The recognition of competences in the Provincial Centres for Adult Education

A review of selected practices, challenges and successful factors

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Executive Summary

The adult learning opportunities provided by Italy's Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) have to respond to the needs of a very diverse audience in terms of nationality, age and professional status. Therefore, in order to be able to draw up personalised learning pathways and offer tailored learning opportunities, the CPIA need to identify and assess the wealth of competences that individuals have accumulated over the course of their lives. The existing legislation calls this process "recognition of competences" (*riconoscimento dei crediti*). Yet, in spite of being a key innovation in the Italian adult education system, little is still known about how CPIA across Italy identify and evaluate prospective students' prior learning. This report reviews the existing practices adopted by the CPIA throughout the country in order to fill this gap and shed light on the success factors and drawbacks of the process for the recognition of competences. Information has been gathered through an online survey to CPIA conducted in December 2020 and through virtual interviews organised in 13 CPIA in March 2021.

The learning offer of the CPIA is organised in three strands: literacy and Italian language courses, Level 1 courses (which are further distinguished into two teaching periods, corresponding respectively to the first cycle of education – *scuola media* – and to the achievement of the certification attesting to the acquisition of basic skills relating to compulsory education), and Level 2 courses (which correspond to a technical, vocational or artistic upper secondary school diploma). At the end of each course, students need to demonstrate to have acquired certain competences – the legislation lists 20 competences for literacy and Italian language courses, 22 competences for the first period of Level 1 courses, and 16 competences for the second period of Level 1 courses. The process for the recognition of competences aims to identify, assess and certify which of these final competences the adult might already possess. The validation of these competences translates into a reduction of the number of hours of classes that the student will need to attend.

A prerequisite for the successful recognition of competences is the organisation of the CPIA curricula into learning units (*unità di apprendimento*). In fact, this allows the identification and assessment of the skills, knowledge and competences that a prospective learner who turns to a CPIA already possesses, thereby offering the possibility of truly tailored learning pathways. Yet, as high as 14% of the surveyed CPIA declare not to have designed their teaching in learning units, which therefore prevents them from a successful recognition of competences. The difficulties encountered by such Centres in the adoption of a so-called *progettazione per UDA* can be partially explained by a lack of stable managerial structure and the reluctance of some teachers to change their way of structuring their teaching.

For those CPIA that have designed their courses in learning units, during the first contact with prospective learners teachers typically explain the CPIA functioning and start collecting the information about students' background and motivations. During the identification phase, a dedicated group of teachers – the so-called Commission – examines more in depth which past experiences of the prospective learners can be considered relevant for the personalisation of their learning pathways.

Two main instruments are typically adopted by Commissions in order to identify adults' competences: an interview and a personal booklet. The interview follows a biographical approach and, in eight out of ten CPIA, its format is detailed in written instructions. While nearly all surveyed CPIA consider the interview a

valuable instrument for the identification of competences, their opinion on the effectiveness of the personal booklet is more diverse. For instance, certain CPIA consider that compiling a comprehensive dossier for each student takes too much time and effort, especially for foreign adults. In addition, each student can provide a number of *evidenze utili* (hereinafter "useful evidence", that is, diplomas, certificates and documents issued by the institutions listed in paragraph 52 of article 4 of Law 92/2012) to support the Commission in assessing competences gained through past formal learning experiences. However, some Centres point out that Commissions often do not know how to recognise the information collected through the booklet and the "useful evidence" as competences (and hence training hours) without national grids. In order to value the personal booklet, some CPIA have suggested to digitalise the information collected and to expand its adoption and validity beyond the CPIA that produces it.

By contrast, CPIA's feedback on the evaluation of competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning (through *ad hoc* examinations run by the Commissions) is overwhelmingly positive. Such positive attitude could be explained by the fact that these tests are typically prepared by the CPIA teachers themselves.

While CPIA are extremely aware of the key importance of the recognition of competences for their students, the online survey and virtual fact-finding interviews revealed that in practice the process still presents numerous challenges. It appears clear that Commissions need more support with the implementation of all the different phases of the recognition of competences. In particular, the majority of respondents find that the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines do not detail enough the format and specificities of the proposed tools. While in the past few years the Ministry has supported initiatives for the development of templates of personal booklets and interviews, these seem either unfamiliar to most CPIA or, if known, not considered suitable to their specific contexts and audience. Additional guidance is sought also in relation to the evaluation of competences, for example through the elaboration of correspondence grids common to all CPIA that could help Commissions translate the various proofs of evidence held by adults into credits. Moreover, numerous CPIA also asked for ministerial guidelines on the criteria, parameters and formats that tests for the evaluation of competences could follow.

After a short explanation of the process for the recognition of competences in the CPIA and a presentation of the methodology used to gather the information included in this report (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 explains the importance of designing the learning programme in units for the recognition of credits, as well as how Commissions are organised and operate. Chapter 3 reviews the instruments used in the identification phase, namely the interview and the personal booklet, and presents their typical structure and characteristics. Chapter 4 focuses on the evaluation phase and highlights some of the challenges and success factors identified by the CPIA in the existing methodologies for the assessment of competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Chapter 5 concludes with forward-looking reflections on possible avenues for the improvement of the process for the recognition of competences in the CPIA.

Sintesi

L'offerta formativa dei Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA) in Italia deve rispondere alle esigenze di un pubblico molto diversificato in termini di nazionalità, età e professione. Pertanto, al fine di elaborare dei percorsi di apprendimento personalizzati e offrire opportunità di apprendimento su misura, i CPIA devono identificare e valutare il patrimonio di competenze che gli individui hanno accumulato nel corso della loro vita; tale processo è definito dalla legislazione vigente come riconoscimento dei crediti. Nonostante il riconoscimento sia un'innovazione significativa nel sistema italiano di educazione degli adulti, si sa ancora poco su come i CPIA in Italia identifichino e valutino l'apprendimento precedente dei loro futuri studenti. Questo rapporto esamina le pratiche esistenti adottate dai CPIA in tutto il paese al fine di colmare questa lacuna e far luce sui fattori di successo e sugli svantaggi del processo di riconoscimento dei crediti. Le informazioni presentate nel rapporto sono state raccolte attraverso un sondaggio online ai CPIA condotto nel dicembre 2020 e attraverso interviste virtuali organizzate in 13 CPIA nel marzo 2021.

I CPIA offrono tre tipi di percorsi: percorsi di alfabetizzazione e di apprendimento della lingua italiana, percorsi di primo livello (ulteriormente distinti in due periodi didattici, corrispondenti rispettivamente al primo ciclo di istruzione – scuola media – e al conseguimento della certificazione attestante l'acquisizione delle competenze di base connesse all'obbligo di istruzione), e percorsi di secondo livello (che corrispondono al diploma di scuola secondaria superiore tecnica, professionale o artistica). Alla fine di ogni percorso, gli studenti devono dimostrare di aver acquisito determinate competenze; la legislazione elenca 20 competenze per i percorsi di alfabetizzazione e di apprendimento della lingua italiana, 22 competenze per il primo periodo dei percorsi di primo livello, e 16 competenze per il secondo periodo dei percorsi di primo livello. Il processo di riconoscimento dei crediti mira a identificare, valutare e certificare quali fra queste competenze l'adulto potrebbe già possedere. La convalida di queste competenze si traduce in una riduzione del numero di ore di lezione che lo studente dovrà frequentare.

Uno dei prerequisiti per il riconoscimento dei crediti è l'organizzazione dei curricula dei CPIA in unità di apprendimento. Questo permette di individuare e valutare le abilità, le conoscenze e le competenze che un potenziale allievo che si rivolge ad un CPIA già possiede, offrendo così la possibilità di personalizzare realmente i percorsi di apprendimento. Nonostante ciò, il 14% dei CPIA intervistati dichiara di non aver progettato il proprio insegnamento in unità di apprendimento, cosa che impedisce loro un efficace riconoscimento dei crediti. Le difficoltà incontrate da tali Centri nell'adozione della progettazione per UDA si spiegano in parte con la mancanza di una struttura manageriale stabile e con la riluttanza di alcuni docenti a cambiare il loro modo di strutturare la didattica.

Per i CPIA che hanno progettato i loro corsi in unità di apprendimento, durante un primo contatto con i potenziali studenti, gli insegnanti generalmente spiegano il funzionamento del CPIA e iniziano a raccogliere informazioni sul background e le motivazioni degli studenti. Durante la fase di identificazione, un gruppo di insegnanti – la Commissione per la definizione del Patto formativo individuale – esamina più nel dettaglio quali esperienze dei futuri studenti possono essere considerate rilevanti per la personalizzazione dei loro percorsi di apprendimento.

Due strumenti principali sono generalmente adottati dalle Commissioni per identificare le competenze degli adulti: l'intervista e il dossier personale. L'intervista segue un approccio biografico e, in otto CPIA su dieci,

il suo formato è definito attraverso istruzioni scritte. Mentre quasi tutti i CPIA intervistati considerano l'intervista un valido strumento per l'identificazione delle competenze, la loro opinione sull'efficacia del libretto personale è più variegata. Ad esempio, per alcuni CPIA, compilare un dossier in modo dettagliato per ogni studente richiede tempo e fatica, soprattutto per gli adulti stranieri. Ogni studente può fornire alcune "evidenze utili" (ovvero diplomi, certificati e documenti rilasciati dalle istituzioni elencate al comma 52 dell'articolo 4 della Legge 92/2012) per facilitare la Commissione nella valutazione delle competenze acquisite attraverso passate esperienze di apprendimento formale. Tuttavia, alcuni Centri sottolineano che le Commissioni hanno spesso difficoltà a riconoscere le "evidenze utili" e le informazioni raccolte attraverso il libretto personale come competenze possedute (e quindi misura oraria) in assenza di griglie di corrispondenza nazionali. Per valorizzare il libretto personale, alcuni CPIA hanno suggerito di digitalizzare le informazioni raccolte e di estendere la sua adozione e validità al di là del CPIA che lo produce.

Al contrario, l'esperienza dei CPIA sulla valutazione delle competenze acquisite in contesti informali e non formali (attraverso esami *ad hoc* condotti dalle Commissioni) sembra essere oltremodo positiva. Tale atteggiamento positivo potrebbe essere spiegato dal fatto che queste prove sono tipicamente preparate dagli insegnanti stessi del CPIA.

Nonostante i CPIA siano estremamente consapevoli dell'importanza del riconoscimento dei crediti per i loro studenti, l'indagine online e le interviste virtuali hanno rivelato che concretamente il processo presenta ancora numerose difficoltà. Appare in modo chiaro che le Commissioni hanno bisogno di più sostegno nell'attuazione di tutte le diverse fasi del riconoscimento delle competenze. In particolare, la maggior parte degli intervistati trova le linee guida ministeriali del 2015 non abbastanza dettagliate sul formato e le caratteristiche degli strumenti proposti. Anche se negli ultimi anni il Ministero ha promosso delle iniziative per lo sviluppo di modelli di libretti personali e interviste, questi sembrano poco conosciuti alla maggior parte dei CPIA o, se conosciuti, non considerati adatti ai loro specifici contesti e pubblico. Ulteriori indicazioni sembrano necessarie anche in relazione alla valutazione delle competenze, ad esempio attraverso l'elaborazione di griglie di corrispondenza comuni a tutti i CPIA che possano aiutare le Commissioni a tradurre in crediti le varie prove in possesso. Inoltre, numerosi CPIA hanno chiesto anche indicazioni ministeriali sui criteri, i parametri e i formati che le prove per la valutazione delle competenze potrebbero seguire.

Dopo una breve presentazione del processo di riconoscimento dei crediti nei CPIA e della metodologia utilizzata per raccogliere le informazioni incluse in questo rapporto (Capitolo 1), il Capitolo 2 spiega l'importanza di progettare i percorsi per unità di apprendimento e le modalità di organizzazione e funzionamento delle Commissioni. Il capitolo 3 passa in rassegna gli strumenti utilizzati nella fase di identificazione, ovvero l'intervista e il dossier personale, e ne presenta la struttura e le caratteristiche più ricorrenti. Il capitolo 4 si concentra sulla fase di valutazione ed evidenzia alcune delle sfide e dei fattori di successo identificati dal CPIA nelle metodologie esistenti per la valutazione delle competenze acquisite nell'apprendimento formale, non formale e informale. Il capitolo 5 presenta delle riflessioni a lungo termine sulle possibili traiettorie per il miglioramento del processo di riconoscimento delle crediti nei CPIA.

1 Introduction

Setting the scene

The adult learning opportunities provided by Italy's Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) respond to a broad range of needs of a diverse audience in terms of nationality, age and professional status. Users of CPIA include workers who intend to resume their studies in order to improve their career prospects; unemployed people who seek to broaden their labour market opportunities; young people who return to education after dropping out; and immigrants who want to attain a diploma with the aim of obtaining the Italian nationality or better integrating into society and the labour market. Given such wide range of users and backgrounds, the CPIA need to identify and assess the wealth of competences and skills that individuals have accumulated over the course of their lives in order to be able to draw up personalised learning pathways and offer tailored learning opportunities. This personalisation of the learning pathways in the CPIA takes place through the process of recognition of competences (*riconoscimento dei crediti*).

The recognition of competences by the CPIA is regulated by the Decree of the President of the Republic n. 263/2012, and it has been further operationalised by the practical guidelines included in the Ministerial Decree of the 12 March 2015 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2012[1]) (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2015[2]). The legislation identifies the competences that adult learners need to attain at the end of each course offered by the CPIA[1] – 20 competences for literacy and Italian language courses, 22 competences for the first period of Level 1 courses and 16 competences for the second period of Level 1 courses.[2] The process for the recognition of competences aims at understanding whether a learner already possesses some (or parts) of the competences required to successfully conclude a CPIA course. In case such match is recognised, the CPIA can validate the competences already possessed by the adult and translate them into credits. These credits correspond to reductions in the total amount of hours – up to a maximum reduction of 50% of the entire curriculum (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2019[3]) – that the student needs to attend in order to complete the course.

In practice, the process for the recognition of competences consists of three phases. First, a dedicated group of CPIA teachers and other participants – called Commission – proceeds with the identification of the adult's competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The students' prior learning and its potential match with the competences required to complete a CPIA course is then evaluated by the Commission and – if found appropriate – translated into credits. For each students, the recognised credits are listed in a specific certificate (*certificato di riconoscimento dei crediti per la*

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[1] In addition, the legislation also identified 8 key citizenship competences to be acquired by the end of compulsory education (*Competenze chiave in materia di cittadinanza da acquisire al termine dell'istruzione obbligatoria*), that are defined as follows: learn to learn; plan; communicate; collaborate and participate; act independently and responsibly; solve problems; identify links and relationships; acquire and interpret information.

[2] Level 1 courses are organised in two teaching periods: the first period leads to the achievement of the final qualification of the first cycle of education (*scuola media*), while the second period leads to the certification of the acquisition of basic skills related to compulsory education (corresponding to the first two years of vocational and technical upper secondary education or *scuola superiore*).

personalizzazione del percorso), which is then attached to their individual learning agreement (*patto formativo individuale*). This official contract between the adult learner, the Commission and the director of the CPIA formalises the personalisation of the learning pathways.

Although the recognition of the adults' cultural and professional heritage based on the reconstruction of their individual histories is the true innovation of the CPIA system, the process remains understudied, and little is known on the success factors and challenges. The present report aims at shedding light on this very important aspect of the Italian adult education system. Thanks to the information collected through a specifically designed online survey and several virtual fact-finding visits to selected CPIA, the report aims at reviewing the very diverse practices in place throughout Italy and identifying strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches to the recognition of competences adopted by different CPIA. In addition, the report also reflects on possible ways to improve the recognition process based on the analysis of the direct experiences of the surveyed CPIA and on the identification of successful practices ensuring a smoother and more transparent process.

Online survey

There are currently 130 CPIA in Italy, offering education courses to approximately 197 000 students in the school year 2020/21 (Table 1.1).[3] Since each CPIA comprises both a central head office and various associated first and second level schools, the number of actual points of delivery of CPIA courses is much higher than 130. To gain comprehensive insights on the process for the recognition of competences from this articulated system, in October 2020 the OECD created the "Survey on the recognition of competences for the personalisation of learning pathways in the CPIA" (in Italian, "*Questionario sul riconoscimento dei crediti per la personalizzazione dei percorsi formativi nei CPIA*"). The survey included 24 questions, divided into 4 sections: (i) the design of training by learning units (*progettazione per UDA*), (ii) the Commission, (iii) the personal booklet and the interview, (iv) the assessment of the competences. The format of the questions mixed multiple-choice and open answers. The survey also allowed the CPIA to attach numerous documents to support and complement their replies. This aspect of the OECD Online Survey was particularly innovative, and allowed the research team to access and examine over 500 files, including examples of individual learning agreements, templates of personal dossiers, interview forms, and examples of tests for the recognition of competences.

The OECD Online Survey was administered digitally to all CPIA during the months of November and December 2020. Out of the existing 130 CPIA, the number of questionnaires retained for the analysis in the present report (i.e. questionnaires with answers for all mandatory questions) is 99, approximately 76% of the sector. This response rate is particularly large given the short timeframe to complete the questionnaire and the fact that responding to the OECD Online Survey was not compulsory. Nevertheless, the information presented in this report should not be seen as a complete inventory of all the existing practices of the CPIA in Italy, but rather as a snapshot of the practices in place in the vast majority of centres.

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[3] While the National Student Registry (*Anagrafe Nazionale degli Studenti – ANS*) identifies 130 CPIA for the school year 2020/21, the Ministerial Decree n. 4/2020 registers 129 Centres. This discrepancy is due to the recent merge of the two Centres in Umbria (CPIA 1 Perugia and CPIA Terni) which has not yet been accounted for by the National Student Registry. As the OECD Online Survey used the list of the CPIA provided by the National Student Registry, the analysis included in this report is based on 130 Centres.

Table 1.1. The regional distribution and the number of students of the CPIA

Number of CPIA, students, and CPIA in the OECD Online Survey by region, 2020/21

	Number of CPIA	Number of students	Number and % of CPIA in the Survey
Abruzzo	3	2,313	3 (100%)
Basilicata	2	1,393	1 (50%)
Calabria	5	10,217	4 (80%)
Campania	8	17,765	4 (50%)
Emilia-Romagna	12	14,105	5 (42%)
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	4	4,255	2 (50%)
Lazio	10	14,300	5 (50%)
Liguria	6	7,483	5 (83%)
Lombardy	19	28,606	10 (53%)
Marche	5	4,115	3 (60%)
Molise	2	1,201	2 (100%)
Piedmont	12	20,263	9 (75%)
Apulia	7	14,205	7 (100%)
Sardinia	5	8,236	4 (80%)
Sicily	10	21,384	9 (90%)
Tuscany	11	13,079	9 (82%)
Umbria	2	1,656	2 (100%)
Veneto	7	12,632	1 (14%)
No regional information			14
Total	130	197,208	99 (76%)

Note: Data for number of CPIA and number of students refer to the school year 2020/21 based on the information collected through the National Student Registry (*Anagrafe Nazionale degli Studenti – ANS*). The OECD Online Survey did not collect the information on region for CPIA that have not adopted a design of the courses in learning units (*progettazione per UDA*).
Source: OECD Secretariat's calculations based on data from the Ministry of Education and OECD Online Survey.

Virtual fact-finding interviews

To complement information gathered through the online survey, in February and March 2021 the OECD undertook virtual in-depth semi-guided interviews to 13 CPIA. Each meeting lasted approximately two hours. The centres could detail their practices regarding the identification and assessment of competences, the challenges they face, and the facilitating factors they adopted to overcome existing barriers. The 13 CPIA for these fact-finding interviews were chosen based on their availability, but also on their contributions to the OECD Online Survey, in a specific attempt to select a good mix of Centres in terms of size and regional distribution. The list of participating CPIA (with their official denomination) is as follows:

- CPIA 2 Bari
- CPIA 1 Brindisi
- CPIA 10 Formia
- CPIA 1 Grosseto
- CPIA 1 Lecce
- CPIA 1 Lucca
- CPIA 2 Milano
- CPIA Pescara-Chieti
- CPIA Salerno
- CPIA "Alberto Manzi" – Siracusa
- CPIA Provincia Teramo
- CPIA 3 Torino
- CPIA "Alberto Manzi" di Treviso

2 The prerequisites for a successful recognition of competences

A training designed in learning units

The process of recognition of competences and personalisation of learning pathways relies on the organisation of learning into well-defined units. More precisely, the so-called *progettazione per unità di apprendimento (UDA)* splits the courses provided by the CPIA into a set of learning units, each representing the skills (i.e. ability to complete tasks and solve problems), knowledge (i.e. facts, theories and practices related to a specific field of study) and competences (i.e. capacities to use knowledge and skills in personal and professional contexts) that a student needs to obtain in order to complete the course successfully. This allows the identification and assessment of the skills, knowledge and competences that a learner who turns to a CPIA already possesses, thereby offering the possibility of truly tailored learning pathways.

While training designed as a set of learning units is the most important prerequisite for the recognition of competences in the CPIA, not all Centres have in place a *progettazione per UDA*. According to the OECD Online Survey, 14% of the CPIA do not have a training offer through learning units (Figure 2.1). This implies that, more than one in ten CPIA, does not carry out an accurate recognition of competences as established by the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines. Therefore, for the scope of this analysis, the report will not take into account the 14 CPIA which reported not to apply learning units.

Insights from the field

Some CPIA pointed out few practical obstacles to the breakdown of trainings into learning units. First and foremost, there is a certain resistance in changing old habits. Several CPIA teachers have structured and taught their courses in a specific way for years, and it is difficult to convince them of the importance of updating their practices. A lack of sufficient financing has also implied that some CPIA did not have the stable managerial structure needed to enforce the implementation of the *progettazione per UDA*.

Figure 2.1. More than one in ten CPIA has not designed its training offer in learning units

% of CPIA with a training design in learning units (*progettazione per UDA*)
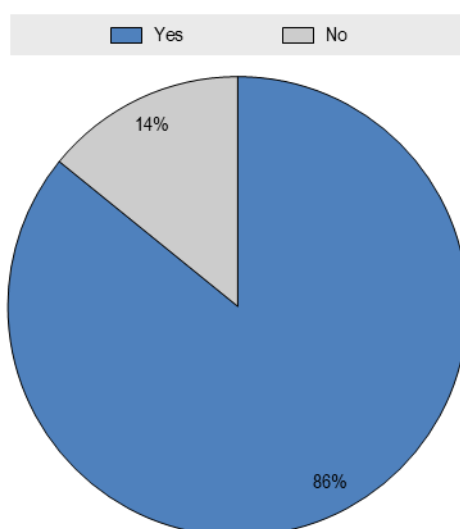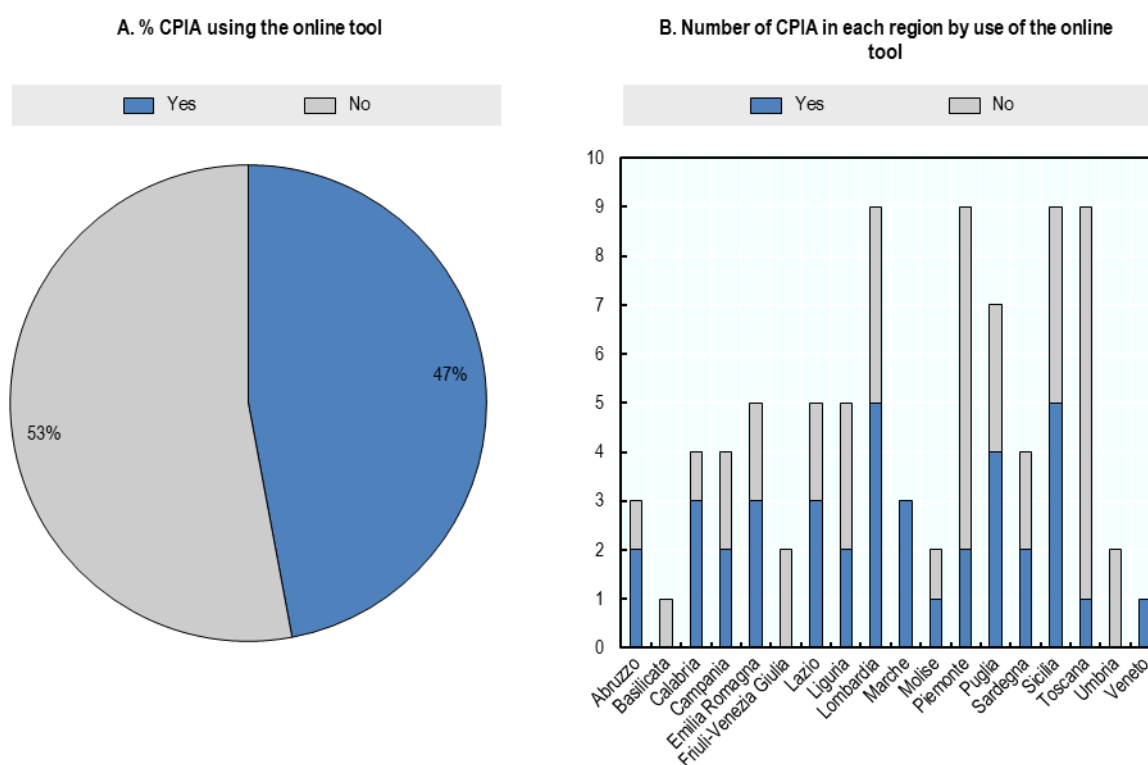

Note: The original question is "Il suo CPIA ha provveduto alla progettazione per UDA?". The total number of respondents is 99.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

The Ministerial Note n. 2539 of October 2017 establishes that the National Student Registry (*Anagrafe Nazionale degli Studenti – ANS*) needs to contain not only data of the students of all public schools, but also those enrolled in adult education courses, thus enforcing the changes to the adult education system detailed in the Presidential Decree 263/2012 (Ministero dell'istruzione, 2017[4]). To this end, all providers of formal education in Italy (including the CPIA) have access to an online platform, called SIDI (*Sistema Informativo Dell'Istruzione*), which provides a number of data on schools, such as financial data and information on staff and students. In 2019, the Ministry of Education developed a new functionality of the SIDI to help the CPIA with the definition of the Individual Learning Agreements (*Patti Formativi Individuali*) of the adults attending their Level 1 and Literacy courses (see DGOSV Note n. 7759/19 (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2019[5]) and DGCASIS Note n. 1235/19 (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2019[6])). More specifically, the SIDI for the CPIA has been expanded with two new functions: "Insert Training Offer" ("*Inserisci Offerta Formativa*") and "Learning Units Management" ("*Gestione UDA*"). To establish a new Individual Learning Agreement, in "Insert Training Offer", the CPIA needs first to define its training offer and insert the number of hours required for the student to attain the level of competences envisaged by the course. In "Learning Units Management", the CPIA has then to link each of these competences to the knowledge and skills required by the relevant course.

According to the OECD Online Survey, only 47% of the 85 CPIA which adopted the *progettazione per UDA* use the online function on the SIDI platform of the Ministry of Education (Panel A of Figure 2.2). However, this proportion varies greatly at geographical level. For example, all three CPIA in the Marche region that reported having applied the learning units make use of the online tool by the Ministry (Panel B of Figure 2.2). By contrast, respondents in regions such as Basilicata, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Umbria do not currently use this online function. In Tuscany, which is one of the regions with the highest number of CPIA with the breakdown of courses into units, only one respondent out of 9 is using the online tool.

Figure 2.2. Less than half of the surveyed CPIA use the online tool for the design of training in learning units

A. % CPIA using the online tool

B. Number of CPIA in each region by use of the online tool

Note: The original question is: "Il suo CPIA ha utilizzato la funzione on line per la progettazione per UDA?". The sample of respondents is based on the 85 CPIA that have replied to use learning units.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Overall, according to the respondents of the OECD Online Survey, the strengths of this online tool lie in its potential to standardise and uniform the CPIA training provision at national level. Greater homogeneity and transparency of the offer and training structures of the CPIA are indeed considered very important and urgently needed. Respondents found the online tool also important to improve uniformity in the *progettazione per UDA* among the different schools of the same Centre. Respondents also appreciate the possibility to access numerous materials concerning CPIA courses, including tests – a feature that has been clearly fundamental during the COVID-19 pandemics.

However, numerous weaknesses of the online tool have been identified. Firstly, a majority of respondents to the OECD Survey are critical of the rigidity of the Learning Agreement functionalities on the SIDI platform. In fact, the CPIA are not allowed to personalise the online agreements' content based on their specific users or local context, but they have to strictly follow the parameters identified by the SIDI, which are considered by some respondents as not entirely adapted to adult learners. Consequently, the system does not always reflect what the Centres and their staff do in practice in the field. In addition, several CPIA pointed to the complexity of using the online tool. The platform is perceived as difficult to update, lengthy, and the compilation process is not sufficiently user-friendly.

As shown in Panel A of Figure 2.2, the OECD Online Survey identifies a number of CPIA which do not use the online tool provided by the Ministry (53%). When asked why this tool had not been adopted by their Centres, a large part of respondents pointed to a lack of information and awareness about the instrument. Other reasons include the poor familiarity of staff with new technologies, as well as a certain reluctance

from the teaching staff to use the online function (deemed unsuitable for the needs of their Centres). In particular, some CPIA mention that their learning units are not organised in single competences, but they are rather crosscutting (i.e. one unit covers more than one competence). As the online tool does not envisage the assignment of multiple competences to one UDA, some Centres did not consider it for adoption.

Insights from the field

During the interviews, the CPIA mentioned a number of additional specific obstacles to the use of the SIDI online function for breaking down the trainings into learning units. While being very technical and hard to gauge for a non-specialist audience, the following examples are indicative of the need for further discussions and refinements of the online function for the *progettazione per UDA* by the Ministry of Education in order to make it more flexible and suitable for the CPIA context.

For instance, interviewed Centres mentioned the need to expand the platform with the possibility to add learning units for the courses that broaden the educational offer (*corsi di ampliamento dell'offerta formativa*). Moreover, the SIDI platform does not allow the simultaneous registration of the same adult in two different education providers, which is frequent, for example when attending at the same time a vocational training programme and a CPIA language course. Respondents also mentioned difficulties in i) creating a first period of Level 1 pathway without a second language; ii) developing transversal pathways; and iii) assigning credits for the entire A1 curriculum to Literacy and Italian language students who already have intermediate certifications because the total amount of hours would exceed the allowed 50% of the pathway.

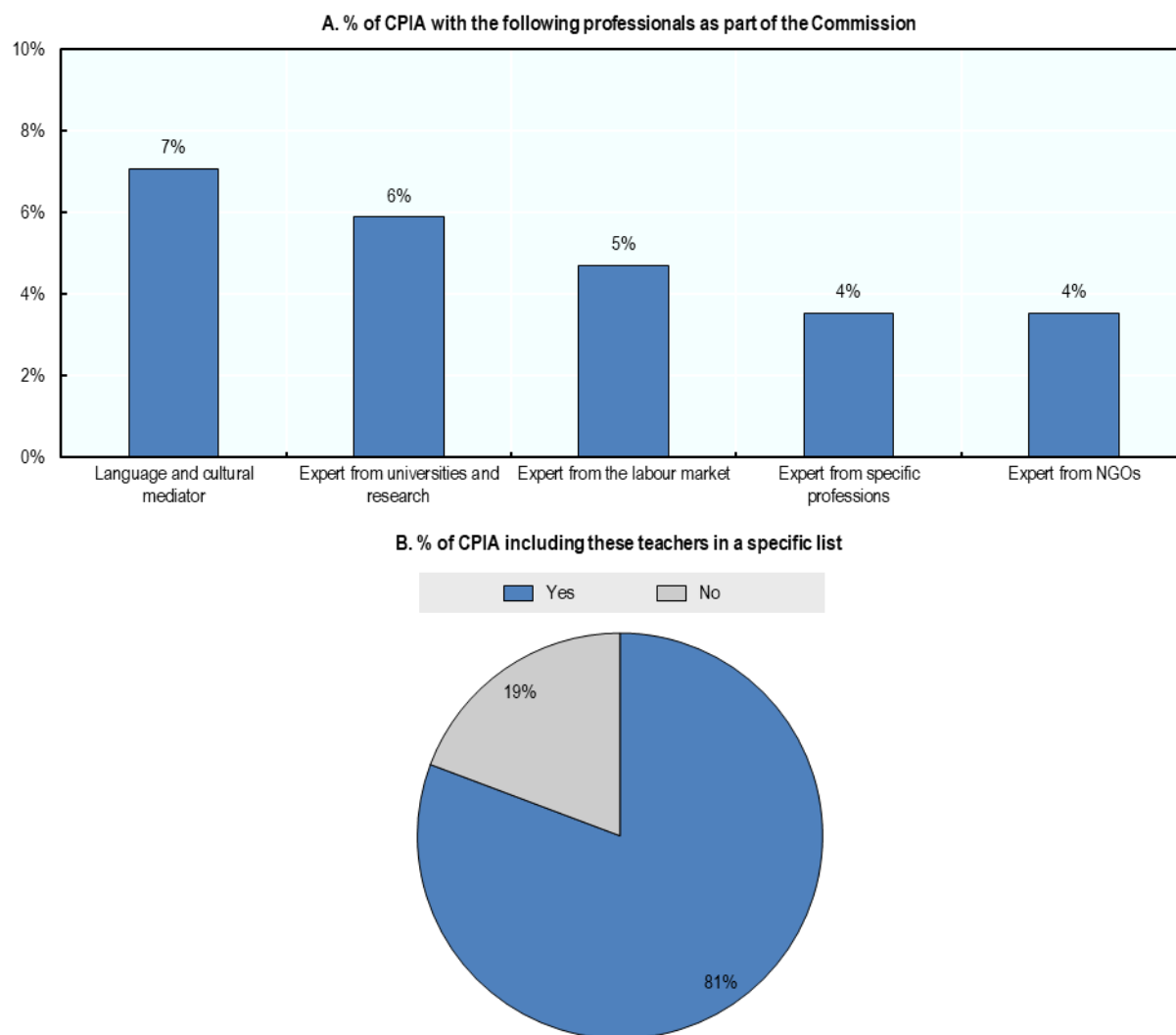## A commission for the personalisation of learning pathways

Another prerequisite for the recognition of competences in the CPIA is the presence in each centre of a so-called Commission (*Commissione per la definizione del Patto formativo individuale*). Such Commission is in charge of welcoming prospective students, identifying, assessing and certifying their prior learning considered to be of relevance for CPIA courses, and establishing formal individual agreements that structure each student's personalised learning pathway. In numerous CPIA, the Commission is composed of different sub-commissions, focusing on different themes depending on the specific needs of the Centres. For example, some CPIA have one sub-commission for the first period of Level 1 and Literacy courses, one for second period of Level 1 courses, and another one for courses in prisons.

The Commission is chaired by the Director of the CPIA and it is formed by a number of teachers from the different types of courses provided by the Centre. According to the OECD Online Survey, while Commissions in nearly all CPIA include teachers from Level 1 (first period) and Literacy and Italian language courses, eight in ten Commissions also have teachers of Level 1 (second period) courses. There are just a handful of Centres where Commissions are composed by only certain categories of teachers (for example, by those of Italian and literacy courses), but this mostly reflects the fact that not all CPIA offer simultaneously all courses. The number of teachers included in the Commission spans from 3 to as high as 20, also reflecting the different size of the CPIA across Italy.

In addition to teachers, the law allows the presence of external experts or mediators among the members of the Commission. In practice, however, the involvement of external experts remains very limited (Panel A of Figure 2.3). Of the 85 respondents to the OECD Online Survey, only six CPIA (7%) make use of language and cultural mediators. Experts from the labour market or NGOs are invited to be part of the

Commissions in less than five CPIA. In 81% of the Centres, the composition of the Commission is specified in dedicated lists, as established by the 2015 Guidelines of the Ministry of Education (Panel B of Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Few external experts are part of the Commissions, but dedicated lists typically specify it

A. % of CPIA with the following professionals as part of the Commission

B. % of CPIA including these teachers in a specific list

Note: The original question in Panel A is: "Si prega di indicare qui di seguito quale tipologia di docenti e di eventuali ulteriori figure professionali fanno parte della Commissione", while the original question in Panel B is: "Tali docenti sono inseriti in apposito elenco?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

According to the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines, the Commission's role, composition, functioning and channels of communications and collaboration with other institutions should be clearly defined in an internal regulation. Yet, only 72% of CPIA responding to the OECD Survey have adopted such regulation of the function of their Commissions (Figure 2.4).

In addition, in order to carry out the recognition of competences, Commissions can also equip themselves with other tools. For instance, they can develop a standardized application form for the recognition of credits (*modello di domanda per il riconoscimento dei crediti*), that can be used whenever a student would like to enrol in a CPIA course. Approximately one in two CPIA (54%) have this form (Figure 2.4). 64% of

respondents use a template of the personal dossier (*modello di libretto personale*) to identify the competences that adults have acquired through previous experiences. By contrast, only 38% of respondents have set specific guidelines for the assessment methodologies and tests used for the evaluation of prior learning (*linee guida per la predisposizione delle specifiche metodologie valutative e dei riscontri e prove utili alla valutazione delle competenze*). In addition, it is worth stressing the considerable proportion of CPIA having a template for the certification of competences (*modello di certificato di riconoscimento dei crediti per la personalizzazione del percorso*): roughly 8 in 10 CPIA have a standard certificate template. Based on the results of the OECD Online Survey, the only tool that is truly used by every CPIA is the template of Individual Learning Agreement (*modello di Patto Formativo Individuale*). Lastly, some CPIA have adopted a quality assurance system (such as ISO 9001 or the Common Assessment Framework – CAF) to ensure the high-quality provision of adult learning, which often require Centres to develop a whole set of standardised forms for the recognition of credits.

Figure 2.4. Commissions use a variety of tools, although relatively few have adopted specific guidelines for assessments

% of CPIA stating that their Commission has adopted the following tools
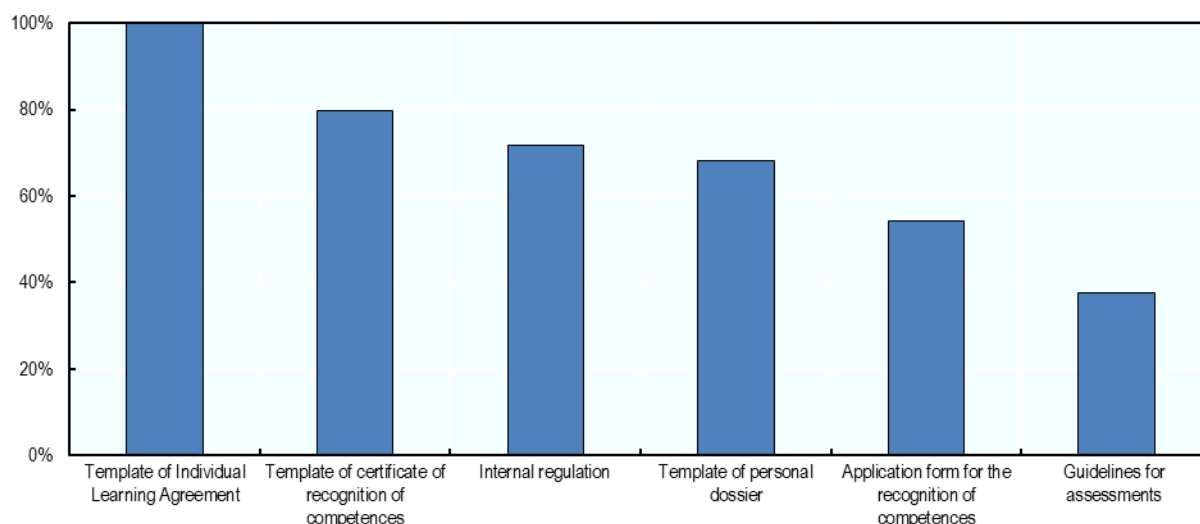
Note: The original question is: "La Commissione si é dotata di dispositivi e strumenti?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Insights from the field

Although existing only in a few CPIA, the internal guidelines for the methodologies and tests for the assessment of prior learning (*linee guida per la predisposizione delle specifiche metodologie valutative e dei riscontri e prove utili alla valutazione delle competenze*) are typically very well designed. Most guidelines include a first section that concisely explains the process of recognition of credits and the role of the Commission, aiming at a common understanding of the procedures behind the individualisation of learning pathways in the CPIA. Most importantly, guidelines often include tables that identify, for each competence of each course, the corresponding assessment method. This type of correspondence tables are the most innovative and useful aspect of such guidelines, and are frequently complemented by examples of actual tests.

The Commission can also entrust one of its members with the task of accompanying and supporting the adult in the process of identification of competences and in the composition of the personal dossier. Such figure of a tutor (*docente accompagnatore*) is useful to help students understand and experience in a less stressful way the procedure of recognition of competences. Yet, almost half of the CPIA in the OECD Survey state that a tutor teacher has not been identified within their respective Commissions (Figure 2.5). CPIA stated that tutoring activities are very time consuming. Therefore, teachers with such guidance and support role may not have time to teach.

By contrast, in a number of CPIA, most – if not all – teachers are tasked to conduct a few hours of tutoring even if they are not formally recognised as *docente accompagnatore*. In this way, students are followed throughout the year and not only when they first register at the CPIA. For each group of students (*gruppo classe*) for Level 1 first and second teaching periods, and for Literacy and Italian language courses, a coordinator is often identified to better organise the tutoring activities. Generally, this person has already experience in adult education, a good knowledge of the process of the identification and assessment of competences and might have also taken specific training courses on these topics.

Figure 2.5. Almost half of the CPIA have not identified a tutor teacher

% of CPIA that have identified a tutor teacher
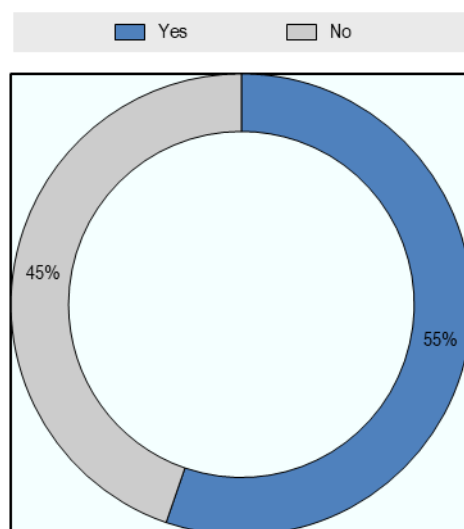
Note: The original question is: "E' stato individuato il docente accompagnatore?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

3 The identification of competences

The different instruments used in the identification phase

According to the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines, during the identification phase two main instruments – the interview and personal booklet – should be used to detect the competences that learners gained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. In particular, the interview – typically set according to a biographical approach – is meant to help identify all relevant experiences and, for foreign adults, to make a first assessment of their Italian language proficiency. All the information gathered, together with official documents and certificates, should then be collected in a personal booklet (*libretto personale*), which would serve as a sort of portfolio containing all the pieces of evidence of one's competences.

In practice, however, the Guidelines provide only limited guidance on how to structure the interview as well as the personal booklet. As a result, Centres across Italy have different practices in the design and usage of these instruments. For example, the interview for the recognition of competences is usually tailored to fit the specific needs of the users of each CPIA, while the use of the personal booklet remains scattered. Indeed, many CPIA do not fully understand the function of the personal booklet, beyond collecting and organising all the information about the students in a structured way. Moreover, to complement the interview and personal booklet, numerous CPIA have introduced additional tools that help them understand the personal and professional background of the prospective student and further tailor their learning pathways.

The interview

The interview represents an important step for the identification of competences as the Commission can gather useful information on people's experiences, motivations and aspirations.[4] The teacher (or the group of teachers) who conducts the interview has a key role in motivating the students to enrol in the CPIA and to advise them towards the right course. Many CPIA mentioned that, during this phase, it is very important to be empathic with learners and to adapt the content of the interview and the language used to the person's profile, interests, language proficiency, and ethnic origins. To support Commissions in this task, four in five CPIA have produced written instructions on how Commissions should operationalise the interview (Figure 3.1). These documents are particularly helpful for new teachers and especially those who come from the 'day' school (*scuola del mattino*) and are not very familiar with the characteristics of adult students.

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[4] In addition to the formal interview undertaken by the Commission to identify the competences of the adult, many CPIA also conduct less structured and more informal interviews during the reception phase in order to better understand the motivations and aspirations of the prospective learners and orient them towards the right course.

Figure 3.1. Four in five CPIA have written instructions on how to structure the interview

% of CPIA having written and/or formal instructions on how to structure the interview
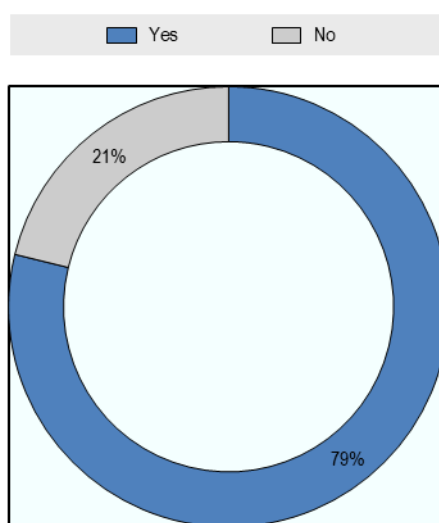
Note: The original question is: "La Commissione ha delle istruzioni scritte e/o formalizzate su come strutturare l'intervista?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Such written instructions can typically take two forms. Several Centres across Italy have developed general guidelines on how to conduct the interview in order to make the students feel comfortable and help them identify those experiences that might be relevant for the credit recognition process. These guidelines are useful to initiate the conversation, but the interviews' structure and content should then be adapted to fit the prospective students' characteristics. In contrast to this approach, some other CPIA have preferred to develop precise templates for the interview, detailing the exact topics that need to be covered during the discussion with the adult.

The CPIA often have two different templates of interviews, one for learners (mostly foreigners) who want to enrol in Literacy and Italian language courses and another one for those who want to enrol in Level 1 courses. While the first one contains questions necessary to assess adults' language proficiency, the second one is generally organised in four dimensions as presented in Table 3.1. The first dimension relates to the personal information of the students, including their age and nationality; the second one focuses on their prior learning experience, including previous education, work experience and hobbies; the third section is about the motivations and the reasons behind the adult's decision to re-enter an education programme and what would be the benefits of attending the course; the forth section represents the initial step in the identification of competences acquired in informal and non-formal contexts and typically also investigates whether the person has digital skills. Furthermore, some CPIA also include questions that indirectly help understand the level of the person in relation to the specific axes (e.g. for the mathematical axis, whether the person is able to compare the price of two products at the supermarket), as well as their proficiency in foreign languages and their availability to attend the courses. Importantly, the *SOGI* and *Nettuno* digital school registers provides an interview template directly in each respective platform, which are therefore adopted by a considerable number of Commissions.

**Table 3.1. Common dimensions included in most interview templates for enrolment in Level 1 courses**

Dimension	Questions/ topics of interest
Personal information	• Name and surname • Age • Nationality
Prior learning experience	• Education: memories from school, important moments, challenges, reasons for leaving education • Work experience: current job, how the person acquired the necessary skills, if the person likes the job • Hobbies: what the person does in her/his spare time, participation in associations/groups, volunteer activities
Motivations and reasons for going back in education	• How the person learnt about the CPIA, • Why the person decided to enrol • How the courses may be useful in the work environment or at home • Whether the course is needed to obtain residence permit
Competences acquired in informal and non-formal contexts	• What the person learnt through the experiences mentioned before • What job position the person has • Whether the person knows how to use a computer

Source: Elaborations based on documents received through the OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

The interview is seen as an important step in the process of credit recognition by nearly all CPIA (Figure 3.2). In particular, it is considered a valuable instrument for three main reasons: i) it helps build a relationship of mutual trust between the student and the teachers, which is particularly important for people who had a negative experience with the education system in the past; ii) it contributes to a better understanding of the personal and professional experiences of the adult and to the motivations to enrol in the CPIA, leading to a more precise personalisation of pathways and to the identification of homogenous groups of students; iii) it can be conducted in different languages, which helps, at the same time, to quickly assess the level of Italian of foreign people before using their own language to explain the functioning of the CPIA and its different courses to prospective students.

Figure 3.2. Nearly all CPIA consider their experience with the interview as somehow positive

Distribution of CPIA by their appreciation of the interview instrument
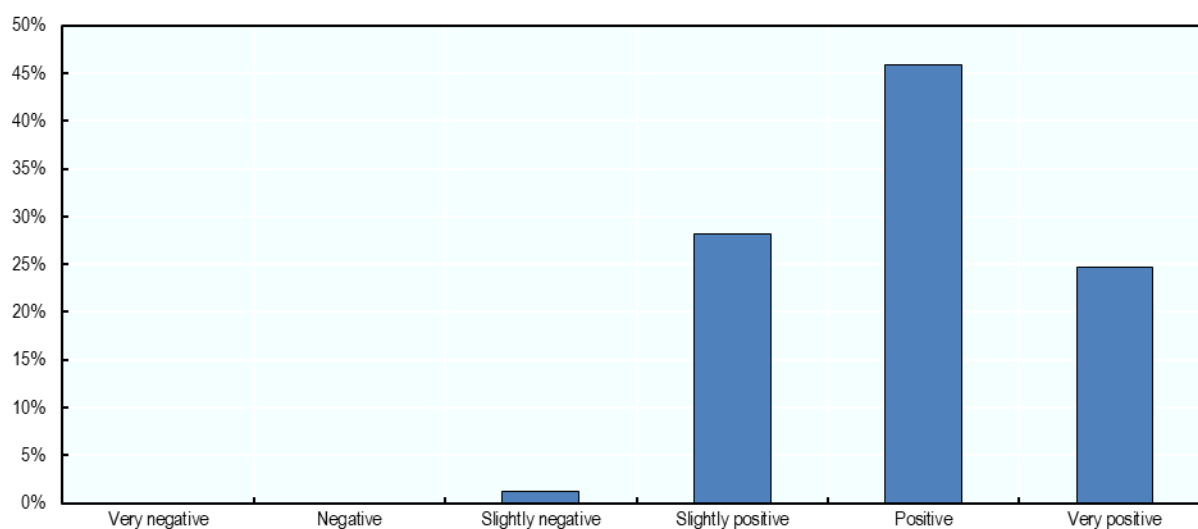
Note: The original question is: "In una scala da 1 a 6, come considera la sua esperienza dell'utilizzo dell'intervista per l'identificazione delle competenze comunque acquisite?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Yet, some CPIA also highlight challenges related to the use of this instrument. First, teachers stated that they do not always have time to conduct the interview properly as the CPIA are sometimes understaffed. In addition, because of the high turnover of teachers that most Centres face, the newly recruited staff might not have the right competences and need to receive guidance from more experienced staff. Learning how to correctly conduct the interview for the recognition of competences is especially important since a large share of prospective learners comes from disadvantaged groups, such as people with difficult economic and social conditions, migrants and asylum seekers, as well as people detained in prisons. However, because of limited funds, nowadays the CPIA heavily rely on temporary teachers, who – even if they receive training on the recognition of competences by senior CPIA staff – might leave the Centres after one year, overall increasing training needs.

Insights from the field

The issue of Commissions lacking the necessary skills to correctly perform the recognition of competences process is often mentioned by the CPIA as an important drawback of the current system. During their interviews, the Centres identified two main solutions to address the skill gaps among the staff who conduct the recognition of competences.

The first solution would be to provide training to the teachers in charge of students' reception, which can be all staff of the CPIA or selected teachers. Training should focus on the development of two main types of skills: i) technical skills on how to conduct the process for the recognition of competences and adapt assessments to adults' characteristics; ii) soft skills to help make the student feel more comfortable and build a trust relationship with the teacher. Training to teachers already exists in some CPIA at the initiative of school directors (*dirigenti scolastici*). For example, one CPIA has been experimenting the provision of trainings to only half of the teachers in order to evaluate whether this

group was able to better advise the students in comparison to the teachers who did not participate in the training (i.e., the so-called control group). Among the initiatives addressed to a larger audience, it is worth mentioning a workshop on recognition of competences which was organised in October 2019 which brought together 60 teachers and four school directors from provinces of Emilia Romagna and Lombardy. The course aimed at developing the knowledge and skills necessary for the members of the Commissions to correctly identify the competences acquired in formal, informal and non-formal learning contexts as well as create effective tests for the recognition of credits. In alternative to face-to-face training and to overcome time and resources constraints, some CPIA have developed practical kits for new staff with suggestions on how to solve specific issues that might occur during the identification process.

The second option would involve the hiring of one or more experts who could be in charge of the reception phase and could collect all relevant information for the identification of competences in order to provide a general overview of the candidates' profile to the members of the Commission. The support of a mediator is also considered useful in light of the large proportion of foreign CPIA students, who often have only a very basic knowledge of the Italian language.

Slightly less then half of CPIA believe that the interview could be replaced or supplemented with other instruments (Figure 3.3). A number of Centres who took part in the OECD Online Survey provided valuable feedback on how the interview process could be improved. In particular, the CPIA suggested to introduce a table with a clear correspondence between the answers received by the interviewee and the competence of each course type and learning period. In their views, this would make the process smoother and quicker. In addition, several CPIA would like to digitalise the information gathered through the interview and automatically transfer such information into digital registers. Some also suggested to envisage an additional interview during the year in order to monitor the skills acquired after the first months of attendance and verify whether the credits identified at the beginning of the year were assessed properly or need to be refined.

Figure 3.3. Slightly less than half of the CPIA believe that the interview could be replaced or complemented with other instruments

% of CPIA stating that the interview could be replaced or complemented with other instruments
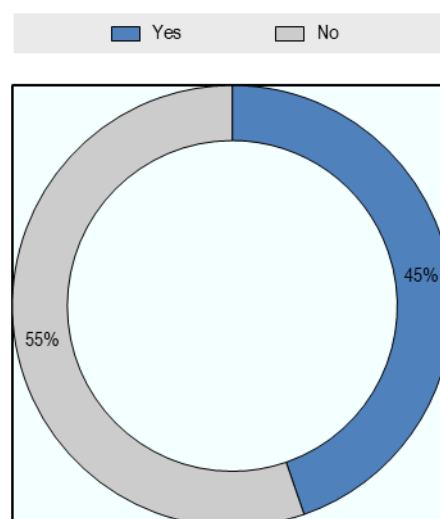
Note: The original question is: "Secondo lei, in aggiunta o al posto dell'intervista, esistono altri strumenti di esplorazione che potrebbero semplificare l'identificazione delle competenze acquisite?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

The personal booklet

Half of the CPIA responding to the OECD Online Survey never or rarely used the personal booklet. This holds true in all participating CPIA in Abruzzo, Basilicata, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria and Veneto, and in the vast majority of CPIA in Lombardy, Piedmont and Tuscany. Calabria and Molise are the only two regions where all respondent CPIA use the personal booklet often or sometimes (Figure 3.4). Yet, qualitative interviews suggest that many CPIA collect and organise the information gathered from the prospective students, but they do not consider this record keeping as an actual personal booklet. In fact, as the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines do not specify the format of this instrument, many respondents do not consider their archiving activities in line with the authorities' expectations.

Figure 3.4. One in four CPIA does not make use of personal booklets for the identification of the competences of prospective learners
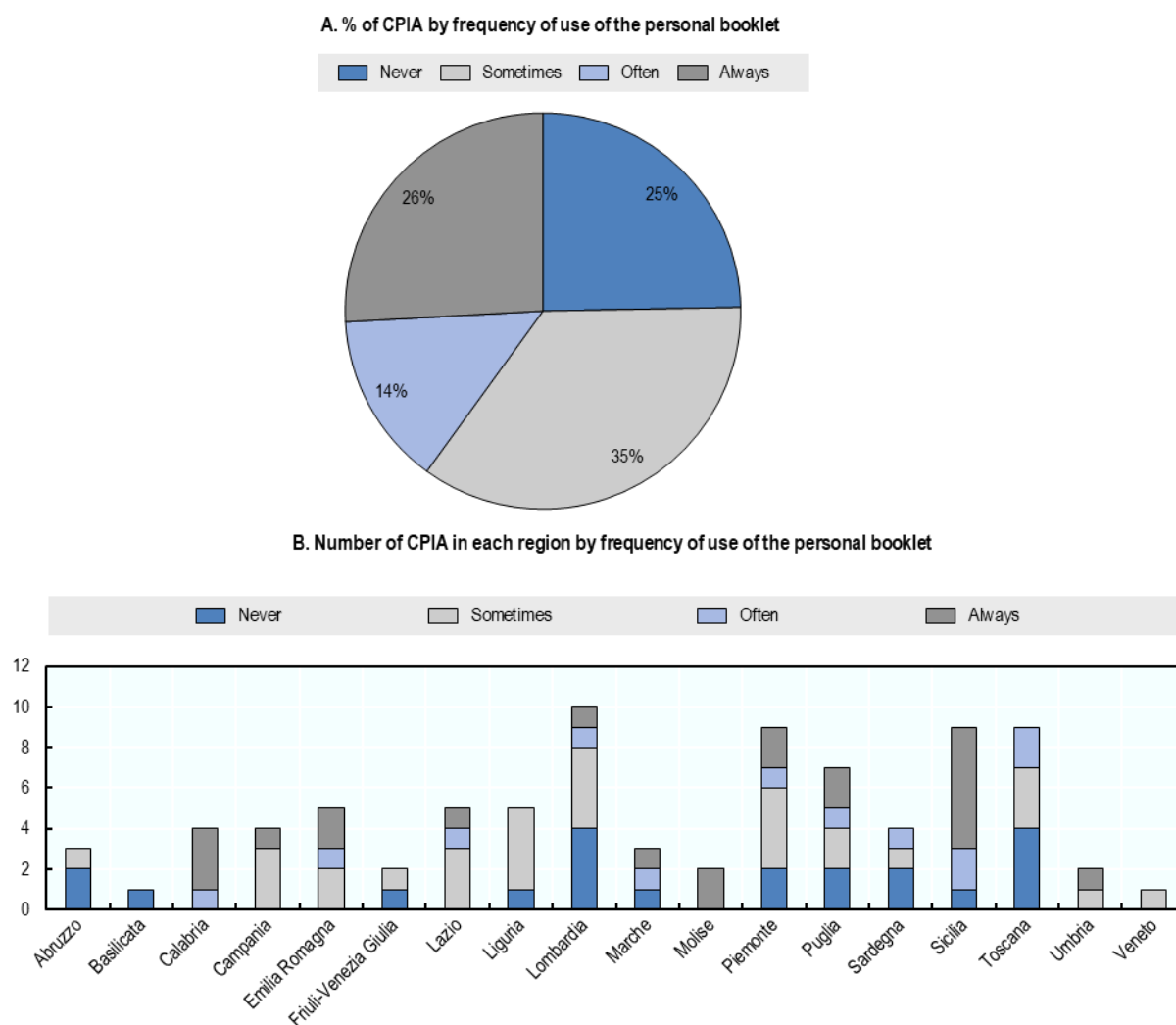
A. % of CPIA by frequency of use of the personal booklet

B. Number of CPIA in each region by frequency of use of the personal booklet

Some of the personal booklets put in place by a number of CPIA across Italy draw from a template prepared in the framework of the PAIDEIA plan, under the coordination of the CPIA of Bologna (Piano P.A.I.D.E.I.A., 2015[7]). This template includes three main sections related to formal, non-formal and informal learning, as well as a section on personal interests and experiences (Table 3.2). It allows for both multiple-choice and open questions, as well as for uploads of relevant certificates and documents. In addition, some CPIA include a section on transversal competences, which contains questions on teamwork, personal and professional objectives, ability to adapt to different situations and relationships with colleagues. By comparing Table 3.2 with the previous Table 3.1, it appears clear that some information commonly included in the personal booklet are also discussed during the interviews. To avoid such overlaps, some CPIA developed a common template for both the interview and personal dossier that is filled in during the identification phase.

Table 3.2. Common dimensions typically included in personal booklets

Dimension	Questions/topics of interest
Personal Information	• Name and surname • Age • Nationality
Formal credits	• Highest educational attainment: type of diploma, year of graduation, place where the institution is based • Interrupted studies: school of origin, certificated credits • Other courses provided by education and training institutions • Italian language certificates
Non-formal credits	• Courses provided by institutions that are not in the education and training system
Informal credits	• Current job • Previous work experiences
Personal interests	• Activities in the free time • Other relevant personal experience

Source: Elaborations based on documents received through the OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

The low proportion of CPIA making use of personal booklets for the identification of competences possessed by learners is clearly linked with the perceived ineffectiveness of the tool. Indeed, only one in three CPIA has a positive or very positive experience with the personal booklet (Figure 3.5) – in sharp contrast with the generally positive experience with the interview. Indeed, many CPIA consider the use of the personal booklet somehow challenging. Filling up the dossier is considered very time consuming and the CPIA often lack the necessary time and human resources to do so. In addition, less experienced staff consider it quite complex and need support from colleagues to learn how to use it. Most importantly, however, many CPIA do not see a real use of the booklet in the recognition of competences process. In fact, some CPIA see little value added in spending a large amount of time compiling the booklet for each student considering the absence of a national grid assigning a specific amount of hours to each type of diploma, certificate and other piece of evidence of prior learning. By contrast, these Centres prefer to skip the compilation of personal booklets and test competences directly, with written exams.

Another limit of the personal booklet identified by several CPIA is linked to the fact that, as of now, this instrument is only valid for the Centre that produces it. This means that if students move to another province or region, the dossier cannot be transferred and used by another CPIA. Such impossibility of exploiting the dossier of the adult beyond the CPIA who compiles it could be addressed by standardising and digitalising the information collected, thereby facilitating its regular update and transferability to other Centres. In addition, according to some interviewed members of Commissions, its digitalisation would also improve the access to personal booklets by other public institutions (e.g. public employment services or training centres) that might be relevant for the students, after completing the CPIA courses. This way, the work performed by the CPIA in the identification phase would also contribute to further strengthen the linkages between the education and training system and active labour market policies.

Overall, only few respondents to the OECD Online Survey highlighted some advantages of this instrument. In particular, the personal booklet centralises all the relevant information about learners, including their expectations and motivations, and provides a complete overview of the skills acquired in different contexts. Lastly, a more structured organisation of information on the competences of students could be useful for Commissions during the preparation of the learning agreement.

Figure 3.5. Around eight in ten CPIA consider their experience with the personal dossier as somehow positive

Distribution of CPIA by their evaluation of the personal dossier (%)
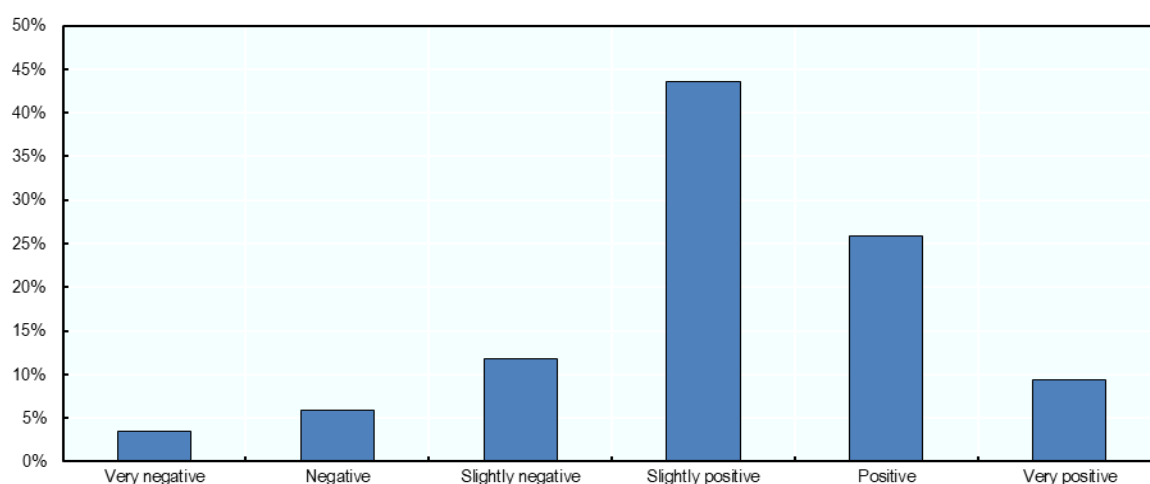
Note: The original question is: "In una scala da 1 a 6, come considera la sua esperienza dell'utilizzo del libretto personale?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Insights from the field

A number of CPIA have made efforts to centralise and digitalise the information collected in the identification phase. Although not explicitly using the personal booklet, one Centre reported having digitalised all relevant elements that facilitate the identification of the skills of the learner. This helps keep track of the information collected through the interview, which can be easily accessed by all teachers. According to many CPIA, another advantage of online personal booklets relies on the possibility to update them more easily and regularly. Furthermore, students could use online booklets

as a personal portfolio streamlining all data on their educational attainments and status on the labour market, even after the completion of the CPIA course

Looking at existing good practices, the CPIA of Lecce has developed an online platform that collects all the relevant information about students, including all diplomas and certificates that can support the recognition of competences by the Commission. The platform is interactive and students can access it, find the learning units (UDA) corresponding to their learning needs, take an online test and book an appointment for an oral, virtual examination to validate the requested credits. Thus, the Commission can easily score tests and attribute all or part of the credits. This online tool also collects information on the Ateco code (*Codice dell'attività economica*) of the job, a useful information that can inform the work of the Regional Centre for Research and Development (CRS&S) to assess the local labour market needs.

Another worth mentioning initiative is the one of Emilia Romagna, in the framework of the project "Bologna: towards the lifelong learning metropolitan network" ("*Bologna: verso la rete metropolitana per l'Apprendimento Permanente"*). The project looked at the differences and similarities between the regional system of certification of competencies and the recognition of competences by the CPIA based on the Decree n. 263/2012 and the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines. The initiative highlighted the importance of increasing the comparability between the two approaches and create a standardised dossier to be used in both contexts.

Auxiliary instruments

In addition to the interview and the personal booklet, many CPIA use other instruments to identify and recognise competences. In particular, Centres may ask learners to fill in specific documents, such as self-declaration forms that indicate additional skills that cannot be explicitly tested but can still contribute to the personalisation of learning pathways. Supplementary instruments include also hands-on tests that can be particularly useful for people who are not comfortable with traditional classroom exams, those who have limited competences in Italian languages and those whose competences have been acquired mainly in non-formal and informal contexts.

Quite often during the first appointments with learners, teachers in charge of reception ask adults to take a short entry test (*test d'ingresso*) that provides a first assessment of the correspondence between the declarations of the students gathered through the interview and their actual competences. This test is typically followed by other tests that are specific to each axis and which constitute the actual assessment of the competences for the credit recognition (see the next chapter for a thorough analysis of the methodologies for the evaluation of competences). In other cases, there is an observation phase where students can attend few classes in small groups before the beginning of the actual course and which helps teachers understand whether competences were corrected identified and assessed and finalise the credit recognition process. In addition, in some cases one or more interviews might be conducted by the teachers of each axis even a few months after the beginning of the courses to make an additional assessment of the skills of the students and modify the credits recognised at the beginning of the process if needed.

4 The evaluation of competences

The evaluation of the competences obtained through formal learning

After having identified the competences held by the learner at the time of enrolment in a CPIA course, the Commission – together with the adult – assess the possession of these skills in view if the subsequent certification. In the case of competences acquired through formal learning, the Commission can make use of a series of "useful evidence", that is, diplomas, certificates and documents issued by the institutions listed in paragraph 52 of article 4 of Law 92/2012.[5] In particular, respondents to the OECD Online Survey mentioned several "useful evidence" that are typically taken into consideration by their respective Centres. For instance, in addition to school diplomas, some Commissions look at school reports (*pagelle*), prior evaluations, certifications of skills related to the acquisition of professional qualifications (*qualifiche professionali*) issued by accredited bodies, and certifications of skills gained through apprenticeship courses.

Further documents that can prove the competences obtained through formal learning are mentioned by INVALSI (2012[8]): the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), as well as various official certificates of knowledge of the Italian language – such as the Certificates of knowledge of the Italian language (CELI), the Certification of Italian as a Foreign Language (CILS), the Dante Alighieri Italian Language Project (PLIDA), and the Certificate of Basic competence in Italian as a foreign language (base.IT).[6] Official certificates of knowledge of foreign languages are also valid – for example, the *Diplôme d'études en langue française* (DELF), *Preliminary English Test* (PET), *Diplomas de Español as Lengua Extranjera* (DELE), etc.

While the vast majority of the Centres find that the methodologies established by the Ministerial Guidelines for the assessment of the competences obtained through formal learning are effective, one in five respondents is still not entirely convinced about their effectiveness (Figure 4.1). The main concern is the relevance of these methodologies for non-EU foreign adults, which represent 60% of the CPIA students and 96% of the adults enrolled in Literacy and Italian Language courses across the national territory. More precisely, the automatic recognition of competences acquired in the country of origin is considerably hindered by a number of issues: firstly, many non-Italian-speaking learners (especially asylum seekers, refugees, and unaccompanied foreign minors) do not have documents certifying their educational

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[5] Paragraph 52 of art. 4 of Law 92/2012 states: "*Per apprendimento formale si intende quello che si attua nel sistema di istruzione e formazione e nelle università e istituzioni di alta formazione artistica, musicale e coreutica, e che si conclude con il conseguimento di un titolo di studio o di una qualifica o diploma professionale, conseguiti anche in apprendistato a norma del testo unico di cui al decreto legislativo 14 settembre 2011, n. 167, o di una certificazione riconosciuta*".

[6] Note that numerous CPIA consider these additional certificates (e.g. ECDL, CELI, CILS, etc.) as proofs of competences obtained through non-formal learning. This report uses, instead, the definition given by INVALSI (2012[8]), which allocates them within the "useful evidence" to prove the possession of competences achieved through formal learning.

background. Secondly, even in cases where foreign learners are able to provide the necessary documents, very often, the two education systems are hardly comparable and there are no codified equivalences. Lastly, the communication and exchange of information with foreign learners is often hampered by language problems and lack of a proper translation (unless it is provided at the expense of the student).

Insights from the field

In 2019, all the CPIA of Lazio and the Roma Tre University joined forces to examine how to improve the assessment of the previous experience and cultural background of CPIA foreign students in order to better personalise their learning pathways. In particular, the project aimed at identifying the skill set required by members of Commissions to evaluate the competences obtained by foreigners in informal and non-formal contexts, as well as developing a portfolio of competences that could be used by all institutions in the local network.

The initiative led to the creation of a number of outputs. First, several templates and guidelines have been developed in order to support Commissions in recognising the most relevant experiences of foreign students, assessing their transversal skills and identifying their past and future projects. In addition, a very detailed work was conducted to review the school systems (from kindergarten to postgraduate training) of the majority of the countries of origin of migrants resident in the region. The goal of this exercise was to facilitate the comparison of the level of schooling and training declared by students coming from non-EU countries and the Italian system and to provide substantial support to the work of the Commissions in the validation of credits.

Furthermore, a number of respondents to the OECD Online Survey stress that the description of formal learning assessment procedure provided in the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines is too general and leave too much room for interpretation. For instance, the Guidelines do not give any indication on the number of hours to be recognised for the various useful evidence. Moreover, the Guidelines do not address other important aspects, such as the obsolescence of skills (how long prior to the interview was the qualification obtained?) or the correspondence between the courses already attended by the learner and those that are part of the learning pathway ahead. Finally, a few CPIA reported a more general perplexity regarding the actual impact of the existing procedures in terms of effective development of learning pathways and support towards better social and working conditions.

Figure 4.1. According to one in five CPIA, the assessment of prior formal learning as established by the Ministerial Guidelines is not effective

% of CPIA stating that the methodologies for the assessment of the competences obtained through formal learning as established by the Ministerial Guidelines are effective
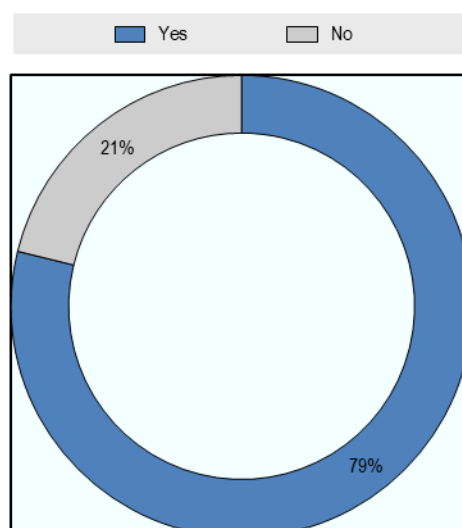
Note: The original question is: "Secondo lei, la valutazione delle competenze acquisite nell'apprendimento formale come prestabilita dalle Linee Guida CPIA è efficace?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Insights from the field

According to all interviewed CPIA, the exact list of "useful evidence" that the Commission takes into account for each student is decided during the identification phase of the process of recognition of competences, through the interview and/or personal dossier. However, in most cases CPIA do not have detailed correspondence tables that assign a precise share of total course hours to each piece of evidence. In practice, many Centres still ask students to undergo a battery of tests to evaluate their competences – regardless of whether they have been acquired in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. This is even more often the case for non-EU foreign adults, who often lack a formal certification and – even when they do – can face difficulties in translating it in Italian or comparing it to Italian certificates.

The evaluation of the competences obtained in non-formal and informal contexts

In order to value adults' cultural and professional background, Law 92/2012 and the subsequent 2015 Ministerial Guidelines provide that, in addition to the recognition of competences acquired through formal learning, those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts should be documented and taken into consideration in the personalisation of adults' learning pathways by the CPIA. The key difference between non-formal and informal learning relies on the intention behind the educational process. On the one hand, non-formal learning is sought intentionally and is provided by any organisation pursuing educational and training objectives (including voluntary work, national civil service, and private companies) outside the formal education and training system (as defined in paragraph 53 of article 4 of Law 92/2012). On the

other hand, competences gained through informal learning are those acquired in the everyday life, including at work, at home and during leisure time, regardless of the intention to learn (paragraph 54 of article 4 of Law 92/2012).

The CPIA can gather information on competences obtained in non-formal contexts by collecting certificates of participation in workshops, on-line training or volunteer activities, as well as certificates of attendance of courses provided by associations or institutions not recognised in the formal education system or based abroad. Likewise, relevant documentation of informal learning includes declarations from the employer, containing information on the position and tasks undertaken by the prospective student; job contracts; proofs of personal interests that have led to the acquisition of competences relevant for CPIA courses; personal and professional experience abroad; volunteer work or participation in associations.

Similarly to skills acquired in formal education, CPIA do not receive clear guidelines on how to recognise these documents as credits by the existing legal framework. As a result, the CPIA across Italy tend not to use this evidence to evaluate the competences acquired in non-formal or informal contexts, but prefer to adopt – in accordance with the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines – specific ad-hoc tests and written examinations to assess adult's prior learning.

Generally, these tests can take different forms. One of the most frequently adopted assessment methodology consists in standard classroom tests. These are easier to prepare and assess for teachers, although respondents to the OECD Online Survey recognise that they might be a source of stress for very-low skilled adults and students who had bad experiences with formal education systems in the past. For this reason, some CPIA introduced the use of hands-on tests, which are simulations of real-life situations where students are expected to show their competences in a particular practical context, such as the work environment, at home or in the society. While some Centres have become familiar with this type of exercises and have established their own grids to translate results into credits, others do not have the capacity or the physical space to conduct such real-life tests, even if in theory they find them more effective than classroom tests.

Insights from the field

In 2018, the Italian National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL) joined forces with the Ministry of Education and the network of regional centres for research and development (CRS&S) in order to test whether the OECD self-assessment tool "Education and Skills Online" (also called PIAAC Online) could be exploited to assess the competences of adults enrolling in CPIA courses. In particular, the initiative identified a target of approximately 300 adults applying to the second period of Level 1 courses in 14 CPIA across Italy, and tested which of the 16 final competences identified by the 2015 CPIA Ministerial Guidelines could be assessed through PIAAC Online. The results of the pilot suggest that the OECD tool allows to directly measure and evaluate 9 of the 16 competences requested to students finishing the second teaching period of Level 1 courses (for a detailed description of the project, refer to ANPAL (2020[9])).

A number of CPIA that took part in the initiative by ANPAL have also been interviewed in the scope of this report. Although not directly a focus of the discussions, some Centres spontaneously commented on their experiences with the PIAAC Online pilot, mentioning a certain scepticism about its scalability at national level to assess students' competences within the process of credit recognition. Several challenges have been pointed out. First, some teachers mentioned that the PIAAC Online tests were too difficult for their students. In some extreme cases, during the examination, teachers had to explain the meaning of certain questions or how to use the digital platform, thereby unintentionally jeopardising the effectiveness of the PIAAC tests, which are not meant to be completed with external help. Second,

whereas the pilot was possible for adults applying to the second period of Level 1 courses, some CPIA doubt that their first period or Literacy students would be able to complete the PIAAC Online test. In fact, the users of these courses are mostly foreigners with very low proficiency in digital skills and Italian language and, according to some teachers, the PIAAC Online might be too difficult for them. Finally, a few respondents were aware that access to the "Education and Skills Online" self-assessment tool is not free. While platform costs for the pilot were covered by ANPAL, some teachers wondered how CPIA could cover such costs if the tool were to be made mandatory by Ministry of Education for the assessment of students' competences in the future.

It is worth mentioning that the above drawbacks reported by CPIA during the consultations with the OECD are similar to the ones identified by ANPAL through a follow-up survey addressed to the 34 CPIA teachers who participated in the pilot. In fact, ANPAL (2020[9]) shows a substantially mixed feedback on the scalability of the PIAAC Online tool. For instance, 38% of teachers who took part to the pilot declared that, overall, the test is not user-friendly and easy to complete and 85% of them stressed that learners had difficulties in replying to the test during the pilot. The ANPAL questionnaire also indicates that more than a fourth of surveyed CPIA teachers do not find the PIAAC Online very useful to support Commissions in the process of recognition of competences.

For learners who want to enrol in Literacy and Italian language classes, there is often an entry test that, together with the interview, leads to the assessment of language proficiency. The test generally includes an oral part in which adults are asked to talk about themselves through simple questions and to describe orally some images that teachers show them (Table 4.1). This is followed by listening and comprehension exercises with an increasing level of complexity. Students are also asked to read aloud a simple text and look at a number of images and either write their name or link them to the right words. While the entry test provides a first assessment of the language proficiency of the prospective students, an additional test is needed to better evaluate the skills of those who already have a knowledge of the Italian language and would like to have some of these competences validated into credits. This test for the evaluation of competences mainly focuses on reading and writing, and requires some vocabulary and knowledge of the different components of a sentence (e.g. articles, verbs, etc.).

Table 4.1. Common types of exercises typically included in the tests for Literacy and Italian language courses

Entry test	Test for evaluation of competences
• Talk about yourself	• Read a text and answer Y/N questions related to it
• Answer simple questions	• Describe images (written)
• Describe images orally	• Comprehension
• Listening and comprehension	• Link questions with correspondent answers
• Reading	• Choose the right word to insert in a sentence
• Link words with the right images	• Put different elements in a sentence (e.g. articles, verbs, etc.)
• Write words based on images	

Source: Elaborations based on documents received through the OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

A number of CPIA highlighted that in some regions migrants who enrol in Literacy and Italian language courses have very low levels of education and are often illiterate even in their native language, thereby having a too low proficiency to access A1 courses. To respond to this increasing demand for lower level

language courses, many CPIA have opened pre-A1 level courses. According to the current legislation, these cannot officially be considered part of the regular Literacy and Italian language courses offered by the CPIA, but they need to be provided as part of attempts to broaden the educational offer (*corsi di ampliamento dell'offerta formativa*), with direct consequences on the resources received by the Ministry. Because of this, many interviewed and surveyed CPIA (especially those that have established collaboration with associations for immigrants or with the SPRAR – Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) would like to see these pre-A1 courses included in the regular CPIA offer.

For students enrolled in Level 1 courses, the CPIA prepare tests that are typically structured either by competences or by learning units (UDA). From the documents collected through the OECD Online Survey, it appears that the former approach (i.e. tests by competences) is preferred by the majority of Centres. Thanks to this review of models of examination, it was also possible to identify some common characteristics of the topics and typologies of tests adopted by various Centres for the first and second periods of Level 1 courses. Table 4.2 shows that the CPIA use both oral and written tests and support of images is frequently used. The examinations prepared under the language axis generally cover topics that are relevant for adult students, such as the challenges in the labour market and the situation of the immigrant population in Italy. For the other axes, the tests focus mainly on specific topics of the curriculum and generally take the form of a classroom test. Especially for the mathematical and scientific-technological axes, these classroom tests are extremely useful for the Commission to evaluate the competences of adults who, for example, have scientific degrees obtained abroad, but limited Italian language competences.

Table 4.2. Typical methodologies of tests for the evaluation of the competences of adults enrolled in Level 1 courses

First period		Second period	
Languages axis			
1. Interact orally in an effective and collaborative manner with an appropriate linguistic register to different communicative situations.	• Interview	1. Master the expressive and argumentative tools indispensable to manage verbal communicative interaction in various contexts.	• Written test with the following components: write words from singular to plural, choose the right verb, correct a sentence, write the opposite
2. Read, understand and interpret written texts of various types.	• Read a text • Y/N questions • Choose the right word	2. Read, understand and interpret written texts of various types.	• Read a text and answer questions
3. Produce texts of various types appropriate to different contexts.	• Write a short text following general assignments	3. Produce texts of various types in relation to different communicative purposes.	• Write a short text following assignments
4. Recognise and describe artistic and cultural heritage assets also for the purposes of protection and conservation.	• Link historical images with their description	4. Use the fundamental tools for a conscious fruition of the artistic and literary heritage.	• Write description of an historical image
5. Use information technologies to research and analyse data and information.	• Linked to the above – research can be supported by online search	5. Use the English language for the main communicative and operational purposes.	• Interview • Read a text and answer questions • Complete a text with missing words

|			
6. Understand the cultural and communicative aspects of non-verbal languages.	• Link images showing people with the right feelings	6. Produce texts of various types in English in relation to different communicative purposes.	• Interview • Link words to their translation • Complete sentences
7. Use the English language for the main communicative purposes related to aspects of their own life and environment.	• Interview • Read a text and answer questions • Complete a text with missing words		
8. Understand and use a second EU language in simple and direct exchanges of information on familiar and routine matters.	• Interview • Link words to their translation • Complete sentences		
Historic-social axis		**Historic-social-economic axis**	
9. Orient oneself in the complexity of the present using the understanding of historical, geographical and social facts of the past, also in order to meet different opinions and cultures.	• Link an historical event with the right date • Question related to time • Situate before/ after	7. Understand the change and diversity of historical times in a diachronic dimension through the comparison of epochs and in a synchronic dimension through the comparison of geographical and cultural areas.	• Comment figures related to historical events and motivate your answer • Questions on historical events
10. Analyse territorial systems near and far in space and time in order to evaluate the effects of human action.	• Questions about region/ province/ capital • Link images about geography with right text • Knowledge of cardinal points	8. Place personal experience in a system of rules based on the mutual recognition of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, to protect the person, the community and the environment.	• Y/N questions
11. Read and interpret the changes in the world of work.	• Link images about jobs with the right description	9. Recognise the essential characteristics of the socio-economic system in order to orientate oneself in the productive fabric of one's own territory.	• Interpret a chart • Read a text and answer questions
12. Exercise active citizenship as an expression of the principles of legality, solidarity and democratic participation.	• Questions about Italy (short answer or Y/N)		
Mathematical axis			
13. Operate with integers and rational numbers mastering their writing and formal properties.	• Operations in line and column • Geometry • Fractions • Multiplication tables	10. Use the techniques and procedures of arithmetic and algebraic calculation, also representing them in graphic form.	• Expressions • Exponentials
14. Recognise and compare geometric figures in the plane	• Units of measurement	11. Compare and analyse geometric figures,	• Surface

and in space identifying invariants and relationships.	• Link form with its definition	identifying invariants and relationships.	• Units of measurement • Short problems
15. Record, order, correlate data and represent them also evaluating the probability of an event.	• Percentages • Averages	12. Identify appropriate strategies for solving problems.	• Fractions • Represent coordinates x/y on a table
16. Tackle problematic situations by translating them into mathematical terms, correctly developing the solution procedure and verifying the reliability of the results.	• Represent coordinates x/y on a table • Simple probabilities	13. Analyse and interpret data, developing deductions and reasoning, also with the aid of graphic representations, consciously using calculation tools and the potential offered by specific computer applications.	• Averages • Probabilities
Scientific-technological axis			
17. Observe, analyse and describe phenomena belonging to natural and artificial reality.	• Link terms to their definition • Link measure and unit of measurement • Complete a technical sentence	14. Observe, describe and analyse phenomena belonging to natural and artificial reality and to recognise the concepts of system and complexity in their various forms.	• Link terms to their definition • Link measure and unit of measurement • Complete a technical sentence
18. Analyse the network of relationships between living beings and between living beings and the environment, also identifying interactions at the various levels and in the specific environmental contexts of biological organisation.	• Tick a box question	15. Analyse qualitatively and quantitatively phenomena related to energy transformations starting from experience.	• Open questions
19. Consider how different ecosystems can be modified by natural processes and human action and to adopt ecologically responsible ways of life.	• Tick a box question	16. Be aware of the potential and limits of technologies in the cultural and social context in which they are applied.	• IT questions (no practical exercises)
20. Design and realise simple products also of a digital nature, using material, information and organisational resources and commonly used objects, tools and machines.	• Tick a box question • Question with short explanation		
21. Orientate oneself on the economic and ecological benefits and problems linked to the various methods of energy production and to technological choices.	• Tick a box question • Question with short explanation		
22. Recognise the properties and characteristics of the different media for their effective and responsible use in relation to one's needs for study, socialisation and work.	• IT questions (no practical exercises)		

Source: Elaborations based on documents received through the OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

The experience of the CPIA with such tests for the assessment of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is overwhelmingly positive. As shown in Figure 4.2, these are considered effective by seven out of ten Centres. The interviews suggest that this is due to the fact that the Ministerial Guidelines remain relatively vague on the format and content of the tests, so teachers prepare their own personal examinations. While this allows flexibility, which is considered extremely important by all respondents of the OECD Online Survey, it also leads to a great heterogeneity in the existing assessment methodologies applied across the country. As a result, the same competences can be evaluated and recognised differently from one CPIA to another.

Figure 4.2. Seven in ten CPIA consider the existing tests for the assessment of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning effective

Distribution of CPIA by their appreciation of the existing methodologies for the assessment of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning
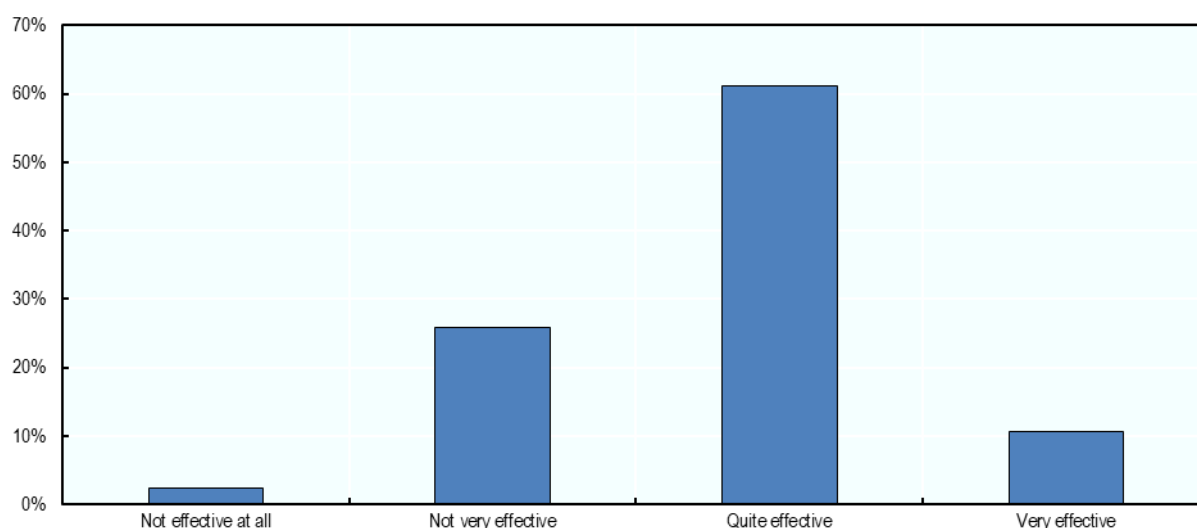
Note: The original question is: "In una scala da 1 a 4, come considera le metodologie valutative e le prove messe in atto dalla Commissione al fine di accertare correttamente il possesso delle competenze acquisite nell'apprendimento non formale e informale?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

Insights from the field

Many CPIA would welcome additional guidelines to advise teachers in the development of the tests and would like to be directly involved in their elaboration. In particular, the CPIA would like to have some parameters and criteria that could guide the choice of the tests for each axis, while also leaving the autonomy of the teachers in adapting their content to the students' characteristics. Moreover, Universities and the regional centres for research and development (CRS&S) could play an important role in supporting this process.

Yet, during the interviews, some CPIA raised a number of issues regarding the complete standardisation of the tests across the country. First, tests need to be reviewed and updated every year to correct

possible difficulties encountered by the students, to adapt the contents and to avoid that new students get access the test from previous years. Secondly, in many CPIA tests are based on the UDA and not necessarily on the competences. Therefore, if tests were uniform throughout the country, for some CPIA it would be very challenging and time consuming to review the organisation of the curricula in order to find the exact correspondence between tests, competences and UDA. Finally, the students of the CPIA are a very heterogeneous group even within the same region, and schools (*sedi associate*) that are part of the same CPIA already face challenges in using the same tests with different groups of students. Standardised tests might not be suitable for all profiles of CPIA students and for all courses.
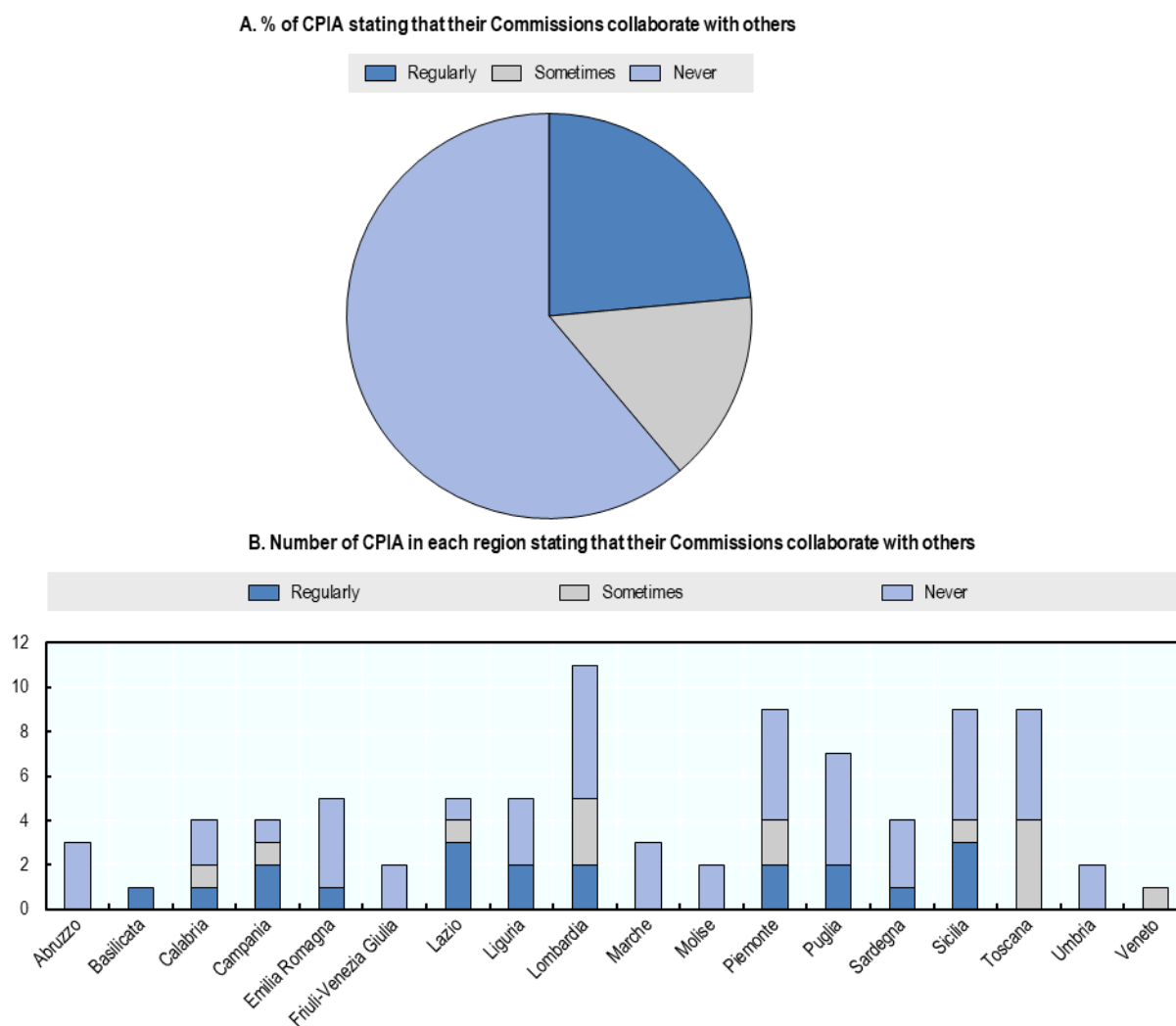
Although tests and assessment methodologies are typically specific to each teacher, more and more CPIA are trying to coordinate the use of the same tests for all teachers of the same axis, even if they belong to different branches (*sedi associate)* of the same CPIA. Several efforts have been made throughout the country to strengthen collaboration among CPIA in the same region.. For example, the CPIA networks in Puglia and Sicilia, as well as the *Tavolo Eda* in Tuscany play a key role in promoting knowledge exchanges across Centres on a number of different topics, including on the process for the recognition of competences and the personalisation of learning pathways, the training needs of CPIA teachers and the integration of the CPIA in the regional education and labour market landscapes.

Yet, collaboration in the selection of the methodologies for the assessment of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is still limited, with around four in ten Commissions working regularly or occasionally with other Commissions on this topic (Figure 4.3). For example, CPIA in Abruzzo, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Marche, Molise and Umbria stated that their Commissions have never collaborated with others. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the only CPIA of Basilicata that participated in the OECD Online Survey reports having regular collaborations. Similarly, three of the five CPIA in Lazio have regular collaboration.

Insights from the field

The *AlfaZeta* project, promoted by the Marche regional centre for research and development (CRS&S), focused on the elaboration of guidelines for the preparation and evaluation of entry tests, as well as on the identification of common criteria for final tests to assess Italian language proficiency. One of the main outcomes of the project is a template of the entry test for Literacy and Italian language course, which was piloted in 2017 in a wide range of institutions including the CPIA, the SPRAR (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and the CARA (Reception Centres for Asylum seekers). The University for Foreigners of Perugia has supervised the work, collected the input and finalised the template in 2019. The project highlighted that, while the entry tests could be standardised across CPIA to ensure that students' language proficiency is assessed everywhere in the same way, the final exams need to be adapted to the type of the exercises conducted during the course as well as the profile of the students enrolled.

Figure 4.3. Four in ten Commissions collaborate in the selection of the methodologies for the assessment of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning

A. % of CPIA stating that their Commissions collaborate with others

Regularly Sometimes Never

B. Number of CPIA in each region stating that their Commissions collaborate with others

Regularly Sometimes Never

Note: The original question is: "Nella scelta delle metodologie e prove per la valutazione delle competenze non formali e informali la Commissione ha collaborato / collabora con altre Commissioni?". The total number of respondents is 85.
Source: OECD Online Survey to the CPIA.

5 Conclusions and implications

A strong need for greater support to CPIA Commissions

Throughout both the online survey and virtual fact-finding visits, it appeared clear that the CPIA need greater support in order to embark successfully in the process of recognition of competences. Many members of the Commissions are not properly trained to undertake this important and specific task, with consequent difficulties that hinder both learners – who might receive less than optimal recognitions – and teachers – who end up committing too much of their time to the process. As shown by the report, some local initiatives to train CPIA staff have been occasionally organised, but there is a need for a more systematic and nation-wide support.

Training staff in the process of the recognition of competences is particularly challenging also because the CPIA currently face high turnovers of teachers. Newly appointed staff are often hired on a temporary basis from the "day school" ("*scuola del mattino*"). Consequently, their knowledge of adult education and the recognition of competences is generally poor. In addition, CPIA directors see little value added in training them to this task, since their contracts typically end after one year. To overcome this issue, a plausible solution could be to appoint few permanent teachers who specialise in the recognition of competences and act as tutors to welcome and provide guidance to learners. However, numerous Centres report that this option is difficult to implement in practice, since the process of recognition of competences is extremely time-consuming. Lastly, considering the high number of new students enrolling every year, it would be impossible for a few teachers to welcome and devote enough time and guidance to each of them.

Many surveyed CPIA argue that detailed ministerial guidelines on each phase of the process of recognition of competences – and in particular on the format and content of the instruments for the identification of adults' competences and their evaluation – would greatly support their work. Such guidelines, which should remain non-prescriptive, would also be a useful tool to inform and train newly hired staff. Most importantly, ministerial guidelines would provide a common framework for all CPIA across Italy, contributing to the harmonisation of local practices, while leaving some room for flexibility and autonomy of teachers, allowing the development of truly personalised individual learning pathways. Clearly, these new guidelines should not replace training courses offered to CPIA staff, which would still be extremely useful to keep staff up-to-date with a rapidly evolving system and to expose them to the latest research on the topic and other similar European experiences and practices.

How to improve the identification phase?

Surveyed and interviewed CPIA have been particularly critical of the personal booklet instrument for the identification of adults' competences. First and foremost, a large majority of respondents highlighted a lack of detailed instructions in the 2015 Ministerial Guidelines about the structure and format of this tool. According to some CPIA, the information contained in this booklet are very similar to those already included in the digital register (*registro elettronico*). Other CPIA point out the constraints posed by the compilation of a dossier for each student, which would require too long time for the Commissions. Finally, some CPIA mentioned that, when the Commissions compile a booklet for each learner, it remains difficult to make use of it and to translate its content in actual credits for the recognition of competences.

While some common templates of personal booklet already exist in Italy (such as the one prepared by the CPIA of Bologna and discussed earlier in the report), the analysis of this report suggests that many CPIA might not be aware of them or consider them applicable in their own Centres. It therefore appears of paramount importance to initiate a debate with the CPIA sector to better understand if and how existing templates of personal booklet should be modified in order to be adopted by the whole system.

Indeed, many respondents to the OECD Online Survey and consultations considered important to have a common, nation-wide template for the booklet. This would indeed help the Centres, as they could avoid putting time and efforts in developing their own booklets, and it could also be a first step towards the scalability of this document at national level. In fact, some CPIA argue that, considering the wealth of information compiled in the booklets, they should be transferable to other institutions or other CPIA when the adults continue their learning pathways, thereby becoming a sort of personal portfolio of the student. In fact, as of now, when a student transfers from one CPIA to another (because, for example, the adult moves to another region), the personal booklet does not follow the person, and hence the new Centre must start again the lengthy process of compiling the dossier. Similarly, when a student ends a CPIA course and visits the public employment service to find a job, the employment agency needs to collect again the same documents that have already been gathered by the CPIA. This is a problem especially for migrants, since they often have troubles in putting the necessary pieces of evidence together. For this reason, several CPIA mentioned that a common, nation-wide template of the personal dossier in digital form would be an important step to encourage the wider use of the booklet and improve the competences recognition process.

How to improve the evaluation phase?

Surveyed CPIA propose a number of options for the Italian authorities to support Commissions in the assessment of the competences, in particular with regard to those acquired in formal learning. Firstly, a large share of respondents stress the need for correspondence grids through Ministerial Guidelines that assign for some of the most frequent "useful evidence" (as defined by paragraph 52 of article 4 of Law 92/2012) a precise amount or a range of credits to be recognised. These grids would have two key objectives: on the one hand, they would harmonise the existing practices at national level, thereby ensuring that the same diploma leads to similar amounts of credits regardless of the CPIA that performs the recognition of credits; on the other hand, clear correspondence grids would also help Commissions save precious time and reduce the length of the process of credit recognition, which is often considered to be too lengthy. The use of these correspondence tables by the CPIA should remain discretionary, since they have to supplement (and not replace) the granular work done by Commissions with the adult learner that seeks credit recognition.

According to many CPIA, such correspondence grids are especially important in the context of foreign titles and qualifications. At the moment, it is extremely difficult for the members of Commissions to know whether foreign (especially non-EU) qualifications are equivalent to Italian ones, with the consequence that migrant adults are often asked to prove their competences directly through tests, regardless of whether they hold or not a formal diploma. Although aware that it would require an encyclopaedic work, many respondents to the OECD Online Survey argue that – without such correspondence grids – the assessment of foreigners' competence acquired in formal learning has to be undertaken through tests and not through "useful evidence".

Similar suggestions have been made by many CPIA in relation to the assessment of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. In fact, these competences can equally be proved by students through self-declarations, certificates of trainings, courses attendance, letters from employers, etc. However, several respondents to the OECD Online Survey would like to have access to reference correspondence tables, also considering that few CPIA have already built their own grids to link some of

these pieces of evidence of non-formal and informal learning to specific shares of credits. This would make the process more transparent and ensure that all Commissions across Italy assign a similar amount of credits to comparable experiences.

In alternative to the creation of national correspondence grids for titles and various proofs of evidence, some CPIA mentioned another tool that would significantly improve their experience with the assessment of adult learning: namely, the creation of a dedicated online platform. This platform would foster the exchange of information between institutions belonging to the Italian education system, thereby helping Commissions seek relevant information when in doubt regarding how to evaluate a certain "useful evidence". In addition, the platform could allow the CPIA to share their tests used for the recognition of competences obtained in non-formal and informal contexts and their correspondence grids.

By contrast, surveyed CPIA are relatively satisfied with their own tests for the evaluation of adults' competences. These are typically considered well adapted to the local CPIA users and are the result of many years of work, often involving several teachers across different schools. Yet, being aware of the large heterogeneity of these methodologies of assessment across Italy, some CPIA would find useful if the Ministry of Education were to share more precise instructions on the modalities and criteria of the tests to be used in the evaluation phase. These additional guidelines should not be prescriptive, but they would support Commissions in identifying the correct typologies and parameters of methodologies for the assessment of each of the competences of the CPIA courses. The Commissions would retain autonomy in customising the tests to different type of students and in updating them over time in accordance with the local needs.

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