

AGE MANAGEMENT IN PORTUGAL

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In the education sector

Trade unions complain that the profession is no longer attractive: there are fewer and fewer young people who dream of becoming teachers and more and more professionals are switching from classrooms to more stable careers. The majority of teachers (52.9 percent) in Portuguese schools are more than 50 years old, while teachers under 30 do not reach 1 percent (they are 0.6 percent), according to data from the "State of Education 2019", released by the National Educational Council (CNE). The teaching profession in Portugal has experienced a double aging, both at the bottom with the lack of young teachers entering the profession, or at the top with the age of professionals in their careers increasing.

In 18 years, the percentage of teachers in the 3rd cycle and secondary with at least 50 years old per 100 teachers under the age of 30 went from 61.3 percent to more than 3000 percent, according to 2018 data from Pordata. In this analysis, Portugal appears as the second country in Europe with the biggest difference: In the 1st and 2nd cycle it is only surpassed by Italy and in the 3rd and secondary cycle by Greece. Between 2018 and 2019, the aging rate of teachers increased in pre-school education by about 16 percent, while in the 2nd and 3rd cycle and in secondary education the growth was around 17.5 percent, according to Pordata data.

In recent years, there are fewer and fewer young people interested in pursuing a teaching career. An example of this is the gradual decrease in the number of students looking for courses in the area of education: Between 2011/2012 and 2017/2018 there was a decrease of about 50 percent of people studying these areas.

The main problem may be incomes. Most teachers have been working in schools for at least two decades, but continue to be at the same salary level, with only 8.7 percent of teachers reaching the top of their career. The number of education graduates has fallen in the last decade, while the average age of teachers has increased, according to the "State of Education 2020" report that warns of the risk that "in the near future" Portugal will have few qualified professionals. The warning is left in the annual report of the National Education Council (CNE), which draws a picture of the Portuguese education system in the 2019/2020 school year and reveals two contradictory trends that could soon worsen the shortage of teachers.

In the last decade, the percentage of higher education graduates in Education courses fell from 8.6 percent in 2011 to 5 percent in 2020, placing Portugal below the OECD and European Union average. In addition to the drop at the exit of universities, when it comes time to choose a degree there are also fewer students opting for this area and despite a slight increase in the 2019/2020 academic year compared to the previous one, there were 52.4 percent less enrolled than in 2010/2011.

In the report, the CNE also recalls the need for master's degree for the professional qualification for teaching, pointing out that also here the demand has been insufficient.

The 2020/2021 teacher census for mainland Portugal shows that slightly more than 15 percent of teachers in pre-school, primary and secondary education were aged 60 or over, which means that in the next seven years, public education could lose 19 479 teachers to retirement.

A prospective study published by the Ministry of Education also pointed to the worsening shortage of teachers, due to the increase in retirements and the reduced number of graduates, estimating that by 2030/2031 it would be necessary to hire around 34,500 professionals to ensure there is no shortage of teachers in schools.

In general

The challenge of socio-demographic ageing in Portugal is, if anything, greater than in most countries in Europe and indeed in the world. Not only life expectancy is improving more than OECD average but above all the present Portuguese fertility rate is among the lowest in the whole world (2014 = 1.21). Population is currently decreasing in Portugal and may decline by 25% in the next 30-40 years.

To realize the speed of the process in Portugal, the ageing index has grown from 100 to 144 since 2000. Comparatively low income among the rich countries which are also leading the ageing trend, like Germany or Japan, and lack of sustained growth since the beginning of 21st century both account in Portugal for recent emigration and virtually no immigration in the face of the current recession. However, an examination of the ageing process in Portugal in European comparative perspective shows that several other cumulative factors also contribute negatively to the fact that Portuguese seniors have a much lower quality of life than European average. Our comparative exercise is based on the 2011-12 wave of SHARE-Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe which included at the time 16 countries.

The ENEAS was the result of the working Group created by the Joint Order¹ signed by the Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Minister of Health, with the aim of defining a strategy for active and healthy ageing, through cooperation between the different sectors. Ageing has been assumed as a challenge in different areas of political action.

The measures that have been put in place during the last years are part of a cross-disciplinary policy on ageing issues. The initiatives foreseen in Strategy for Active and Healthy Ageing will be carried out in conjunction with already existing programs and strategies to ensure policy coherence. It should be mentioned the recent law of September 6th nº 100/2019 that approves the Status of Informal Caregiver that regulates the rights and duties of the caregiver and the care recipient, establishing the respective support measures.

Meanwhile the recent approved Programme of the Government for 2019-2023 identifies as one of the main challenges for this period, the Demography. In this context one of the priorities is the Ageing process and the quality of life and it is foreseen an Action Plan for Ageing Population containing a structured set of answers. As was already mentioned the National Reform Program is an important political framework for the development of ageing policies.

All studies show that the best strategy to deal with ageing is the adoption of what is currently known as “active ageing” recommended by the OMS. According to the index of active ageing in Europe among people with 50+ years, Portugal ranks by far as the lowest country with less than half the European average; Lisbon instead, although with an older population but with more time spent at school, is near the European average.

Regarding the future, besides a much more intensive support from public and private institutions to “active ageing” activities than nowadays, the most important change expected to overcome Portugal’s current backwardness in the crucial area of population ageing is of course the issue of pensions. Portuguese seniors actually retire on average later than most Europeans. However, recent studies show that an increasing number of seniors in Portugal are already prepared to retire later because they already know that keeping active is decisive for their future health and quality of life. Early retirement was frequently advocated in the past order to make room for young people arriving on the labour market. Nowadays, however, the full renovation of generations is far from taking place, so the missing young workers will just not be there to contribute to the retirement of older people.

Changes across generations are already taking place and governments have to find a new balance – demographic, cultural and socio-economic – between the certainty of lesser births, longer periods at school and an increasing need for the elderly to remain as active as possible mentally, physically and socially!

Sources:

A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES
Realizing the potential of living longer



Proceedings of the 2017 UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing 20-22 September 2017 Lisbon, Portugal

https://fronteirasxxi.pt/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Conference_Proceedings_Lisbon_Ministerial_Conference.pdf

“Estado da Educação 2019” (CNE)

“Estado da Educação 2020”, released by the [National Educational Council \(CNE\)](#).

<https://www.podata.pt/en/Subtheme/Portugal/Teaching+Staff-43>