



EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Country Report on Adult Education in PORTUGAL

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Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Portugal. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Portugal as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info@eaea.org).



Overview

The underlying policy for adult education in Portugal can be summed up by Article 73 of the 1976 Portuguese Constitution, which establishes that everyone should have **free access** to education. This law encouraged the establishment of various forms of education (including **formal and non-formal**) and aimed to contribute in overcoming economic, social and cultural inequalities, including the personal and social development of citizens. It also aimed to promote a spirit of tolerance, mutual understanding, solidarity and responsibility [1]. Over the last decades, Portugal has made a significant effort to **increase the qualification level** of the general adult population. However, the current reality is still far from the situation of many European Union and OECD countries as Portugal continues to have low qualification levels, particularly in the older generations and young people [2].

Politics and Law

In 2002, a structural governmental reform replaced the National Agency for Adult Education and Training with the **Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional** (Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training) as a central department of the **Ministry of Education** to carry out integrated policies and systems addressed to both adults and young people. Between 2002 and 2006, the Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training, a central department of the Ministry of Education, was responsible for managing and co-ordinating non higher adult learning and education (ALE) at a national level, which was shared with the **Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional** (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training), a public institute of the **Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity**.

In 2005 the government began the **New Opportunities Initiative** as a national strategy within the scope of the National Employment Plan to co-ordinate the accomplishment of the education and vocational training policies addressed to Portuguese young people and adults, as well as to ensure the development and management of the System for recognising, validating and certifying competences.

The Agencia Nacional para a Qualificacao (National Qualifications Agency) was created in 2006 as a public institute under the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. This was a result of restructuring the Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training and the end of the Instituto para a Qualidade na Formacao (Institute for Quality in Training). [3]



Investing in the qualification of the Portuguese population has been a common aim for various public policies, this is namely since Portugal began to benefit from structural funds aimed at supporting the adjustment path to the development of average standards in the **European Union**. [4] The creation of a system to improve the qualification levels of the adult population required the mobilisation, adaptation and reinforcement of the various opportunities available. Particular importance was given to the recognition, validation and certification of lifelong and life-wide competences, which are seen as the starting point for adult training, and occupational training for adults with low schooling levels.

Since 2000, Portugal has developed the **National System for Recognising, Validating and Certifying Competences (RVCC)**, carried out in the National Network of Centres for Recognising, Validating and Certifying Competences (now replaced by **New Opportunities Centres**) hosted in public or private local bodies which are strongly established in their own communities. With regard to the vocational education and training, usually aimed towards adults with low qualification levels, the emphasis is placed not only on rapid expansion and dissemination but also on the creation of conditions to enable working adults to attend [5].

Future trends/key concerns/directions

The directions that ALE is progressing towards in Portugal at the moment are primarily focussed on **strengthening the skills base** in the population. There is a particular emphasis on **secondary level schooling for adults**, which is now seen as the minimum level of certification. There is also a drive towards the dual certification of **EFA (Education and Training for Adults)** courses, and modular training courses [6]. The course the country will take in the coming years, however, clearly depends on the current economic situation faced by many countries within Europe, and therefore is very difficult to predict.

Structure overview

Extending education and training to the adult population is, in Portugal, seen as an issue of the utmost importance. The aims are either the acquisition of qualifications, or the creation of conditions for social recognition, validation, certification, acquisition or **development of competencies** (both academic and professional) for a significant part of the population who didn't have the opportunity to have a longer education. Besides the specific effects of lifelong learning in relation to the participation of citizens in all aspects of life, the adaptability of the **national production system** to the demands for **economic competitiveness** - namely upgrading production levels - relies on active adult education and training. This is sustained through a dialogue with the civil society and economic initiatives, in a framework where a core role is played by the



companies' policy on human resources, namely in continuing training. The non-recognition and certification of many competencies acquired in **informal and non-formal** contexts by most of the Portuguese, namely in a labour context, reinforces the **need for a national effort towards recognition**, validation and certification of those competencies in the framework of lifelong learning, with a view to defining individualised education and training pathways in accordance with each particular situation.

Although traditionally in Portugal, the situation concerning the classification of qualifications did not fully recognise both informal and formal learning, steps have already been made to change this situation. This is firstly clear in the existence of a system within the **RVCC (Validation and Certification of Competencies) National Qualifications System** which states that these (non-formal) qualifications are seen as equally worthy as those obtained through the formal education system.

The governmental strategy to improve ALE is based on two pillars: raising the **academic training** of the workforce, and making **vocational education** a real option for people. Education and training of adults is developed in specific ways including:

- A Lifelong Recognition System,
- Validation and Certification of Competencies (RVCC), through formal, informal and non-formal learning, allowing students to obtain dual academic and professional certifications;
- Education and Training (EFC) for students from 15 years;
- Courses of Education and Training for Adults (EFA), and
- Modular Training for students over 18 years. [7]

As a public institute under the responsibility of both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the **Agência Nacional para a Qualificação (National Qualifications Agency)** has been responsible for managing and co-ordinating non higher ALE at national level since 2006.

The National Qualifications Agency is assigned to co-ordinate, promote and manage the provision of the dual certification vocational education and training, as well as to:

- define the guidelines for **funding models** and for allocating resources required to provide qualifications;
- develop and manage the system for recognising, validating and **certifying competences**, both academic and professional;
- regulate and co-ordinate the **New Opportunities Centres** network;



- design and bring up to date the **National Qualifications Catalogue**, with the support of the Sector Councils for Qualification, ensuring flexible and modular education and training approaches;
- and to define mechanisms for integrated assessment and **quality assurance** of the **vocational** education and training provision. [8]

Access to lifelong learning in Portugal for adults already in work is made feasible through the participation of stakeholders and **social partners** to develop organisation and cost sharing of training. This is based on them taking into account the role lifelong learning has in the development of employment rates and competitiveness of the Portuguese **labour market**. Within the **Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity**, the **Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional** [9] (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training) is a major public vocational training promoter and the **Direcção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho** (Directorate General for Employment and Industrial Relations) is responsible for the accreditation and audit of the private vocational education and training providers [10].

Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- ANOP

An important role concerning the development of adult education is also played by associations and non-governmental organisations. In particular **ANOP, the Associação Nacional de Oficinas de Projectos - Desenvolvimento e Educação**, which is a private non-profit association that was created in 1999 by a group of organisations concerned with local development, **vocational training** and job creation. It is made up of professionals with experience mainly in the areas of adult education and training. Its headquarters are in Santa Maria da Feira, in the Northern region of Portugal.

ANOP aims to promote local initiatives, while providing opportunities for lifelong learning, qualification and training activities and encouraging innovation in the fields of inter-institutional partnerships. It works to promote social cohesion, active citizenship and solidarity, and devise new ways to fight poverty. [11]

- ENTRE-SERRAS

Another example of Portuguese Associations involved in the promotion of adult learning is **ENTRE-SERRAS (Associação de Desenvolvimento do Concelho de Pampilhosa da Serra)**. As a non-profit association it seeks to promote the



development of the Pampilhosa da Serra's region. This target is pursued through a holistic approach which involves work in various fields. The efforts to foster a culture of partnership in Education lead to a close co-operation between **ENTRE-SERRAS** and the local public authority for **Basic Adult Education - Extensão Educativa de Pampilhosa da Serra**. Since its inception, ENTRE-SERRAS launched a series of initiatives that aims to promote the development of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning; special attention is given to **non-formal and informal education**. [12]

Vocational Institutions and career-related training

The recognising and validating of knowledge, skills and competences, non-formal and informally acquired, carried out on the basis of a **National Key-Competences Framework for Adult Education and Training Key-Skills Referential** points to the certification of **basic and secondary education** levels. This process is developed through the National Network of New Opportunities Centres.

The Recognising, Validating and Certifying Competences (RVCC) process and the AET courses are based upon the **Key Competences Frame of Reference** for AET to obtain a formal certificate of 4, 6 and 9 years of schooling and on the specific Occupational Standards to get a level I and II of **professional qualification**. In 2006, a new Key Competences Frame of Reference for AET extended the possibility of formal certification through the RVCC process and the AET courses to 12 years of schooling, as well as a level III professional qualification according to specific Occupational Standards. In 2007, **disabled people** gained access to all adult education and training based on both Key Competences Frames of Reference for AET in order to obtain an academic certification. Lately, to improve accessibility and appeal for learners, paths to learning were made **more flexible** and 'tailor-made', and to meet the qualification needs of adult learners (particularly those in employment) the AET courses were adjusted, with short term modular training now within the National Qualifications Catalogue.

This service is provided within the **National Network of New Opportunity Centres (NO Centres)** through public and private entities duly accredited by the Directorate General for Vocational Training. They are, among others, enterprise associations; associations for local /regional development; associations of municipalities; Institutional social partners and public institutions. Although the New Opportunities Centres' mission is the school certification of adults who have not accomplished the standard nine years of basic schooling, it is expected that this service will also aim to respond adequately to the real expectations and needs of the population. Beyond these activities the Centres have other functions, such as information, counselling, training, and developing professional RVCC processes [13]



The NO Centres are organised on the basis of **three steps of intervention**, firstly **hosting** the individual, then **diagnosis** and lastly **referral** to the appropriate pathway. There is an initial emphasis on the recognition of existing competences. As a result, the adult will construct their **personal portfolio** containing the documentary proof of the competences held, with the support of an advisor. If this documentary evidence is lacking then the individual is encouraged to undertake short training courses which will demonstrate the skills in a **validated** way. **Counselling and guidance** are regarded as a core component of this phase of the process, in so far as they are designed to inform the student of the locally existing education and vocational training opportunities. They can also assist with preparing and submitting applications for validation, refer adults to short term training most suited to their individual needs, and assist adults in defining and implementing their subsequent career and personal projects. [14]

- **The SIGO - Sistema de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Formativa de dupla certificação** (Integrated System for Management of the double certification training supplies) aims to accomplish diverse objectives, including to:

- support the decision making within the training supply structure in order to prevent difficulties at national territory and target public level, and to optimise financial resources
- supply legibility providing an informative, integrated and exhaustive tool for all stakeholders, and
- be a monitoring device of the NO Centres' activities.

- **Second Chance learning** is also defined as an aspect of adults' education. It aims to provide schooling to individuals who are no longer at the age to attend basic education (up to 15 years of age) and secondary education (up to 18 years of age). There is a second chance learning opportunity for every non-higher schooling level. The second chance learning is organised in accordance with a **studies plan**, which is adjusted to the targeted age group level it is aimed at and it awards certificates and diplomas equivalent to those that are granted by regular basic and secondary education: **certificate of vocational initiation**, (level I) and certificates of vocational qualification (level II and III).

- **Adult Education and Training Courses (EFA)** are aimed at adults (over 18 years of age) without basic education and vocational qualification. Preceded by a process of recognition and **validation of competences both non-formally and informally acquired**, the Adult Education and Training Courses are flexible, modular and tailor-made pathways to obtain either dual certification (academic and professional) or only an academic one. They are based on the **Key Competences Frame of Reference for Adult Education and Training** for basic education in order to obtain a school certification (4, 6 or 9 years of



schooling) and, since the beginning of 2007, on the Key Competences Frame of Reference for Adult Education and Training for upper secondary education to obtain a 12 years of schooling certificate. They are also based on Vocational Training Frameworks in order to obtain a professional certification (level I, II or III professional qualification). [15]

Universities

Portuguese universities are **gradually increasing** their role in adult education. They provide different typologies of courses for adults and every institution is free to provide courses specifically designed for adults or continue to focus its attention on young people.

e-learning

In 1988 the **Universidade Aberta** was created with the purpose to promote e-learning for adults, where there is also the possibility to attend both traditional and distance courses. Since its foundation the Universidade Aberta - the aim of which is to train large and geographically disperse audiences - has given new opportunities for higher education training in around 24 countries. Universidade Aberta has been promoting actions related to higher and continuous training. It has also contributed to the active **dissemination of the Portuguese language and culture**, especially in Portuguese speaking countries and communities. As far as research is concerned, Universidade Aberta awards PhD degrees in different subject fields however paying special attention to research in distance education. The university teaching model rests on e-learning and on the intensive use of different online communication tools. Because online learning requires specific skills on the part of the student, all degree programmes include a **preparation program**. The assessment of knowledge and skills, focused on a system of year-long assessment, will assume different forms depending on the teaching model. [16]



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