Portugal

Thematic Article 1 – Early Leaving from VET

2013

A. Early leaving from education and training in Portugal: definitions and statistics

In Portugal the concept of early school leaving follows the European one: percentage of individuals aged 18 to 24 years old who achieved, at maximum, lower secondary education and didn't come to follow any kind of education or training.

The table below compares the national early school leaving rates to the EU 27 average values.

	PT (2010)	EU 27 (2010)	PT (2012)	EU 27 (2012)
Early school leaving	28.7%	14.0%	20.8%	12.8%
Tertiary education attainment	23.5%	33.5%	27.2%	35.8%

Source: Eurostat

In spite of the figures presented, Portugal has shown a strong improvement on the rate of early leavers from Education and Training from 43.6 % in 2000 to 20.8% in 2012. However this important effort, the value achieved is still the second highest in the EU (average 12.8 %). Comparing the tertiary education attainment, we also notice the progress achieved even though the Portuguese figures are still rather below the European average. Nevertheless, it is one of the most notorious improvements registered in the EU regarding the reducing of early school leaving.
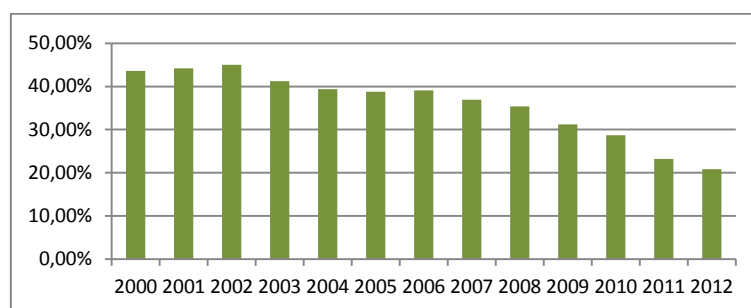
Source: Eurostat (UOE, LFS)

In fact, strong efforts have been made for the last years to reduce the early school leaving rate of young people and to improve the tertiary education attainment in Portugal, as well as to improve the knowledge, competences and skills needed for the future (such as basic skills on reading, maths and science, language skills, ICT skills, Entrepreneurial skills, civic competences), and to match the educational outcomes with labour market needs.

This progress relies on a number of measures implemented in the last decade that include: the diversification of supply at secondary level, namely through VET, the implementation of projects aiming at the improvement of students' basic skills in Mathematics and Portuguese as well as projects to prevent and correct low achievement and school drop-out, the reorganisation of the

schools network, and some Lifelong Learning initiatives, considered as compensatory measures, aiming at the return to the education and training system of early school leavers.

From 2011, and although some of these measures continued with a view to reducing and tackling early school leaving, some changes were implemented, which are in line with the commitment made under the Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality.

B. Different aspects that may influence the decision to remain in or drop out from VET

a. Structural characteristics of the education and training / VET system

In Portugal, as elsewhere, the E&T system has been evolving responding both to endogenous as well as to exogenous factors and, even more so, ever since it joined the EU (ex-EEC) in mid-1980s. There seems to prevail, nevertheless, the view that the pace of modernization of the Portuguese E&T system through 19th and the 20th century was rather slow in comparison with other countries in Europe. Some would perhaps reiterate this view and even argue that the trend remains in early 21st century by highlighting the results of Census 2011 that show , for example, that 22% of 18-24 year olds have left school at lower secondary level (9 years of schooling).

Indicators	2001	2011
Iliteracy rate	9,03	5,23
Children aged 3-5 years at Ensino Pré-Escolar (pre-primary education)	52,28	73,49
Population aged 15 years or over who have not completed any education level	18,03	10,39
18-24 years of age who completed the 3th cycle of basic education (9th year of schooling) and have left school	33,37	22,08
20-24 years of age who completed secondary education	44,04	60,8
Population aged 30-34 years who completed higher education	14,22	28,62
Population aged 15 years or over who completed the 3rd cycle of basic education (9th year of schooling)	37,95	49,6
Population aged 18 years or over who completed secondary education	22,67	31,69

Source: INE (2012)

Others, on the contrary, would say that E&T has been significantly improving in education in general and would underline the fact that, for the first time ever, 50% of the population aged 15 years old or over attained the level of lower secondary (9 years of schooling) whereas they were just 38% in 2001.

Education and training system

Pre-primary education (children 3 to 5 years old) - the universality of pre-school education for children aged 5 was established under *Law 85/2009, 27 August* although attendance is not compulsory. It is provided at schools by the State, private/cooperative organizations, private social

solidarity institutions and non-profit institutions. Public pre-schools are fully financed by the state that also covers the costs of the educational component provided by private, social and non-profit organizations. Fees are paid in private nursery schools.

In 2009, it became mandatory to attend school between the age of 6 and 18 years, thus extending compulsory education to 12 years of schooling. In line with these policy changes and as of 2012, compulsory education comprises two stages: basic education, subdivided into three sequential cycles (1st - 9th year) and secondary education (10th - 12th year). Compulsory education is provided in state schools which are publicly-funded but also in private schools (independent private and government dependent private).

Basic education is organized into 3 cycles. These three cycles are organized sequentially allowing school children to move through a predictable sequence of developmental stages.

Organization of basic education

Cycles	Years of schooling	Age level	ISCED level	National Qualification level
1st cycle	1st - 4th	6 - 10	1	-
2nd cycle	5th - 6th	10 - 12	1	1
3rd cycle	7th - 9th	12 - 15	2	2

Secondary education is characterised by subject specialisation and is organized in different paths, either leading to further studies or vocational qualifications. Permeability has been ensured between general/academic paths (leading to further studies) and VET paths (leading to the labour market). Qualifications are provided within the National Qualification Framework (QNQ).

Organization of secondary education

Type of path	Years of schooling	Age	ISCED level	National Qualification level
1. Science and Humanities courses 2. Technological courses 3. Specialized Art courses 4. VET courses	10-12	16-18	3	4

Learners who have successfully completed secondary school are entitled to a secondary school diploma while learners in technological, specialized art courses and VET courses are entitled to hold cumulatively a level 3 professional certificate.

Higher education is structured according to the Bologna principles and is organized into university and polytechnic education. Pre-conditions to enter higher education include: successful completion of a secondary level course or a similar qualification level, admission exams and specific

requirements concerning the area of study. University and polytechnic institutions grant 1st cycle degree and 2nd cycle degree whereas PhD degrees are granted by universities alone. This level of education is both funded by the state and by students' fees.

Government-regulated VET provision

The adoption of lifelong learning as a policy principle in the late 1990s constituted the defining moment for E&T policies both at European level and in the Member States, namely in Portugal where it took some time before it percolated the existing E&T systems. By 2000, it was framing a set of policies developed to tackle the traditional underperformance of Portugal's educational attainment a) by creating a system of recognition of prior learning, b) by developing measures to combat the high dropout rates at lower secondary level and c) by further developing adult education policies.

The traditional gap between education and training is in the process of being bridged since 2000. In 2007, Decree-Law 396/2007, 31 December established the *National Qualification System* (SNQ) which constitutes a milestone in tackling the longstanding low level of qualification of the Portuguese population, the high dropout rate of school and early school-leaving as well as the improvement of VET. The overall policy goal for setting up this system was, therefore, to improve the competences and raise the qualifications of the population with the purpose of improving the capacity of Portugal to adapt to the ongoing economic restructuring in a sustained way.

The SNQ framework is based on an organic relationship between vocational education and training within the school system (IVET) and vocational education and training in the labour market (CVET). It establishes common objectives and instruments, and adopts a governance model based on a) a network of state and private schools, IEFP training centers, certified private VET providers; b) sector councils and c) participation of social partners.

System of National Qualifications: instruments to support implementation

□ *Quadro Nacional de Qualificações* (QNQ): the national qualification framework, designed in line with EQF, is organized in eight levels of qualification and a set of descriptors specifying the learning outcomes of the different qualification levels;

□ *Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações (*CNQ): a strategic tool to manage and regulate non- higher E&T and designed in line with QNQ. Presently, it covers 262 vocational qualifications in 39 areas of education and training. The purpose of this dynamic tool is a) to develop key competences which are critical to the competitiveness and modernization of Portuguese economy and enterprises; b) to facilitate the design of learning paths that will ensure educational and training progression and c) to enable the recognition, validation and certification of prior competences;

□ *Sistema nacional de reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências (RVCC)*: a mechanism for the recognition, validation and certification of competences;

□ *Caderneta individual de competências*: a document to register the learner's acquisition of competences throughout life, those within the CNQ as well as any other completed training programme.

E&T provision available for young people

E&T courses intended to motivate learners to further continue studies/training by providing flexible learning solutions in line with learners' expectations and local labour market needs.

VET courses to provide learners with the required vocational education and training a) to execute a job by equipping them with the skills they need; b) to take further studies and/or training (further training or higher education).

Apprenticeship-type training to provide learners with the adequate knowledge and competences a) to enter the labour market by providing them work experience; b) to continue their studies/ training by upgrading their educational attainment.

Courses of specialized arts education: visual arts, audiovisual arts, music or dance to provide learners with the specific vocational education and training they need a) to enter a career in the artistic field of their choice by developing their capacities and talent; b) to take further studies/training in one of the fields.

Courses of technological specialization to provide learners with the required knowledge, scientific and technological skills a) to enter a career by deepening their scientific/ technological knowledge in a specific field of training; b) to enhance their career by upgrading their competences; c) to take further studies in higher education by attaining level 5 of QNQ.

E&T provision available for adults include both courses traditionally offered (e.g. recurrent education courses) and more recent courses (EFA and FMC courses) that are briefly introduced below:

Cursos de Educação e Formação para adultos (EFA): these education and training courses have been provided to adults since 2000. They have always been regarded as a key tool to decrease the traditionally high levels of educational and professional non-attainment of the Portuguese population. The earlier architecture of these courses was the creation of flexible training paths (a combination of a foundation education course and training) defined according to the recognition and validation of a candidate's prior competences. EFA courses have evolved through the decade to a more diversified offer.

Formações Modulares Certificadas (FMC): as from 2008, the FMC (VET modular courses) have also been available. They allow learners to embark upon a flexible, gradual and credit-based training by taking individual units as described in the reference frameworks of the CNQ.

RVCC mechanism (Recognition, validation and certification of competences)
Today, this mechanism is designed in two different paths (a schooling and a VET path) and it is based on the principle of lifelong learning, thus assuming a number of corollaries, e.g:

- schooling is the foundation stage in an individual's lifelong learning journey;
- individuals accumulate knowledge and competences throughout life and in a variety of contexts;
- today's fast and ever-changing world requires individuals to constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills;
- Individuals have both the right to further develop their potential for learning as members of their societies and the obligation to contribute to their development.

In the Portuguese context, however, and in addition to what might be the mainstream conception of schemes to recognize, validate and certify prior learning, the launching of the RVCC mechanism was regarded as a breakthrough in lifting up the educational level of the Portuguese population.

b. Labour market and social policy related issues

Portugal has become a diversified and increasingly service-based economy since it joined the ex-European Community in 1986. The general feature of the Portuguese economy structure is the small and medium sized enterprise (SME) with low productivity and non-tradable services. In the 1991-2000 decade, when the economy grew at rates above 3% per year on average, GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) increased to 70% of the EU15 average in 2000. Deep-rooted structural problems have, however, caused a major loss of competitiveness of the Portuguese economy over the last decade.

In 2011, the estimated Portuguese total labour force (in thousands) was 5 513. The agricultural sector, forestry and fishing employed 10% of the total population, the industrial sector, construction, energy and water reached 27,5% while the services sector employed 62,5% of the population, thus confirming the service–oriented character of the Portuguese economy.

In 2012, youth unemployment (under 25 years old) reached a rate of 37.7% – with a ratio of 14.3%, the third highest rate level in the UE 27 MS that increased considerably compared to the pre-crisis period. This situation needs a strong answer by all stakeholders both from the education and training sector and from the labour market, considering the increase of the ratio of young unemployed (8.2% in 2010 compared to 14.3% in 2012), and the contrasting increase of the level of their qualifications.

	PT (2010)	EU 27 (2010)	PT (2012)	EU 27 (2012)
Youth Unemployment rate	27.7%	21.1%	37.7%	22.8%
Unemployment rate	9.7%	12.0%	15.9%	10.5%
Youth Unemployment ratio	8.2%	9.0%	14.3%	9.7%

Source: Eurostat

c. Individual reasons

The diagnosis of the causes of dropout as reasons mentioned by most students to not continue to study points out: 1) the will itself, 2) already be tired of studying, 3) be time to try the independence, 4) be difficult to get into higher education and 5) financial difficulties, which reveals, according to the informants, dropping out of school due to little interest in education, economic causes and access to further education difficulty perception.

Within cognitive factors, learning disabilities are the most important variable, followed by retention and poor school performance. Under emotional factors, risk students lack interest in school and do not value academic success. Many of these students do not find the expectations of the school and show a high frequency of behavior problems, one of the strongest predictors of dropout. These behaviors misfits are a consequence of the lack of social skills. Also, studies related to the family patterns of students who drop out of school refer 1) "unconventional" lifestyles, 2) single-parent family structures, 3) bad parenting practices, including lack of emotional support, involvement with the youth's schooling and inadequate supervision, and other researchers also report a 4) the weight of interfamily disputing.

In general, low parental expectations are strongly associated with dropout and there is a strong association between the level of parental involvement and achievements. Finally, there are studies that relate the dropout phenomenon in families dependent on social grants, where employment is precarious, which does not happen with young people from families professionally stable. In short, low parental expectations and insufficient or inadequate supervision variables are strongly associated with school dropout, while the family atmosphere and the quality of family support to student affect either positively or negatively.

C. Measures to reduce drop out from VET

a. Measures to prevent drop out from school based VET and apprenticeship type training

The Portuguese Government has been implementing preventive/ intervention measures leading to the reduction of early exit from education and training, including:

2015 Education Program, initiated at the beginning of the academic year 2010/2011, aims to involve schools in meeting the objectives of improving pupils' basic skills and extending compulsory education. This program takes the objectives defined in the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in the field of Education and Training (ET2020) and establishes national goals and indicators in the area of improving basic skills in Portuguese and Mathematics and reducing dropout.

The extension of compulsory education to 18 years. Approved by Law n. º 85/2009 of 27 August, accompanied by scholarships to students from lower economic situation attending high school (established in the academic year 2009/2010). For students enrolled in the academic year 2009/2010 in any grade of 1. º or 2. º cycles of basic education or 7th grade is now compulsory to stay in school until age 18 or until obtaining a diploma course lecturer at the secondary level of education. It is hoped, therefore, achieve the academic year 2013/2014 a rate of completion of secondary school education or through training of 85%.

The Program Educational Territories of Priority Intervention, which helps to prevent early exit from education and training and combat levels of educational failure, through organizational measures, adequacy of strategies to specific audiences and use of material and human resources to ensure the conditions that generate educational success

The reorganization of counseling services at vocational schools. The proposed reorganization is being designed and It's intended to improve the quality of vocational and educational counseling, integrating approaches and resources and supplying gaps.

The increase in the implementation and extension of Education and Training and Professional Courses that promote increased levels of schooling, as well as the transition to working life and employability;

Support for international students and / or migrant background through classes in Portuguese Not Maternal Language as well as actions Portuguese second language, offer for the adult population that works in the modality of Education Extra-School, replaced in 2010/2011 by a Modular Formation and also actions Portuguese for All, the program under initiative of the High Commissioner for Integration and Intercultural Dialogue.

Student Welfare support, providing conditions for the frequency of different socioeconomic contexts students and families with low incomes.

In July 2012, in preparation for the academic year 2012-13 and in line with the stated policy goals for education in the period 2011-15 (i.e. to raise educational quality and improve educational success), a new policy initiative was created at the level of the 2nd cycle and the 3rd cycle in basic education. The target group for these courses is +13 year olds in risk of dropping out of school. The objective is to offer young people *Cursos de Educação e Formação*, which cover both basic education and initial vocational training while raising young people's awareness to the labour market and simultaneously allowing for further learning. The educational services at regional level are piloting the initiative during the academic year 2012-13 and it will be expanded further if the evaluation, to be conducted at the end of the academic year, demonstrates its value. More recently, this pilot project was extended to other schools that can apply to offer this kind of vocational courses at basic education level in the next school year (2013/2014).

At the 1st cycle of basic education, through the strengthening of measures to support study, and a more effective monitoring of the pupil when the first learning difficulties are detected;

Adoption, in exceptional circumstances duly justified by the school and approved by the competent educational administration, of different educational paths, namely, alternative curricular paths and integrated programs of education and training, tailored to the profile and characteristics of pupils;

Implementation of a modular system, as an alternative to the basic education curriculum for pupils aged 16.

In March 2013, Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education (*Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*) were established by a legal act. They replaced the former New Opportunities Centres that supported, in the past, the recognition, validation and certification of academic and professional competences in Portugal. The Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education ensure the provision of a quality service in the field of guidance for young people and adults, with a focus on information about educational offers, professional or dual certification, offering a realistic choice, and meeting the individual profiles, the diversity of pathways in order to following their studies or to respond present and future needs of the labour market, among other factors.

b. Remedial measures within VET / related to VET

In order to remediate early school leaving, some compensatory measures have been implemented over the last years in Portugal, namely:

New Opportunities Initiative. Its two lines of intervention focused on jobs for youth and adults (a structure that vocationally oriented qualification for youth and another oriented adult population has not completed high school) are assumed as the central policy of extending schooling mandatory and recovery skills shortages. This initiative has allowed the diversification of educational and training offerings for young people especially at the level of secondary education by strengthening vocational education, but also the supply of education and training at the level of basic education. It is worth mentioning that almost met the target of 50% of students enrolled in secondary education attending vocational pathways.

The **Basic Skills Training Programme** was approved by Implementing Order no. 1100/2010, of 22 October, aimed at the acquisition by adults of basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and use of information and communication technologies, and their subsequent integration in Adult Education and Training (EFA) courses at an elementary level or in processes of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills. The curricular organisation of the Programme is composed of 6 Training Units of 50 hours each, which are included in the National Qualifications Catalogue (CNQ) and will be developed according to the individual needs diagnosed for each adult. This Programme has been developed with all adults who show the need to acquire all or part of the skills identified above.

PPT Programme - Portuguese for All, seeks to contribute to the reception and socio-professional integration of legalised immigrants, with the objective of developing a series of training actions in Portuguese, every day and technical language. PPT focuses on the development of measures which facilitate greater proficiency in the Portuguese language, as well as the promotion of legally established rights for the exercise of active citizenship. The training actions to be developed in the Portuguese language are based on the levels defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Implementing Order no. 1262/2009, 15 October, created the courses of Portuguese for Speakers of Other Languages, presented in the National Qualifications Catalogue (CNQ) and defined the rules required for their development and certification.

D.   conclusions

According to studies, early school leaving appears as s phenomenon with different and interrelated reasons – at individual level, family level, school level and socio-economic level. As such, measures to combat ESL must address these different aspects of the problem, including guidance, attractiveness, offer diversity, accessibility and permeability.

Strong efforts have been made for the last years to reduce the early school leaving rate of young people and to improve the tertiary education attainment in Portugal, as well as to improve the knowledge, competences and skills needed for the future (such as basic skills on reading, maths and science, language skills, ICT skills, Entrepreneurial skills, civic competences), and to match the educational outcomes with labour market needs. These efforts have brought some significant improvement in the last decade as early school leavers rate decreased from more than 40% in 2000 to around 20% in 2012. However, these figures still leave Portugal in the top of ESL at European level.

Work in progress

Restructuring of the current model of VET for an increased bid to areas deemed relevant to job creation, in close collaboration with the labour market.

Restructuring of the VET curriculum design to reinforce the training and learning in a work context ("Dual System"). In this scope should be mentioned the memorandum signed between Portugal and Germany by which a bilateral cooperation take place in order to support a Portuguese dual system in organisational and conceptual terms.

Establishment of VET Reference schools in close cooperation with labour market and companies/business clusters, at sectorial and local/regional level.

Bibliography and references

Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional (ANQEP), www.anqep.gov.pt

Eurostat database. *Education and training.*

Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional (IEFP), www.iefp.pt

M. C. Taborda Simões, A. Castro Fonseca, M. D. Formosinho, M. L. Vale Dias & M. C. Lopes, 2008, Abandono escolar precoce: Dados de uma investigação empírica, Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia, 42-1

Portugal, 2011, Educação e Formação 2020: Relatório Nacional de Progresso – 2011

Portugal VET in Europe – Country report, DGERT, 2012

RESLEA – Reduction of early school leaving of young people, Portugal country report, 2013