LITERACY IN PORTUGAL
COUNTRY REPORT
SHORT VERSION

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Portugal is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European countries. ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its member countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills. One major tool to achieve this aim is to produce a set of reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive reports on the state of literacy in each country where ELINET has one or more partners, and to provide guidance towards improving literacy policies in those countries. The reports are based (wherever possible) on available, internationally comparable performance data, as well as reliable national data provided (and translated) by our partners.

ELINET continues the work of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLG) which was established by the European Commission in January 2011 and reported in September 2012. All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: “ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference”.

The Country Reports are organised around the three recommendations of the HLG’s literacy report:

- Creating a literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation, inclusion (and equity).

Within its two-year funding period ELINET has completed Literacy Country Reports for all 30 ELINET member countries. In most cases we published separate Long Reports for specific age groups (Children / Adolescents and Adults), in some cases comprehensive reports covering all age groups. Additionally, for all 30 countries, we published Short Reports covering all age groups, containing the summary of performance data and policy messages of the Long Reports. These reports are accompanied by a collection of good practice examples which cover all age groups and policy areas as well. These examples refer to the European Framework of Good Practice in Raising Literacy Levels; both are to be found in the section “Good Practice”.

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1 For more information about the network and its activities see: www.eli-net.eu.
2 In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as “HLG report”. This report can be downloaded under the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf.
3 See: http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/.
4 “Equity” was added by ELINET.
2 General Information on the Education System in Portugal

In Portugal, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for defining, coordinating, implementing and evaluating national policies for education, science and information society, articulating them with the policies of qualification and training. The Ministry performs these responsibilities via direct administration services of the State, indirect administration, advisory bodies and other entities. In the Autonomous Regions of the Azores and Madeira, the Regional Governments, via the respective Regional Secretariats for Education, are responsible for defining the national education policy to a regional plan and manage human, material and financial resources. The Public schools are free of charge, while private schools may charge fees that in many instances are at least partially supported by the State.

The educational system is organised in four stages (Decree-law nr. 139/2012, 5th June):

1) Early education (0-6 years): ante-preschool (0-3 years); preschool education (3–6 years);

2) Basic Education – 9 years, in three consecutive cycles:
   1st Cycle (Primary Education) - 1st to 4th grades;
   2nd Cycle - 5th and 6th grades;
   3rd Cycle (Lower Secondary Education) - 7th to 9th grades.

3) Secondary Education (named Upper Secondary Education) – 3 years (10th to 12th grades), with four types of courses:
   - Scientific-humanistic courses;
   - professional courses and vocational courses;
   - specialised artistic courses;
   - Technological;
   - recurrent education.

4) Higher Education (university and polytechnic).

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6 The scientific-humanistic courses are focused on access to higher education.
7 Professional and vocational courses are oriented to students’ professional qualification towards active life, also allowing access to further studies.
8 Courses with specific study plans offered by some private schools submitted to approval of the Ministry of Education and Science.
9 Recurrent education – addressed to adults who have not completed this level of education at the regular age.
The Portuguese school system offers opportunities for non-traditional students through a range of alternative options, which provide a second opportunity to those individuals who left school early, who are at risk of doing it or who want to acquire further qualifications at the school level, especially those in the labour force. Several training alternatives are available:

- Education and Training Courses (CEF courses) which are targeted at young people (15 years old or above), at risk of leaving school or who have already left the education system before concluding the 9th Grade, and which lead to a vocational qualification (at levels 1, 2 or 3);
- System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) that is intended to formally validate learning gained in different contexts by adults who intend to obtain an academic or vocational certification;
- Learning Courses that are professional courses targeted at young people aged below 25, who have completed basic education but not secondary education.

A “major handicap for Portugal has been the very low starting point in terms of educational attainment and literacy of its population” (Santiago et al. 2012, p. 17), in the last decades, numerous programmatic policies were introduced in order to:

1) reinforce the student’s basic knowledge through compulsory education, now extended to the 12th grade or 18 years of age;
2) emphasise the foundational knowledge and skills, namely literacy, numeracy, history, geography, and other basic subjects;
3) invest in student’s English language proficiency;
4) promote more equitable system which enables the generalisation of the academic success and the attempting of student’s difficulties;
5) improve the Vocational Education and Training system and reinforcing its dual character and flexibility;
6) increase the teachers’ quality and the general teaching quality;
7) develop the autonomy of the schools.11

Those policies had positive effects on student learning outcomes as well as on the results of the international surveys, in which Portuguese students are around or slightly below the OECD average, especially regarding reading literacy in PISA and PIRLS tests.

3 Literacy Performance Data

Portugal participated in IEA’s PIRLS (4th graders reading comprehension) in 2011, and in the OECD’s PISA studies (15 year-olds’ reading literacy) since 2000. This means it is possible to describe the change over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers, only for the 15 years-old students. Portugal was involved only in the third cycle of the PIRLS Study; so trends cannot be examined among 4th graders, and the comparison between relative reading levels of proficiencies for different age groups will be limited.

Portugal performed above the EU average in PIRLS 2011 (541 vs 535 EU-average). Its performance in PISA 2012 was very close to the EU average (488 vs 489). A substantial increase was observed between PISA 2000 and 2012 (+18 score points), namely almost a half-year of schooling.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers was somewhat lower than on EU average in PIRLS (16% vs 20%) and very close to it in PISA (18.8% vs 19.7%). These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of low-performing readers has decreased since PISA 2000 (by about 8%). Among girls, a decrease of 8.7% was observed while among boys, it is -6.3%. The proportion of top-performing readers was exactly the same as on EU average in PIRLS (9%) and slightly lower in PISA (5.8 vs 7% in EU).

The gap according to the pupils’ socioeconomic background was somewhat lower than the EU average in PIRLS (50 vs 76 on average), indicating a relatively weaker relationship between parents’ educational level and performance. In PISA, this gap was just below the EU average (86 vs 89 on average). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was lower than in EU countries on average (26 vs 38 EU-average). Similarly, in PIRLS, the mean score difference between those who always spoke the language of the test at home, and those who sometimes or never did so was below the EU countries (12 vs 26). In PISA, the gap according to language spoken at home was 31 (vs 54 in EU).

In Portugal, the gender gap (in favour of girls) is slightly higher in PIRLS (14 vs 12 on average) than the corresponding EU average differences, while it was lower in PISA (38 vs 44 on average).

In conclusion, Portugal has increased its overall reading score overtime among 15 year-olds, rising to the same level of performance as EU countries on average. Portugal has a proportion of low-performing readers very close to EU average; it has decreased since 2000. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is smaller in Portugal than in the EU on average at both levels. The gap according to socioeconomic status, migration or language spoken at home tends to be somewhat lower in Portugal, which is then a little more equitable than EU countries on average.

There are no PIAAC data for Portugal because, due to a change in the Government, Portuguese participation in the assessment was interrupted after the collection of pre-test results.
4 Key Literacy Policy Areas for Development (age-specific and across age-groups)

4.1 Creating a Literate Environment

4.1.1 Pre-Primary Years

Providing a supportive home environment: In Portugal, as PIRLS data show, a vast majority of pupils have parents with some positive attitudes towards reading (19% like and 70.3% somewhat like reading); however, 10.7% of parents do not like reading. There are great differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement: 563) and those who do not (average achievement 524).

The availability of children’s books at home in Portugal (12%) is close to the European average (11%); nevertheless, fewer pupils in Portugal, only 8%, reported having over 200 books compared to the European average (12%). The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with more than 200 books is 62 points, which is the equivalent to one year and a half of schooling.

Since reading to the child is a predictor of future literacy achievement, the percentage of pupils whose parents engaged in literacy-relevant activities often or at least sometimes with them before the beginning of primary school is a matter of concern in Portugal. According to PIRLS data, although the percentage of parents who never or almost never engaged their children in literacy activities is very close to the EU average (2%), only 34.9% of pupils were often engaged in those activities (the European average is 40.7%).

Creating family literacy programmes: There is a need for programmes to raise awareness of all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

4.1.2 Children and Adolescents

Providing a literate environment in school: Based on data provided by teachers, PIRLS shows that 67.4% of students in Portugal are in classrooms which have class libraries; yet, only 14% of Portuguese students were in classrooms with more than 50 books, which is less than half of the EU-24 average of 32%, and 24% of students are in schools which do not have library at all (the international average is 14%).

This means that, in Portugal, the number of primary schools without library or with scarce resources for reading promotion is somewhat high compared to the EU average. As mentioned in PIRLS, libraries provide a range of reading materials and other resources from which teachers can draw to expand their instructional approaches and from which pupils can choose books for their own learning and enjoyment. Consequently, library users tend to be much more likely to read above their expected level, to enjoy reading and to have positive attitudes toward reading.

Supporting reading motivation especially among adolescents: In Portugal, there is a remarkable decrease in reading motivation from 4th grade (cf. PIRLS, 2011) to age 15 (cf. PISA, 2009). In PIRLS 2011, about 97 percent of Portuguese pupils reported that they like reading. According to PISA 2009, however, nearly 20 percent of 15-year-olds report being highly engaged in reading.
In PISA 2009, Portugal has a difference of 90 score points between students reporting being highly engaged in reading and those reporting being poorly engaged in that activity (OECD, 2010b).

Although schools and libraries already do a lot of work to overcome this problem, much more has to be done. Families and communities should do more in order to support reading motivation, reading habits and a stable self-concept as a reader among adolescents, especially boys and students from disadvantaged families (low SES).

**Offering digital literacy learning opportunities at school:** A literate environment can also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment.

Although, in Portugal, the curriculum recommendations stress that technology should assist reading instruction providing support for reading, writing and correction of students’ work, the *Survey of Schools. ICT in Education: Benchmarking Access, Use and Attitudes to Technology in Europe’s Schools* (European Commission, 2013b) highlights that ICT–based activities are not very common in Portugal and information technology only appears as a supplemental tool in the process of reading instruction.

The OECD study “Students on Line” (OECD, 2011, p. 321) shows that Portuguese students aged 15-16 have to rely more on private resources than school support to acquire digital literacy: 54% of students do not use the computer at school and more than 75% of pupils do not spend time at all on computers during the lessons of the different subjects. Also, according to teachers of students, in PIRLS 2011, only 47% of students are in classes where at least one computer is available for student use during reading lessons, which is well below compared with Nordic countries (e.g. 79% in Norway) Portugal is well below.

The discrepancy between steering documents and classroom practices is a problem to overcome.

**Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples**

**Family Literacy Programmes:** The project “Da promoção da Literacia Familiar ao Sucesso Escolar das Crianças” (“From the family literacy promotion to educational success of children”), carried out by the Higher Education School of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra, was developed between 2009 and 2011. This project intended to understand how the attendance of training in New Opportunities Centres promotes the development of family literacy and the acquisition of literacy skills (Salgado et al. 2011).

The programme Plano Nacional de Leitura (National Reading Plan) has been launching several initiatives which aim at promoting the development of skills in reading of families, from the parents to children. Among them are “Ler + em família” (“Reading + in families”) and “Ler+ em casa” (“Reading + at home”).

**Programmes for introducing parents and children to libraries and bookshops:** Almost all public libraries, integrated into *Rede Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas* (“National Network of Public Libraries”), have been developing initiatives, aiming at raising awareness of the families for the importance of reading as a means for promoting book reading, which is crucial to acquire skills that will help in the learning of reading and writing. “Mimos e Livros à mão de semear – Promoting Emergent Literacy”; “Bibliófilo vai à escola” (“Bibliophile goes to school”); “Leituras em família” (“Reading in the family”);

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“OportunAidade - aprendizagem não formal ao longo da vida” (“OportunAidade” – non-formal lifelong learning); “Biblioteca para Avós” (“Library for Grandparents”); “Bebeteca” (“Library for Babies”) are some examples of those public libraries initiatives.

**Initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents:** Working in close cooperation, RBE and “Plano Nacional de Leitura” have been carrying out several initiatives and actions, such as “Ler+Escolas” (“Reading+Schools”); “Ler+Jovem” (“Reading + Young”). All of these governmental initiatives have contributed to engage teachers and educators in reading activities inside and outside of the classrooms, covering all Portuguese people from kindergarten to adulthood. Additionally, training programmes for teachers and educators have been designed to encourage all professionals of reading to promote initiatives that encourage the pleasure of reading amongst children, young people and adults.

The *Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares* (“School Libraries Network”) has been promoting projects in different fields, such as “Ideias com Mérito” (“Ideas with merit”), “aLeR+” (“Reading+”), “Ler é para já” (“Reading now”) and “Newton gostava de ler” (“Newton enjoy reading”), with the purpose of improving the quality of learning and literacy levels of the education community.

**Offering attractive reading material for children and adolescents in print and non-print:** Portugal’s curriculum provides a list of titles and authors as examples of what primary and lower secondary level pupils must read. The suggested books are organised into different categories such as books for reading with parents/teachers and books for students who do not read regularly. Also, one of the main focuses of the “Plano Nacional de Leitura” is budget provision for school libraries’ acquisition of different types of books (fiction, poetry, drama and science books) magazines, internet resources, to be used in the classroom in reading and writing activities and to promote independent reading.

It is important to emphasise that all libraries of the *Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares* and of the *Rede Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas* are properly equipped with a variety of texts and books, and their databases are updated every month, as required by UNESCO in the Manifesto of The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

RBE provides a range of services, such as Webpages, blogs, newsletters, social networks, learning platforms, encouraging the digital literacy practices and the ICT use and preparing students for search, use, production and communication through internet and social networks. In addition, one of the goals of the school libraries is to create a reading culture (digital and printed), exploring technological equipment and other strategies to improve and promote reading for pleasure (RBE/MEC, 2013).

**Fostering digital literacy in and outside schools:** In Portugal, public libraries are well organised in order to engage and to motivate the adolescents to visit them and to use and enjoy the available digital and multimedia resources. They also have a good broadband connection and students can use appropriate hardware, especially laptops.

Several public libraries of the *Rede Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas* (“National Network of Public Libraries”) have been developing a variety of initiatives, as “Leitur@s com TIC’s” (“Reading with ICT’s”), “Num Click” (“At a click”) “Literacia Inform@tica Para Todos” (“Computer literacy for all”), whose main goal is to promote literacy skills, on new information and communication technologies, among the population, from children to senior citizens.
There is also an initiative, named Eduscratch\textsuperscript{14}, which was implemented, through a partnership between the Directorate-General for Education of the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science and one of its ICT Competence Centres, in 2010. This project aiming at promoting the use of the Scratch software in the schools. Scratch is an intuitive programming tool to support computational thinking. In its early stages, some teachers participated in in-service training workshops to learn the programme. As teachers at different levels used EduScratch in very different ways, training was designed to meet their different needs. An important aspect of this programme has been its attention to substantive as well as technological issues. Ultimately, the objectives of this project are to promote the efficacy and innovation of the use of the technologies in the learning process, across all areas and contexts, and to make of each young person an inventor and creator, rather than simply a consumer of technologies.

4.1.3 Adults

Fostering literacy provision for adults: The data available on adult literacy provision in Portugal is scattered, sometimes contradictory and often almost inaccessible. This situation is complicated by the withdrawal of government funding for many types of courses in January 2012 meaning that, in essence, adult education and training in Portugal was suspended, except provision offered as either Modular or Recurrent Education (see below). In the years before this, funding was increasingly given primarily to provision promoted and regulated by the State, meaning that many socio-community initiatives were deprived of funding unless they adapted their training to the State regulations.

Adult education and training in Portugal is divided into basic education – which is in fact subdivided into three basic levels (B1, B2 and B3) – and secondary education. There are five types of officially recognized adult education and training available in Portugal: 1) the Sistema Nacional de Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências (RVCC) (National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences); 2) Cursos de Educação e Formação de Adultos (Adult Education and Training (AET) Courses); 3) Formações Modulares (Modular Training); 4) Ensino Recorrente (Recurrent Education Courses), and 5) Vias de Conclusão do Nível Secundário de Educação (Paths to Conclude the Secondary Education Level).

There is no statutory entitlement to literacy provision in Portugal beyond compulsory schooling, and adult literacy has been promoted mainly at the level of secondary education. With regard to low basic skills, the rhetoric on tackling this has not been matched by practical steps to address it. The Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades (INO) [New Opportunities Initiative] which was launched in 2005 was a highly popular initiative whereby adults could obtain qualifications, particularly through the recognition of competences. Around 1.5 million people enrolled in New Opportunities, primarily through Modular Training, before it was ended by the new Portuguese government in 2012.

The National Reading Plan, which began in 2006, aims “to raise the level of literacy of the Portuguese people and to place the country on a par with its European partners”\textsuperscript{15}. It offers a number of reading initiatives for adults, families, and community groups, and there is involvement in the popular scheme from a range of organizations at the local, regional, national and international levels.


4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

4.2.1 Pre-Primary Years

Providing free or affordable high quality preschool education for all children / investing more money in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): The enrolment rate at age 4 is 95.4%. Portugal thus reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC.

Portugal is at the lower end among European countries concerning: the total public expenditure per child on pre-primary education (0.4%); the ratio of children to teachers (15.8); the percentage of males among preschool teachers (1.8%).

Raising the professional qualification level of staff in ECEC: Portugal should improve and update teaching staff, by means of training courses of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), especially in the fields of pedagogical practice, special needs, and linguistic diversity as well as oral and written language. There is a lack of educators and teacher training in those areas (Ministério da educação e Ciência/Inspeção-Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2014). Continuing Professional Development, for teachers of kindergarten, should be mandatory in Portugal.

Improving early language and literacy screening and training: Policy makers should provide the effective technical and educational support, in order to ensure the pedagogical quality as well as the articulation between teachers, technical staff, the pedagogical directorate, and educators. It is also important to create an early intervention plan and/or an individual educational plan (Ministério da educação e Ciência/Inspeção-Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2014), where early language and literacy must have a crucial role.

The report Caracterização dos Contextos de Educação pré-escolar: Relatório Final (Ministério da Educação/DGIDC, 2006) highlights that there is a lack of material resources, documentation and teacher training concerning written language and emergent literacy and non-verbal communication.

Regular diagnosis of oral language proficiency for pre-primary years is needed and all kindergarten teachers should know how to conduct this diagnosis. The aim should be that all children entering school should be entitled to the development of the language of the school so that they can profit from reading instruction.

Introducing comprehensive literacy curricula in pre-primary schools: All kindergartens should fulfil a minimum of 5 hours per day for educational activities, which are intended to construct and to develop the curriculum (Ministério da educação e Ciência/Inspeção-Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2014), by giving special emphasis to those activities related to the development of language and literacy.

In preschool, children can be prepared for formal instruction in school. Kindergarten teachers should provide a literacy environment where children learn and engage in the communicative functions of reading and writing with the aim of developing curiosity and motivation to learn to read and write in school.
4.2.2 Children and Adolescents

**Improving the quality of literacy instruction:** In spite of what Portuguese teachers report in PIRLS 2011 (that they put a strong emphasis on a comprehension strategies), national research highlights their lack of knowledge on specific teaching of reading comprehension strategies (Dionísio et al. 2011).

In fact, data from PISA 2009 show that there is a need for explicit instruction of reading strategies, in Portugal: there is a gap of 89 score points between students who know which strategies are the most efficient to understand and remember a text (532 score points) and those who have a limited knowledge of that (443 score points); there is also a gap of 95 score points between students who know which strategies are the most efficient to summarise a text (530 score points) and those who have a limited knowledge of that (440 score points).

Research has demonstrated that there is also a serious teacher dependency on the textbooks, across all grades and subjects (Moreira et al. 2006). PIRLS data reinforce this trend: 67% of teachers reported to use textbooks as a basis for instruction (Mullis et al. 2012, p. 236). This dependency should be avoided, because textbooks hardly include the range of adequate strategies needed for reading comprehension.

**Building a stronger focus on literacy into curricula:** The absence of explicit teaching of literacy strategies in content areas is due to a general lack of knowledge regarding literacy strategies.

There is a need to mainstream reading / writing literacy across the curriculum, and to offer content area literacy instruction in all school subjects throughout secondary education, whether academic or vocational.

**Strengthening remedial support for struggling literacy learners:** As PIRLS shows, 37% of students, in Portugal, are in classes whose teachers wait to see if performance improves with maturation, and 99% of students are taught by teachers who ask parents to provide additional support to a student who falls behind in reading.

According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, tackling reading difficulties is not a topic at this training level in Portugal (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 99).

Also, the field of specific learning disabilities, in Portugal, is characterised by a lack of a technically adequate system of school-wide screening and progress monitoring (Mendonça & Martins, 2014).

Policy makers should provide support systems (additional instruction time, additional experts like reading experts, psychologists, speech therapists) for students falling behind in literacy.

Pupils with learning difficulties/disabilities or those who face personal, social or emotional challenges often have too little contact with education staff or other adults to support them. They need easy access to teachers and other professionals supporting their educational and personal development. They also need guidance and mentoring together with cultural and extra-curricular activities to broaden their learning opportunities. In addition, whether remedial training takes place or remedial courses are offered is dependent on the school’s resources, and very often when classes have to be cancelled, remedial courses are the first. There is evidence that not all children in need of remedial support in literacy receive it. Students who do not reach a minimal standard of literacy level should have a legal right to individual support.

**Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training:** Literacy instruction in primary and secondary schools should become more cognitively demanding, more individualised and targeted
at using higher-level strategies. One crucial prerequisite for achieving those goals is adequate preparation of teachers.

Not all teachers who are involved in teaching reading and writing skills in primary or secondary schools have a solid training in literacy. Only limited aspects of literacy are mentioned in the curricula on mother tongue education.

Although reading across the curriculum is being more and more recognised as necessary by schools, it is not yet a shared concept in Portugal. Policy and schools put on mother tongue teachers the responsibility for teaching reading, expecting that this learning may impact on the performance in other curricular subjects.

Literacy expertise should become a clear standard for teacher education in all grades and subjects, not only for primary teachers, but also for secondary teachers. It should be ensured that initial training as well as CPD courses cover topics such as the teaching of reading, tackling reading difficulties, assessing pupils' reading skills, and supporting those with persistent difficulties.

**Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Programmes, initiatives and examples**

**Improving the quality of preschool:** The curriculum for preschool education has been established in Portugal since 1997 enshrining the preschool as the first stage of the lifelong learning process. The *Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-escolar* (Ministério da Educação/Núcleo da Educação Pré-escolar, 1997) (“Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education”) is the reference document for all educators, from the National Network of Preschool Education, and provides guidance for all educators’ decisions in the educational process, leading to the development of the children. This guideline document aims at promoting an improvement of the quality of preschool education, in Portugal, and organising educational components. The curriculum for preschool emphasises the role of literacy for lifelong learning.

**Providing more cognitively demanding literacy instruction in school:** The projects “EMA – Escola Melhor” (“For a Better School”) and “FENIX – Mais sucesso Escolar” (“More Educational achievement”)

The goals of these projects, developed by schools and supported by national institutions, are to promote more and better learning across all school grades, from preschool to basic education, and consequently improve the educational achievement, motivate teachers about the relevance of literacy practices in the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, and providing conditions and opportunities for learning and consolidation of knowledge.

These projects are based on a school organisational model which provides a more personalised approach for students with learning difficulties in Portuguese, Mathematics or another subject, for instance through a pedagogical differentiation.

**Early identification of and support for children and adolescents with literacy difficulties**

“Monitorização do Risco de Dificuldades de Aprendizagem Específicas na Leitura de Alunos do 4º ano” (“Use of monitoring based on the curriculum as a way to identify students at risk of developing learning disabilities in the reading area”)

Developed by the Research Centre in Education (CIEd) at the University of Minho and financed by The Foundation for Science and Technology, the main goal of this study was to describe the use of curriculum-based monitoring (CBM) of reading fluency for identifying students at risk for presenting dyslexia. One hundred and forty-six students in the 3rd grade from a group of schools in Braga,
Portugal, have participated in the study. They were monitored twice during the school year. The students whose result was below or in the 20th percentile were considered at risk.

This project has contributed to the extension of the existing knowledge in the field of reading and risk of reading failure, in a population of 1,400 students who were screened from second through fourth grade with Curriculum-Based Measurement probes (Mendonça & Martins, 2014).

**Pre-service and in-service teacher training:** In Portugal, between 2006 and 2010, the government has implemented the “Programa Nacional do Ensino do Português (PNEP)” (“National Plan for the Teaching of Portuguese”). It was an initiative to improve the teaching of the Portuguese language in schools, in particular, the teaching of reading comprehension and oral and written communication. One teacher from each school applying for the programme was selected to be trained in a higher education institution for one school year. In the following year, this same teacher should disseminate the knowledge, gained by delivering the same training, to a group of teachers within the school (Legislative Order nr. 546/2007, 11th January).

4.2.3 Adults

**Monitoring the quality of adult literacy providers:** The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training coordinates the implementation of adult education and training policy and the system for recognizing, validating and certifying competences. Monitoring of adult education and training, including providers of adult literacy programmes, has been carried out by a succession of national regulatory bodies, but as the volume of training has increased over the years, monitoring has taken place less frequently and the focus has changed from the quality of processes to inspections of providers for compliance with regulations. Provision is also monitored through the commissioning of reports (national and thematic) and external evaluations.

Currently, however, very little monitoring takes place.

**Developing curricula for adult literacy:** There is a basic education key competences framework in Portugal which was designed specifically for adult education and training. It does, however, have a very limited use in adult literacy teaching, as most adult education and training provision is not accessible to those with low levels of literacy skills. For example, a candidate who struggled to read or write would not be able to write his/her own "learning reflexive portfolio", which is the core of the process, and would represent, in the AET courses, an expenditure of time and energy that the institutions and the pedagogical teams avoided by selecting candidates who were likely to require less support and achieve better results. Because of this, for about a decade adults with the greatest literacy needs were not selected for this provision. In other words, those who were excluded were those who most needed it. To solve the problem, a specific response to teach adults how to read and write was (and still is) necessary.

A Training Programme in Basic Competences was created to allow those adults to acquire the basic skills of reading, writing, calculation and use of ICT. The programme, which runs for 300 hours, consists of six short training units.

The key competences frameworks are based on principles of adequacy and relevance, on the one hand, and of openness and flexibility, on the other. They are not fixed and regulatory documents, but rather frames of reference that must be adjusted to each person and each group of learners, according to the learner's individual context. In addition, it is intended that their structure is flexible enough to
enable a plurality of combinations of competences and training components, as well as a
differentiation of rhythms and individual learning processes.

**Improving the qualification and status of teachers of adult literacy:** The professional status of
adult education teachers in Portugal varies depending on the sector of adult education in which they
teach: generally those who teach in mainstream adult education (that is, those teaching in public
schools and in the centres of the Portuguese Public Employment Service, on programmes funded by
the relevant government ministries) enjoy a higher status and far better working conditions that those
teaching on programmes funded at the EU level or under individual grants. The working conditions of
these teachers are best described as precarious. Most teachers working in adult education are qualified
to at least degree level, and there are further requirements (licenses to teach) for those working in the
field of adult literacy; however, a specialisation in adult literacy teaching is not mandatory and in
practice the licenses to teach are mainly gained in the context of teaching children and young people.
Moreover, very few training programmes for teaching basic education include components on either
adult education or adult literacy. Continuing Professional Development activities within the field of
adult education do not usually address adult literacy and trainers responsible for literacy frequently
complain that they have to seek information by themselves and to develop their own training support
materials.

### 4.3 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

#### 4.3.1 Pre-Primary Years

**Compensating socio-economic background:** The Gini index is the most commonly used measure of
inequality, and represents the income distribution of a nation's residents with values between 0% (maximum equality) and 100% (maximum inequality). In Portugal, it is 34.5%, which is very close to maximum of inequality.

An indicator of child poverty is the percentage of children living in a household in which disposable
income, when adjusted for family size and composition, is less than 50% of the national median
income (UNICEF/Innocenti Research Centre, 2012). The range is from 4.7% in Iceland to 25.5% in
Romania (for an overview of European countries see table A2 in Appendix B). With 14.7%, Portugal is in
a group in the middle of the distribution.

The child's socio-economic and cultural background has a strong impact on literacy. Material poverty
is a well-recognised main factor influencing literacy (World Bank, 2005; Naudeau et al. 2011). Socio-
economic background also influences biological risks to children, by determining early exposure to risk
factors and increased susceptibility (Jednoróg et al. 2012).

**Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children:** The benefits of
attending preschool institutions have been proven in many studies. The duration of attendance is
associated with greater academic improvement.

In Portugal, 37% of pupils do not attended preschool institutions between the ages of 1 and 3. There is
a significant difference in reading competence at grade 4 for students participating and not
participating in preschool: the reading score of pupils who attended pre-primary education for 3 years
and more was 27 points higher than that of pupils who did not attend at all.
4.3.2 Children and Adolescents

Support for children with special needs: In Portugal, in the school year 2014/2015, 71,301 pupils with special needs attended basic and secondary education institutions. As mentioned in the report *Políticas Públicas de Educação Especial* ("Public policies in Special Education"), several improvements are needed in the area of Special Educational Needs: i) relevant mechanisms and support for students’ progress between cycles; ii) adequate solutions for students when they have completed the school career; iii) educational resources and solutions concerning school organisation; iv) skills profile of students for teachers of Special Education Needs; v) a material and technological resources databases; vi) more human resources for a better inclusion of children into schools full-time (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2014: 36).

Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school: In Portugal, there is a considerable migrant gap in reading achievement, as PIRLS (12 score points) and PISA (26 score points) data show. The government should ensure that there are intensive programmes of language and literacy development to support all children and young people with migrant backgrounds or without adequate competence in the Portuguese language. According to Santiago, Donaldson, Looney and Nusche (2012), given the importance of the language of instruction mastery level and the growing number of students whose mother tongue is not Portuguese, gathering information is sorely needed, not only to improve decision making at school level, but also to determine a national strategy and teachers’ guidance for these populations. It would be also desirable to have more comprehensive data on the linguistic profiles of students, in planning a language strategy at the national level and making decisions about specific resources and support for second language learners.

Preventing early school leaving: Following the Eurostat, in Portugal, the rate of early school leavers was 19.2% in 2013, 1.6% less than in 2012. However, it is important to remember that the target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rate set for 2020 is 10% (European Commission, 2014: 2). Despite the expansion of the education system and the several measures implemented toward reducing ESL, the educational attainment as well as the high share of students leaving school too early with low skills remains a challenge in Portugal. According to Santiago, Donaldson, Looney and Nusche (2012), the high proportion of early school leavers could be related to the relatively low appreciation of schooling by large groups of the population. It could also result from the parents’ low educational attainment and the availability of unskilled jobs.

Consequently, it is important to review and update the Portuguese educational system in order to make it even more inclusive, by allowing all individuals to acquire relevant skills (OECD, 2010). The impact of family background on the probability to drop out is also stronger in Portugal than elsewhere: 98.9% of men aged between 25 and 34 who dropped out before the end of upper secondary school have a low-educated father. This figure is more than 10% higher than on average across European OECD countries (OECD, 2010a).

Addressing the gender gap among adolescents: In Portugal, there aren’t specific official (Ministry of Education and Science) measures to address the gender gap among adolescents.
However, data provided by PIRLS 2011 shows that there is a difference of 14 score points between girls (548 score points) and boys (534 score points) in Reading Achievement (table 6). In PISA 2012, the score difference in Reading performance between boys (468 score points) and girls (508 score points) is 60 score points.

Furthermore, in national examinations of Portuguese Language, girls perform better than boys: girls attain more levels 4 and 5 (on a scale from 0 to 5) than boys (Direção-Geral da Educação/Júri Nacional de Exames, 2014).

Given this gender difference, it is clear that programmes and policies specifically aiming at supporting boys’ reading engagement are needed in Portugal.

To underline the importance of the analysis and monitoring concerning gender differences could be desirable: the value of the national tests and national examinations in monitoring students’ progress by gender could be enhanced in order to allow the tracking of improvement and permit the investigation of the impact of student gender on performance, and consequently the development of policies and programmes (Santiago et al. 2012).

**Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples**

**Programmes for inclusion:** The programme “Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária” (TEIP) (“Priority Intervention in Education Territories”) programmes are designed to promote education in schools located in underprivileged areas with high dropout levels. The main goal of the last TEIP 3 Programme (Legislative Order nr. 20/2012, 3rd October) is to: “respond to social contexts that encourage the risk of failure in the normal education system, due to the fact that academic success is rarer in socially and economically disadvantaged areas than the national average, where violence, indiscipline, dropouts, school failure and child labour are examples of problems”. It is expected that TEIP 3 promotes learning and academic success, makes more effective use of available resources, and achieves better results.

Tutoring and other kinds of support are organised for individual pupils and pupil groups. Intervention measures include, among others: pedagogical support, tutorials, cultural mediation supplementary activities, and parental involvement16.

**Family literacy programmes for migrant parents:** The project “Programa Metropolitano de Leitura para Grupos Desfavorecidos” (Programme Reading Metropolitan for disadvantaged groups”) was developed between 2004 and 2006, in the Metropolitan Area of Porto (AMP), in a partnership between PRIMUS (Regional Development Agency) and Local Authorities from nine cities of the Metropolitan Area of Porto. The Programme had two targets: children and young people and immigrants.

The main objectives of the “Programme Reading Metropolitan for disadvantaged groups” are: i) to raise awareness and foster reading as a continuous and regular practice; ii) to promote the acquisition of the language knowledge and its correct use as well as of the new knowledge through reading; to foster the intercultural dialogue and citizenship, especially, along the road of cultural diversity; iii) to provide reading moments and spaces for reading; to increase the qualifications of reading

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professionals; to enhance the exchange between libraries and readers; iv) to encourage the partnerships between local authorities and cultural institutions (Lopes & Queiroz, 2006).

The programme “K’Cidade - Programa de Desenvolvimento Comunitário Urbano” (“K’City – community and urban development programme”) was developed by the Aga Khan Foundation, in 2004, with the purpose of promoting the processes of social change that respect the communities, in a process of gradual autonomy and reinforcement of the different players. It also aims at responding to the challenges of urban communities, from Lisbon, especially the poor and socially excluded, such as those comprised of immigrants and ethnic or cultural minorities.

The activities were carried out in partnership with several local institutions. They were divided into four priority intervention axes:

1) Citizenship – encouraging the interventions in a territorial approach, intended to foster the empowerment of communities and other players.

2) Education and Childhood – promoting children’s welfare, by improving quality and access to essential services.

3) Families into community – addressing the needs of the most vulnerable communities, through an integrated approach which should involve and support families.

4) Lifelong Learning and employment – strengthening of skills, knowledge and qualification, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective, by promoting social inclusion, namely through the development of literacy and numeracy initiatives for adults, in a lifelong learning perspective.

The mission of the programme is to empower the excluded urban communities, with the aim of improving their quality of life17.

Promoting school attendance, especially among disadvantaged children: A nationwide network called “Commissions for the Protection of At-Risk Children and Youth”, was created in Portugal, managed by the municipalities. This team, which includes teachers, works directly with health services, education, security, parents and local associations – where ESL is a high and legal priority. By law, both teams are responsible for ESL and the protection of children’s rights to remain in education until the age of 18 (European Commission, 2013a, p. 34).

In order to reduce grade repetition in basic education, Portugal has introduced an extraordinary period at the end of the school year where students from 4th and 6th grades who failed national exams (Portuguese and Math) receive additional support from teachers and have the opportunity to repeat the exam. Students or groups facing difficulties also have a Pedagogic Support Plan designed by teachers, parents and school psychologists if needed. (European Commission, 2013a, p. 37).

Different programmes are specifically designed for territories, schools, classes or pupils who are at risk of ESL or who are performing below target. These secondary prevention programmes include the “TEIP” Programme (for schools located in socially and economically disadvantaged areas), the “Mais Sucesso Escolar” (“More School Success”) Programme and the “Percurso Curriculares Alternativos” (“Alternative Curricula Pathways”) Programme. They are run by the Ministry of Education and Science and have nationwide coverage. The “TEIP” and “Mais Sucesso Escolar” Programmes have recently been extended and now cover over 25% of pupils and schools in Portugal (15.6 % for “TEIP” and 10.2 % for

“Mais Sucesso Escolar”). They provide extra support to pupils (academic, personal, social) inside and outside the classroom in the form of mentoring/tutoring, intercultural mediation, guidance and vocational experiences. They include in-service teacher training, as well as parent and community involvement. It is worth noting that “Mais Sucesso Escolar” was originally a teachers’ initiative, later recognised and supported by the Ministry (European Commission, 2013a, pp. 39-40).

As a form of compensation, early school leavers over 15 years old can complete their lower secondary education in the Integrated Programme of Education and Training (PIEF). PIEF classes may be held in regular schools, NGOs, communities’ facilities and enterprises. Each group has a full-time tutor and a small group of teachers develop a tailored curriculum with a high degree of flexibility and a strong vocational focus. Students may enrol and finish their studies at any time of the year and the duration of the course depends on their own pace. There are also some experiences of Second Chance Schools, namely in the Porto Metropolitan Area (European Commission, 2013a, p. 44).

4.3.3 Adults

**Increasing offers for second-language learners:** Portuguese language courses for immigrants are available: the National Catalogue of Qualifications, for instance, contains eleven Unidades de Formação de Curta Duração (UFCD) [Short Training Units] of Portuguese for speakers of other languages. These UFCD courses are funded under the European Social Fund and are offered free of charge to learners. There is, however, no special support for second language learners who also require help with their literacy, and the curriculum is one based on Portuguese for native speakers. Instruction is carried out by teachers with specific training in teaching Portuguese as a foreign language or second language, or by certified trainers in the same area.
5 References


**Legislation**

