Developments: Funding and policies in the pandemic setting

According to EAEA members Higher School of Education at Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra, Escola Profissional Amar Terra Verde (EPATV) and Portuguese Association for Culture and Permanent Education (APCEP) the situation of adult learning and education in Portugal has stayed the same compared to the previous year. In their view, adult education in general is neglected, with a lack of consistency in policies and appropriate funding. There have been only slight changes in the ALE in 2020/2021, with blended-learning solutions becoming a more widely used way of training.

Adult Learning Education policies in Portugal remain restricted to the point of only focusing on qualifications for employment. Qualification is important but not sufficient for a broad, inclusive, and holistic perspective of adult education. Our partners point out that civil society is often not involved in the ALE policy-making processes.

A nationwide incentive programme

In September 2020, as part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, a financing contract was signed for the Qualifica Programme. This programme consists of two main mechanisms - the National Adult Literacy Plan and Qualifica Accelerator. The latter is the Adults Incentives programme given to learners who, meeting certain eligibility conditions, complete a school or professional qualification in the process of recognition, validation, and certification of competences. This project aims to reach a total of 100,000 certified adults by 2025. The main objectives of the programme are:

- To increase qualification levels and improve the employability of adults, providing them with skills adjusted to the needs of the labour market
- Significantly reduce illiteracy rates, both literal and functional, equally combating semi-illiteracy and illiteracy
- Promote a greater inclusion of young adults in education and training pathways
- Correct the country's structural backwardness in terms of schooling in order to achieve greater convergence with the European reality
- Adapt the training network to the needs of the labour market, in national and regional development models

Funding of ALE

In the last year, the funding situation has slightly deteriorated in Portugal. Due to the pandemic situation ALE organisations and providers received less public funding, while costs of learning provision have increased. Our partners would like to see a larger commitment of national authorities in funding and a larger variety of initiatives to involve adult learners.

The impact of COVID-19 on ALE

The pandemic caused the learning programmes to shift to fully or partly online environment. Members state that during the COVID-19 pandemic the digital gap has increased. Those that already had very good digital skills were able to continue learning in and further improve their skills, and those who did not have good digital skills dropped out or had significant problems in keeping up. A shift to digital environment has also attracted new groups of learners.

Generally, participation rates in ALE have decreased due to the shift to online learning. Disadvantaged groups have disproportionately dropped out of courses. Reaching the

target groups has been a particular challenge due to the low digital skills or bad digital environment. Online learning has also necessitated some investments in the technological environment.

CONFINTEA

Portuguese Association for Culture and Permanent Education, and Escola Professional Amar Terra Verde (EPATV) are involved in the CONFINTEA process, but it is not clear if they will join the national CONFINTEA VII delegation.

Sustainability

The Portuguese members view social and environmental sustainability as a very important component for their organisation. In general, they see further potential for sustainable development goals (SDG's) in Portugal, noting that the implementation of SGDs substantially varies in the ALE sector.

Challenges: Lack of consistency in adult education policies

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 which is has not yet been implemented.

In the near future, low-skilled adults and minorities, literacy, digital literacy, and

democracy and digitalisation are the focus areas for Portuguese members.

They urge for a more robust policy and practice field of adult education. A broader, inclusive policy of adult education and stability for the sector is needed to ensure lasting and impactful initiatives.

APCEP has several recommendations to the government:

1. There should be a global and integrated public policy including the formal and the non-formal adult education. This policy should be created bottom-up with strong support and involvement of non-governmental stakeholders and adult learners.
2. A larger commitment of national authorities in funding is needed.
3. The stakeholders should work together to increase the participation of adult learners, particularly adults with low levels of school education and professional qualifications who lack motivation to participate.
4. The link between existing provision (basic education/vocational education and training according to EU guidelines) and higher education provision for adult learners is critical point to be addressed in the future.
5. The adult education policy and practice should be strengthened (including legislation, administration, coordination and quality assurance structures, local and national adult education centres and institutions).
6. Professionalisation of adult educators should be improved, including formal recognition of higher education paths for those working in adult education, lifelong education or ducation permanente.