EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK | COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

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Initial education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic:
Portugal

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19

Pre-existing resources in the education system appear to have facilitated areas of Portugal's immediate response. The regional and local support structures established to support national projects in curricular flexibility and autonomy and digital education were quickly mobilised to provide support to schools and teachers for the transition to distance learning. As Portugal works to balance short-term responsiveness with longer-term strategic aims and resilience, the crisis has brought specific challenges to be addressed. Portugal has made considerable progress in recent years in reducing grade repetition and early school-leaving rates. Maintaining and building on this progress may become more challenging as international evidence from the OECD (2020) suggests school closures can lead to increases in school drop-out and inhibit transitions between grades and phases. Strong targeted support for at-risk students, both during closure and once schools have reopened is therefore critical; adapting structures already in place such as the National Programme to Promote Educational Success and the Education Territories of Priority Intervention Programme to respond to the altered context may provide a useful starting point.

This snapshot presents information originally published as part of the **Education Policy Outlook: Portugal (2020),** available at: www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Portugal-2020.pdf

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The Portuguese education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 12 March, Portugal announced the closure of all education institutions from 16 March. Portugal began reopening higher education from 4 May and upper secondary from 18 May; basic education would continue at a distance to the end of the academic year. Initial responses in light of the work of the *Education Policy Outlook* in 2020 in the context of this pandemic are:

1. **Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways:** The Support Schools website was launched and constantly updated with tools, resources and guidance for online learning. An online course, Training for Digital Teaching, launched with around 750 schools and school clusters registered for the first session. To complement online learning, Portugal launched #EstudoEmCasa, eight hours of daily educational programming broadcast via a national television channel, YouTube and a mobile application. Thanks to public-private collaboration, teachers were also able to upload classes to YouTube and share resources via an online community, accessing training and technical support. In higher education, classes and assessment continued through institutional digital platforms, and the pre-existing COLIBRII and NAU - Sempre a Aprender platforms, which have been reinforced during closures. Portugal cancelled basic education assessments and standardised examinations for grade 9; upper-secondary examinations, which inform tertiary admissions, were maintained but postponed, and students would take fewer subjects. These students were prioritised when schools reopened. Tertiary institutions implemented distance examinations wherever necessary.

2. **Strengthening the internal world of the student:** The #SerJovemEmCasa campaign offered activities, workshops and information to keep young people stimulated at home. Youth associations contributed ideas and resources to the campaign. This complemented the #SerAtivoEmCasa campaign, publishing daily guidance, leaflets and videos across social media and official websites to promote physical activity as a way of maintaining the health of children and their families. The Ministry of Education (MoE) collaborated with the Order of Psychologists to develop a bank of wellbeing resources for young people, their families and teachers.

3. **Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families:** Portugal continued to provide school meals to the most disadvantaged children despite school closures, and the number of children accessing these meals steadily increased. Portugal published Guidelines for the Support of Vulnerable Students (GSVS) with ten practical measures for schools to implement. The MoE also published specific guidelines for the Multidisciplinary Support Teams for Inclusive Education highlighting four key areas of support: 1) providing technical support to teachers and schools; 2) identifying and implementing methods for inclusive education; 3) supporting families to transition to online learning; and, 4) collaborating with other community services. Portugal announced that special education institutions would be among the first educational institutions to reopen on 18 May 2020.

4. **Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level:** Organised locally, designated education institutions remained open to care for children of essential workers. The MoE established a brigade of over 100 educators from the regional teams of the Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility project and other pre-existing national projects to support educators to adapt teaching and to collect and disseminate good practice. The GSVS recommended other forms of collaboration: mobilising local volunteers (e.g. university students, retired teachers and non-teaching school staff) to support high-need families; mobilising local partners (e.g. private sector) to provide digital equipment and Wi-Fi; and collaborating with the High Commissioner for Migration.

5. **Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** The MoE established new communications tools to ensure timely and accessible guidance for educators: the E72 application was launched to provide answers to user questions within 72 hours, complemented by a new tool for school leaders to contact the MoE. Several platforms were put in place to promote the sharing of good practices.

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Table 1

Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)	Portugal	Average	Min	Max
Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)				
1 Index of self-efficacy	-0.01	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2 Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	88.5%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)				
3 Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	12.0%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4 Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	65.5%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced before **11 May 2020.**

For more information visit: http://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/

Contacts:	Diana Toledo Figueroa (Project Leader): Diana.ToledoFigueroa@oecd.org
	Christa Rawkins (Policy Analyst): Christa.Rawkins@oecd.org

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