



NATIONAL REPORT for PORTUGAL

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1. Summary

This report starts by considering facts and figures in the field of Lifelong Learning (LLL) and University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) in Portugal. Even if there was an immense growth of higher education from the mid-seventies to the mid-nineties, levels of tertiary educational attainment are still low and the percentage of early school leavers is still high. Therefore, it is not surprising that governmental initiatives to upgrade qualification and to promote access for mature students were central in the last decade – even if the a change in government, together with economic crisis, generated a shortage of public investment in this field.

Until recently, the links between research and practice in LLL were close: universities were involved in the initial and in-service training of professionals working in the centres for the recognition of prior learning (many of which were closed in the last few months). Research and theory in adult education were of extreme relevance in the design of these centres, but also in the design of the model of recognition of prior learning that was instituted. Moreover, these centres were the object of many research projects and academic publications, including both researchers and professionals who came to the universities to investigate their own practices (see case study). This intense dialogue will be no doubt interrupted by the lack of public investment.

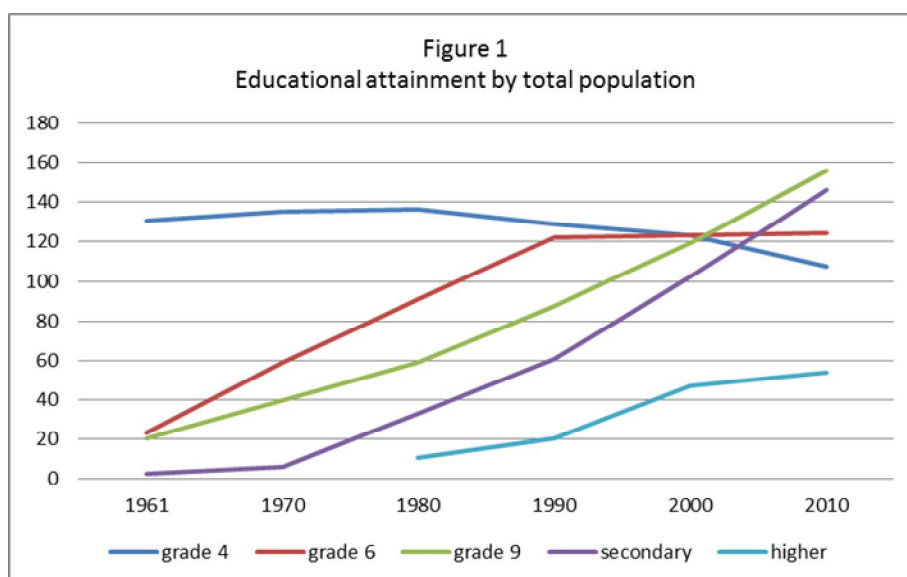
In the case on ULLL the situation is less clear, as this is a novel phenomenon – for many years, self-designated “senior universities” accounted for the training of mature adults (retired citizens) in diverse contexts; but now a new group of “older 23” students is entering universities, and existing research about their experience is still scarce – we are reviewing in this report the few existing studies. Therefore, it is important to consider how this situation will evolve and to keep monitoring the possible implications of existing research into practice, particularly when it comes to considering not only access but, especially, progression. As far as the situation is now, I would say that the dialogue between research and practices in non-existent.

2. Methodology

This report was prepared by Isabel Menezes from the University of Porto after consultation with national experts in the field of LLL and ULLL (see references). Additionally, and besides review of specific literature, we rested on the OECD reports and statistics from the Eurostat, internationally, and from the INE and Pordata, nationally.

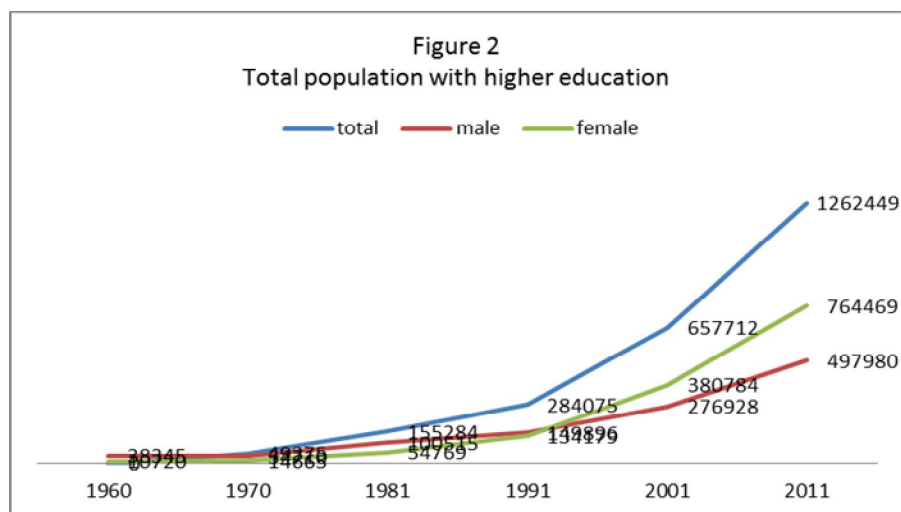
3. Facts and Figures on LLL and ULLL

The situation LLL and ULL in Portugal is only understandable if we take into account major evolutions in education and access to education. Portugal was under a dictatorship for almost 50 years until 1974; during the dictatorship, investment on education was very low and compulsory education was the lowest in Europe (4 years until the late 1960s). In Spain, although the situation was similar until the 1950s, the investment in education started during Francoism. Even if investment in education grew immensely after the institution of democracy, the impact of low levels of educational attainment in the population are still visible today (see Figure 1), especially in older cohorts.



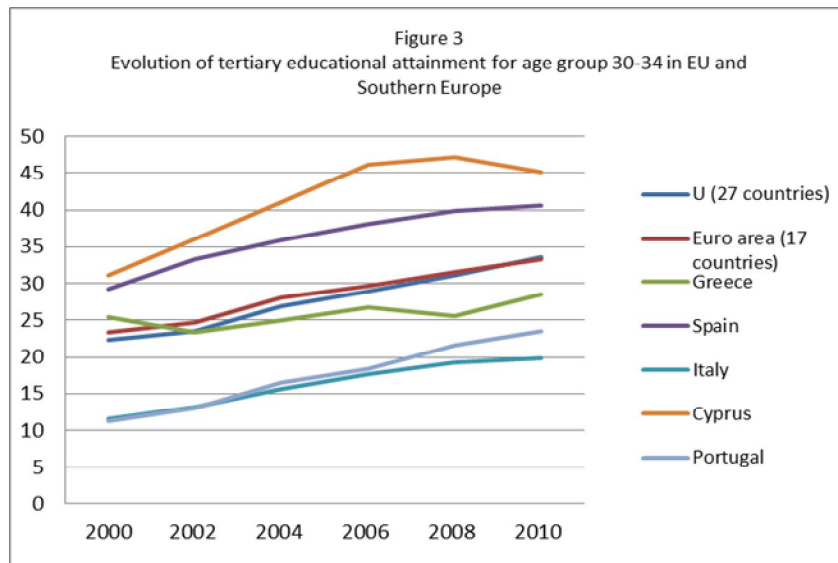
Source: INE and Pordata

With democracy, not only universal access to education was guaranteed, but also a wider access to higher education was achieved: “the number of enrolled students increased almost 800% relative to the student population in 1974” (OECD, 2006, p. iv). However, it should be noted that, in 1974, higher education had “a gross enrolment rate around only 7%” for the 18-24 years old cohort (Amaral & Magalhães, 2009, p. 506). This implied, until the late 1990s, a huge expansion of the higher education system, including “regionally distributed polytechnics and private universities” (*ibid.*), under the motto “more is better” (Magalhães, Amaral & Tavares, 2009). This explains why the population with higher education increased very significantly (see Figure 2), and also why enrollment in higher education only started to decrease in the late 1990s for the private sector and the early 2000s for the public sector – a period where quality and accreditation were emphasized, corresponding to a “more is a problem” phase (Magalhães, Amaral & Tavares, 2009).

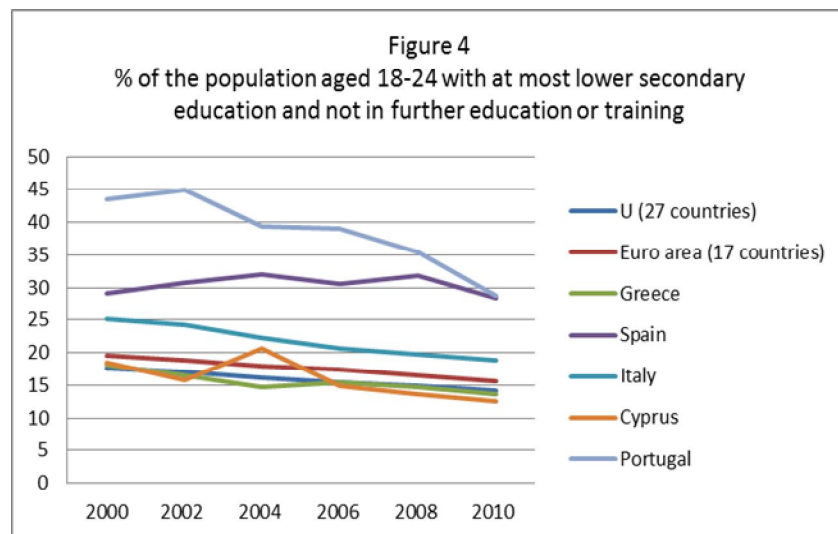


Source: INE and Pordata

However, in comparison to other EU union and Southern European countries, the levels of tertiary educational attainment are still low (Figure 3), while the percentage of early leavers aged 15-24 is still comparatively very high (Figure 4).



Source: Eurostat



Source: Eurostat

Given this panorama, it is not surprising that Portugal has been involved, in the last decade, in a major effort in LLL and ULLL. In fact, since 2001, major governmental programmes have been promoted to upgrade qualification, namely the New Opportunities Initiative that is centred on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (Gomes, 2011). The goal was to qualify 1 million Portuguese with secondary education until 2010 – a goal that obviously (some might add, fortunately) failed. However, the impact of the New Opportunities in the qualification of the population at



the basic and secondary level was still impressive: from 2001, more than 1 million Portuguese over 18 years (the majority between 25 and 44 years old) were enrolled in the New Opportunities Centres (Centres for the recognition of prior learning and referral to education and training programmes), and more than 400.000 were certified, the majority of them with the level of basic education (ANQ, 2010). Again, this data reinforces the very low levels of educational attainment and high levels of educational dropout in Portugal.

However, the obvious increase in both searching for and obtaining qualifications had a profound impact on ULLL, as more adults can now enrol in higher education. Additionally, the initiative was (at least in an initial phase¹) accompanied by strong public messages regarding the importance and value of education and LLL. This – together with the lowering of candidates in higher education – had important implications in the regulation of access to ULLL.

4. Access to ULLL: policy and practice

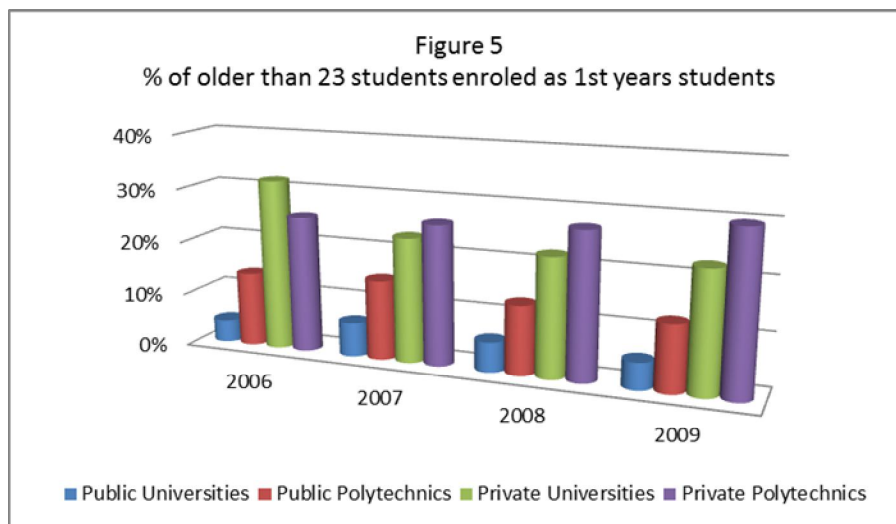
During this period of intense growth, then followed by a relative decline in enrolment in higher education, access to ULLL by was dependent upon the completion of secondary education, involving a set of quite demanding final standardised national examinations; however, adults over 26 could, since the 1960s, apply for a special examination. Nevertheless, only slightly over 3000 candidates per year applied to this exam until the early 2000s, and less than 20% were approved. Moreover, according to Amaral and Magalhães (2009),

“the lack of access equity was another problem. The analysis of the socioeducational indicators made evident that student access to HE was strongly related to

¹ In fact, as the newly certified adults (and their families) were confronted with the low social and, especially, economic valorization of the newly acquired qualifications, the attitudes toward LLL became more negative; moreover, in the last electoral campaign, the current prime-minister expressed severed criticisms towards the New Opportunities now accused of being “an easy way out” in comparison with the “real” education. The implications were, not surprisingly, devastating.

student background, meaning that Portugal was still far from equitable access to HE. Among European countries, Portugal (Eurostudent, 2005) presented the higher prevalence of students coming from families with higher schooling when compared against the relevant age range of the total population” (p. 512).

The OECD report (2006) also underlined the need to include more diverse publics. This initiated what Amaral and Magalhães designate as a “more is different” period, where measures to facilitate access to diverse publics, including mature students, were reinforced. Illustrative of this is the fact that, in 2006, the government issued a new framework for access to ULLL that specifically promoted access to students “over 23” years old (Decree-Law 64/2006 of 21 March). Contrary to the national examination of the former system, the new law leaves to each higher education institution the responsibility for defining criteria for selection and entrance. The impact was immense, particularly for those private institutions where enrolment had decreased significantly (Figure 5).



However, Amorim, Azevedo & Coimbra (submitted) stress that the percentage of “over 23” students seems to have stabilized (see Figure 5 above), and that no information really exists regarding the academic routes of these students after entrance. This leads



them to speculate that this interest in new publics might be more a sign of what Brunson (2006) has called “organized hypocrisy” than an actual “epiphany” regarding “bridging the epistemological gap between academic and experiential knowledge” (s/p) – in this sense, this would suggest that more than a real interest in expanding to other publics, higher education institutions are more likely learning to cope with the absence of their traditional (and still most desired) publics.

Moreover, as we have discussed in previous reports regarding other groups in risk of exclusion from ULLL (e.g., disabled people, migrants and elders) no actual systematic policies foster their inclusion, and much is left to the actual initiative of individual institutions. The implication is that if many interesting projects do exist, many institutions reveal very fable recognition of access issues regarding these specific groups. However, if we are indeed, as Amaral and Magalhães (2009) suggest, in a period where diversity of students is a must, then we will surely witness more policy and practices regarding these publics in the coming years.

5. Practical links between Research and Practice

The previous analysis rests heavily on research that has systematically (and critically) analyzed the impact of policies in the life of LLL institutions and publics. As particularly one of our case-studies will reveal, this research also influences the development of ULLL, and many post-graduation opportunities for professionals working in the field of education and LLL will imply not only confrontation with existing research but, eventually, the implementation of their own research on professional contexts and practices. However, whether or not these experiences generate change in practice clearly depends, as our previous research has suggested, not only on individual professionals but also on their work contexts, their networks of professional relationship and the existing levels of support for innovation and reflection (Menezes, 2005).



6. References

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