



The right to education of adults in Portugal

Rosanna Barros

To cite this article: Rosanna Barros (2023): The right to education of adults in Portugal, The International Journal of Human Rights, DOI: [10.1080/13642987.2023.2194107](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2023.2194107)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2023.2194107>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 27 Mar 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 460




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The right to education of adults in Portugal

Rosanna Barros 

CIEd – Research Centre on Education, UM, University of Algarve, Faro, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The subject of this article is the right to education of adults, which is a central issue in the humanistic approach to Adult Learning and Education (ALE) that we are supportive of. From this angle we discuss human rights as an overarching framework for citizenship in Portugal, a country with a high number of low-qualified adults. The text provides a historical context, and for the analysis of the selected and specific current documents in recent policy agendas we use Tomaševski's¹ theoretical 4A framework, built mainly for school contexts, and apply it to ALE policy. This heuristic exercise makes a significant contribution to advancing knowledge in the policy studies of ALE. The objective is to understand ways of realising the right to education of adults by means of policy measures undertaken by national governments, against the backdrop of today's neoliberal trends in Europe. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to assess the degree to which the twenty-first century Portuguese policies have been adhering to the UN principles on the right to education in relation to ALE. From the discussion of the results, we conclude that the realisation of the right to education of adults has been successfully achieved.



KEYWORDS

Adult learning and education; right of education; educational policy studies; educational governance

Introduction

We understand education as a right and consider ALE as a goal itself as well as a foundation for democratic citizenship.² Nowadays, as in the past, this assumption could mean that we might be 'in and against the state'³ governance concerning educational priorities and mandates. Indeed, the 'in and against the state movement' states that it is possible to support national public and free basic educational agendas but at the same time to criticise them, to expand the vision of a quality public education for all. We use this metaphor here, first, to make clear our involvement in the issue of using educational and scientific work to support popular struggles for greater democracy, equality, and social justice; and second, to express the idea that the governance of education must make it a lifelong right.

From that binding nature of our approach, the degree of global attention to ALE as human right can be considered through a policy analysis exercise. In this article, we

CONTACT Rosanna Barros  rmbarr@ualg.pt  CIEd – Research Centre on Education, UM, University of Algarve, Campus da Penha, Estrada da Penha, Faro 8005-139, Portugal

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

take policy analysis mainly as a process of systematic investigation of the national implementation of selected existing ALE policy measures.⁴ In this aspect, our framework takes previously accepted conclusions, from political science and sociology on the importance of the Lisbon Agenda as a turning point, to consider, on the one hand, the complexity inherent to the concept of today's governance as Bevir elaborates it, 'at the most general level, governance refers to theories and issues of social coordination and the nature of all patterns of rule. More specifically, governance refers to various new theories and practices of governing and the dilemmas to which they give rise'.⁵ And, on the other hand, we understand global governance⁶ as referring to the fact that 'the global polity is an evolving set of processes and interactions (...) that by definition involves heterogeneous private and public actors at (...) local, national, international, and transnational levels'.⁷ In fact, in the most recent Eurydice report it is stated⁸ that,

In the area of adult learning, 'governance' refers to the way in which responsibility for policies and measures is distributed between public authorities, agencies or organisations within a country. Evidence from across Europe shows that adult learning is a complex policy field. In fact, responsibility is often shared not only horizontally, i.e. across different national policy areas (e.g. education, employment, social affairs), but also vertically, i.e. between different decision-making levels (national and subnational) and stakeholders.⁹

Those are analytical ideas that shape what we stand for when considering global, European, and national attention to ALE. However, that multilevel rationale,¹⁰ and the new governance architecture operating today in Europe, is not going to be developed much in the analysis presented here, as we have chosen to focus, mainly, on the ALE policies in Portugal and on the type of national attention given to ALE as a human right.

Therefore, by focusing on the specific research problem, namely the current state of ALE as a right in Portugal, this article describes and explores Tomaševski's 4A framework as a tool for analysing Portugal's commitment to, compliance with and implementation of the ALE provision and its effects on improving the participation of vulnerable adults in educational activities. In another words, it was our intention to develop an analysis to understand possible ways of realising the right to education of adults by means of policy measures undertaken in Portugal. According to this approach, we realise that availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability is not necessarily the standard four attributes used in every international treaty for public education policy agendas.

Based on that aim, the scope we are interested materialises in discussing the right to education of adults in Portugal as a broad issue of democracy and social justice, in a contemporary context of a significant number of low-qualified adults and youth school drop-outs, an economic crisis and the emerging disruptions of the recent pandemic crises. Against this backdrop, the Portuguese state, in close articulation with ANQEP,¹¹ has developed measures for ALE and declared it as an issue in terms of policy agenda. Consequently, our study intends to answer the following research question: to what degree have Portuguese policy developments met the principles for Human Rights to Education in relation to ALE?

To generate insights about the current state of ALE as a right in Portugal, we have decided to give analytical attention to three selected and specific current measures, that constitutes our object and empirical issue, as the focus of this article is to assess the degree to which the Portuguese policies have been adhering to the UN principles

on the right to education in relation to ALE. The selected measures, and inherent documents, were chosen from other possible measures present in the democratic period (See table on the contextualization section further ahead). Thus, the documental *corpus* of ALE measures regarded here was (i) the Knowing Plus measure; (ii) the New Opportunities measure; and (iii) the Qualify measure. Hence, we have applied Tomaševski's model to the ALE field. That 4A tool considers availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability as factors with substantive different evidence and are used in this article as a framework for discussion.

Finally, the paper comprises five sections. In the first one, some short methodological considerations are made, followed by a second section with a detailed description of the 4A theoretical framework and explanations of the way we have adapted it to the field of ALE. The third section, intended to show the main socioeducational specificities of the Portuguese society, is dedicated to developing a historical contextualisation of the main landmarks of the Portuguese policy agenda of ALE, during the Dictatorship State (1926–1974) and the Democratic State (1974 to the present time). In the fourth section we engage in a discussion of the realisation of the right to education for adults in Portugal, accordingly with the empirical data interpreted with the hermeneutic potential of the 4A tool, and in the last section some concluding remarks and recommendations for ALE governance are made.

Methodological options of the research

This article concentrates on the different meanings, implications and outcomes that occurred in Portugal concerning the policies of ALE. It examines how this country has declared, in different official discourses embedded in policy texts, an interest in taking specific measures to cope with low-qualified adults' issues. It also analyses, using Tomaševski's 4A framework, how ALE has been governed and regulated in relation to the human rights principles. To underline the research problem findings and to answer the research question, we carried out a triangulation of two different qualitative and interpretive methods of analysing the documental texts associated with each selected ALE measure: (a) a qualitative content analysis (QCA),¹² used to determine the presence of terms related to the 4A concepts, i. é., availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability; and (b) a critical discourse analysis (CDA),¹³ used to make interpretations based on both the details of the text itself and on its contextual relations to a political agenda of human rights. and present some evidence from the analysis of these documents. This methodological path was inspired by Jørgensen and Phillips¹⁴ when they underline the possibilities for combining different discourse analytical and nondiscourse analytical approaches in empirical study, however, we did not intend to mobilise the post-structuralist discourse theory, but only to search for partial connections between the 4A categories and discursive emphasis made by policy actors about proposals and decisions for action in the field of ALE public supply, and in relation with the human rights premisses.

Thus, the central national policy documents for ALE, were selected by two criteria: (a) only operating during the Democratic Portuguese State and (b) just after the Lisbon Agenda. The reason for choosing the measures of this period relates with the importance of the multilevel new mechanisms of educational governance that had emerged in Europe by the beginning of twenty-first century,¹⁵ and their political purpose of convergence in

common targets, as lifelong learning for all has gain protagonism implying surveillance of resource strategies implementation of political priorities, particularly in what concerns the increment of RLP practices for low-qualified adults.¹⁶

With this time frame, three ALE programmes with official policy documents were found, namely: (i) the Knowing Plus measure¹⁷ (1999–2006); (ii) the New Opportunities measure¹⁸ (2006–2012); and (iii) the Qualify measure¹⁹ (since 2016). In this regard it is important to underline, as clarified before, our agreement with a previously accepted conclusion from recent policy studies debate, that identify the Lisbon Agenda as a turning point in the European and global educational governance.²⁰ That's way those political measures, and inherent documents, were discussed keeping in mind the empirical evidence showing the relevance of supranational entities influencing the Portuguese political agenda during that period, particularly UNESCO and, mainly, the EU reports, surveys, communications, and recommendations, as supranational levels of governance can no longer be separated from national (and subnational) ones. An example from documental analysis can be observed here,

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, resulting from the Lisbon European Council held in March 2000, launching a debate at European and national level on a comprehensive life-long learning strategy at individual and institutional levels in all spheres of public and private life, shows that Europe is in a process of transition to a knowledge-based and innovation-based society and economy (...) The National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies (RVCC) subscribes, specifically the European employment strategy. (Law: Portaria 1082-A/2001, of 5 September)

Aiming to generate insights about the current state of ALE in Portugal from an innovative analytical approach we use Tomaševski's model and apply it, as a heuristic device, to adult education policy. The objective is to understand ways of realising the right to education of adults by means of policy measures, and priority aspects of policy discourses on ALE undertaken in this national state. Empirical data come from official policy documents (sources include laws, political actors' speeches and other public political instruments and tools, including official websites of the ALE Programs or measures) of the Portuguese policy agenda on ALE. A significant part of the data *corpus* for the recent democratic period was collected in the broad study context of two research projects we were involved with: (i) an international action-research project²¹ on the European key-competences for ALE; and (ii) a national multicase research project on transformative education.²²

Theoretical framework

The subject of this article is addressed in two complementary ways: (i) from the review of some international organisation discourses, particularly the UN and UNESCO arguments, highlighting that the states have the obligation to protect, respect, and realise the citizens' right to education as a matter of public concern; and (ii) from a case study of Portuguese concrete policy agenda and discourses; developed through the adoption of the 4A Model of Tomaševski²³ and its application to ALE policy.

We take these complementary approaches because, as mentioned in the previous sections, the right to education of adults must be understood and discussed by dovetailing the supranational, the national and the subnational scale of analysis. However, in this article our focus favours, on the one hand, the supranational lens by considering the

existence of the international human rights background, grounded in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948, UDHR) and, on the other hand, by considering national responsibilities arising from treaties adopted by Portugal to reaffirm and guarantee these rights legally. Interestingly, it means that this subject is basically still an issue of a national right despite the efforts of international organisations such as UNESCO. Thus, concerning the UN role in this topic, Article 26.2 of the UDHR states that:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the UN for the maintenance of peace.

In accordance with this framework, UNESCO has performed a very important role in this field of research by developing a vision of educational policy and governance as a vehicle to promote the human right to literacy and ALE as something more than mere alphabetisation and free basic Education for All.²⁴

Indeed, the UNESCO Recommendation on ALE states that: ‘all Member States, according to their specific conditions, governing structures and constitutional provisions, should develop comprehensive, inclusive and integrated policies for ALE in its various forms’.²⁵ This quote makes it clear that embracing ALE as a human right is fundamentally a responsibility and an obligation for democratic governments. Based on that, this article considers the case study of the Portuguese national state’s responsibilities to reaffirm and to guarantee the right to education of adults.

To develop this analytical dimension, we resort to the theoretical contribution of Katarina Tomaševski, who was, from 1998 to 2004, the first UN special rapporteur on the right to education of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.²⁶ Tomaševski’s inspiration is deeply linked to an equalitarian perspective of human and social development that includes a strong criticism of human capital approaches to education.²⁷ Tomaševski’s approach argues that education as a right is an indispensable means of realising other rights.

This root cause implies agency and compromises because ‘the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself’.²⁸ Thus, the performance of national states on this subject should be kept under regular public observation. Indeed, this is an important part of the mission of critical adult educators and researchers, as we can choose to use educational and scientific work to support popular struggles for greater democracy, equality, and social justice.²⁹ In this sense, Tomaševski’s approach to this subject is very useful because it improves the way the right to education (or the denial of the right to education to several social groups in many countries) is understood in analytical terms. However, her contribution remains anchored in relation to child learners and their contexts.³⁰ Nevertheless, we believe the 4A framework could represent an important heuristic device also in the field of ALE for those researchers committed to the vision of ALE as a human right.³¹ Therefore, our analytical exercise could be an opening output to reframing policy studies in ALE considering human rights, giving clarity to, and concretising our work as social justice educators, because it refocuses attention on a broader array of fundamental rights to be accomplished by national states, particularly in post-welfare European democratic regimes and post-pandemic crises.

In this light, we agree with Tamez (2012)³² when he states that Tomaševski's 4A scheme represents a valuable tool to (i) analyse ALE as a human right in the context of states' obligations, and to (ii) evaluate national policies, measures, and programmes in this field. According to this author,

Thinking the [ALE] EPJA as a human right implies a change of perspective. You need the distancing of the common logic of unsatisfied basic needs and 'educational backwardness', and the recognition of the obligations and responsibilities of the State for the guarantee of this right; that is, that the right to education only can be guaranteed when educational services are available to all persons; When are affordable universally; When the obstacles have been removed (economic, cultural, structural, gender, etc.) for access, enjoyment and use; When are adequate and relevant not only to the educational needs of the groups who are aimed, but also their desires, interests and aspirations of learning.³³

With that having been said, we consider Tomaševski's analytical proposal a useful way to clarify the right to education in terms of tangible factors. Presented in more detail below, it is our central tool for a better understanding of the realisation of the right to education of adults on the Portuguese policy agenda. The 4A scheme assumes that governments have an obligation to make education available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable. These 4A are to be respected, protected, and fulfilled by the governments of each country, as the prime duty-bearer.³⁴ In fact, this main assumption enables us to undertake such a study beyond the school environment, particularly in a national context with significant percentages of low-qualified adult population. The implicit aim is to expand the role of research whilst reinforcing government responsibility for ALE. Furthermore, this scheme gives us a lens through which we can also better consider the national tensions coming with the shift that occurred in Europe, from the Keynesian mandate (with lifelong education political priorities) to the post-Keynesian mandate (with lifelong learning political priorities) advocated for the field of ALE policy.³⁵ This kind of information is required for governments willing to develop ALE as a human right in current times.

The 4A framework shortly revisited

In Tomaševski's terms, education is a meaningful right in national contexts if it is available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable. These four attributes must then be present as a guide for policy development and implementation. Indeed, both before and after her role in the UN, with relevant work done on this matter, those 4A were considered as essential to monitoring ways of realising human rights in several different domains. For example, Anyinam (1987)³⁶ has drawn attention to the need to re-examine these attributes as applied to ethno-medical policy and practices in Africa. And a considerable amount of work has been done subsequently to develop the 4A framework on literacy around the globe.³⁷ However, in the field of ALE there is a scattering of contributions and therefore this article seeks to examine those four attributes as applied to ALE national policy measures in more detail.

Considering Tomaševski's work on the 4A scheme, *Availability*

embodies two different governmental obligations: the right to education as a civil and political right requires the government to permit the establishment of educational institutions

by non-state actors, while the right to education as a social and economic right requires the government to establish them, or fund them, or use a combination of these and other means so as to ensure that education is available.³⁸

This should mean that education has adequate territorial coverage, as well as infrastructures and trained teachers able to support the delivery of education. When adapting the 4A to monitoring ALE national policy agendas, we considered the nature and extent of availability by the presence of different types and modalities in the contexts of public ALE national offers. Particularly we think that availability of ALE can be viewed in two main ways: availability in terms of total supply of practices and trained educators, and availability as a geographical distribution.

Considering Tomaševski's work on the 4A scheme, *Access*

is defined differently for different levels of education. The government is obliged to secure access to education for all children in the compulsory education age-range, but not for secondary and higher education. Moreover, compulsory education ought to be free of charge while post-compulsory education may entail the payment of tuition and other charges and could thus be subsumed under 'affordability'.³⁹

This should mean that the national education system is free and non-discriminatory, and positive steps are taken to include all, particularly the most marginalised and poor. When adapting the 4A to monitoring the ALE national policy agenda, we considered not simply the geographical proximity of practices but also the presence of measures that allowed, with concrete criteria, the practices to explore cultural, social, and psychological proximity with heterogeneous adults, looking for the adequacy of 'accessibility coverage'.⁴⁰

Within the context of Tomaševski's work on the 4A scheme, *Acceptability* is an important facet of education that has to be

highlighted by the addition of 'quality' before education in policy documents, thus urging governments to ensure that education which is available and accessible is of good quality. The minimal standards of health and safety, or professional requirements for teachers, thus have to be set and enforced by the government.⁴¹

This should mean that the indicators for the quality of the education system as a whole (including schools and related bodies, teaching and learning environment, etc.) have been adequately achieved. But also, the quality and relevance of contents of education, monitoring what the system offers to the students (i.e. quality of teaching and learning process, curriculum, etc.). When adapting the 4A to monitoring ALE national policy agendas, we considered acceptability by studying reports on the relevance of ALE by adult learners and practitioners. Public discourses of policymakers giving importance (or not) to the quality of public educational offers in this sector also provide information on the ways ALE as a human right for adults is accepted.

Finally, in Tomaševski's 4A scheme it is pointed out that *Adaptability*

has been best conceptualized through the many court cases addressing the right to education of children with disabilities. Domestic courts have uniformly held that schools ought to adapt to children, following the thrust of the idea of the best interests of each child in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴²

This should mean that formal education systems evolve with the changing demands of society and adapt to suit individual specific needs. When applying the 4A to monitoring the ALE national policy agenda, we considered that ALE systems are generally regarded as open and flexible, usually falling into a non-formal educational paradigmatic approach. This openness of ALE, therefore, makes it more adaptive, varying in nature and degree, and thus being capable of incorporating new elements to meet new contextual pressures upon society in different ways.

The above exercise has borne in mind the main structural and cultural differences between schooling and adult education, highlighting what the 4A framework could look like in the specific context of ALE. Thus, in this article we undertake an analysis of the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability of the current Portuguese policy agenda of ALE.

By focusing the discussion on the framework of human rights in the present-day democratic political arena in a national context of Southern Europe, a historical contextualisation of the main national realities is needed. In view of that, the next section provides a historical context for adult education policy with the purpose of underlining key measures through time. We draw attention to Portuguese specificities rooted in socio-political backgrounds, and how current educational policy agendas have considered the right to education of adults in the context of the democratic regime. Therefore, the next part of the text is dedicated to this description and analysis.

The Portuguese policy agenda of ALE – historical contextualization

To introduce the analysis of the ALE policies in Portugal from the dictatorship state period until today, Table 1 displays the policy measures undertaken by governments. Administratively, Portugal is *de jure* a unitary state and the public policies have a national scope despite the existence of two autonomous regions.

(I) During the Dictatorship State (1926–1974)

In Portugal, the fascist government lasted four decades (48 years). During this regime, the ‘education of the people’ was likely to turn into subversion. Consequently, the agenda of public policy concerning the education of adults did not go beyond a discursive intention⁴³ of promoting literacy and numeracy to a certain extent. The education of adults was explicitly designated by the dictator Salazar himself as a ‘method of the poor’, which was based on ideological manipulation and curricula simplification. The general

Table 1. Portuguese ALE policy measures through time.

1952	Popular Education Plan
1953–1956	National Adult Education Campaign
1971	Primary School Supplementary Courses for Adults
1979	National Literacy Plan for Basic Education for Adults
1986	Second Chance / Recurrent Education for Adults
1999–2006	Knowing Plus Program
2006–2012	New Opportunities Program
2016	Qualify Program ⁹⁰
	+ National Adult Literacy Plan (2022)
	+ Accelerant Qualify (2022)

vision was connected to the idea that the regime should not teach the people how to read. And, indeed, in 1930 a total of 62% of the population over the age of seven was unable to read.⁴⁴ Thus, the educational mandate was clearly geared towards the creation of qualified elites at the expense of mass literacy.

However, in the 1950s two literacy programmes were on offer for adults, namely the *Popular Education Plan* in 1952, and the *National Adult Education Campaign*, promoted between 1953 and 1956. Regarding this agenda, Melo and Benavente comment that ‘for a little more than two years, these adult education courses delivered about 150 000 certificates of elementary primary studies’,⁴⁵ and underline the compulsive nature of the measures taken, by remembering that ‘to get a driver’s license or to get a place in a factory, it was necessary to have ‘the paper’’.⁴⁶ Those were policy instruments used by the regime to obtain statistical improvements in the Portuguese literacy panorama, as required by the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA), which Portugal joined in 1959. By 1960, according to Candeias & Simões (1999),⁴⁷ the regime statistics intended to prove a significant progress, showing that only 30% of the population over the age of seven could not read.

In the final phase of the fascist government, between 1960s and 1970s, a general ‘shift in the Portuguese education policy’ occurred.⁴⁸ Indeed, educational policy promoted the overall increase of compulsory education for all, and in 1971 the *Primary School Supplementary Courses for Adults* were launched. However, those courses were not adequate for adults and mostly repeated the format of the courses of elementary basic education for children but were delivered in the evenings. Therefore, a stigma has been associated with adult education policies and practices, in such a way that when the dictatorship succumbed it could be said that the education of adults did not have a past in Portugal. And as happens under a dictatorship state, people were deprived of the enjoyment of many rights and freedoms, and the right to education of adults was particularly denied.

(II) During the Democratic State (1974 to the present time)

Throughout this 48-year-old regime the policy agenda of ALE was intermittent and had some contradictory mandates. This panorama is much connected with the specificities of the party-political system in Portugal as it was established soon after the Revolution of 25 April 1974. In fact, the centre-left Socialist Party (PS – Partido Socialista, founded in 1973) and the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PPD/PSD – Partido Social Democrata, founded in 1974) promptly became the country’s largest parties and PS and PPD/PSD can be considered as catch-all parties.⁴⁹

Relevant to our historical contextualisation is just to keep in mind that these two centrist parties have been alternating in government (either alone or in coalition) since 1976, and although PS and PPD/PSD have a less consistent and coherent programmatic agenda compared with ideological parties,⁵⁰ in what concerns the policy agenda of ALE we can find substantial differences between the measures put forward by them.⁵¹ Indeed, basically, if a right-wing party takes the approach, the field of ALE becomes instrumentalised and taper for market political priorities against a neo-liberal background and logic, were public discourse points to the need for individual people to guard against possible changes in the markets and ‘benefits include better matching between labour demand and supply, availability of a more qualified workforce in support of modernisation and

growth processes’,⁵² then in these context the outcome in the Portuguese scenario has been the stop of humanistic policies and investment in vocational education and training (VET) programmes, as it could be observed in the influential 2015s *OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report for Portugal*,⁵³ where it is stated, ‘VET stakeholders have made a continuous effort to remove the negative stigma surrounding the system and to present it as a pathway that leads to quality employment opportunities’; however if a left-wing party takes the approach, then the field expands, and humanistic policies come back, as it could be observed in the influential 2021s UNESCO Report *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*,⁵⁴ where several recommendations are made based on ‘guiding principles for dialogue and action, of special interest to governments and civil society organisations alike, including: emphasising the importance of inclusive adult education; imagining new learning spaces; strengthening funding; and broadening the right to education’. Indeed, this vision is reflected in the most recent legislation for the ALE field in Portugal, which indicates ‘a consistent response to the qualification of the population, in particular low-skilled adults, needs to be strengthened, deepening the role of the Qualify Centers as a gateway to adult qualification offers’ (Law: Portaria n. ° 62/2022 of 31 January).

That been said, and still as part of the post-revolutionary educational agenda (1974–1979) several political measures of literacy can be mentioned,⁵⁵ albeit without tangible impact or implementation.⁵⁶ Therefore, the first framework-law appeared in 1979 and was concerned with the elimination of illiteracy and the creation of basic education of adults.⁵⁷ It led to one of the most important Portuguese political measures in the field of ALE: the *National Literacy Plan for the Basic Education of Adults*. The main policy documents and discourses that had an influential role in delivering this Literacy Plan were, at the national level, the new *Constitution of the Republic* of 1976, and, at the international level, the UNESCO Report *Learning to Be – the world of education today and tomorrow* of 1972; the UNESCO Report *Towards an Education Policy in Portugal* of 1975; and UNESCO’s *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* of 1976. This Literacy Plan reflected, then, the humanistic mandate promoted by UNESCO, and it was important because it expressed a view of experts and policy makers that accepted and valued the right to education of adults, in relation to democratic principles, for the first time in the Portuguese contemporary policy context. In this measure it is stated,

Alphabetization and Adult Education should be understood from a dual perspective, the personal self-appreciation of adults and their progressive participation in cultural, social, and political life, with all this in view of the constitution of a democratic and independent society.⁵⁸

This Literacy Plan had an open scope for conceptualising the field, with several open and flexible modalities, from popular education to local development, and was designed to be available and free with widespread geographical coverage. It was to be implemented over a period of a decade with two phases of execution of five years each. However, as a political right turn in government took place in 1985, this Plan was abandoned, being considered by national policy discourses as not in line with the required modernisation of education, viewed as necessary for a country that had just entered the European Economic Community in 1986.

As a result, a new political period started where the sector of ALE was marginalised and not considered a political priority, despite the new possibilities coming from the access to European social funds. Hence, the educational agenda embraced a vocation mandate⁵⁹ and the Basic-Law of the education system⁶⁰ was created, through which adult education was mostly confined to a second chance formal education. Indeed, during this decade the public provision available for adults was known as recurrent education, developed as free compensatory evening courses for adults delivered at schools and, as Pintassilgo (2016) pointed out, ‘adult education was too attached to the school model and had essentially utilitarian and vocational purposes’.⁶¹ Consequently, by the last decade of the last century, the educational qualification level of adults was still very low. In this respect, Villaverde Cabral (2002) highlights the fact that ‘in 1950, about half of the Portuguese population was simply illiterate (...) half a century later, in addition to those that were not caught by the literacy process (about 15% of the population), there were nearly 50% functional illiterates’.⁶² To emphasise how much this Portuguese educational reality becomes worrying, from a framework of human rights, he sustains that ‘at the beginning of the twenty-first century there is nothing remotely comparable with this fact in Europe’.⁶³

After being governed by a right-wing ideology from 1985 to 1995, a left-wing government took office and its agenda included relaunching the ALE policy and practices in Portugal. Indeed, between 1996 and 1999 several preparatory political initiatives occurred with this purpose, such as the new *Educational Pact for the Future*, the *Carta Magna for Lifelong Education and Training*, the strategy document entitled *A Bet on Educational Participation of All*, and the constitution of an Official Delegation to participate in the 5th CONFINTEA of UNESCO. Together these multilevel elements operated as the building blocks for the second most important Portuguese political measure in the field of ALE that took place in the democratic period: *Knowing Plus: programme for the development and expansion of adult education and training, 1999–2006*. This political programme introduced in Portugal the innovative idea of shaping the national ALE agenda by having the recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a central pillar to realise the right to education of adults. Indeed, we can observe a clear definition of it in these policy measure,

The competence recognition axis is the process of personal identification of previously acquired competences which is embodied in the set of activities, based on a logic of balance of competences, using for this purpose a diversity of instruments that allow adults opportunities to reflect and evaluate their life and professional experiences (...)
The case referred to in the preceding paragraph does not have a previously determined time and takes place according to the specific situation of each adult or group of adults.
(Law: Portaria 1082-A/2001, of 5 September)

In this measure, one of the main purposes indicated is to ‘diversify, bring flexibility to adapt and develop education and training devices for adults, creating conditions for the exercise of everyone’s right to lifelong education and training’.⁶⁴ Therefore, since its implementation in 2001, the practices of ALE have been diversified,⁶⁵ although keeping, as a common characteristic, the experiential learning of adults as an adaptable attribute and departure point for a new type of educational processes mainly based on tutorial practices and biographical approaches, falling into a non-formal educational approach.

With this in mind, and back to the democratic historical context, a third Portuguese political measure in the field of ALE took place in 2006, the *New Opportunities Program – 2006–2012*, and was responsible for expanding the availability of the RPL system while at the same time creating a marketing campaign through which a completely new public visibility and acceptability of the field of ALE was obtained. However, that political measure⁶⁶ also introduced some new tensions and ambivalences in the framework of twenty-first century renewed public Portuguese panorama of ALE.⁶⁷ Some shifts in the main vision supporting the mandate for ALE, recently reshaped by the influence of the European Union's paradigm of lifelong learning, have been expressed in related political discourses, as illustrated below,

The central importance of qualifications for economic growth and the promotion of social cohesion is now widely demonstrated by various indicators published by various international organisations (...) We have to do more; we have to do better, and we have to do it faster. We need to strongly accelerate the qualification of the Portuguese, with a view to convergence with the most developed countries.⁶⁸

Consequently, policy priorities changes were visible by the adoption of new politics of measurement in the field of national ALE, mainly supported by a rational of outcomes-based assessments in the RPL System.⁶⁹ Thus, several risks emerged for the humanistic *ethos* previously existing in the policy agenda. The main risk of instrumentalization of the process of RPL has been extensively debated in scientific-academic policy studies literature since then,⁷⁰ with the intention of creating a basis for a public debate more critically oriented to avoid the political manipulation of the ALE national provision in order only to achieve statistical demands, as was the case in the past during the dictatorship regime.

Despite the paradoxes referred to, the whole course of ALE's recent public policies has been shaken by the crisis. After a dark period when the ALE agenda was suddenly suspended within the austerity policy context introduced in Portugal by a right-wing government between 2012 and 2015, a turning point has currently happened through the fourth Portuguese political measure in the field of ALE that was introduced in 2016: the *Qualify Program*. In this regard, it is worthy to mention the disruptions introduced by the austerity political discourse that was used in the media to discredit the previous educational measures.⁷¹ In fact, the policy devaluation of RPL and biographical approaches, consistently used in the practices of this field since the beginning of twenty-first century, double contributed to (i) deepen a stigma against low qualified adults; and (ii) diminish the perceived emancipatory role of ALE in society, as was the case in the mid-1970s, when alphabetisation and holistic adult education activities were much related with organised collective resistance, for example, aiming to reverse processes of territorial stigmatisation.⁷²

Taking in concern that the stigma associated with ALE public policies, particularly in the period of recent austerity, can be better apprehended, and seized, through the general data of participation in different kinds of educational activities, by the adult population, then it is also essential to make it clear that 'the decrease in participation between 2011 [10.4%] and 2016 [4%] should make us reflect on the impact of the extinction of the New Opportunities programme in 2011/2012, and the exclusive reliance on European funds for ALE'.⁷³

This is a relevant issue, although not representing our focus in this article, about everything because the contradictions that can be found between a period of emptiness in the

policy agenda for ALE and the persistent Portuguese context of a significant number of low-qualified adults (and youth school dropouts) are associated, as the literature on sociology of education shows, with diverse realities of social inequalities and educational injustices, that pose threats to the enjoyment of the principles enshrined in the Human Rights Statement. In the words of Pinto Carvalho da Silva (2022), it is highlighted that,

The void (...) of measures and offers, during the period of time that preceded the extinction of the [new opportunities] programme followed by the stigma and discredit that were at the discursive basis of the political arguments for its closure, kept the adults away from formal education and left again on the shelf [in standby] the problem of the Portuguese population's lack of qualifications.⁷⁴

Against the risk of widen the abyss of educational injustices, flourishing on the floor of recent public stigma, a new political priority and importance, in the framework of human rights, has been given again to the field of ALE by the Qualify Program, and previous practices have resumed, being once again available throughout the country. Thus, for example, on the website of the programme it is stated,

The Government has established the revitalization of adult education and training as a national political priority, operating as the central pillar of the qualifications system and ensuring the continuity of lifelong learning policies and the permanent improvement of the quality of learning processes and outcomes. In order to relaunch this priority, the Government has created the Qualify Programme which is an integrated strategy for adult training and qualification⁷⁵

Also in the most recent law⁷⁶ intended to update the Qualify Program, and the regulation of the Portuguese RPL, we can observe that two significant new actions, from a humanistic point of view, have been introduced: (i) the possibility of granting, with an incentive of a financial nature, for adults who obtain a school or professional certification under the RPL procedures; and (ii) the intention of strengthening the flexible character of this modality and to underline the need to adapt the process to the profile of adults.

From this historical contextualisation, it seems clear that the democratic Portuguese national policy agendas have considered education for adults differently, however, only after the implementation of the RPL policy and practices in 2001, has the right to education of adults been consistently considered as a framework for Portuguese ALE policy measures. Bearing this in mind, we have selected the three policy objects present in this period, as previously justified, namely: (i) the Knowing Plus measure; (ii) the New Opportunities measure; and (iii) the Qualify measure, to be analysed and discussed with the Tomaševski theoretical and analytical framework adapted, as proposed in previous sections, to the major characteristics of the ALE field. In another words, we present, in next section, the main results of the application of the 4A tool to monitoring today's ALE national policy agenda.

Discussion on the realization of the right to education for adults in Portugal

Portugal has focused on ALE mainly through twenty-first century policy programmes dedicated to the purpose of increasing the level of basic and secondary education as

well as the professional qualification of low-skilled adults. In this context, adults were considered as the active working part of the population who needed specific strategies to increase their key competences, update professional (re)skills, and improve communicative capacities for civic participation. Therefore, since the Lisbon Agenda, three policy programmes have been succeeded in creating a nationwide network of specialised ALE centres,⁷⁷ where public and free ALE practices are offered. A characteristic mark of those measures has been the focus on RPL and the value of experiential learning.

How these different policy agendas and mandates have affected the realisation of the right to education of adults is what the Tomaševski's model applied to ALE reveals. The 4A considers availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability as factors with substantive different evidence and are used in this article as the framework for discussion.

When the RPL was introduced in Portugal as public provision, the levels of school certification of the adult population were very low. According to public data of the National Statistical Institute, in 2001 in a universe of 4.892.000 active adults, 8.9% had no instruction, 33.9% had only 4 years of basic education, 21.4% had 6 years of basic education, 14.6% had 9 years of basic education, and just 12% had the secondary education level of instruction. Data revealed that 69.9% of literate active adults had not completed basic education but had diverse professional and life experience, nonetheless.

Thus, according to that current statistical panorama a key feature clearly emerges: a low – qualified person is the profile for an ageing national adult population, and this reaches a significantly high number. Against this backdrop, in this section of the article we intended to draw attention to the possible ways through which those policy agendas (with concrete RPL programmes) met the principles to realise the right to education of adults, in accordance with the adapted framework of the 4A scheme.

Concerning availability of ALE

By targeting vulnerable adults with low or no qualifications, the RPL policy in Portugal, according to its main pedagogical scope, has regarded the right of adults to education as a path of social justice. The main expression of this has been the innovative characteristic of Portuguese practices of RPL that have been strongly connected to validation activities. In the content of all three ALE policy measures analysed, the methodological processes seek to give social value to experiential learning, reinforcing (self – and hetero-) recognition of adults' experiences. In this framework, providing counselling and guidance to low-skilled adults has been a major priority. Adult educators were trained by national public initiatives to engage in the RPL processes and pedagogical practices.⁷⁸ Thus, in the Portuguese case there is evidence of availability, in terms of trained educators' criteria, and it represents an effective contribution to the promotion of social inclusion by means of personalised support provided before, during and after validation. We can observe this aspect, for example, in the current measure at work, where it is stated, as a policy priority, the need to accomplish a clear.

strengthening of the teams that are part of the Qualify Centers and consequent strengthening of funding through Community funds (...) strengthening teams and introducing flexibility in the functional articulation between the elements that constitute them seeks to provide greater stability which, desirably, leads to an improvement in the quality of the operation of the centers. (Law: Portaria n. ° 232/2016 of 29 august)

Indeed, since the creation of this educational modality, Portuguese adult learners can go through a RPL process by two main routes⁷⁹ that can be followed in a separate (single certification) or in an integrated way (double certification): (a) the academic process – aiming at improving the qualification levels of adults who do not have basic or secondary education certificates; (b) the vocational process – for adults who do not have formal qualifications in their occupational areas to improve their professional qualification levels.

Concerning accessibility of ALE

Portugal has a low-income social context, so it is also important to highlight that there has been no cost for learners. RPL could even be organised in an itinerant way, with adult educators doing sessions in local associations, recreational clubs, parish boardrooms, etc. with the intention of helping populations with accessibility problems, with fewer resources or with other limitations operating as barriers. Further, a specific system of guidance for immigrants has been developed, intended to be culturally sensitive and to go beyond access, promoting an inclusive climate and building networks for successful enrolment levels. That specific measure was implemented in cooperation with the High Commissariat for Migrations in national and regional centres of support for immigrants.⁸⁰ In recent years, foreign workers with low qualifications arriving in the country have used the RPL to upgrade their qualifications and, complementarily have currently at their disposal a network of 23 Professional Insertion Offices⁸¹ (GIP Immigrant).

There was also a specific RPL procedure for the disabled, although only for the basic level certification, in the Inclusive RPL Centers, with complementary support in the current network of 6 Professional Insertion Offices⁸² (GIP Inclusion). A specific methodological guide,⁸³ with a non-discriminatory focus, was created for practitioners to develop the RPL process for disabled candidates, being geared towards specific disabilities: mental disability, sensorial disability, blindness and deafness, neurological diseases, mental health, and learning difficulties. We can observe this aspect, for example, in the New Opportunities measure, that claims,

the two axes of intervention of the Government's public policies presented herein must be associated, defining a set of guidelines on the qualification of adults with disabilities, where there is a normative scarcity that is urgently to supplant. As part of promoting opportunities for education, training and lifelong work, this order contains the guiding principles of access for persons with disabilities to the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) conducive to a school qualification (Law: Despacho n. ° 29176/2007, of 21 December)

Therefore, the way the RPL agenda has been developing in the context of the three ALE measures allowed for the consolidation of practices that explore cultural (immigrants) and psychological (disabilities) proximity with heterogeneous profiles of adults.

Thus, one of the most highlighted criteria of the adequacy of accessibility coverage has been the participatory levels obtained in RPL, which has been of great interest to policy-makers. Indeed, in a country with a total population of 10.297,1 million in 2020,⁸⁴ according to the National Council of Education, there were, in 2010, more than 1 million adults enrolled in RPL processes and 386,463 already certified. Between 2005 and 2012 the national network of ALE Centers offering RPL practices expanded to over 500 units nationwide and over 12,000 adult educators were involved in this system, working during the day and in the

evenings.⁸⁵ Between 2017 and 2021, according to the ANQEP (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education), the total number of adults enrolled in RPL processes (registration, referrals, and certifications) exceeded 700,000.⁸⁶

Concerning acceptability of ALE

Acceptability of ALE is an attribute that can be found in the Portuguese RPL policy because, (i) the above-mentioned characteristics of the practices allow relevance to be reported by adult learners and practitioners in several published studies about the field;⁸⁷ and (ii) due to the quality of the process which involves a carefully designed national chart of quality working as a framework for RPL.⁸⁸ We can observe this aspect, for example, in the New Opportunities measure, where this was emphasised,

The quality of the service provided to the public, as a pillar of the current national system of qualifications, should also be a priority for the New Opportunities Centers, which, in the various dimensions in which they intervene, must be governed by the Quality Charter of The New Opportunities Centers, approved by the National Agency for Qualification. (Law: Portaria n. ° 370/2008, of 21 May)

Acceptability also comes from the methodology and its results, focused on the needs and the interests of adults, which remain at the centre of the Portuguese RPL processes.

Concerning adaptability of ALE

The main methodology used in RPL processes comprises several phases, each one of them being based on a balance of competences and a biographic approach. Consequently, the best practices of RPL meet the adaptability criteria for adults with low schooling levels but high professional and life experience. Indeed, that attribute has been recognised in academic research literature and ALE policy reports for the methodological paths conducted in accordance with a previous educational diagnosis and with the specific rhythms and circumstances of each adult, and for giving rise to a portfolio developed in a permanently accompanied way by specialised trained educators. We can observe this aspect, for example, in the New Opportunities measure, where this was detailed,

Educational diagnosis consists of (a) carrying out an analysis of the profile of the adult, using, *inter alia*, clarification sessions, curricular analysis, individual and collective interviews or other appropriate strategies; (b) identifying the best available responses, in view of the analysis carried out in accordance with the preceding subparagraph and all existing education and training offers at local or regional level.

Concluding remarks

The objective of this article has been achieved as it allows one to better understand ways of realising the right to education of adults by means of the analysis of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability of three policy measures undertaken by Portuguese governments. Also, the question of our study was answered. We have described how Portuguese policy agendas have considered education for adults, highlighting the scenario in democratic times. This was addressed in detail and ALE measures were

presented and discussed. The absence of a real policy agenda ensuring provision of ALE during the dictatorship regime helps to explain the high percentage of low-qualified adults during the democratic regime. This fact echoes the need to spread a vision of educational policy and governance as a vehicle to promote the human right to literacy and ALE as something more than mere alphabetisation and free basic education for all, so that demand for further and higher education can be developed in Portugal.

The research question of the study obtained a satisfactory answer, although it still requires more research to encompass voices and perceptions from outside the formal texts of policy documents, analysed in this article. Through our heuristic exercise, we demonstrate that the four attributes considered by the adopted model as able to translate the realisation of the right to education through national educational measures, also works in relation to ALE. Indeed, the adoption of the 4A in ALE policy analysis highlighted the connections between the level, the form, and the content of social rights through ALE availability and accessibility, while the public awareness of social and educational justice can be better understood by means of ALE acceptability and adaptability.

In Portugal, in the last two decades specific measures have consistently put the subject under legislative consideration and large-scale implementation occurred, mainly through the provision of RPL practices. Those practices unveiled tensions and contradictions concerning the role of ALE, and a debate is currently under way as to whether and how educators should be involved in the formulation, planning and implementation of ALE in Portugal, and what paradigmatic approach (lifelong education or lifelong learning policy priorities) will better serve the interests of low-qualified adults and an increasing ageing population. Despite the relevance of that debate, this was not the focus of this article. Here we analysed a broader subject to apprehend how the right to education of adults has been under consideration by governments, assuming that (i) the right to ALE should be beyond questions of countries' competitiveness; and (ii) it requires from researchers and citizens a permanent critical and vigilant attention to violations or deprivations, particularly of the right to have rights in the most vulnerable segments of the adult and old population.

Concrete criteria for each of the elements of the 4A model applied to the field of ALE have been used as a lens. From the discussion of the results, we can conclude that the realisation of the right to education of adults by the twenty-first century Portuguese state has been successfully achieved. Indeed, analysis of the three ALE policy measures (the ones existing on the agenda of the current period) translates the government's obligation to make education available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable mainly through RPL practices. Taking the metaphor of the 'in and against the state movement' we can support the Portuguese national public RPL policy agenda, yet at the same time criticise the recent trends which indicate the adoption of the politics of measurement in the field of ALE, mainly supported by a rationale of outcomes-based assessments in the RPL System.

To summarise, starting with, the availability of ALE, providing counselling and guidance to low skilled adults has been a major priority, and concerning the attribute of availability in terms of the geographical distribution criterion, the panorama is satisfactory. Secondly, concerning accessibility of ALE, Portugal shows some investment by national public initiatives in (i) dealing with psychological aspects (disabilities) and increasing proximity with heterogeneous adults; and (ii) creating ALE measures

allowing for the consolidation of free public practices that explore cultural (immigrants) proximity, focused on open access to all adults without discriminations. Thirdly, concerning acceptability of ALE, in Portugal there has been investment by national public initiatives in creating and implementing a national chart of quality framework able to guide practitioners. Reports on the relevance of ALE practices are also available, through which evidence on the attribute of acceptability are better highlighted, for example concerning the criterion of focusing practices on the needs and the interests of adults. Finally, concerning adaptability of ALE, Portugal shows a considerable investment in flexible methodologies used in RPL. Although present in discursive policy documents, the implementation of methodological paths conducted in accordance with the specific rhythms and circumstances of each adult need to be kept and continuously improved.

Consequently, we believe that, based on the results, this article has made it clearer that the right to education can only be guaranteed when educational offers are available to all with a non-discriminatory scope; when they are affordable universally; when the obstacles (economic, cultural, structural, gender, etc.) have been removed for the access, enjoyment and use of all heterogeneous adults of our complex societies; and, finally, when the ALE public practices are adequate and relevant not only to the educational needs of the groups they are aimed at, but also to their desires, interests and aspirations of learning, adopting a humanistic path for ALE policy building and monitoring.

To conclude, some recommendations for ALE governance arising from the analysis of our main results are provided because a challenge remains in the twenty-first century: to improve the situation and the qualification of low-skilled adults through a lifelong right to ALE. Therefore, in accordance with their specific conditions, governing structures and constitutional provisions, the Portuguese state should develop further comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated policies for ALE taking the approach of human rights as a framework for policy. This entails promoting the real implementation of ALE policy as a long-term investment, beyond short term political parties' power squabbles to ensure availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability of ALE as the prime duty-bearer of the governments. That route is important also to prevent social risks in financial austerity crises. That approach can allow for the improvement of the formal system of education to incorporate the adults' learning experience developed outside the formal system. It can also increase opportunities for improvement in their professional careers, in life projects and for engagement in continuous education and training processes during their life course.⁸⁹ Thus, the performance of national states in this subject should be kept under regular public observation and the involvement of non-governmental and non-profit civil society organisations in monitoring that process is highly recommended.

In Portugal, governmental social responsibility must withstand the temptation of governing by numbers and protect ALE as a field which needs flexible management to allow practices to be developed with transformative methodologies and an open scope. Finally, we believe that the more ALE is considered a key policy issue in promoting citizenship, the more possible it will be for adult individuals to have an active and responsible participation in a post-pandemic and ecologically disruptive society as human beings with rights and urgent obligations.

Notes

1. K. Tomaševski, *Human Rights Obligations: Making Education Available, Accessible, Acceptable and Adaptable* (Gothenburg: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – Sida, 2001). http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/righttoeducation.org/files/resourcattachments/Tomaševski_Primer%203.pdf
2. M. Gadotti, ‘Adult Education as a Human Right: The Latin American Context and the Ecopedagogic Perspective’, *International Review of Education* 57, no. 1/2, CONFINTEA VI Follow-up: The Challenges of Moving from Rhetoric to Action (2011): 9–25.
3. The authors of *In and Against the State* (1979) were Jeanette Mitchell, Donald Mackenzie, John Holloway, Cynthia Cockburn, Kathy Polanshek, Nicola Murray, Neil McInnes and John McDonald – the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, a working group of the Conference of Socialist Economists (<https://libcom.org/library/against-state-1979>).
4. D. L. Weimer and A. R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Englewood Cliffs, 1999); L. Bell and H. Stevenson, *Educational Policy: Process, Themes and Impact* (London: Routledge, 2006).
5. M. Bevir, *The SAGE Handbook of Governance* (London: SAGE Publications, 2011).
6. M. Bevir and I. Hall, ‘Global Governance’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Governance*, ed. M. Bevir (London: SAGE Publications, 2011), 352–66, 1.
7. K. Mundy, ‘Global Governance, Educational Change’, *Comparative Education* 43, no. 3 (2007): 339–57, 343.
8. This statement is based on the previous work of Andriescu et al. See M. Andriescu et al., *Adult Learning Policy and Provision in the Member States of the EU. A Synthesis of Reports by Country Experts* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019). <https://op.europa.eu/pt/publication-detail/-/publication/fc3abdf9-ced3-11e9-992f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
9. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. *Adult Education and Training in Europe: Building Inclusive Pathways to Skills and Qualifications. Eurydice Report* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), 49.
10. R. Dale and S. Robertson, eds., *Globalization and Europeanization in Education* (Wallingford: Symposium, 2009).
11. The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP, I.P.) is the ALE’s central public agency in Portugal and constitutes, with the Ministry of Education, the public shared authority with responsibility for policies and measures directed at this educational field, within this country. Historically the ANQEP is the actual version of ANEFA (National Agency for Adult Education and Training), which was the first Portuguese specialised agency for ALE, implemented only in 2000 and during the democratic period (Law: DL n. ° 387/99, of 28 of September).
12. We use qualitative content analysis (QCA) as suggested by Gläser-Zikuda, Hagenauer and Stephan. See M. Gläser-Zikuda, G. Hagenauer, and M. Stephan, ‘The Potential of Qualitative Content Analysis for Empirical Educational Research’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 21, no. 1 (2020): Art. 17, [38 paragraphs].
13. We use a critical discourse analysis (CDA) as suggested by Fairclough and Fairclough. See I. Fairclough and N. Fairclough, ‘Textual Analysis’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*, ed. M. Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes (London: Routledge, 2015), 186–19.
14. M. Jørgensen and L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002).
15. M. Milana, *Global Networks, Local Actions: Rethinking Adult Education Policy in the 21st Century* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2017).
16. R. Duvekot and others, eds., *Making Policy Work: Validation of Prior Learning for Education and the Labour Market* (Houten (NL)/The Netherlands: European Centre for Validation Prion Learning, 2020).
17. The documental *corpus*, concerning the Laws of this measure, is: (i) Law: Decreto-Lei n. ° 387/99 of 28 September. Diário da República – I Série A, n. ° 277; (ii) Law: Despacho

- Conjunto n. ° 1083/2000, of 20 November (DR n. ° 268, II Série); (iii) Law: Portaria n. ° 1082-A/2001, of 5 September (DR n. ° 206, I-B Série); (iv) Law: Decreto-Lei n. ° 208/2002 of 17 October. Diário da República – I Série A, n. ° 240; and (v) Law: Despacho 21974/2002 de 11 of October. Diário da República – II Série, n. ° 235.
18. The documental *corpus*, concerning the Laws of this measure, is: (i) Law: Despacho n. ° 15 187/2006, of 14 July (DR n. ° 135, II Série); (ii) Law: Decreto – Lei n. ° 213/2006, of 27 October (DR n. ° 208, I Série); (iii) Law: Despacho n. ° 11 203/2007, of 8 Jun (DR n. ° 110, II Série); (iv) Law: Decreto – Lei n. ° 357/2007, of 29 October (DR n. ° 208, I Série); (v) Law: Despacho n. ° 29176/2007, of 21 December; (vi) Law: Portaria n. ° 230/2008, of 7 March (DR n. ° 48, I Série); and (vii) Law: Portaria n. ° 370/2008, of 21 May (DR n. ° 98, I Série).
 19. The documental *corpus*, concerning the Laws of this measure, is: (i) Law: Portaria n. ° 232/2016 of 29 August. Diário da República, 1.ª série – n. ° 165; (ii) Law: Portaria n. ° 47/2017 of 1st February. Diário da República, 1.ª série – n. ° 23; (iii) Law: Portaria n. ° 61/2022 of 31 January; and (iv) Portaria n. ° 62/2022 of 31 January.
 20. S. Borrás and C. Radaelli, *The Politics of the Lisbon Agenda Governance Architectures and Domestic Usages of Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011).
 21. [Project 479A0AF7447AC35B]. ERASMUS+, *EURE.K – Validation des Compétences-Clés Européennes* (2015–2018). See <http://www.eure-k.eu/wakka.php?wiki=Accueil>
 22. [Project PTDC/CS-SOC/113750/2009]. FCT, *EDUPLACES, Locais Educadores: práticas, vozes e percursos de educação inclusive* (2016–2019). See <http://eduplaces.wixsite.com/eduplaces>
 23. There is a relevant body of work done by Tomasevski (and others) to develop a framework that could be used to make, implement, and monitor policy. Some material is available at: The Right to Education Project website, which is continuously being updated with research, mainly in the educational school contexts.
 24. UNESCO, *UNESCO and Education: Everyone has the Right to Education* (France: UNESCO, 2011). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212715>.
 25. UNESCO, *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* (France: UNESCO and UIL, 2016), 8. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002451/245179e.pdf>.
 26. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights was intended to examine, monitor and publicly report on human rights circumstances in specific countries or territories as well as on major occurrences of human rights violations worldwide. It was created in 1946 and was replaced by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2006.
 27. K. Tomaševski, *Development Aid and Human Rights: A Study for the Danish Center of Human Rights* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); S. Klees and N. Thapliyal, 'The Right to Education: The Work of Katarina Tomaševski', *Comparative Education Review* 51, no. 4 (2007): 497–510.
 28. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1979), 298.
 29. J. Crowther et al., 'Defending the Radical Margins of University Adult Education', in *In from the Margins* ed. A. Antikainen, P. Harinen, and C. A. Torres (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006), 53–64.
 30. That is why it was adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comment 13 on the right to education (1999, para.6).
 31. This is an ongoing collaborative work in progress developed with Chiara Biasin (University of Padova. Italy).
 32. C. Tamez, 'Pensar la educación con personas jóvenes y adultas como un derecho humano', *Decisio – Saberes para la Acción En Educación de Adultos* 32 (2012): 40–46.
 33. *Ibid.*, 41.
 34. K. Tomaševski, *Human Rights Obligations in Education: The 4A Scheme* (Netherlands: Wolf Legal Publishers [WLP], 2006).
 35. R. Barros, 'From Lifelong Education to Lifelong Learning: Discussion of Some Effects of Today's Neoliberal Policies', *RELA – European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 3, no. 2 (2012): 119–34. <http://www.rela.ep.liu.se/article.asp?DOI=10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela0071>

36. C. Anyinam, 'Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability: Four Attributes of African Ethno-Medicine', *Soc Sci Med.*, 25, no. 7 (1987): 803–11.
37. D. Archer, *Writing the Wrongs: International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy – Based on Research Funded by the Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2006 & UNESCO* (ActionAid International, 2005). https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Archer_Writing_the_Wrongs_2005_En.pdf; D. Archer and M. G. Nandago, 'Participation, Literacy and Empowerment: The Continuing Evolution of Reflect', *Participatory Learning and Action* 50 (2004): 35–44; D. Archer and S. Cottingham, 'Action Research Report on Reflect – Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques – The Experiences of Three Reflect Pilot Projects in Uganda, Bangladesh, El Salvador', *Educational Article No. 17* (London, UK: DFID, 1996), 96; G. Beco, 'Human Rights Impact Assessments', *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 27, no. 2 (2017): 139–66. See also ActionAid's work on adult literacy through the rights-informed REFLECT approach (<https://actionaid.org/>).
38. Tomaševski, *Human Rights Obligations*, 13.
39. *Ibid.*, 13.
40. Anyinam, 'Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability'.
41. Tomaševski, *Human Rights Obligations*, 13.
42. *Ibid.*, 15.
43. There were two main laws of 1929. Decree n° 16481 of 8/2/1929 and the Decree n° 16826 of 8/5/1929, both related to the instruction of the people and the extinction of illiteracy.
44. A. Candeias and E. Simões, 'Alfabetização e escola em Portugal no século XX: Censos Nacionais e estudos de caso', *Análise Psicológica* 1, no. XVII (1999): 163–94.
45. A. Melo and A. Benavente, *Educação Popular em Portugal – 1974–1976* (Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1978), 29.
46. *Ibid.*, 29.
47. Candeias, and Simões, 'Alfabetização e escola em Portugal no século XX'.
48. A. Teodoro, 'The End of Isolationism: Examining the OECD Influence in Portuguese Education Policies, 1955–1974', *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 4 (2020): 535–47.
49. According to Belchior and Freire 'as an ideal type, catch-all parties are more electorally oriented, pluralistic, and distinguished by a shallow organization and a vague ideology (centre-oriented)' (p. 279). A. Belchior and A. Freire, 'Is Party Type Relevant to an Explanation of Policy Congruence? Catch-all versus Ideological Parties in the Portuguese Case', *International Political Science Review* 34, no. 3 (2013): 273–88, 279.
50. Portuguese ideological parties are: (1) CDS/PP – Partido do Centro Democrático e Social/ Partido Popular, it represents mainly Christian-democrat values and conservative voters; (2) PCP – Partido Comunista Português, is a Marxist-Leninist mass party and, for elections, it makes frequently coalitions with CDU – Coligação Democrática Unitária and PEV – Partido Ecologista Os Verdes; and (3) BE – Bloco de Esquerda, which is a left-libertarian party.
51. Even not being the focus of this article, that seeks to analyse just the type of discursive political attention given to ALE as human right, we consider relevant to clarify that we can found two main pictures concerning the relation between the ALE general policy agenda and the specificities of the party-political system, during the period analysed (the 21st century Portuguese panorama). Indeed, adopting Lima and Guimarães's models for policy studies in ALE (2011), we can observe: (a) particularly through 2002–2012 and again since 2016 (the left-wing party period), a predominance of political priorities characteristic of the 'modernisation and state control model' aiming to expand the field of ALE, even if in cross fertilisation with the 'human resources management model' more concerned with the demands of the market for a limited range of skills; and (b) during 2012–2015 (the right-wing party period), in the context of the 'austerity' governance agenda, we observe that the 'human resources management model' has been expressed in a more prominent way than before, with a new facet that express an authoritative negligence to ALE, that stopped the previously major measures. L. Lima and P. Guimarães, *European Strategies in Lifelong Learning – A Critical Introduction* (Germany: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2011).

52. F. Sgobbi, 'The Return to Recognition of Prior Learning: An Analysis of the Portuguese case', *Working Papers of DINÂMIA^CET 2* (2020): 1–29, 22. https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/bitstream/10071/20698/1/DINAMIA_WP_2020-02.pdf
53. (2015, p. 41). <https://www.oecd.org/skills/nationalskillsstrategies/Diagnostic-report-Portugal.pdf>
54. (2021, p. 107). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707.locale=en>
55. I. Gomes and others, 'The Portuguese Literacy Campaigns After the Carnation Revolution (1974–1977)', *Journal of Social Science Education* 14, no. 2 (2015): 69–80.
56. It was the case, for example, of some ephemeral activities, as the Cultural Dynamization Campaigns promoted by the military, or the Literacy Actions promoted by the students. A National Literacy Plan was conceived but was never implemented.
57. Law n° 3/1979, of 10 January.
58. DGEP, *Trabalho Preparatórios para o Plano Nacional de alfabetização e Educação de Base dos Adultos (PNAEBA) – Relatório de Síntese* (Lisboa: Ministério da Educação/Secretaria de Estado dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário/Direcção-Geral de Educação Permanente, 1979), 10.
59. This vocational agenda was particularly influenced by the pursued goals of first and second editions of the 'Educational Development Program in Portugal' (the PRODEP I, from 1990 to 1993, and the PRODEP II, from 1994 to 2000/2001), created by the right-wing government using European funds. A large scope can be found in the PRODEP III (last edition of this programme operating from 2001 to 2006), where the pursued goal was to promote lifelong learning and improve the employability of the working population.
60. Law n° 46/1986, of 14 October.
61. J. Pintassilgo, 'Adult Education in Portugal: Reflections Between Past and Present', *Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente* 8, numero speciale, suppl. al n. 12/2016 (2016): 35–46, 42.
62. M. Villaverde Cabral, 'Espaços e Temporalidades Sociais da Educação em Portugal', in *Espaços de Educação – Tempos de Formação* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2002), 47–67, 51.
63. *Ibid.*, 51.
64. A. Melo, L. Matos, and O. S. Silva, *S@ber +: Programa para o Desenvolvimento e Expansão da Educação e Formação de Adultos, 1999–2006* (Lisboa: ANEFA/GMEFA, 2001), 12.
65. After the diminishing panorama of recurrent education, two main categories of modalities in terms of ALE practices have been expanding in the national scene; (i) the System of recognition, validation and certification of key-competences (System RVCC); and (ii) the Courses of adult education and training.
66. The main policy documents and discourses at international level that had an influential role in this Program's purposes were the several EU recommendations and political initiatives related with lifelong learning and the new governance rationale that has been developing since the open method of coordination appeared.
67. R. Barros, 'The Portuguese Case of RPL New Practices and New Adult Educators – Some Tensions and Ambivalences in the Framework of New Public Policies', in *Recognition of Prior Learning – Research from Around the Globe*, ed. Per Andersson, Andreas Fejes and Fredrik Sandberg (London: Routledge, 2016).
68. (2005, INO's Presentation Speech of the Prime Minister, s/p).
69. R. Barros, 'The Role of Transnational Bodies in Lifelong Learning and the Politics of Measurement – The promise and pitfalls of outcomes-based assessment into Recognition of Prior Learning System in Portugal', in *Power and Possibility: Adult Education in a Diverse and Complex World*, ed. Fergal Finnegan and Bernie Grummell (Leiden/Boston: Brill-Sense Publishers, 2020), 53–63. <https://brill.com/view/title/56049>.
70. R. Barros, 'The Portuguese Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy Agenda – Examining a Volatile Panacea by Means of Ethno-Phenomenological Interpretations', *Encyclopaedia, Journal of Phenomenology and Education* XVIII, no. 40 (2014): 53–68. <http://encp.unibo.it/article/view/4653/4142>; P. Guimarães and B. Mikulec, 'The Paradox of Utilitarian

- Recognition of Prior Learning: The Cases of Portugal and Slovenia’, *RELA – European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 12, no. 1 (2020): 109–22.
71. F. Antunes and S. Viseu, ‘Education Governance and Privatization in Portugal: Media Coverage on Public and Private Education’, *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 27, no. 125 (2019): 1–25.
 72. J. Queirós and V. Pereira, ‘The Stigma of Place – Voices in the Revolution: Resisting Territorial Stigma and Social Relegation in Porto’s Historic Centre (1974–1976)’, *The Sociological Review* 66, no. 4 (2018): 857–76.
 73. V. Pinto Carvalho da Silva, ‘Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Southern European Societies’, *Revista de Sociologia de la Educación-RASE* 15, no. 1 (2022): 45–69, 61.
 74. *Ibid.*, 74.
 75. <https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/programaQualifica>.
 76. Law: Portaria n. ° 61/2022, of 3 January.
 77. Currently the national network of Qualify Centers consists of 310 centres. See: https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores_n4.
 78. R. Barros, *A Criação do Reconhecimento de Adquiridos Experienciais (RVCC) em Portugal – Uma Etnografia Crítica em Educação de Adultos* (Lisboa: Chiado Editora, 2011). <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.1/14093>; R. Barros and A. Ferreira, ‘Criação e Evolução do Reconhecimento de Adquiridos Experienciais em Portugal’, in *Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de adquiridos experienciais em Portugal, França, Bélgica e Itália / Reconnaissance, validation et certification des acquis de l’expérience au Portugal, France, Belgique et Italie*, Carmen Cavaco Org. (Lisboa: Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, 2018), 43–74. <http://hdl.handle.net/10451/34147>.
 79. Law: Portaria n° 782/2009, of 23 July.
 80. See: <https://www.acm.gov.pt/acm/servicos>.
 81. Law: Portaria n° 140/2015, of 20 May.
 82. The Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) currently has a general network of 408 Professional Insertion Offices (GIP), a network of 3 GIP Immigrant and a network of 6 GIP Inclusiveness. See: <https://www.iefp.pt/gabinetes-de-insercao-profissional>.
 83. See: https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/file/340/GM_Pessoas_Deficiencias_Incapacidades_RV.pdf.
 84. See: <https://www.pordata.pt/Portugal>.
 85. CNE, *Estado da Educação 2011 – A Qualificação dos Portugueses* (Lisboa: Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2011).
 86. See: https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores_n1.
 87. R. Barros and I. Silva, ‘Perceções sobre práticas de reconhecimento de adquiridos experienciais em Portugal – dilemas e desafios hodiernos das equipas técnicas e dos adultos em processo’, in *Rumos da Educação e Formação de Jovens e Adultos em Portugal e no Brasil – um balanço comparado de políticas e práticas*, ed. Rosanna Barros, Paulo Gomes Lima and Márcio Azevedo Orgs. (Natal: Editoria IFRN-Brasil, 2020), 62–106. <https://memoria.ifrn.edu.br/handle/1044/1835>.
 88. DEB, *Recomendações – Para um Conjunto Articulado de Apostas do Ministério da Educação na Qualidade e Inovação em Educação de Adultos* (Lisboa: Ministério da Educação/Departamento da Educação Básica, 1997).
 89. M. Snyman and G. Berg, ‘The Significance of the Learner Profile in Recognition of Prior Learning’, *Adult Education Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2018): 24–40.
 90. Recently in the framework of the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* (2021), provision was made for these two new subcategories concerning the Portuguese ALE offer, intended to expand the Qualify Program with: (i) a National Adult Literacy Plan; and (ii) an Accelerant Qualify (Law: Portaria n. ° 61/2022, of 31 January).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work is funded by CIEd – Research Centre on Education, Institute of Education, University of Minho, projects UIDB/01661/2020 and UIDP/01661/2020, through national funds of FCT/MCTES-PT.

Notes on contributor

Rosanna Barros, has a PhD in Education (2009), has a post-doctoral graduation in European structural policies and educational innovation (2018), and has Habilitation in Educational Sciences (2021). She is a Board member of ESREA, and Convenor of the Research Network on Policy Studies in Adult Education of ESREA. She teaches in the University of Algarve and is a research member of the CIEd of the University of Minho, Portugal. She publishes regularly.

ORCID

Rosanna Barros  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3882-1539>