Developments: Urgent demand for the implementation of the National Plan for Adult Literacy

Over the last year the situation of adult education has stayed the same in Portugal and there have been no new policy changes or innovations. APCEP, the umbrella organisation of adult education in Portugal doesnt receive public financial support, but most funding is based on annual membership contributions. During COVID-19 some organisations were unable to afford the membership, which left APCEP more dependent on their own savings.

There have been some policies for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways but no new projects that further the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The report by the European Semester partially reflects the experience of APCEP in the civil society sector in Portugal. APCEP was not aware of any consultation or implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

One of the main challenges in Portugal is reaching people with low basic skills. There is an urgent demand for the implementation of the National Plan for Adult Literacy. The plan is being prepared to address the high illiteracy in Portugal. The process of Recognition, Validation, and Certification of Competences will be published soon, including specific regulations.

Another important program is the INCoDe.2030. It released the Digital Competence

Dynamic Reference Framework (Quadro Dinmico de Referncia de Competncia Digital - QDRCD), a tool to evaluate the populations digital skills. Based on the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, the QDRCD has three objectives: to support the definition of policies and strategies; to design education programmes; and to evaluate and certificate skills, either by self-diagnosis or by certifying entities.

Quick adaptation to the situation caused by the pandemic

COVID-19 has significantly affected the adult learning sector in Portugal. During lockdown, all of the face to face meetings and local activities were suspended. As most of the beneficiaries of APCEP are from low income backgrounds and have low schooling, many of them are not able to access APCEPs online services. These parts of the population have suffered from the global pandemic in various aspects.

At ESEC-IPC there was a move to digital learning. Some of the learners didn't have access to the internet and computers at home, so the institution lent resources to overcome that problem. There was also an effort to strengthen the social support for the students.

The response of the adult learning and education sector to the COVID-19 pandemic was very positive and quick, based on collaboration and solidarity. Adult education professionals created channels of communication and learning to overcome the crisis. Self-organised groups managed to engage people in an online community of learning. The pandemic led to new online training initiatives and webinars are now very dynamic and reach many participants. The adult education providers used online strategies to maintain the major activities and some of them are using b-learning solutions (combining online and offline solutions).

"We are all digital is another initiative by INcoDe.2030 that brings together efforts by several national entities to help the Portuguese population with less digital skills to better deal with the situation of social isolation in which a majority of the population

now is.

Challenges: Broad and inclusive policy for adult education is needed

The main challenge for adult learning and education in Portugal in the upcoming year will include the launch of the National Plan on Adult Literacy. In the upcoming year, APCEPs focus is on adult literacy and adult education for democracy and citizenship. As a recommendation to the government, APCEP urges the government to prepare a white paper on adult education, based on a wide participation of public, private and civil society institutions and organisations. This white paper could then inform a National Plan for Adult Education, followed up by concrete measures of implementation.

According to ESEC the main challenge for Portugal is an adult learning policy that goes beyond qualification purposes. Qualification is important but not sufficient for a broad, inclusive and holistic perspective of adult education. A broader, inclusive policy of adult education and stability is urgent for the sector.

At the moment the sector is facing great instability and uncertainty for learners and professionals, aggravated by COVID-19. Another major challenge is to reach people with low basic skills. EAEAs members are hoping that the National Plan for Adult Literacy will become a reality soon, addressing these issues.