Law no. 92/2012 on the reform of the labour market provides an official definition of lifelong learning: “the term lifelong learning refers to all learning activities formally, non-formally and informally undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences in a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective”.

Formal learning takes place in the education and training system, in universities and in the High level arts, music and dance education institutions (Afam) and leads to a certification or a vocational qualification, which can be obtained also through an apprenticeship.

Non-formal learning is an intentionally chosen learning that takes place outside the formal education and training system. It takes place in any organisation with educational and training purposes, also in voluntary bodies, national civil service organizations, organisations of the private social sector or enterprises.

Informal learning refers to activities carried out in every-day life, at work, at home and in leisure time, even without an intentional choice.

Furthermore, the same law foresees the establishment of a national public system for the certification of competences based on minimum service standards and uniform throughout the country.

‘Certifiable competences’ are a structured combination of knowledge and skills recognisable also as formative credits through a special procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The certification of competences is defined as a public deed that ensures learning transparency and acknowledgment, consistently with the objectives set by the European Union. A certification, diploma or qualification formally attests that assessment and validation have been carried out by a public institution or an authorised subject.

The decree no. 13/2013 – issued in application of law no. 92 - provides the general rules of the national system for competences certification. The decree makes the new National system for competences certification operational; it aims at increasing the professional competences acquired at work, as well as those acquired in leisure time in order to promote mobility, to foster the meeting together of demand and supply in the labour market, to increase learning transparency and the relevance of certifications at national and European level.

Subsequently, an inter-ministerial decree issued on 30 June 2015, has defined the National framework of the regional qualifications. The decree has established:

1. a tool for the mutual recognition of regional qualifications,

2. standard procedures and certification for the identification/validation of non-formal and informal learning and of the certification of competences.
Finally, the inter-ministerial decree issued on 8 January 2018 has established the National framework of qualifications (Quadro nazionale delle qualificazioni - QNQ), which is the tool that describes and classifies all qualifications released within the National system for the certification of competences.

The QNQ is the national tool for referencing national qualifications to the European qualification framework. Moreover, the QNQ has the purpose of coordinating the various systems offering lifelong learning and the services for the validation and certification of competences.

An innovative aspect of the new adult education system, that contributes to promote the national lifelong learning policies, is the promotion of the cultural heritage and the professional experience of the individual. The introduction of the Individual formative agreement allows for the acknowledgement of the adult’s knowledge, formal, informal and non-formal competences.

The agreement is signed by the adult, the specific relevant board and the head of CPIA and – for learners of the second level pathways – also by the school head of the upper secondary school. The Individual formative agreement formalises the personalised study pathway related to the teaching term of the path chosen by the adult at the time of enrolment. The Certificate for the recognition of credits is annexed to the Agreement for the personalisation of the pathway.

For further information on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning please also refer to the national description available on the CEDEFOP website.

**Legislative references**

- Ministerial Order no. 455 of 1997 (establishment of permanent territorial centres)
- Law 27 December 2006, no. 296 (Financial law 2007)
- Ministerial decree 25 October 2007 (re-organisation of permanent territorial centres)
- Law 28 June 2012, no. 92 (Reform of the labour market)
- Presidential decree 29 October 2012, no. 263 (re-organisation of centres for adult education)
- Legislative decree no. 13 of 2013 (validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of competences)
- Inter-ministerial decree 12 March 2015 (Guidelines for the application of the new adult education system)
- Inter-ministerial decree 30 June 2015 (operational dispositions on the recognition of regional qualifications)
- Inter-ministerial decree 8 January 2018 (Establishment of the National framework of qualifications)