

CHAPTER 16

Current support systems in Portugal

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In Portugal, education is organized according to the democratic principles established by the Constitution of the Republic (1976), in particular the freedom to teach and learn (Art. no. 43). Each school is part of a school cluster, which has its own administration and management team. These groups include pre-school establishments and one or more levels and cycles of education that share the same pedagogical project. Although these school clusters are managed by the Ministry of Education, they have some autonomy in terms of pedagogy and management of the timetables of teachers and non-teaching staff. Some recent reforms have increased the autonomy of clusters in terms of curriculum management (Decree-Law no. 55/2018, 6th July) in order to promote decentralization, assigning responsibilities to municipalities with regard to investment, equipment and building maintenance, provision of meals and management of all staff (Decree-Law no. 21/2019, 30th January).

In Portugal, schooling is compulsory for 12 years, from 6 to 18 years of age, which corresponds to the end of secondary education. Public education from the age of 4 until the end of secondary education is free and universal.

The education system has a comprehensive structure that involves a long basic schooling with vocational options at the beginning of secondary education. In the first year of secondary education (10th year) students can opt for: a) science-humanities courses; b) vocational courses; c) other education and training provision (Eurydice 2021/22).

The education system in Portugal is divided into pre-school education (from the age of three until the start of basic education), basic education (six to 15 years old) and upper secondary education (15 to 18 years old) (Eurydice 2021/22). Pre-school education is devoted to children between the ages of 3 and 6 (the age at which they move on to compulsory education). These educational years are optional; it is up to the family to decide whether to send their children to school before the age of 6 but is universal for children starting from the year in which they celebrate their fourth birthday. The network of existing establishments has been increasing in the last years in the context of a policy of wide availability (Eurydice 2021/22).