



# **APPLE- eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from dropping out of school Education**

National report: Key findings of desk research  
and interviews with educators and stakeholders  
in Portugal

IO1 – Capacity Building Seminars for Educators



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## Abstract

*In Portugal, the number of young people leaving education has been decreasing in the last years, approaching the EU average. The numbers reflect the effort of the existent programs, tools and projects that aim to combat this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the number of young people dropping out of school is still considered high. This report is a part of the Intellectual Output 1 - Capacity Building Seminars for Educators - of Apple project and intend to present the results of the Portuguese reality in terms early school dropout. The main purpose was to understand the needs of teachers and stakeholders in terms of training as well as to design a profile of the youngsters in risk of dropout. A desk research was conducted on the existent tools and practices that are implemented to combat this issue at a national level. We also collected data from teachers and stakeholders in the field of education through a qualitative and quantitative approach. The research showed that in Portugal exists a wide range of tools to combat the early school dropout and school failure with promising results. The data indicate that some of the needs of teachers in terms of training are related to the need of practical approaches, strategies to deal with disruptive behaviour in classroom, develop skills such as sensibility and sense of observation to early identify behaviour and signs showed by students at risk of dropping-out and to improve the image that both parents and youngster have about school.*

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## 1 Introduction: the national context

The number of young people leaving education or training early in Portugal has decreased from 12.6% (in 2017) to 11.8% (in 2018), approaching the EU average (10.6%). Early school drop-out in Portugal is now close to the EU average, although there are still considerable differences. In 2017, more than one third of Portuguese students who started high school didn't finish it in five years (when the standard is three years) and end up dropping out of school without obtaining a compulsory education diploma (OCDE, 2017). However, in 2019, the rate of Early school drop-out reached the lowest numbers ever. According to data recently revealed by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), in Portugal the early school dropout was 10.6% (10.1% in the continent).

In terms of gender, the INE data shows that there is a considerable disparity between girls and boys when it comes to dropout: 14.7% for males and 8.7% for females. There are also very significant regional differences: 28.3% in the Autonomous Region of the Azores and 11.2% on the continent (INE, 2019). The same source shows that the mean of the age of school dropout or other education with school equivalence is 17 years old.

Indeed, the General Directorate for Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC) (2020) shows that the 3rd cycle (in Portugal corresponding to the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) is more problematic in terms of dropout, especially in the case of students with lower socioeconomic statuses. Only one in five students who have the School Social Action (ASE- a measure that is implemented annually whose main purpose is to support families in need who have school-age children), i.e., 21% has school success. In high school, only 29% of Students with ASE finished 12<sup>th</sup> grade without failing.

In Portugal, the reasons behind early school drop-out are considered multifactorial and may result from personal, social, economic, cultural, educational and family-related factors (Official Journal of the European Union, 2015). The phenomenon may also be related to the environment, educational system itself and to the labour market and the economic crises and unemployment rates in the last years. Consequentially, some families lack the financial structure to support young people in the educational area and ensure successful schooling pathways (Estêvão & Alves, 2013). Some studies show more specific reasons for the dropout, such as unfavourable school climate and environment, violence and bullying; inadequate teaching methods and curriculum plans; insufficient support for the student; lack of education and career guidance; teacher-student relationship. Thus, school dropout appears to have multiple roots, from



economic, motivational, vocational, and circumstantial factors, as well as policies and legislation related factors (Maximiano, 2017).

APPLE: *eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from dropping out of school Education* is a European initiative, which aims at tackling Early School Leaving, by developing an innovative guides for educators and an early warning platform, that will enable educators, schools and authorities to easier identify youth at risk of dropping-out. The main objective of the Output 1 Capacity Building Seminars for Educators is to develop and implement capacity building seminars, addressed to educators in order to enhance their knowledge and develop skills on innovative pedagogical methods. Upon the implementation of the seminars, educators will be able to provide support to students who are at risk of dropping out of school, as well as their families. By developing a guide for educators and an online early warning platform, consisting of key scientific material and tools, APPLE aims to equip educators, schools, educational organizations and authorities with the necessary tools to identify youth at risk of dropping out and halt early school leaving. Early identification of children and young people at risk of early school leaving will enable educators to act and reduce the risk of dropping out.

In order to develop the contents of the training, desk and field research was conducted in the six participating countries, regarding existing practices and tools implemented at national level, the needs of education professionals and potential characteristics of young people at risk of early school leaving, as depicted by educators and education stakeholders. **This report summarizes the results of the Portuguese reality in terms of desk research of existing tools and practices as well as field research findings at a national level.**

## 2 Methodology

To conduct the research, it was used a qualitative approach, through interviews with Stakeholders and Educators as well as quantitative research applying a questionnaire to the participants. Complementary to the data collection methodology, we conducted a brief desk research on early school dropout in Portugal, focusing our research on existing tools/practices/methodologies to combat this phenomenon at a national level. In the same line, we conducted a desk research on the needs of teachers and stakeholders on the educational

field. In order to achieve that aim we used national data bases, legislation, articles and national documents.

Aproximar recruited the participants for the interviews mobilizing relevant entities in the educational field, especially the school dropout associations, schools and personal contacts to reach teachers and stakeholders in the educational field, mostly by e-mail. The interviews were conducted by skype and phone. Prior to the interview the participants received a formal invitation to participate in the Apple project; a brief power point presentation with the main information about the project (framework, aims, partnership, expected impacts and benefits of participation); as well as a debriefing document. The interviews were recorded to facilitate the transcription and analysis and all participants gave the verbal consent of the recording. The interviews duration varied from 10 to 56 minutes.

We interviewed in total 10 participants:

- ▶ 3 teachers, one male and 2 females that teach Portuguese & French language (7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grad); Mathematics (7<sup>th</sup> grade); and Portuguese (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades). One of the teachers have an additional role of directorate of the class.
- ▶ 7 stakeholders, 3 males and 5 females, from 6 different entities such as PNPSE (Plano Nacional de *Promoção de Sucesso Escolar* - National Plan of School Success Promotion) from General Directorate of Education; ISCTE-IUL & TEIP program (*Territórios Escolares de Intervenção Prioritária* - School Territories of Proprietary Intervention); Amadora Inova; *Associação Tempos Brilhantes* & Project SAPIE (*Sistema de Alerta Precoce do Insucesso Escolar* – Early Alert System of School Failure); IAC (*Instituto de Apoio à Criança* – Institute of Child Support), etc. Within these entities we interviewed project managers/coordinators, psychologists and a pedagogical director.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed based on the guideliness of the Intellectual Output provided by the project coordinator, focusing on the needs in terms of training.

The questionnaire that we applied allowed to understand the teachers and stakeholders perspective on the characteristics of the students in risk of dropout (age, gender, minorities group in drop-out), the idea of the national numbers in terms of drop-out as well as main characteristics and factors that lead to the early drop-out. We manage to collect in total 6 questionnaires (1 from a teacher and 5 from stakeholders), from 1 male participant and 5 females.



The professionals that filled the questionnaires were the same that participated in the interviews, and the tool was sent and received by email. The compiled results from the collected data are described and analysed in the end of this report in the section of the characterization of young people at risk of early school leaving.

## 3 Key findings of the desk research

### 3.1 Existing practices and tools for the prevention of early school leaving

As a national strategy and in line with the national goal of the Europe 2020 Strategy, Portugal determined as a goal of the reduction of the early school leaving rate to 10%. Following that goal, Portugal have been developing different initiatives as political strategy to combat and prevent early school leaving. These measures are framed in pre-existent national plans, operational programmes and public policies, including an extensive variety of organisations and public entities.

The highlight in this set of measures was the promulgation, in 2009, of the compulsory education to 18 years old and the strategy to devise and implement political measures shared by several entities of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Security (Alvares et al 2015; Ministry of Education, 2009).

Another example is the implementation of the National Plan for Prevention of Early School Leaving (PNAPAE) launched in 2004, 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.

Most recently, in 2016, the National Program to Promote the School Success (PNPSE) was 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. The Mission Structure's objective is to implement and ensure the assistance, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

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 (Cedefop, 2015). This cooperation takes place in various policy areas and 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 assume cooperation between different departments and state organizations.

The National Committee of Promotion of Children and Young People's Rights and Protection (CNPDPJ) 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. CNPDPCJ has been collaborating with other entities in order to prevent early school leaving, through its municipal committees and 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.

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 automatically collected by the administrative services of the school network. Even though this registration is not carried out with the direct purpose of collecting data on absenteeism and early school leaving, the students' personal data enable the identification of those that drop out of school.

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

Some of the measures implemented by the government and other programs and tools developed in Portugal will be described next, as well as some of the results obtained so far in the matter of reducing the early drop-out in our country.

### 3.1.1 More School Success Program (Programa Mais Sucesso Escolar)

In early 2009, the Ministry of Education launched the More School Success Program (*Programa mais Sucesso Escolar* - PMSE) as one of the alternative pedagogical strategies to deal with school failure in education. On the bases of the PMSE are some ideas such as the improvement of the organizational school conditions in terms of learning and teaching, the improvement of school results without jeopardizing the level the educational demands, development of coordination mechanisms and regulation and the cycle of studies as a unit of analysis. This program is applied through different types intervention, such as *TurmaMais Project* and *Fénix Project* that were implemented in schools using a similar methodology.

### 3.1.2 TurmaMais Project

This project acts as a rotating platform for fighting school dropout and failure, namely, a class named "TurmaMais" (ClassPlus) – an extra class without fixed students that temporarily aggregates (in about six weeks) students from two to three classes of the same year of schooling and with similar levels of proficiency and characteristics. The main aims of this project are to improve the school performance of all students, promote social integration in school by increasing the self-esteem of students with more difficulties, deepen practices for monitoring learning processes and outcome and deepen the reflexive and intervention capacity of the school organization.

It gathers the students into different working groups, thus reducing the heterogeneity of the classes of origin and allowing to aggregate elements with similar interests. This typology consists of creating a class without fixed students that temporarily aggregates students from the various classes of the same year of schooling, with identical difficulties in school. The methodology TurmaMais allows a big freedom at the level of the arrangement and rearrangement of the groups of students to attend this type of support, as well as the calendar of their passage through the project.

This class uses differentiated pedagogies and diverse forms of organization of the group, allowing collaborative work through pedagogical partnerships. This can be seen as a preventive,

interventional or compensating measure, according to the typology of each student involved. In this kind of 'turntable' system, each group of students perform working hours similar to their home class, with the same workload and the same teacher by class. Each specific group of students continues to work on the programmatic contents that their home class is developing, and may benefit from closer and more individualized support, more harmonized in terms of learning paces and without overloading weekly hours for students. Throughout the year, students enter or leave the TurmaMais, depending on whether they get the learning pace close to their peers who are in the "mother class" (Directorate-General for Education, 2019).

In the year of 2009/2010, through PMSE, the project TurmaMais was implemented in 67 schools. The success rates of the year 2009/2010, shows that the project managed to obtain significative progress. With the exception of 1st class (where the rate of success/progression is 100%), in every school year, the reduction of school failure situates between 40% and 80%, although its recommended a more in depth analysis in terms of the success per discipline/class (Fialho, Sebastião & Salgueiro, 2010).

### 3.1.3 Fenix Project

This project is based on an organizational model in the school that allows to give a more personalized support to students who show learning difficulties in the disciplines of Portuguese language, Mathematics, or other one identified by the school according to the rate of Success. This model consists on the creation of Fénix Classes – called informally as "nests" in which students who need greater support in learning are temporarily integrated, allowing a more individualized teaching, adjusted to the different learning paces. The goals of this project are to decrease student retention rate, prevent school dropout and absenteeism, improve school success, promote the potential of each student, considering the different learning paces, creating smaller groups of students (nests) to potentialize the learning outcomes, develop varied and personalized teaching and learning dynamics.

The project is divided in two dimensions of intervention based on the profile of the students:

- Low School Performance Students: the teaching-learning processes aim to recover the gaps observed in terms of content and skills.

- High School Performance Students: the work carried out aims to promote excellence, giving students the possibility to develop their skills and extend their potential.

The students are supported by a full-time teacher in a more restricted group, outside the classroom which makes it possible to carry out a more specific work by identifying and meeting concrete needs, consolidating the contents in a more customized, diversifying and adapting, both strategies and materials for each student. The time that students spend in the nest depends on the evolution of each student, based on a continuous assessment of their progress (Directorate-General for Education, 2019).

The transition of the class/ the completion rates in 2013/2014 of Fenix project schools had higher values than national rates from 2nd to 9th year of schooling, which represents the effectiveness of the support offered to students in learning development groups (Verdasca, et al., 2014 ).

### 3.1.4 National Programme to Promote School Success (Programa Nacional de Promoção de Sucesso Escolar - PNPSE)

The Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 23/2016, of April 11, created the National Program for the Promotion of School Success (PNPSE), with the aim of promoting quality education for all, combating school failure and dropout and increasing the efficiency and quality of public schools. It created a Mission Structure of professionals with recognized merit and competence in the field of education, to ensure the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the PNPSE. Through this national plan the Ministry of Education plays a supporting role for schools and teachers, with a particular focus on boosting continuing training plans and their implementation, providing specific support for measures that are essential in improving pedagogical work in the classroom.

The National Programme to Promote School Success is based on a logic of proximity, 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. It's also based on the promotion of practices that allow to anticipate and prevent school failure, through early intervention and 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.

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, 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.

The results of the evaluation report of the program showed that from 2016-2018 compared to the 2014-2016, were registered improving school success, educational equity and efficiency gains, namely: 30,000 fewer students retained in primary education in the PNPSE schools network, reduction of retention rates in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles, respectively, by 29%, 31% and 28%, increased educational equity as a result of reducing the disparities in outcomes between schools (Verdasca, et. al, 2019).

In 2019, PNPSE was extended by the ministry of education for two more school years, since the results show a significant reduction in retention rates and the rate of early school leaving reached the lowest ever in 2018 (11.8 %, when in 2016 this number stood at 14%) (Diário da República, 2019).

### 3.1.5 National Plan of School Drop-out Prevention (Plano Nacional de Prevenção do Abandono Escolar - PNPAE)

In 2004, a government plan was created with a focus specifically on the problem of school dropout. The National Plan for the Prevention of School Dropout (PNPAE) is a report entitled "Eu Não Desisto" (I Don't Give Up) which gathers the most relevant information on school dropout, especially from the perspective of increase in compulsory education up to the 12th grade. The aim of the PNPAE is to intervene globally and locally to prevent exits from the



Education System before the completion of high school (PNPAE, 2004). The Plan follows international guidelines, namely in terms of the 2010 European Union target for reducing school leaving.

The PNPAE target the prevention of early dropout and to the successful schooling and, consequently reduce school dropout and early exit rates to less than half registered in 2001. The aims of PNPAE included: 1) The development of a set of systematized initiatives to combat school leaving during the period of mandatory schooling and the establishment of School Social Support Centres (CASE); 2) The promotion of technological education and vocational education; 3) The development of information services and professional guidance; 4) the development of conditions for the operationalization of the training clause in employment contracts of minors under the age of 18; 5) The expansion of the network of Skills Recognition, Validation and Certification Centers (CRVCC); 6) the development and consolidation of open and flexible education and training routes, capable of contributing to an effective reduction in the deficits of school and professional qualifications of the population (Canavarro, 2004).

### 3.1.6 TEIP program

The TEIP Program (*"Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária"*; in english "Educational Territories for Priority Intervention") is a government initiative of the Ministry of Education currently implemented in 137 groups of schools that are located in economic and socially disadvantaged territories, marked by poverty, social exclusion, violence, indiscipline, dropout and school failure. The program's central objectives are the prevention and reduction of early school leaving and absenteeism, the reduction of indiscipline and the promotion of the educational success of all students.

The intervention begins with a plan for improvement. After the diagnosis (SWOT analysis) and after the main areas of intervention are identified and prioritized, strategic actions are defined per 4 priority axis, namely: 1) Improvement of Teaching and Learning; 2) Prevention of absenteeism and early school drop-out; 3) Organization and management; 4) School - Family - Community Relationship. The TEIP plan also include a training plan for teachers, technicians and administrative staff of the school such as: school climate regulation and conflict prevention, pedagogical supervision, management of conflicts in the classroom, etc. The plan is monitored and evaluated (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2020).

The TEIP evaluation report of the school year of 2010/2011 shows that since the year 2006/2007 until 2010/2011, there is a progressive reduction of the percentage of students that interrupt the scholar path early, with a tendency of the rates to get closer to the national values registered (0,2 percentual points from national levels in 2010/2011). Since the program was started, 62% of TEIP schools diminish their global percentage of school dropouts. The TEIP program also registers positive impact on the rate students with disciplinary actions, with 65% of TEIP registering a diminish of cases of indiscipline. More than 63% of TEIP increased the rate of school success (Directorate-General for Education, 2012)

### 3.1.7 V. Educative project Portuguese Non-Mother Tongue

Initiative created by the Directorate-General for Innovation and Curriculum Development and the Ministry of Education in 2006 with the aim of prevent the dropout of immigrant students by developing linguistic competencies and facilitating the access to the curriculum and to integrate immigrant students in the educative system. This measure defines standards and guidelines and creates the Portuguese Non-Mother Tongue as equivalent to the discipline of Portuguese in the educational curriculum. It predicts the conduction of a diagnostic test that stablish the level of proficiency in the Portuguese language. Based on this diagnostic the student is integrated in a group with a correspondent level where the group gets support and help from the assign teacher (Fonseca et al. 2007; Law n.º 139/2012).

### 3.1.8 Integrated Education and Training Program (PIEF)

The Integrated Education and Training Program (PIEF) is a socio-educational measure, of a temporary and exceptional nature, to be adopted after all other measures of school integration failed. It aims to promote the social inclusion of children and young people by creating integrated (socio-educational and formative) responses to prevent and combat school dropout and provide qualification (Joint Order No. 947/2003 of the Ministers of Education and Social Security and Labour, published on 26 September). This measure focuses on young people with a very specific profile such as: situations of school dropout; age gap in relation to the level of education attended; criminal behaviour; psychological problems; victims of child labour. This measure has as added value the collaboration of a Local Intervention Technician. This agent has as function to define, implement and monitor the development of a series of actions planned and elaborated according to the specificities of the class. It is also up to the technician to streamline the mediation processes with the interlocutors (of the partner entities) necessary for the implementation of the program; develop socio-family diagnoses and refer to the flagged

situations of young people at risk of social exclusion. To this end, the needs of the young person, in particular in terms of education, parental skills, family and ecological factors, should be identified, in conjunction with the identified interlocutors of the PIEF network and, according to the guidelines of the Social Security. The technician actively participates in the process of integration and permanent monitoring of students of the PIEF class, at the individual, social and family level, through integrated intervention with the partners of local networks, promoting inclusion in the community school and in the local community (Vaz, 2014).

### 3.1.9 Alternative Curriculum Routes (PCA)

PCA promote an educational offer aimed at students that, being within compulsory schooling, fail repeatedly at school or are at risk of early dropout (Normative Order no. 1/2006 of January 6, 2006). Alternative Curriculum Routes are intended for students up to 15 years old, including who are in any of the following situations: 1) Occurrence of repeated failing; 2) Existence of problems in integration into the school community; 3) Risk of marginalization, social exclusion or dropout; 4) Learning difficulties, in particular: strong demotivation, high nonparticipation rate, low self-esteem and lack of expectations regarding learning and the future, as well as the disagreement between school culture and its culture of origin. The Alternative Curriculum Course program is designed based on the characterization of the group of students who will attend it, in the diagnosis of essential skills to develop (Directorate-General for Education, 2019; Brilha, 2008).

### 3.1.10 “Choices Programme” (Programa Escolhas)

The “Choices Programme” (Programa Escolhas) is a national government programme integrated in the High Commission for Migration (ACM) 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 emigrants, who are in one or more of the vulnerable situations such as school absenteeism; school failure; early school dropout; unemployment; deviant behaviours; subject to educational tutoring measures; subject to promotion and protection measures; emigrants in vulnerable situations. In the particular case of measures to prevent and combat early school dropout, this program financed some projects such as:

#### i. UCAN Project

Under the "Choices Programme", the UCAN programme awarded scholarships to young people from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, which may compromise 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.

#### ii. 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.

The Choices Program was pointed out as "good practice" in 2012, in terms of fighting early school leaving. The distinction was made at the congress "Reducing Early School Leaving: efficient and effective policies in Europe". This Conference is part of the European Commission's effort to reduce early school leaving to 10% in the EU by 2020 and the work of Choices has been highlighted as an example to follow, among 21 other European "good practices".

The school success rate among children and young people up to the 12th grade participating in projects of the Choices program was, in 2010/11, 82% and 2,773 children and young people supported by the Choices, who were outside the education system returned to school (ACM, 2012).

### 3.2 Needs of educators

According to Álvares (2015), a gap in the educational system in terms of fighting the early school dropout by teachers is training. Despite the investment in this matter, in particular in the teaching of Mathematics, Portuguese and Experimental Science, there's a need to develop training courses for teachers specifically focused on working with students with specific profiles and on breaking down some prejudices linked to the drop out and the causes of this phenomenon.

Casanova (2015) also indicates that the educators are aware of their own training needs, which are based on the difficulties in terms of performance and teaching. The needs of teachers seem to be related to the knowledge of the organization of the classes and modalities, as well as techniques and instruments of evaluation. At the level of school practice, the priorities evidenced by teachers are the need to learn different pedagogical strategies promoting the educational success of students; work methodologies to be used appropriate to the diversity of contexts; ways of performing interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary articulation. At the level of the pedagogical relationship, preferential needs seem to point to the promotion of students' motivation and conflict management. In terms of indiscipline and school dropout, teachers affirm as a need to learn strategies of motivation to reduce school dropout and also to reduce indiscipline. Regarding the evaluation of students, teachers want to learn techniques to collect data and assessment instruments. At the level of the relationship with the community, teachers want to affirm to have the need to explore how partnerships are established with community institutions and with social entities (Casanova, 2015).

Another author also sustains the need of training for teachers, namely, training focused on learning difficulties of these students, on different strategies or alternatives to teach students with difficulties, on working methodologies with these students and concrete application of strategies. Some other training needs showed by educators is pedagogical relationship, pedagogy, psychology of school behaviours, pedagogical strategies and teaching methods, learning difficulties specific to these students, methodologies of work with these students, concrete and practical ways of implementation of strategies, knowledge of the educational Portuguese system and other countries. The teachers also show a need to understand the failure and school dropout in terms of the factors that determine such situations as well as evaluation methods, stimuli and pedagogical relationship in diverse contexts, understand the topic of the indiscipline and troubled students (Duarte, 2009).

The TALIS Project 2018, promoted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international large-school survey of teachers, principals and learning environments in schools. According to this survey, teachers showed needs among some areas of professional development such as development of advanced skills in ICT; teaching practices in multicultural/multilingual environments; teaching practices to students with special needs of education (area in which, in Portugal, teachers express a particular need for professional development); teaching students with different levels of skills and needs. In Portugal, on average,

19% of teachers teach classes that have at least 10% of students with special education needs; 45% of teachers stated that their initial training for teaching included "teaching in mixed contexts", but less than half (39% of teachers) felt prepared to teach in these contexts when they finished their studies. Although in the 12 months prior to the administration of the TALIS survey 30% of teachers participated in vocational training activities, including the teaching of students with special education needs, this is precisely one of the areas of professional development that teachers report as having greater training needs (value for Portugal: 27%) (OECD, 2019).

The recommendations resulting from the project RESL.eu - Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe, which focuses on the factors influencing young people aged 18-24 in deciding to leave school and on the intervention measures that bring them back, stated that is necessary to focus on strengthening alternative learning pathways and create a national strategy to reduce school dropout, which goes beyond raising the compulsory schooling age. Therefore, is important and necessary to promote the feeling of belonging and the voice of students, as well as to ensure access to high-quality vocational training, in order to combat the stigmatization of this system (Educare, 2018).

The "Plan to combat school dropout" (2013-2014) specify the needs of the administrative and management staff of the school, such as develop strategies to minimize absenteeism and eliminate abandonment, stimulate attitudes oriented towards living in the day-to-day school and promoting educational success, create conditions, infrastructure, quality in personal and pedagogical relations, extracurricular activities, physical and human resources that make the School a pleasant place. There's a need to create structures for observation / analysis and monitoring of problematic cases (with a multidisciplinary team), as well as to promote the articulation and regular sharing of information between the various services. It's also referred as imperative to create partnerships with external entities that help solve problematic situations, requesting support in the resolution of school dropout situations, when the other solutions failed to resolve the problem. It's also necessary to disseminate the training alternatives available for increasing the schooling and qualification of young people over 18 years, making them return to school. The plan also show a need for the administrative professionals in the school to collaborate in actions aimed at preventing school exclusion of students, organize and ensure information on existing socio-economic support for the students and their families, assist students and families in the effective fulfilment of school attendance and seek the articulation of appropriate socio-educational responses.



### 3.3 Needs of education stakeholders

In the strategy of the Ministry of Education in supporting schools and their professionals, the continuous training emerges with emphasis, recognizing the role in training in the school context, such as workshops and experimentation in the classroom. The Nacional Plan of the Promotion of School Success identifies also the need to continually train the educators to guide and empower them in identifying their weaknesses and the most relevant factors associated with the pedagogical work that hinder learning and negatively influence school outcome to help them in the design of strategic action plans.

Additionally, there's a need to promote collaborative networks between schools based on common interests, shared in training workshops in terms of problems and difficulties, but also strategic thinking about possible solutions to be constructed to overcome weaknesses and constraints, on practices already adopted that work.

In the framework of the guidelines related to the elaboration of strategic action plans, some strategies can be highlighted such as a) pedagogical relevance - change of work dynamics in the classroom, reinforcement of collaborative work of teachers, focus on differentiation and pedagogical innovation; b) sustainability and efficiency of measures - achieved by criteria for mobilizing internal resources and cost-effectiveness of measures.

In the context of the needs of continuous training, there are three major areas that tend to cross the strategic action plans of the schools: methodological-didactic, pedagogical organizational, civic-social. The first one includes the aspect of 'Methodologies and didactics in teaching', the aspect of curriculum management, collaborative work and evaluation of learning and the aspect of pedagogical differentiation and innovation. From the first aspect emerge curricular areas of Reading and Writing / Portuguese, Mathematics, Experimental Teaching of Sciences. The second involves the training needs in collaborative work strategies and horizontal and vertical articulation, monitoring and evaluation of learning, pedagogical supervision and co-observation and flexible management of the curriculum. The third aspect refers to training needs in pedagogical differentiation and innovation strategies, whether supported by technological environments or aligned with the same curricular areas of the methodological-didactic aspect.

It's also essential to the stakeholders involved in this area to obtain financial support for the creation of continuing training and educational responses in the school context appropriate to

the needs of the school organization and directed to the sharing of methodologies, pedagogical materials and instruments, curricular sources, criteria and teaching practices (PNPSE, n.d.).

The Education and Training Monitor of 2019 published by the European Commission, analyses how education and training have evolved in the EU and its Member States. The Monitor identifies the imperative need of the social entities and governments to invest in the education and teachers. *That means that is essential to provide them with the tools they need. The monitor of 2019 focus on the teachers*, including and analysing the results of a wide-ranging survey by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development to which teachers responded. This latest edition of the OECD International Survey on Teaching and Learning underlined the need for teachers to receive training to better address some issues such as the use of technologies, teaching pupils with special educational needs and teaching in multicultural classrooms. In this sense, the Monitor recommends ensuring an adequate number of teachers in the system, in all disciplines and in both rural and urban areas. It is also noted that greater political efforts are needed to attract the best candidates for education, ensuring them the appropriate training and motivation to remain in the profession.

The “Plan to combat school dropout” (2013–2014) mentioned some needs of the stakeholders and social entities in the area of education, such as Autarchies and other Social Institutions, to promote the socio-educational skills of the population of the Municipality, to implement Social School Action and support services for families in need. Also, identify and report family situations with children/young people dropping out of school through institutional entities. The plan evidence the need for the autarchies and other Social Institutions to promote the socio-educational skills of the population of the Municipality, prevent or put an end to situations likely to affect the safety, health, training, education or integral development of young people, mobilize educational resources to intervene in psychological and pedagogical support to children and young people at risk, collaborate with logistical support, necessary for the well-being of families at risk and contribute to the students' school reintegration.

In the specific case of the CPCJ, the plan points out to the need of develop actions to promote the rights of children and young people and to prevent risk situations, inform the Community about the rights of children and young people, raise awareness throughout the Community to support whenever they encounter special difficulties as well as to articulate the partnership with

the School for the detection of problems. In the same sense, there's a need to collaborate in the construction of individualized action plans, intensify the intervention with parents and families, monitor the implementation of measures to protect children and young people and contribute to the implementation of training alternatives. Finally, this stakeholder needs to constantly adapt procedures and resources to support the problems identified by the School and to collaborate in educational and civic intervention with parents and families ("Plan to combat school dropout", 2013-2014).

According to the PNPSE report (2016-2018), given that it has been achieved in the course of the last years, the objective of decreasing school failure in education, there's a need for the stakeholders to support the continuity of the schools' action focused on strategies to improve the learning of each and every one of the students, consolidating an integrated vision and an extended socio-educational commitment of the pedagogical leadership of the Schools.

## 4 Key findings of the empirical research

### 4.1 Findings of the interviews with educators

#### 4.1.1 Difficulties faced by the educators

One of the difficulties presented by the teachers, when dealing with students at risk of early drop-out was the lack of answers and feelings of powerlessness when dealing with cases of youngsters in risk of drop-out: "We feel powerless and unable to resolve the matter because we call the «Escola Segura»<sup>1</sup>, the *Escola Segura* comes and talk to the boy after we have given the full turn to the subject. The *Escola Segura* tries to talk to the parent (...) but sees them as lost cases". This feeling and perception of lack of solutions seems to involve also the Child and Youth Protection Commission (*Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens - CPCJ*), which is an organ that intervenes when the school signalizes a child at risk: "When we contact the CPCJ, the CPCJ cannot

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<sup>1</sup> The «Escola Segura» (Safe School) Program originated in a protocol between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education, aiming to improve the safety indexes that occur within the school spaces.

do anything, Social Security also tells us that there is nothing to do". A teacher also refers as a difficulty the lack of feedback from parents and assertiveness on the part of parents, as well as the lack of interest, that in the teacher's perspective influences the student's motivation to go to school: "If parents were more interested in knowing what the school does (for the children), the kids might feel like their parents supported them at school, that could bring the school closer to their parents (...) Most of them won't (...) the school is far away even if they live next door."

A teacher also mentioned the lack of real flexibilization in terms of the contents that she teaches and the fact that the contents are not adjusted to the student's reality and interest, considering that factor as influencing the school drop-out as well as a difficulty in her work as a teacher: "I love what I do but sometimes it's frustrating to teach so many subjects and see that kids have no interest at all, and I totally understand that lack of interest. The programs are extensive and demotivating."

One of the teacher refers also to the social and economic context of his students in the school he works, a TEIP Program School (that we included in the desk research as an example): "The school where I work is a TEIP school, it's a school with some particularities, it has students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. (...) They are students from complicated neighbourhoods, or who do not live in so-called normal homes (...) which reflects on the school". Related to the student's contexts of the TEIP schools, the teacher also referred as a difficulty the fact that these students perceive the school as unimportant aspect of their life's: "the school don't matter to them, considering that they have problems outside of school. They're don't show up, they show up late, some only go to school because to get meals (...) most of them are not identify with school". The negative relationship with the school and the distorted image that these students has of the education seems to be also a difficulty: "troubled young people see the school and even the classmates as an enemy."

#### 4.1.2 Methods used to prevent early school leaving

The methods used to combat the phenomenon and in line with the TEIP program and the students backgrounds, is the adaptation of the teaching methodologies and adaptation of contents: "In this TEIP school the subjects are given in a lighter way(...); for example the management itself advises against giving homework. (...) Tasks to do outside the classroom are discouraged because they will not do them.". This method is based on the fact that the youngsters don't have support at home to complete homework or to motivate them and is not adjusted to the complicated reality that they live outside school. In the same sense, the

evaluation method in this TEIP school is also different, with only one test per semester and in phased out form. The justification is similar: "it is not because they are not capable because they are, but because many do not have the support they should have to achieve the objectives. " Another methodology is to avoid classes that are too expository and long: "they disperse, have difficulty focusing attention, even when they are solving a test their head is focused on what is going on around and they can't concentrate, can't be quiet or sitting down."

A teacher indicates several methodologies that the school uses, namely the class principal are chosen by their profile to deal and "hold" these students: "a class principal who have some affinity with the student, a figure of the tutor teacher (...) to guide him, try to approach the student and motivate him." Also, the school psychologists are encouraged to be in touch with these students. Another methodology is to give tasks to these students in the school yard as a strategy to keep the student away from trouble and deviant behaviour: "In their free time, instead of going home, encourage them to do chores at school that they like (...) instead of doing nonsense, stay in school doing tasks and in contact with teachers or staff (...).

#### 4.1.3 Existing practices and tools that contribute to the prevention of the phenomenon

The teachers didn't specify any tools in particular to prevent early dropout but mentioned some procedures that school undertakes in these situations. The procedure usually consists in communicating with the several parts involved, namely, the school Principle try to talk to the parents, the CPCJ, the kids and their teachers. The same teacher refers that the communication with the student is important to prevent the school dropout, to show concern as well as to try to integrate them during classes: "I always try in class to integrate everyone, in the questions, in the participation.". Another teacher also refers to the process that takes place when a student at risk is identified: "Usually parents are called to school, try to make them see that the children cannot miss school or have unjustified absences. There is a threat that the CPCJ may take action.". In line with this, a teacher referred that the educators and schools are not prepared to deal with this kind of situations and that the school should provide more support and re-think the class structure: "for example create smaller working groups, the classes are very heterogeneous, complicated and large. It's more difficult to manage the classroom context. Maybe smaller classes".

#### 4.1.4 Training needs and necessary skills

In general, the teachers agreed that training was necessary and important specially to deal with the school dropout topic and the student's behaviour, although one of the teachers stated that in this particular point of the carrier, she is not interested in participating in more trainings. One of the teachers talked about the trainings that she participated, indicating the need for a more practical rather than theoretical training: "I have participated in training in this field, but it is a lot of theory, little pragmatism and a deep lag in terms of the reality that we live in schools." This teacher recognized the importance of the theory in training, but highlighted the importance of the contents being based on the realities of the school that the teachers work in. Another teacher also mentioned the need to have more practical training and not only theoretical contents. A need that also was identified was the need to be listened: "that fails a lot not only in education but in several areas, to not listen to people who are working in the field".

Another need pointed out is to have strategies to involve the parents and the community in the school and to hold them accountable for the student's behaviours and demotivation to attend school. A teacher also identified the need of psychology contents in the training on how to deal with certain types of situations, disruptive and challenging behaviours in the classroom. In the same line, a teacher identifies the need of psychology contents in terms of emotional aspects and developing affection in children, parents and teacher: "include psychology of affection, which is something that's missing in schools. Kids shouldn't be so trained for numbers, more so for affections. I have read some articles from the Nordic countries where what they value most is affection, civility, affection for others and it would be important to work on this with students. Everyone should be included in this kind of training, the parents and the kids." Another need identified is to work on the negative image that students and families have of school: "communicate better with the kids and the families. Because most parents also think that school doesn't teach them anything, and kids also have that perception. Parents need to be sensitized to raise awareness among students."

In terms of necessary skills, two teachers stated that is important to have sensibility and the other focused on the importance of observation skills, which seem to be two interconnected skills. Thus, the capability of identifying that a certain behaviour, posture, response is linked to school dropout in the sense that sometimes a behaviour that is not very obvious may be a sign of risk of the dropout: "Awareness of certain behaviours. Some are evident, others are not (...) they could help make this diagnosis earlier.". The other skill mentioned was the capability of define



and establish rules in the class on the first day of school, in order to avoid conflicts and establish a relationship of respect and assertiveness.

#### 4.1.5 Training recommendations

Teachers suggest in general a more practical approach in trainings, although they recognize the importance of the theoretical contents. At this level they reveal willingness to participate in a training adapted to the school reality and context. Moreover, they recommend involving in the trainings psychology contents and strategies to deal with disruptive behaviour in classroom. They also seem to show a need of developing skills such as sensibility and sense of observation to early identify behaviour and signs that may point out that a certain student may be at risk of dropping-out. In the same line, according to the teachers, more training is needed to raise awareness in the parents in terms of the importance to understand the school work, the importance of education and support to children, as well as to improve the image that both parents and children / youngster have about school.

## 4.2 Findings of the interviews with education stakeholders

The stakeholders that we interviewed have or had contact with educators and direct or indirect contact with youth at risk of dropping out of school, some of them being a part of programs, projects or plans to combat this issue at a national level. In terms of tools to prevent this phenomenon, our participant indicated some practices such as awareness sessions in schools and indicated that bullying is a factor to school dropout: "our project conduct some sessions not only in basic schools but also when we are invited to go to high schools to do awareness sessions on topics such as bullying and violence while dating, which are situations that sometimes lead to children not going to school". These awareness sessions are usually implemented in complicated neighbourhoods where the school dropout are higher. Most of the participants mentioned the importance of cooperation between entities specialized in this matter to understand the reasons behind the school dropout as CPCJ, municipalities, city councils as well as with parents. It was also referred the importance to create strategies to develop mutual protocols between family and school and an association for example in the neighbourhood, to help minimize the "distance" between school and these families in social disadvantage.

Another method identified to prevent drop-out was alternative curriculum courses as strategy to motivate and captivate the interest of young people by offering educational opportunities in

areas valued by the students: "Not all young people can sit at a desk for hours listening to a teacher (...). More practical methodologies must be found to do teaching to promote students' interest.". Indeed, the professionals indicate that the trainings must include a component of awareness of all the alternatives that exist in terms of educational pathways and possibilities since "(...) many children are in regular education that are not the most appropriate for them (...) when you don't know all the existing measures, you can't fit the profile of the students to the measures.". There's a perception of the need to adapt the profile of the students to the existent offer in terms of education to guarantee the success and prevent the dropout.

There's also a need, linked to the previous idea, mentioned by the professionals, of a different approach and adaptation of the curriculum towards a more attractive school, i.e. a more flexible curriculum. Using sport as a pedagogical tool was mentioned by several professionals, for example: "it's important for these young people to have extracurricular activities that help motivate school attendance (...) there are many young people at age 15-16 who have football as their main ambitions, who want to pursue professional careers in these areas and clubs with recognition often have policies such as school performance and that ultimately motivates them."

Most of the stakeholders that we interviewed provide training to educators, although for some this axis is not the focus of their intervention or, in some cases, the training is offered in partnership with other associations, such as specialized training centres. The training aspect seems to be valued by the stakeholders in terms of skill development to deal with this issue: "They (the teachers) are on the front line, they are the ones who can make a difference and change the children so that they feel encouraged to go to school. I think it's important to offer training in bullying, skills such as empathy(...)"; "I see that sometimes conflicts arise between parents and teachers and students because of the lack of empathy and try to understand what is happening with the student, in the surrounding environment outside the school." A professional also suggested to include in the training an emotional management component of these children "because sometimes these children seek some support (...) there's a need to deconstruct what is the importance of school and why they have this resistance to school".

This idea is similar to what teachers expressed in their interviews, the familiar factors as influencers on the image that students have of school and the lack of parental involvement and support in education. In the same line as the teachers, the stakeholders referred to the familiar context as an important factor to the issue of early dropout and an important area to include in a training: "Many of these cases originate in the household, and it is very difficult to change

something that is already rooted. And I think all the specific help and training in this area is an asset.”.

In the same line as the interview with a teacher from a TEIP school context, a stakeholder working in this context specified that these schools have specific needs in terms of school dropout prevention. These schools and the teachers face a similar educational territory with various cultures and socio-economic statuses where low socio-economic status prevails and have a large percentage of foreign students. Therefore, in terms of training, this professional stated that the training sessions aim that schools with these characteristics such as multiculturalism and low socio-economic status “can have the best strategies for the equity of education to reach these students who are in the most disadvantaged conditions.” The work with the teachers is mostly focused on adjusting the contents, approaches and knowledge of experts (practice of pedagogies, for example) according and adjusted to the problems that schools identify.

In terms of contents usually involved in training sessions with the teachers, the stakeholders mentioned some such as focus on conflict management, collaborative work, in terms of help professionals to have a greater capacity within the school; formative assessment, to help teachers design new strategies and diverse assessment tools for their students and not focus the assessment on a single moment. In this line it was also identified some needs: “teachers have difficulties in implementing strategies towards learning in learning groups, lack of knowledge in terms of strategies to be implemented in the classroom, (...) deal with a classroom with heterogeneous groups.” Other contents suggested by stakeholders were manage classroom conflicts and conflicts that arise outside the classroom; characteristics and socio-cultural context of these youngsters, training in how to approach parents.

The professionals seem to agree that an effort needs to be made and go beyond the training in terms of pedagogical practices that are appropriate to solve the problem, but to train the teachers focusing on “understanding the context, the situation of the child, the need to be closer to the family... to be more prepared for the challenges of working with an entire class with pre-abandonment or dropout kids”. The professionals, as teachers did, referred that these youngsters, besides the complicated social and familiar background, usually have serious behavioural problems and there’s a need to train teachers to deal with that: “almost all of them in failure and abandonment have behavioural issues towards the school and colleagues. Every year we try to bring a set of themes to teachers through training that helps them deal with what is the situation of students.”

A professional stated that often school dropout is interconnected with other issues that are not related directly to the school, such as self-esteem and family environment. Therefore, there's a need to train teachers in these areas and raise awareness for the teachers to be more sensible to identify the signs: "It should be included in these trainings to see the student as one, not as a collective. Each case is a case... worry about the person who is in front of us, detect the signs.". This perception may be linked to the need explored above in terms of adjusting the profile of the student to the most adequate existent response.

Referring to the results of the tools and methodologies, stakeholders recognize positive impact. For example, a professional stated that the program + School Success, TEIP program as well as professional education has been very useful to the promotion of the "rehabilitation of these students who have in their school pathways record of interruption and early school leaving.". Many referred to some statistical data as proof of these programs results: "These have made the numbers have decreased. A decade ago, we had 50% dropouts, at the moment we have about 11, 12% of students dropping out". A stakeholder agreed with the positive results, nevertheless stated that a finer analysis will reveal that the decrease of the percentage of dropout hinder other more specific realities. Thus, there are still schools in disadvantage areas in Portugal, where the rate is 50% of dropout, adding that the minorities are the most affected by the phenomenon: "the context of daily life in which families integrate are a succession of problems that we could not solve. In normal contexts you can solve problems with the tools we have, in non-normal contexts we still can't solve it, and we still have very high rates of failure and abandonment, but very focused". That point out to the need of tools directed to the schools that present still high percentage of dropout. The stakeholders also mentioned that even these schools have much in common, sometimes they have particularities in terms of ethnic or cultural background that need a specific approach. Also, the reality can change very quickly from one school year to another, which shows the need to monitor this kind of data and adjust the tools to combat dropout accordingly.

This same topic is brought out by a different stakeholder that stated that in Portugal are some schools with a high rate of school dropout with high numbers in terms of minorities: "there are schools with 80% of Roma students and that have a very well structured response with the community". The professional discussed that depending on the context there are solutions that have been found by schools and have been effective due to the school adjustments to the community reality.

Additionally, a stakeholder brought attention to the need of entities related to the area of early school dropout receiving more institutional support by the Ministry of Education: “we have not yet been able to explain to the Ministry these past years the importance of what we have done and the results we have had, we have managed to recover about 60, 70 sometimes 80% of the kids. Recovering means getting them to complete the cycle where they were hanging and return them to schools”.

The professionals agree on the importance of the schools and context evaluations prior to the trainings as well as the context of the students, what needs they may have, in order to give more strategies and tools to teachers. All the participants agreed on the importance of providing training to teachers as a strategy to prevent and combat the early school dropout and showed willingness to support educators for the prevention and tackling of early school leaving.

#### 4.3 Characteristics of young people at risk of early school leaving

The data collected from the questionnaires revealed that some of the professionals are not aware of the real numbers of the students in school dropout or risk of dropout in Portugal. In terms of numbers the average number of students in drop-out, 2 participants stated they are not aware of the number, the others estimated the number: “I would say about 30 000 (3%)”; “Last year we had an average of 11% of dropout students”; “About 15%”; “I would say that from primary to high school education is more than 10 000 pupils”. When asked about the same numbers but in reference to youngsters at risk of dropping out, 2 didn’t respond, 1 wasn’t aware of the number, 2 estimated a value of 10% and 1 a number of 5000 youngsters.

In terms of age and gender of youth in drop-out, the range of answers was from 11 to 16 years old and most of participants think that there are more males than females dropping out of school, and only one participant think that both genders drop out school equally. The participants also estimated an average of ages of these students from 14 to 17 years old. The majority of the respondents think that the minorities are more prone to drop-out school (one of the participants stated that almost all of these students belong to minority groups; and one specify that the students from Roma communities are even more prone to leave school and in earlier ages, particularly girls); one participant however responded that the minorities aren’t more prone to early drop-out.

In terms of the minority groups that are more associated with early school dropout, the participants identified students from Roma communities (4 participants) as well as students from disadvantaged social statuses, students with special educational needs, emigrants (the participants specified students from Romania and Cape Verde); LGBTQ students, youth from single-parent families or families with absent parents (long work routines), students with low socio-economic status and structured or dysfunctional families.

In terms of factors that have impact on the school dropout in the perspective of our participants, the factor with most responds was family quality (with 6 responses), followed by economic factors (5 responses) and cultural/ethnic background (5 responds). The participants also considered as factors the school characteristics (3 responses), gender (3 responses) and academical qualities (1 response). In the open question available in this item, the participants also added as factors: lack of objectives, type of familiar support, lack of structure in the family and peer influence.

Within the academical qualities that may have impact in the school drop-out, the items with most responses were low interest in school (5) and irregular/low attendance (5). Other items considered by the participants were weak reading and math skills (3), lower cognitive abilities (3), low academic achievement (3), age (being older than other in the same grade) (3), being retained in one or more grades (i.e. school year level) (2) and frequent school transfers/long-term absenteeism (2). In the item school characteristics, the factor that seems to be more prevalent is teacher performance (6), followed by standards of conduct (5), administrative/instructional leadership (3) and physical facilities (1).

In terms of factors related to personal background, the items considered to have impact on school dropout were cultural background (5), social class (5) ethnic background (4) and gender (1). The factors within the familiar context identified as items with impact on school dropout were lack of family encouragement (6), followed by intergenerational dropout patterns (5), less individual attention towards children (4), less stimulation to prepare them for school (4), economic background (4) and traumatic experiences (3).

For last, according to participants experience the groups that face higher risk of early school leaving are children and youth from Roma communities (5), children and youth from ethnic and racial minorities (4), students with learning disabilities and emotional or behavioural disorders (4), refugee children and youth (4), students from low income families (4), children and youth



from linguistic minorities (3), migrant children and youth (3), students from and deprived rural areas (2), Students with physical disabilities (1).

## 5 Conclusions

The purpose of this report was to compile the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research as well as desk research on early school dropout in Portugal, focusing on existing tools to combat this phenomenon at a national level, needs of educators & stakeholders and profile of students at risk of early school dropout.

In Portugal exists a wide range of offers in terms of programs, plans and projects that targets the prevention of this phenomenon throughout the last decades, such as: More School Success Program (Programa Mais Sucesso Escolar) (with TurmaMais Project and Fenix Project); the National Programme to Promote School Success (Programa Nacional de Promoção de Sucesso Escolar - PNPSE); the National Plan of School Drop-out Prevention (Plano Nacional de Prevenção do Abandono Escolar - PNPAE); the TEIP program; the Educative project Portuguese Non-Mother Tongue; the Integrated Education and Training Program (PIEF); the Alternative Curriculum Routes (PCA); and the projects included in "Choices Programme" (Programa Escolhas).

Additionally, we were able to identify in the desk research, using national sources in terms of studies and documents, the needs of educators and stakeholders in the educational field. This research showed various needs of the educators in terms of training to improve their skills to deal with this issue, such as: learn pedagogical strategies and methodologies adjusted to the contexts (multicultural/multilingual environments); promotion of students' motivation, conflict management, reduction of indiscipline, techniques to collect data and assessment instruments, learn how partnerships are established with community/institutions/social entities, alternatives to teach students with difficulties, pedagogical relationship, psychology, learn about the national system and other countries, factors that cause the drop-out, practices to teach students with special needs (Duarte, 2009; Casanova, 2015; OECD, 2019).

It's possible to deduce that many of the identified needs in the literature are also present in our qualitative research. The interviews allowed to analyse that the difficulties presented by the

teachers (e.g.: feelings of powerlessness; lack of feedback from parents, of students' interest/motivation; contents not adjusted to the student's reality and interests) mirror the needs that teachers identify in terms of training, and some of the needs founded in the literature, such as: practical training, strategies to involve the parents and the community in the school, psychology contents on how to deal with disruptive and challenging behaviours in the classroom and in terms of emotional aspects (developing affection in children, parents and teachers), work on the negative image that students and families have of school, develop skills of sensibility and observation skills to identify the signs of risk of the dropout, as well as establish rules in the classroom.

The same happens when analysing the collected data in terms of factors that influence the early school dropout. The literature, the qualitative and quantitative research shows that the phenomenon is a multifactorial issue, being caused by social, economic, cultural & ethnic, educational and family-related factors /family quality, the educational system itself/ school characteristics, school climate and environment, inadequate curriculum plans, insufficient support for the student in terms of services and family, lack of education guidance and motivational factors. The focus of the qualitative and quantitative data in terms of minorities at a national level (as perceived by teachers and stakeholders) linked to the early school dropout seem to be students from Roma communities, as well as ethnic and racial minorities, learning disabilities and emotional or behavioural disorders and refugees.

The literature also showed that the needs of the education stakeholders are linked to training educators in terms of factors that hinder learning and negatively influence school outcomes, such as: need to promote collaborative networks between schools and teachers, change of work dynamics in the classroom, pedagogical innovation, curriculum management, horizontal and vertical articulation and between the different services, monitoring and evaluation of learning, pedagogical supervision, flexible management of the curriculum (PNPSE, n.d.; "Plan to combat school dropout", 2013-2014), strategies to better address use of technologies, teaching pupils with special educational needs and teaching in multicultural classrooms (The Education and Training Monitor, 2019).

In the same line with the desk research and in some cases with the interviews with the teachers, our interviews with stakeholders showed: need for articulation and cooperation/collaboration in terms of protocols between family-school-entities to support students in early drop-out, need of investment of

social entities and government in the education and *teachers*, alternative curriculum courses, strategies to motivate and captivate the interest of young people, adapt the profile of the students to the educational offers, offer training to teachers in bullying, empathy, emotional management, familiar factors, strategies to improve the image that students have of school, strategies to involve the parents, conflict management, new strategies and tools of student assessment, as well as raise awareness of teachers to be more sensible to identify the signs of the early school dropout.

It was a transversal perception that educators training is a very important dimension in the school and that in the trainings provided to the teachers is important to pay special attention to the adjustment of the contents to the problems that schools identify, the profile of students and the community where the school are inserted, i.e., adequate to the social, cultural and ethnic context.

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