

Portugal

Auspices

The 1997 National Framework Law provides the definitions, major policy aims, orientations and implementation strategies for pre-school (kindergarten) education in Portugal. Although the Law perceives pre-school as the first stage of lifelong learning, co-operation with families is emphasized. The national early childhood network in Portugal is both public and private, and overall policy responsibility for both networks is shared between two ministries. The Ministry of Education is responsible for pedagogical quality in all settings, and for the funding of kindergarten educational contexts for the age group 3-6 years. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour has charge of family support, provision of socio-educational activities and the funding and supervision of out-of-home childcare, for children aged three months and older. A move toward decentralization has recently taken place, and several policy and organization matters are now being decided by municipalities, the Regional Directorates of Education and the District Social Security Centers, which have the responsibility of supporting national ECEC policies in their regions. To ensure co-ordination, a temporary *Bureau for the Expansion and Development of Pre-School Education* was established from 1996-98, bringing together the major ECEC stakeholders, including the National Association of Municipalities and the larger non-profit or voluntary providers, such as the Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS).

Developments

In recent years, Portugal has made notable progress in ECEC policy formulation and implementation. The whole sector has effectively been reformed, and the pre-school budget has more than doubled. A government *Program for the Expansion and Development of Pre-School Education* was drafted in 1996, followed one year later by the 1997 *Framework Law* which co-ordinates the hitherto diverse provision for young children, and includes for the first time the three to six year-olds within the realm of Basic Education. The government program intends that the expansion and development of pre-school provision should take place in co-ordination with municipal, private and social welfare institutions, with central government assuming a guiding and regulatory role. The increase in coverage has been notable, going in the pre-school sector from 57.5% coverage in 1995 to almost 75% in 2002. Free access to a 5-hour session has now been accorded to 5-year olds, and is planned for 4-year olds in the future. Much attention has been devoted to staff training and status, and Portuguese *educadores* are now required to have a four-year, higher education degree. Curriculum guidelines have been formulated and issued, and there is growing public interest in provision for 0-3 year old children.

Context

Expenditure on ISCED Level 0 institutions as a percentage of GDP: 0.2% (OECD median is 4.4%)

Labor force rates: In 1999, 80.3% of women aged 25-34 years participated in the labor force. 7.8% worked part-time.

Parental leave: 120 consecutive days of fully remunerated maternity leave are allowed to mothers, with 90 days being taken after childbirth (mother having multiple births receive 30 days more per baby). A special

leave until the child's 6th year is also accorded, while either father or the mother can enjoy a special leave up to 2 years.

Attention to children with special educational needs, before they enter compulsory school: a) *Children with disabilities:* In Portugal, there is growing inclusion of children with disabilities in all branches of education; b) *Child poverty rates* reach 24% after redistribution (OECD average is 11.9%); c) *Ethnic and bilingual children:* There are sizeable immigrant minorities, centered especially around Lisbon, Setúbal and Oporto. Several social integration programs with an educational component have been sponsored by the High Commission for Ethnic Minorities, government ministries and municipalities. Children at risk are given priority entrance into some services. Recent legislation has called attention to these children and provides for early intervention strategies to meet their needs.

Provision

Children from three months to three years can attend crèches (11% of children) or family daycare (either nannies or family crèches - together 1.5% of children). Children from 3-6 years generally attend kindergarten or *jardims de infância*. Average costs to parents for childcare amount to c. 11% of an average aggregate family salary. The State, through the Ministry of Labor, heavily subsidizes family support components such as meals, medical supervision, socio-cultural activities. Families also receive tax exemption for various educational expenses.

Access to the "learning period" of the public *jardims de infância* is free, and since 2000/01, has become free also for children of 3, 4 and 5 years in the non-profit institutions of the private network (IPSS). In the for-profit institutions, the State currently supports low-income families through "development contracts" with these institutions. The "family support component" includes lunch and the after-lunch period. The costs of this component are supported by the State and by parents jointly. Low-income families received enhanced reductions.

0-3 years: Almost 90% of children cared for by their families or in informal care arrangements; 12% in some form of full-day crèche or family daycare;

For the age group *3-6 years*, estimated enrolment rates in *jardims de infância* are as follows: *3-4 years:* 60% enrolled. *4-5 years:* 75% and from *5-6 years:* 90% are enrolled. Community centers and itinerant provision are available on a small scale in areas where it is difficult to maintain a *jardim de infancia*. Children can also attend socio-educational activities when pre-school activities are over, if working parents need this extra time. *Jardims de infância*, open from 5-6 hours daily (depending on auspices). The Ministry of Education has introduced curriculum guidelines to improve pedagogical method and content.

Child-staff ratios: Child-staff ratios in *jardims* are: 20-25 children to one educator, with an auxiliary worker being appointed also to across two groups. In the crèches, ratios of up to 10 children per adult professional are practiced. For the socio-educational activities outside the "learning component", one social educator is present for each group of 15 and 25 children.

Staffing and training

All settings should have a pedagogical director, and each class a qualified kindergarten teacher (*educador*). Crèches are staffed by *educadores* (see below), nurses and social workers, all of whom have tertiary-level, professional qualifications. They are assisted by auxiliary workers. These auxiliaries are not required to

have a particular qualification, but training and didactic materials for auxiliaries are made available by the Ministry of Education to the municipalities and educational institutions that provide training.

In the *jardins de infância*, the *educadores* or kindergarten teachers are the lead staff. They are required to complete a four-year university degree as polyvalent educators. *Educadores* have the same pay conditions as primary school teachers, but their pay levels and conditions of work may be considerably reduced when they work in IPSS crèches in the social sector.

OECD Policy Issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified by the OECD Review team were:

More attention to children from 0-3 years is needed: In a context where family networks are weakening, and informal care by neighbors coming under scrutiny, public intervention to support child-rearing needs to be organized, and seen as an education and social service of public interest. The necessary government support to the future expansion of crèche and family centers can include educational, family support and social integration components as well as labor market and gender equity objectives.

Coherence and co-ordination of services: In the early childhood field in Portugal, a tradition of multiple and over-lapping levels of decision-making has tended to diffuse accountability, and render national policy less effective. In recent years, the ministries have established clearer policy frameworks for the entire field. Agreement about the structural requirements of services, the interfaces between different services, and the strengthening of monitoring processes could further help to improve the coherence of the system.

The educational quality of early childhood services: In many instances, early childhood services in Portugal have tended to be loosely structured, play oriented and geared toward care and social aims, especially in the private network. The new curriculum guidelines, new inspection approaches, and the improved training of staff are expected to improve learning focus and outcomes. The organization of in-service training between the sectors and the different providers may also be helpful.

Accountability, self-evaluation and inspection: Greater emphasis needs to be placed by ministries and local authorities on the contractual obligations that receiving subsidies brings, such as the presentation of verifiable evidence of value for money, target achievement, impact or outcome measures. Likewise, quality could be improved with more systematic and effective self-evaluation procedures for settings and staff, with the necessary external moderation, support and validation.

Children with special educational needs: Although it has been part of the traditional role of the kindergarten in Portugal to support children with learning difficulties, their limited access to services has sometimes prevented the detection of special needs in children until their enrolment in primary school. The high rate of child poverty tends also to increase the incidence of special educational needs. The recent legislation on early intervention, and the trend toward universalisation of access will do much to remedy these weakness and strengthen preventive child welfare. In addition, the "inter-departmental group for early intervention", created in 1999, is bringing enhanced co-ordination between the health, education and the social security sectors.