

6.3 Preventing early leaving from education and training (ELET)

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National strategy

Under the national goal of the Europe 2020 Strategy, Portugal established the reduction of the early school leaving rate to 10% as its goal. The percentage of young people between 18 and 24 years old who left school without completing secondary education in 2019 fell to 10.6%, the lowest value recorded in Portugal since this indicator began to be calculated, which happened about two decades.

In 2004, **the National Plan for Prevention of Early School Leaving (PNAPAE)** had been launched, with the goal to prevent early leaving from school or professional training. Its goal was to reduce the rate of early school leaving in half until 2010, and it was targeted at young people under the age of 25.

The prevention and combat against early school leaving has been implemented through a set of initiatives and measures framed in other national plans, operational programmes or public policies, in a **cross-sectoral and inter-institutional perspective in fields such as education, youth or employment and involving a wide range of organisations and public bodies**.

The highlights in this set of measures are the **promulgation of compulsory education to 18 years** in 2009 and the strategy to devise and implement political measures shared by several entities of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Security, in particular in the field of adult education, with the New Opportunities

initiative (Alvares *et al* 2015).

The [National Committee of Promotion of Children and Young People's Rights and Protection](#) (CNPDPJCJ) has also been playing an important role in preventing and combating early school leaving through flagging young people with problems of absenteeism or early school leaving, in particular through the development of intervention mechanisms in collaboration with the school.

The combat strategy against early school leaving mainly focus on the assumption that **leaving school** is also a result of the struggle in learning and of school retention

In 2016, the [National Programme for School Success Promotion](#) (PNPSE) launched with the aim of promote quality education for all, within a framework of enhancing equal opportunities and increasing the efficiency and quality of public schools. It was also created a Mission Structure for the Promotion of School Success, henceforth named Mission Structure, with a scientific, support and proximity nature regarding basic and secondary educational establishments. The Mission Structure's objective is to implement and ensure the assistance, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

As part of the National Programme for School Success Promotion, a [Personal, Social and Community Development Plan](#) (Plano de Desenvolvimento Pessoal, Social e Comunitário, PDPSC) was created for the 2020/2021 school year. This initiative facilitates socio-behavioural interventions that provide schools with extra human resources to implement measures to improve educational success and inclusion, such as: the improvement of social, emotional and personal development skills, a stronger relationship between school and family and the involvement of the community in the partnership for success.

Call for applications for [Personal, Social and Community Development Plan](#) was aimed at school clusters/non-clustered schools, with the deadline for the application being 24 August 2020. PNPSE Mission Structure was responsible for organizing the call, analyse and approve plans and monitor their implementation.

See other relevant information [here](#).

It must also be noted the following reference documents in the field of school success promotion, which indicate measures and initiatives for this effect:

- The [Order no. 5908/2017](#) (pedagogical experience during 2017/2018, developing curriculum autonomy and flexibility)
- The [Decree-Law no. 55/2018](#), of 6th July (curriculum autonomy and flexibility extended to all schools)
- The Legislative Order no. 223-A/2018, of 3rd august, no. 226-A/2018, of 7th august, no. 229-A/2018, of 14th august, no.232-A, of 20th august, 235-A/2018, of 23rd august
- The [Decree-Law no. 54/2018](#), of 6th july (inclusive education)
- The [Ordinance no.181 of 11th June 2019](#) (within curriculum autonomy and flexibility some schools can manage more than 25% of the curriculum to develop innovation plans according to their schools context)

All of them based on an educational service, designed for all, guaranteeing quality learning.

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Thus, the [National Programme for School Success Promotion \(PNPSE\)](#), created in April 2016, aims to prevent school failure (reducing retention rates) by a bottom-up approach, in which, each school implement their

own strategic action plan in order to promote educational practices and improve learning.

PNPSE is based on a logic of proximity, either by creating local initiatives of diagnosis and intervention, from the knowledge produced by schools, their training for an intervention tailored to the local contexts and the specific needs of their target audience, or by the promotion of practices that allow to anticipate and prevent failure, through an emphasis on early intervention, at the expense of a focus on remediation strategies, or through a joint strategy between the entities responsible for the education sector with different educational agents at the local authority level, based on the local diagnosis of the existing problems and answers

This strategy includes:

- strengthening of the individual monitoring mechanisms of students;
- revision of the curriculum to increase the teaching and learning time;
- autonomy in schools, which allows for a local adaptation of the curriculum;
- improvement of the transition between school and different types of education alternatives;
- measures of positive discrimination for students at risk of leaving school or that have already left the Integrated Programme for Education and Training (PIEF);
- strengthening of the support at the level of School Social Support;
- strengthening of the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs.

In the set of initiatives, it is underlined the need to give more emphasis to **students/young people with a greater risk of retention or early school leaving**:

- with learning difficulties;
- whose mother tongue is not Portuguese;
- with several problems of integration into the school community;
- at risk of social or school exclusion or even of leaving school;
- with a history of learning difficulties, in particular, lack of motivation, high rate of absenteeism, low self-esteem, low expectations regarding learning and their future life, as well as a mismatch between school culture and family culture.

Preschool education, and its role in the promotion of school success in the early years of the education path, has been given a particular attention through measures that ensure access to preschool education for all children between the age of 3 and 5 and through the implementation of [Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education](#).

In order to ensure a good implementation of the public policies that focus on preventing and combating early school leaving, it is important to understand the extent and characteristics of this phenomenon through the collection of **statistical information** about said phenomenon.

In Portugal, along with the data collected on a quarterly basis with the Employment Survey under the responsibility of the National Statistics Institute (INE), the monitoring of early school leaving is carried out through the students' records that are collected by the administrative services of the school network.

There are also studies that are carried out through qualitative and quantitative surveys in order to better understand the causes for early school leaving and absenteeism. The Directorate-General of Education publishes

studies carried out at school in disadvantaged backgrounds, which provide information about practices and solutions that schools develop to prevent this phenomenon.

In 2020, a new working group was created by the government, involving many departments of the education administration (DG Education and Science Statistics, DG Education, DG Schools, National Agency for Qualification and VET, the Institute for Financial Management of Education and the Coordination of the PNPSE), in order to define the strategy to prevent ELET, in the context of COVID-19 pandemia, especially focused on improving and harmonizing its monitoring processes. Such programme is under development, including the collection of perspectives from school boards, experts and other organizations working in this field.

Formal education: main policy measures on ELET

In the context of formal education, the early school leaving prevention strategy combines a set of measures and initiatives, most of them framed in the [National Programme for Promotion of School Success](#), the [Qualifica Programme](#) or in the strengthening of the [School Social Support](#).

Early school leaving preventive strategies have been developed, in particular (Álvares *et al.* 2015):

- Preventive **measures focused on the student** - support to students at risk of early school leaving:
 - Positive discrimination measures;
 - Additional classes;
 - Pedagogical support;
 - School social support;
 - Support for disadvantaged/vulnerable young people
- Preventive measures focused on the system - structural policies for the reduction of the risk factors:
 - Increase in compulsory education;
 - Curriculum reforms;
 - Teacher training;

Specific Support measures targeted at young people at greater risk of early school leaving:

- Guidance and counselling provided by specialized services in schools and higher education institutions (see also chapters 3 and 4);
- Support for Portuguese as a non-native language;
- Implementation of projects in the field of literacy and of interculturality;
- Support by facilitators and mentorare by peers;
- Additional support included in the student's schedule;
- Specific tutorial Support

There is also a set of specific measures for basic and secondary education. In secondary education, if learning difficulties are detected, the following preventive measures for school failure and leaving are taken:

- Referral to an educational offer more suitable to the student's profile;
- Implementation of a modular system alternative to the regular school curriculum, for students over 16 years.

Preventive measures of positive discrimination focused on the community: the Educational Territories for Priority Intervention Programme

The TEIP Programme is a government initiative, currently implemented in 137 school clusters/non-clusters schools located in economically and socially disadvantaged territories, marked by poverty and social exclusion, where violence, indiscipline, early school leaving and failure are more visible. The programme's main objectives are the prevention and reduction of early school leaving and absenteeism, the reduction of indiscipline and promotion of the educational success of all students.

TEIP were launched in 1996, targeted at schools inserted in economic and social disadvantaged and vulnerable contexts, due to poverty, violence and/or indiscipline. Thus, these schools would have the right to benefit from financing and additional support.

Since 2012, TEIP 3 has been in force, which has increased the number of schools involved and emphasised a set of support measures for positive discrimination with the goal to improve the quality and effectiveness of the education system, in particular:

- Mentoring and guidance;
- Tutorial Support
- Pedagogical support;
- Intercultural mediation;
- Curriculum enrichment;
- Teaching and non-teaching staff professional development;
- Parental and community involvement, among others.

Schools included in TEIP 3 are subject to a thorough analysis/self-assessment, designed and are implementing an Improvement Plan, which comprises 4 axis of intervention: improvement of teaching and learning (focussed on classroom strategies); prevention of drop-out, absenteeism and indiscipline; school management and organization; relationship between school, families and community. The plan is framed by the school's educational project and autonomy and is supervised by the ME through, in particular, the half-yearly reports delivered by TEIP schools.

Guidance and counselling

School and professional guidance, with its features of prevention, intervention and compensation, assists students in educational and professional career choices, being a measure identified as important to reduce early school leaving.

The support of specialized professionals can be extremely important in creating a learning environment conducive to success, through the mentoring of students at risk, psychological and counselling support, and professional guidance.

In basic and secondary education, school and professional guidance is not incorporated in the school curriculum, but it is provided by the [Psychology and Guidance Services \(SPO\)](#).

In higher education, these valences are usually developed by the departments, student associations and

Employability Support Offices (GAIP).

[**IEFP, I.P.**](#) also offers services of information, guidance and counselling targeted at unemployed and employees looking to change employment or their professional field.

In adult education and training, the services of information, guidance and counselling are provided by Guidance, recognition and validation of competences practitioners through the Qualifica Centres, under the supervision of [**ANQEP, I.P.**](#)

For more detailed information about Professional Guidance and Training, please refer to Chapter 3 - Employment and Entrepreneurship - 4 Career Guidance and Counselling (Career guidance and counselling services (Career guidance and counselling services)).

Social Support Services

School Social Support - Basic and Secondary Education

The [**School Social Support**](#) is a measure aimed at deprived families that contribute some school expenses (school supplies, meals and transport) in order to combat social exclusion and the school leaving rate, promoting equal education opportunities. The free distribution of school textbooks to students in the 1st cycle applies to all students, with no restrictions.

Social Support Services - Higher Education

For all people that wish to pursue further studies in Higher Education, they can do so. The State ensures a system of direct and indirect social support, promoting equal opportunities in Higher Education, through the following measures:

- [**Scholarship**](#) for Higher Education Students, due to underprivileged economic conditions or a situation of handicap/disability. The scholarship is granted for a full school year, unless the exceptions provided for in the legislation currently in force. The Conditions for granting scholarships are defined in the legislation currently in force, namely in the [**Regulation of Allocation of Scholarships for Students in Higher Education**](#).
- [**Mobility scholarship "+Superior"**](#) to *encourage and support the enrolment in higher education in regions of the country with lower demand and lower demographic pressure by economic underprivileged students typically living in other regions.*
- Higher Education attendance scholarships for students with a disability equal or greater than 60%.

Balance of young people's private and professional life - Social support for parents that study

It defines social support [**measures for parents that study**](#), having as a priority objective the combat against early school leaving and failure, as well as the promotion of training of young people.

For more detailed information about School Social Support, please refer to Chapter 4. Social inclusion - 4.6

Access to Quality Services (Social Services).

Intervention/reintegration measures

Integrated Programme for Education and Training (PIEF)

PIEF was created in 1999 under the [Elimination of Child Labour Plan \(PEETI\)](#).

PIEF is a socio-educational measure of prevention against early school leaving that intends to promote the completion of compulsory education and social inclusion, by giving a 1st and 2nd or 3rd cycle school qualification.

It has a temporary and exceptional character and should only be adopted when all other measures of school integration have been exhausted.

Target group: young people between the age of 15 and 18 who have an age gap equal or greater than 3 years in relation to the level of education attended and that are at risk of social or school exclusion.

Alternative Curriculum Paths (PCA)

Alternative Curriculum Paths (PCA) are an exceptional and temporary measure which may be applied when students up to 18 years old (inclusive) do not show any progress in their academic results and are at risk of social exclusion or of dropping out, even after the adoption of other measures to promote success.

The main objective is the reorientation of their school path, providing the completion of the 2nd cycle (last 2 years of the ISCED 1) and the 3rd cycle (ISCED 2) of the primary and lower secondary education.

These PCA courses are currently part of possible measures included in an innovation plan according to Ordinance no.181 of 11th June 2019.

Support material

European Toolkit for Schools Promoting Inclusive Education and Tackling Early School Leaving

A **kit with a set of support materials** was launched as part of the Working Party on Education Policy under the European Union's Education and Training 2020 Agenda on early school leaving.

Early school leaving is tackled in an integrated way and the guidelines for its prevention and combat are organized around five thematic areas as outlined in the document "[An integrated school approach for preventing early school leaving](#)" (European Commission, 2015):

- School management;
- Support to the student;
- Teachers;
- Parents and families;

- Involvement of partners

A resource is developed - [European School Toolkit for Schools Promoting Inclusive Education and Tackling Early School Leaving](#) - with support materials for schools, complemented by practical measures and examples.

Implementation of Inclusive Education Guide

Following the publication of the Decree-Law n.º 54/2018, 6th July, the above mentioned document was published. Its main aim is to support the workers involved in the implementation of the new legislation framework concerning the inclusive education, as well as supporting parents and legal tutors in their collaboration with the school.

Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

“Choices Programme” ([Programa Escolhas](#))

The “Choices Programme” (Programa Escolhas) is a national government programme integrated in the High Commission for Migration ([ACM, I.P.](#)), which aims to promote social inclusion for children and young people, between the age of 6 and 30, from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, namely descendants of immigrants, Roma communities and Portuguese emigrants, who are in one or more of the following situations:

- School absenteeism;
- School failure;
- Early school dropout;
- NEET;
- Unemployment;
- Deviant behaviours;
- Subject to educational tutoring measures;
- Subject to promotion and protection measures;
- Emigrants in vulnerable situations ([6th generation](#)).

UCAN Project

Under the “Choices Programme”, the [U CAN](#) programme awarded scholarships to young people from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, which may have compromised the pursuit of higher education studies. This programme intends to support higher education as a promoter of social inclusion and to prevent early school dropout in this cycle of education.

Operational Programme For The Promotion of Education (OPRE)

Under the “Choices Programme”, [OPRE](#) awards scholarships to young higher education students from Roma

communities with the aim of preventing early school dropout and reduce the barriers that exist between Roma communities and the formal education system.

Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)

The RVCC, as a non-formal and informal learning validation process, can also contribute to the combat against early school leaving and create a possibility of future reintegration into training, through the recognition of skills and competencies by the formal training and educational system, regardless of the context in which they were acquired. However RVCC processes are only available for adults.

Ubuntu schools- Ubuntu leaders' academy

The result of a partnership between the ME and the NGO IPAV (an institution promoting human dignity and collaborative spirit)

This programme is being implemented in several schools across the country with problems regarding inclusion, ESL and school failure. It consists of providing capacity-building for students and teachers to develop social and emotional competences, aligned with the Students' Profile and fostering leadership skills among vulnerable students. It aims at preventing ESL and absenteeism, promoting inclusion and fostering a responsible citizenship.

Includ-Ed

The Learning Communities project - Includ-Ed, funded by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS), at the request of the Ministry of Education and implemented by the CREA Team, from the University of Barcelona, aims to implement, in a set of 49 school clusters a series of Successful Educational Actions (AES), based on scientific evidence, which have been shown to reduce school dropout and failure, regardless of the socioeconomic context of each educational community. This is a comprehensive, innovative, tested and activity-based approach involving local communities and students' parents. This approach was tested in Portugal in a pilot experiment limited to 11 clusters, in 2017-2018, and showed promising results. The objective of the current project (2019-2021) thus translates into extending this experience to a larger group of schools, so that the results can be more conclusive and the necessary conditions can be built, at national level, to ensure sustainability and extension to more school clusters. In addition, the analysis of the results of its implementation will provide relevant information, which will allow to deepen the national strategy to combat school failure within unfavorable socioeconomic contexts.

Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions

The strategy to prevent and combat early school leaving in Portugal consists of a set of measures and initiatives, whose implementation requires the involvement and interaction of a diversity of public entities and civil society organisations.

In recent years there has been an intra-governmental and intersectoral cooperation regarding early school leaving, with several political areas that are cooperating with the field of education at a central/higher level, in particular in the areas of Youth, Social Affairs, Family, Justice and Health. (European Commission / EACEA /

Eurydice / Cedefop, 2015).

This cooperation takes place at horizontal level, with synergies in various policy areas, and at vertical level, with the cooperation taking place at different scales - national, regional, local and in schools. The set of measures in the area of prevention, intervention and compensation involves the crossing of several policy areas that presuppose cooperation between different departments and state bodies.

CNPDPCJ has been collaborating with other entities in order to prevent early school leaving. CNPDPCJ, through its municipal committees, plays a leading role in monitoring and flagging cases of absenteeism and early school leaving. The school reports situations of absenteeism exceeding more than 2 weeks to the CNPDPCJ and a joint work is carried out through multidisciplinary teams composed of technicians from the local authority, social services, local organisations, and several agents from the education sector - teachers, school groups directors, guidance staff. In these cases, the intervention can include the collaboration of a diversified set of players in the sectors of health, education, security, housing, etc.

The implementation of measures under the Youth Guarantee is also based on the cooperation between different policy areas and their respective entities and organisations. It intends to increase young people's qualifications, facilitate the transition into the labour market and reduce youth unemployment. The target is young people between the age of 18 and 29 that are neither in employment, education or training.

Operates on four parts:

- Internships;
- Employment;
- Education;
- Training;

In the field of education, it comprises a set of initiatives targeted at young people at risk of early school leaving or that have already left the mainstream educational path, offering alternative school and training routes, in partnership with IEFPP, I.P. and the Qualifica Centres, in particular:

- Young people Education and Training;
- Learning;

At the level of post-secondary and higher education, it still offers Technological Specialization Courses and Professional Higher Technical Courses.

For more detailed information on the Youth Guarantee, refer to Chapter 3. Employment and Entrepreneurship - 3.6 Integration of young people in the labour market (1. Youth employment measures)