

**Ministry of Education**  
Department of Basic Education

**Early  
Childhood Education  
and Care Policy  
in Portugal**



## Foreword

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Minister of Education

In the name of the right to equal opportunities and the promotion of quality, pre-school education has been, since 1995, considered by the Government as the first priority of educational policy, as well as a decisive factor in the development of the Portuguese society. The success in further learning depends significantly on the children's access to quality pre-school education, thus becoming essential to guarantee, in all establishments that constitute the pre-school national network, the articulation between the educational dimension and the dimension of social support for the family. In fact, pre-school education constitutes an irreplaceable factor in the learning process, as the first stage in basic education and as a way to achieve the objective defined by the UNESCO of quality education for all.

The objective of pre-school education, seen as the first stage in basic education, is to favor the balanced development of all children's potentialities, providing opportunities for autonomy and socialization, contributing to their future success at school, and offering important support to families in their educational task.

Based on these principles and in answer to the needs of children and their families, the Government has pledged to gradually increase the network coverage, according to the following objectives:

- a) Setting standards for **educational quality**, through the enforcement and development of **curriculum guidelines**;
- b) **Ensuring the control by the Ministry of Education of pre-school pedagogical matters** in the establishments that constitute the national network, regardless of their institutional nature;
- c) **Promoting the expansion of pre-school education**, through the organization, until 2000-2001, of a national network that ensures full coverage of the country and population between 3 and 5 years old, regarding educational matters and support to the family.

Such objectives have been mobilizing several sectors of the Portuguese society in a drive to achieve this great national aim, with a special reference - apart from the intervention of the State through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Labour and Solidarity - to the continuous effort of several educational partners, namely educators, parents, local authorities, private solidarity organizations, charitable institutions and trusts. This joint effort has resulted in several co-operation agreements that facilitate the sharing of responsibilities among the different partners involved in the process. In gathering together local authorities, social solidarity organizations and parents associations, the aim is to guarantee a quality response of educational and social nature to every child's needs.

Thus, the present report, which includes the results of the OECD "Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy", is of special importance to our country. Based on the identification of substantial progress made in this area and also of difficulties which still hinder the achievement of the objectives established, the team of OECD experts responsible for the report, clearly state that Portugal may be proud of the progress made so far.

The contents of its different chapters are a valuable contribution towards the deepening of our knowledge and reflection on how innovative and quality responses are being generated through the articulation of efforts and resources.

What is at stake is this - the need for educational answers which take into consideration different social problems met by populations, particularly those threatened with social exclusion.

Pre-school education constitutes an investment in the future, and its success depends on the mobilization of all the energies available. The task has been started, it is important to complete it with determination - the achievement of higher quality education, more equity and better citizenship depend on what we will be able to accomplish.

## Preface

*Paulo Abrantes*

Director of the Department of Basic Education

Ensuring a basic education of quality for all citizens is an issue of the utmost importance in the promotion of the individual as a citizen and as a person. At the same time, it may constitute a key element in the development of a democratic society, open to knowledge and innovation.

Within a global context which prizes basic education and with the main concern of offering every child a long and meaningful compulsory schooling, pre-school education has been considered, in the last few years, a priority of our educational policy.

The Thematic Examination on "Early Childhood Education and Care Policy", which Portugal joined in 1998, has been regarded as a privileged opportunity to reflect on the impact of the measures implemented in this area.

The Department of Basic Education is now publishing the report on the evaluation carried out in our country by international experts, in the context of the above-mentioned examination. This report constitutes a valuable element for reflection, by recognising the enormous effort made by Portugal, as well as by opening perspectives for future action. The Department of Basic Education will endeavour to promote the debate over the most relevant issues identified in the report.

In a subsequent phase, when the conclusions concerning the twelve countries are made public, it will be possible to compare experiences and improve our understanding of policies and practices of the participant countries as regards education for children up to the age of 6.

It is necessary to emphasise and acknowledge the quality of the work developed by Dr. Teresa Vasconcelos, the Portuguese co-ordinator of this international project, as well as to recognise the work of the Pre-School Education Office of the Department of Basic Education, whose commitment and professionalism helped create the best conditions for the development of this study.



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**Background Report**

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## Introduction

The effort to create a bilingual edition of the results of the OECD Thematic Review, shows the high interest that the Portuguese Government has in disseminating, at national and international level, the data about the Portuguese situation.

In fact, by choosing to become one of the examined countries, Portugal subjected to a process of international scrutiny and to comparative analysis the policies and actions that the Portuguese Government has been accomplishing since 1995.

There can not be an educational policy without its subsequent critical analysis. The construction of pre-school education as a citizenship project implies that the civil society, scientific institutions, the partners of the Plan for the Expansion and Development of Preschool Education will regulate and monitor the activity of the Government, but also their own activity as co-responsible entities.

This is the contribution of this document. It is a "mirror" composed by two dated reports, prepared in a certain context.

The Report prepared by the Portuguese part, using the framework suggested by OECD, was considered exemplary at international level, because of the carefulness of its preparation and the rigor of its analysis.

The Report prepared by the OECD experts contains reflections, suggestions, criticisms that may be important as we face the necessary process of regulation of a vast and ambitious initiative as it was the rapid expansion and development of pre-school education in Portugal.

We highlight especially the questions raised in Chapter IV. They are extremely important questions, raised by looking at our reality with strange eyes but, exactly because of that, capable of critical distance. They report ways of being that are very old in our Portuguese society, but that influence the way we look after children. They challenge us to look at the child as a person with rights and responsibilities, who are not the property of anyone, including their family.

We are also invited to go beyond the perception that the responsibility for children from 0 to 3 belongs to the family, which means to the mother. In the European Community country where most women work fulltime the real division of tasks and responsibilities among men and women both from the public as well as the private sphere, is a urgent need. State and civil society should provide the support that families need in order to be able to perform their role. The State needs also to guarantee the early intervention for children at risk. Happy children is a project of society as a whole and not just of the family.

Because Portuguese Government has made such a huge effort in developing education for the early years, we must pay attention to the perverse effects of that rapid expansion: augmenting the gap between regions and social groups, the poor supervision and quality regulation, the lack of research on the effects of the new policies for early childhood.

As the Experts Report says; "There is the need to make differentiated investments in order to reduce inequalities and to establish equality of opportunity":

To the Team of the Departamento da Educação Básica, to the Work Team at national level and to the Review Team of the OCDE, our thanks. Pre-school education in Portugal will, certainly, benefit from this effort of objectification and critical analysis. Our sincere thank's you to the GAERI (Office for European Business and International Affairs of the Ministry of Education) for their support to this project.

The results of the Comparative Study to be published at an international level, in 2001, will enlarge our information. For now, we present the national data and the view that the international experts had about what we are trying to accomplish: to build the foundations of pre-school education in Portugal, to make sure that the bridges and partnerships needed to the accomplishment of this "citizenship project" are in place. This project has been involving many synergies with the aim of giving a better and happier childhood to Portuguese children.

"Marco Polo was describing a bridge, stone by stone.

- But which is the stone that holds the bridge? - asked Kublai Kan.
- The bridge is not sustained by one particular stone - answered Marco Polo - but by the arch that they all create.

Kublai Kan remained silent, thinking. Then he asked:

- But why do you speak of stones? If it's the arch that matters... Marco Polo answered:
- Without stones there is no arch."

Italo Calvino — *As Cidades Invisíveis (The Invisible Cities)*

*Teresa Vasconcelos*  
National Coordinator



## Section I

### Definitions, contexts and types of current provision

#### 1. Historical framework for the development of ECEC policies and types of provision

Pre-school education in Portugal started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and can be linked to the growing influence and improved education levels of the middle classes, anxious to introduce new values in the education of children and citizens. The industrialization of the country was a slow but steady process creating the need for improved educational provision, especially in the urban areas where work could be found. Women entered the labour market, mostly as factory workers and, consequently, the traditional structure and functioning of the family underwent change.

All through the 20<sup>th</sup> century the continuous development of the urban areas and suburbs and the growing participation of women in the labour market, contributed significantly to the increase in public awareness of the value of pre-school education. As a consequence, demand increased.

During the last years of the Monarchy, several public and private pre-school institutions were created, some with the sole aim of providing social welfare and support to needy families and children, as for example the Sociedade das Casas de Asilo de Infância Desvalida (The Society of the Shelters for the Needy Children), others providing education for child development. However, it was only after the overthrow of the Monarchy in 1910, that pre-school education was specifically included in the official education system.

In 1911 the private network of "Jardins-Escolas João de Deus" (the João de Deus pre-schools) were founded by the pedagogue João de Deus; simultaneously, and in accordance with the electoral programme of

the Portuguese Republican Party, pre-school education was officially created for 4 to 7 year old children of both sexes. In 1919, when the Ministry of Education introduced major reforms in education, pre-school education became an integral part of public Primary Education. However, lack of classroom space in Primary Schools forced the Minister to restrict pre-school education to "preparatory classes for the exclusive use of 6 to 7 year old children". The merit of the first Republic governments (1910 to 1926) for recognising the importance of pre-school education and institutionalising it within the wider system of children's education is, nevertheless, widely acknowledged.

At the time of the State Coup of 28 May 1926 (which brought Salazar to power until 1968), no more than 1% of children attended pre-schools. Pre-school education continued to be formally recognised as part of the education system until 1937, when it was abolished by the then Minister of Education on the grounds that the numbers did not justify the expenditure. Instead, the "Obra Social das Mães pela Educação Nacional" (The Social Work of Mothers for National Education) was entrusted with the responsibility of providing support to mothers with the education of their children.

From 1937 to the seventies two lines of action were developed: one providing social assistance type of support in which the Misericórdias and other similar charitable institutions had a prominent role to play; and the second, of private initiative, providing educational environments under the supervision of the Inspectorate-General for Private Education. Furthermore, at the initiative of the Private and Cooperative Education sector provision for pre-school education was gradually enlarged.

Towards the end of the sixties and within the scope of the then Ministry of Health and Assistance (Institute for the Family and Social Work) crèches and Jardins the Infância were set up as a consequence of the social changes mentioned above. Such child support services were extended to first and second childhood groups assuming a complementary role to that of the family during parent's working

hours or other types of temporary parental impediment. However, both in quantitative and qualitative terms these services provided by the Ministry of Health and Assistance were not, on the whole, considered satisfactory. The expansion and development of crèches although considered important did not replace the need to consider families as the natural and best educational and social environments for child development. Such potential should be given incentives through adequate schemes such as the Law regulating Maternity and Part-time Work.

Offering families the right to choose while creating jobs were the main objectives of the child minding service and the family crèches schemes set up in the sixties to provide a type of child care different to the traditional care provided by crèches.

In 1973, towards the end of Marcelo Caetano's somewhat more open regime (Caetano having replaced Salazar in 1968), pre-school education was reintegrated within the national education system through the Law regulating the Reforms of the Education System (Law 5/73 of 25 July), which provided for the setting up of Early Childhood Teacher Training Schools. It should be noted that until 1973 the supervision of pre-school educational contexts had been carried out by the Inspector General for Private Education. From 1973 onwards, the Directorate General for Basic Education, a Department of the Ministry of Education was made responsible for supervising the organization, creation and running of all public pre-school educational contexts directly under the Ministry of Education, as well as, together with the Inspector General for Private Education, for providing pedagogical support to all private, profit-making or cooperative pre-school educational contexts. The first pre-school educational contexts of the Ministry of Education started to be set up in 1978, after the approval of Law 5/77 of 1<sup>st</sup> February which created the pre-school education public system. The statutes for pre-school educational contexts were published in 1979 through Decree-Law 542 of 31 December and were prepared by the two relevant Ministries. This Decree-Law sets the objectives for pre-school education

and the criteria to safeguard the rights and duties of professionals as well as the norms for quality education provision.

The 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974 Revolution was instrumental in opening up Portuguese society and giving women increased awareness as to their social role. This together with a better understanding of the real social needs for early childhood education led to a significant increase in the number of pre-school educational contexts as well as early childhood teacher training schools. The Educational Reform Law of 1986, reiterated the integration of pre-school education in the education system although, in practical terms, little was done by successive governments to develop the provision of public pre-school education until the mid-nineties. During those years the development of pre-school education rested, on the whole, upon private initiative.

In this context, with the aim of increasing the pre-school education network, government adopted measures providing for the creation of financial incentives paid in accordance with signed contract-programs established with new or existing early childhood educational contexts.

As a consequence of the situation generated nationally with the adoption of such measures, the Ministry of Education in 1995 prepared a **Plan for the Expansion of the Pre-School Network**, with the aim of ensuring access of an increasing number of children to pre-school educational contexts able to guarantee the provision of education and care. In 1995, with the object of meeting existing provision needs, financial incentives were made available through the Decree-Law 173/95 of 20 July to private entities wishing to set up pre-school educational facilities. However, such measures were not regulated and failed to contribute to the enlargement of the public network.

The Decree-Law defined the financial support aspects related to the setting up and maintenance of pre-school contexts as well as the rules to be followed in the installation and operational phases. But it passed on almost exclusively to private initiative the responsibility

for the expansion of the Jardins de Infância network. In 1996, under the new Government, the Ministry of Education launched the **Programme for the Expansion and Development of Pre-School Education**, in partnership with the the Ministries of Labour and Solidarity and of Equipment, Planning and Land Administration. The main aim of the Programme is to congregate all previous efforts into a set of proposals leading to the enlargement and expansion of the network through a partnership between the public and the private sectors.

The Framework Law for Pre-School Education was published in February 1997. It should be taken into account the fact that the Framework Law regulating pre-school education operationalizes both the social and the educational components involved in the process, i.e. the childcare component extending support to families and the pedagogical component centred on the educational development of the children.

The Expansion Plan proposes:

- the launching of the **Programme for the Expansion and Development of Pre-School Education** in co-ordination with local government, private and social welfare institutions, central government assuming a guiding and regulatory role. To meet additional requirements the pre-school education budget has been doubled;
- the establishment of contract-programmes with municipalities and private entities leading to the expansion and development of pre-school education;
- the adoption of an organizational model within the public network leading to the expansion of pre-school education, in close cooperation with the basic education school cycles;
- the establishment of a real partnership between the State and civil society through the development of initiatives agreed with by all parties concerned;

- the promotion of pre-school education as one of the units leading to the development of an educated society, involving children, parents, professionals and society in general.

To further this policy the **Gabinete para a Expansão e Desenvolvimento da Educação Pré-Escolar** (Bureau for the Expansion and Development of Pre-School Education) was set up and will, in principle, function until December 1998. (Joint Ministerial Decision 186/ME/MSSS/MEPAT/96).

The new Framework Law establishes the legal framework for pre-school education, the network, general pedagogical and organizational principles. Legal measures contained in the Law enable achievement of the following objectives: the creation of a national pre-school education network made up of the public and the private networks; the right of families to participate in the development of the educational projects of contexts; the definition of the mechanisms required to promote institutional cooperation among the various government departments involved in the Programme for the Expansion and Development of Pre-School Education; the definition of administrative requirements to be fulfilled by pre-school educational contexts as well as of the framework for the provision of financial support.

## **2. Social changes which influenced ECEC policies and practices**

Pre-school education has been decisively influenced by the social and political changes operated since 1973, the year the Education System Reforms started to be introduced, to the present day.

Portuguese society underwent important changes during this century, namely:

- the gradual industrialization of the country bringing the bulk of the population into large urban and suburban centres;
- the substantial increase in the number of working women;