

Responses to the Covid-19 outbreak

On 13 March, the Government establishes exceptional and temporary measures related to the epidemiological situation of the new Coronavirus - COVID-19, and set the suspension of face-to-face academic, non-academic and training activities, starting after 3 days. Training activities could be replaced by distance learning, when possible and when the conditions were met, with the necessary adaptations.

On 18 March, the President of the Republic declared the state of emergency based on the recognition of a public calamity situation, lasting 15 days, which was renewed two more times. Considering the need to reduce the risk of contagion and implement measures to prevent and combat the epidemic, this legislative act partially suspended the exercise of certain rights, namely the right to move in the national territory.

The suspension of face-to-face academic, non-academic and training activities was extended at 9 April after re-evaluation, considering the incidence rate of covid-19 disease to ensure success in combating the pandemic and in coherence with the renewal of the state of emergency.

On 30 April, the Government established a strategy for the survey of containment measures to fight COVID-19, programmes 18 May as the possible date to restart the face-to-face, namely classes for 11th and 12th years, or 2nd and 3rd years of VET offers, with the aim of enabling learners to conclude their studies and prepare their access to higher education.

On 3 May, it finished the state of emergency and begun the state of calamity and on 14 May the Government establishes exceptional measures for the organisation and functioning of educational and training activities in the context of the pandemic.

Therefore, new decisions were taken, regarding education and training:

- Return to presential classes for the two last grades of compulsory education for all education and training, offers starting on 18 May, between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., for protection and security measures of all citizens;
- Reopen the day-care equipment and support for disabled young people on 18 May, with maintenance of the family support until 1 June;
- Restart the pre-school education and leisure activities on 1 June;
- Extend the school year until 26 June;
- Maintain the exams of both general and double certification programmes, which guidelines were already issued, as well as those for the next academic year ([see link Portal do Governo](#));
- Higher education institutions have autonomy to decide when reopen the universities.

In what concerns the different VET offers it can be witness several practices. However, all structures are working to extend the possibility of access and improve the quality conditions of distance learning.

With regard to basic, upper secondary and professional schools, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines on the development and functioning of E@D, e.g. attendance, training plans, assessment, final exams and WBL (see [Ministry of Education FAQs](#)).

The responsibilities for education and training of young people and adult are under the scope of the National Agency for Qualification and VET (ANQEP) and the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP). The activity of the *Qualifica* Centres, managed by ANQEP, have specific guidelines to work at distance. Digital technologies also ensure the continued access to recognition, validation and certification of competences processes. Regarding the activity of the Vocational Training Centres, under the responsibility of IEFP, and depending on the areas of education and training, the programmes are being adjusted to distance training, the didactic material being adapted and the trainers trained, with the aim of restart suspended training actions and initiating new ones. The WBL continues as long as the companies are functioning, but needs to exist an agreement between the parties involved and safe conditions to maintain the training (see [IEFP COVID 19 - FAQs](#) and [ANQEP FAQs](#)).

It should be noted that at the level of information to whole society, the responsible bodies maintain a very active level close to students and trainees, about hygiene and safety in the pandemic situation and in terms of education and training. In fact, the methodological guidelines for E@D have a strong focus on strategies for approaching and monitoring students, at the different levels of teaching and learning (see DGE [Methodological Guidelines](#)).

Still, regarding the online information to students, it is possible to see that all the structures with greater responsibility in education and training (Ministries of Education and Labour and their structures, such as DGE, ANQEP and IEFP) maintain a high level of resources in the home pages of their websites and offer a great support to all agents involved in education and training processes (See [DGE FAQs](#))

In fact, there has been a national political understanding, in particular, among the public structures. There has been capacity to get together a set of resources, namely new platforms or tools, as well as other resources, creating partnerships with associations, scientific societies, enterprises and foundations (see [Apoios DGE](#)).

It was possible to gather synergies around a national goal and the common good, and it was particularly decisive the capacity of schools and teachers to the results achieved with E@D, whose current methodology can be considered a good practice in Portugal, in this extraordinary context.

The most vulnerable or disadvantaged students also need to be signalled, due to a lack of support and/or material conditions. It was created, in parallel to digital education or training, conditions for the development of alternative methodologies. The *Telescola* - a renewed tool, transmitted through a television channel, aimed at “leave no one behind”, whose programme is entitled “Study at Home” ([see link](#)), covering all grades of basic and secondary education, and with a wide range of subjects.

Although, there are also good local practices, from the municipalities and civil society through associations, joining efforts to find ways to provide equipment such as computers, to students with economic difficulties and without access to digital tools. It should be highlighted that Portugal recently launched an Action Plan for the Digital Transition (see [link](#)), that replaces the Portugal Digital Agenda, and also includes education and training for the digital inclusion.

For all agents intervening in education and training, it is available a privileged set of means and supports to teaching and learning processes. Although, digitalisation presents great opportunities, it also presents great challenges, such as: (1) the organisation of distance learning; (2) the adaptation of the training units’ content to the e-learning methodology; (3) the identification of learning supporting measures and inclusion of learners with bigger

weaknesses in apprenticeship; (4) the definition of closer and systematic accompanying plan that assures open communication with learners and their families.

Furthermore, VET faces a double challenge: people need support in the acquisition of the right skills to keep up with a changing economy and at the same time, workers that lost their jobs due to this crisis, need to be re-integrated in the labour market. In this sense, VET will perform a crucial role in this process, in which digitalisation may have a positive impact in employment but only if they have the required competences.

However, the biggest challenge, will be to overcome this pandemic with health and safety, so that we can share experiences and, who knows, create a 'European guide of good practices for E@D and distance training'.

Additional information

Legislation concerning the state of emergency:

Decree of the President of the Republic No 14-A/2020, of 18 March

<https://dre.pt/application/file/a/130326423>

Decree of the President of the Republic No 17-A/2020, of 2 April

<https://dre.pt/application/file/a/131068189>

Decree of the President of the Republic and No 20-A/2020, of 17 April

<https://dre.pt/application/file/a/131915535>

Measures approved by the government related with the COVID-19:

Decree-Law No 10-A/2020, of 13 March, in its current wording

<https://data.dre.pt/eli/dec-lei/10-a/2020/p/cons/20200505/pt/html>

Decree-Law No. 10-G/2020, of 26 March, in its current wording

<https://data.dre.pt/eli/dec-lei/10-g/2020/p/cons/20200501/pt/html>

Portal do Governo

<https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/comunicado?i=suspensao-das-atividades-letivas-presenciais-3-periodo>

IEFP - FAQs

<https://www.iefp.pt/noticias?item=9856352>

ANQEP > FAQs: Educação e formação de adultos

<http://www.anqep.gov.pt/default.aspx>

Ministry of Education/DGE - FAQs

<https://apoioescolas.dge.mec.pt/FAQ>

Apoios DGE

<https://apoioescolas.dge.mec.pt/index.php/Apoios>

Study at home

<https://estudoemcasa.dge.mec.pt/>

Methodological Guidelines

https://apoioescolas.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/2020-04/Orienta%C3%A7%C3%B5es_para_o_trabalho_das_Equipas_Multidisciplinares_de_Apoio%C3%A0Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o_Inclusiva_na_modalidade_E@D.pdf

<https://apoioescolas.dge.mec.pt/FAQ>

<https://apoioescolas.dge.mec.pt/Apoios>

Action plan for the digital transition

Resolution of the Council of Ministers (*Resolução do Conselho de Ministros*) No 30/2020, of 21 April

<https://dre.pt/application/file/a/132140881>

Mission Structure “Portugal Digital” (Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 31/2020, of 13 April <https://dre.pt/application/file/a/132140882>).