process, how would you assess its functioning in terms of:
9. a) *Bureaucracy* (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not bureaucratic at all” and 5 means “very bureaucratic”): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

9. b) *Duration* (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not time consuming at all” and 5 means “very time consuming”): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

9. c) *Costs* (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not costly at all” and 5 means “very costly”): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

9. d) *Other aspects* you deem relevant (write in: __________)

---

**E. Assessment of SKC recognition effectiveness**

10. How *effective* was it (were them) for boosting your labour market participation? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not effective at all» in boosting labour market opportunities, and 5 means «very effective»): 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

11. Have you ever applied for a job offer?  
Yes/No

12. If yes, what kind of requirements were asked by employers? (Please tick the appropriate box or boxes.)
   a) Curriculum vitae?  
   b) School certificates?  
   c) Professional courses certificates?  
   d) Professional experience certificates?  
   e) Interview?  
   f) Others (write in: _____________________)

13. All in all, how would you describe the recruitment process in Portuguese organizations in terms of:

13. a) *Transparence:* (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «not clear at all», and 5 means «following very clear criteria».) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
13. b) Social relations: (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «very formal», and 5 means «very informal».) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

13. c) Recognition of qualifications: (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «biased toward under-recognition», and 5 means «totally fair».) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

14. Sometimes workers’ qualifications and competences are higher than those required by the job performed – there is over-qualification; other times, it is the other way round: workers are under-qualified to do certain jobs. In your case, do you consider there is a mismatch between the qualifications and competences you possess and the requirements of your job? (Please use an evaluation scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 means «under-qualification», 3 means there is «no mismatch», and 5 means «over-qualification».) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

4. Conclusions

One of the significant features of the Portuguese reality when it comes to the issue of SKC, which stands out in this report, is the formal/informal dichotomy (with the general impression that, in Portugal, informality is very present in the labour market integration procedures). In the examples reported, especially with regard to the professional recruitment procedures, informality was reflected, on the side of institutions, in the reduced (or null) importance granted to certificates and a clear focus on professional experience described in the CV and related in job interviews; on the side of individuals, the informality was reflected in the generalized lack of interest in obtaining and recognizing non-academic qualifications, as well as in the recognition of professional qualifications. And if it is true that many of them recognized their higher education qualifications, they did that only in order to enrol in Masters and PhD programs (and never to respond to job applications, because, as we have seen, professional recruitment procedures showed very low levels of formalization). Similarly, if it is true that many of them held Portuguese language courses, they did that because it concerns the access to a key instrument of social integration – speak the language of the host country –, particularly given the fact that a considerable part of them is dedicated to the teaching of their mother language and to translation activities;
and given the fact, also, that the Portuguese labour market, apparently, highly values the job interviews, a situation where speaking Portuguese is certainly important. If the labour market, at least in these activities, is scarcely formalized, it is understandable that certificates are not important to the interviewees, making it difficult to raise awareness among respondents to the importance of certifications and of recognizing skills and qualifications. In other words, much of the regulation of the Portuguese labour market depends on the informal dynamics. In some respects, informal dynamics makes things easier – for example, it helps to overcome excessive bureaucracy, particularly in the creative sectors –, but in general it is negative: stereotypes and prejudices against immigrants are closely related with informality; and tends to increase the fragility of immigrants in the labour market. Given the importance, on the ground, of this informal dimension, it is interesting to note the absence of studies where informality is analysed, which means that there is a huge lack of knowledge about this issue.

One possible explanation for the informality of the Portuguese market lies in something we had already pointed out in the previous report: the weak specification (in the Weberian sense of rationalization) of procedures – some respondents, as we saw above, mentioned cases of the Foreigners and Borders Bureau (SEF) officials who were unaware of the laws or of the requirements to implement them; the same happened in Portuguese embassies, which are bureaucratic and integrate workers who also require technical skills to address the issues raised by those who want to immigrate to Portugal. Another explanation has to do with the action of some public institutions, as is visible in the case of the Turkish association leader. As he reported to us, the privileged contacts he established with some inspectors of the SEF, whom he usually invites to participate in the various courses of the Portuguese-Turkish Association, allowed him to benefit from new provisions in the procedures for the renewal of visas and to get some part-time work as Turkish translator for SEF (and later for the courts, also via SEF contacts).

Another aspect that caught our attention was the weak coordination between organizations, as demonstrated by the acceptance, to pursue further studies, of diplomas from Latin American universities. Apparently, the Portuguese universities (probably for financial reasons and to climb in the rankings of internationalization) tend to facilitate the enrolment on masters programs, without caring whether those diplomas are accepted by DGES: cases of the Chilean interviewee, who after completing her Masters in Portugal realized later that her qualifications were not sufficient to be a Spanish
language teacher: her first cycle (licenciatura) HE diploma had no official validity in Portugal because it was not recognized by DGES; and of the Uruguayan interviewee, who despite the rejection of recognition of her degree by DGES, could enrol in the master's degree, for which a simple letter issued by the same DGES was enough (concluding the master's degree, she was told by DGES officials, would be a way to bypass the rejection: with the Portuguese Masters degree, the other degree becomes «implicit»). This lack of coordination is also reflected in absurd situations reported by more than one respondent: some companies do not grant employment contracts while the immigrant does not have a work visa and the SEF only grants a work permit if the immigrant has a work contract.

In this context, and taking into account some negative descriptions referred above, it can come as a surprise that the ratings attributed to the action of Portuguese institutions are generally positive (with some differences of intensity). To analyse this, it is essential to consider some factors. First, the reduced expectations that almost all of them had about the bureaucracy, costs and waiting time associated with the settlement process and the recognition of foreign diplomas. Second, the effects of memory: with the years, especially after the overcoming of obstacles to social integration in the host country, it is normal that evaluations tend to be positive (especially when this integration is successful, as it seems to be the case with almost all respondents) or to show fluctuations or ambivalence regarding the initial impression. Finally, and thirdly, the considerable volumes of educational and cultural capital of respondents, which surely helped them to deal with the obstacles and labyrinths of these processes, which, in turn, increased the chances to declare a positive evaluation (the Turkish businessman, for example, who comes from a middle class family – «When I need money, I ask my family», he confessed –, could hire a lawyer to deal with SEF bureaucracies).

Finally – but not the least-, the fact that this social audit scheme proposal was drawn with the results of interviews made to only 10 TCN, all of them involved in a particular sector of the economy, should be reminded and stressed, as the results we achieved would need to be further triangulated with other relevant observations to gain scientific validity.