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# “Evaluation of Inclusive Education” for the Demography, Qualifications and Inclusion Thematic Programme (PESSOAS 2030)”

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Executive Summary

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## Purpose, Scope and Objectives of the Evaluation

The evaluation of Inclusive Education was conducted within the framework of the Demography, Qualifications and Inclusion Thematic Programme (PESSOAS 2030). It aimed to assess the implementation and impact of the Legal Framework for Inclusive Education (Decree-Law No. 54/2018, of July 6, amended by Law No. 116/ 2019, by Declaration of Rectification No. 47/2019, of October 3, and by Decree-Law No. 62/2023, of July 25). This evaluation focused on the legal framework for inclusive education seeking to respond to the diverse needs and potential of every child and student, promoting their participation in learning processes and in school life.

As a thematic evaluation, its primary objectives were to examine the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and European added value of the policy by analysing its design, implementation, and outcomes. It also aimed to identify challenges and good practices that could enhance schools' capacity to implement the inclusive education model. The evaluation focused on six key dimensions: inclusive values, principles, and policies; availability and accessibility of resources to support inclusive education; school organization and management; the perspectives of children, students, and families; training and professional development; and student success and certification.

## Methodology

The evaluation design was grounded in the principles of Theory-Based Evaluation and operationalized through the development and validation of a Theory of Change for Inclusive Education. This approach allowed for a clear articulation of the policy's assumptions, intervention mechanisms, expected outcomes, and potential risks associated with its implementation.

The methodological strategy combined qualitative and quantitative techniques, emphasizing systematic triangulation of sources, methods, and stakeholder perspectives. Data collection and analysis included:

- (I) Document and data analysis: Review of qualitative and quantitative information, focusing on legislation and scientific publications on inclusive education in Portugal since 2020; analysis of inclusive education guidelines (collected by the DGE from the AE/ENA network); analysis of data on specialized support services of the CAA in each organizational unit, and of statistical data from the Inclusive Education Questionnaire for the school years 2020/21 to 2023/24.
- (II) Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with central and intermediate entities responsible for the design, coordination, monitoring, and supervision of the policy.
- (III) Focus groups: Engaging representatives of implementing entities, school leaders and teachers, regional teams, parents and guardians, and other partners, to compare and analyse different perspectives on the drafting, implementation, and monitoring of DL 54/2018.
- (IV) Questionnaire surveys: Targeting teachers, principals, technicians, students, parents, and guardians, to capture perspectives from multiple stakeholder groups and triangulate findings.

- (V) Case studies: Eleven case studies of differentiated school clusters across different regions of the country.

Additionally, opportunities for discussion and interim validation of results with relevant stakeholders—including a panel of experts—were incorporated, enhancing both the analytical robustness and the practical relevance of the evaluation.

## Conclusions

1

The evaluation of Decree-Law No. 54/2018 concludes that this legislation represents a milestone in consolidating the right to education for all, reflecting both continuity and a deepening of the equity and inclusion policies that have shaped the evolution of the Portuguese education system in recent decades.

2

Its **relevance** is unquestionable, as it embodies a shift toward a pedagogical approach centred on the potential and needs of each student, structured around a multilevel logic of measures to support learning and inclusion. The main innovation lies in the elimination of student categorization, promoting a multilevel intervention framework and granting schools greater autonomy and responsibility in implementing support measures.

3

The Decree-Law introduces several key changes. First, it fosters a symbolic and conceptual transformation aimed at avoiding labelling and consolidating a more inclusive school culture, redirecting attention to barriers to learning and participation. In this context, are abandoned distinctions between permanent educational needs and learning difficulties of sociocultural origin, as well as the traditional terminology associated with “special education”. This in favour of an approach to intervention focused on skills development and full participation of students in regular curricular activities. Second, the law establishes a multilevel approach, organized into three tiers of intervention—universal, selective, and additional measures—enabling schools to respond more effectively to the diversity of student profiles and needs, irrespective of their background or conditions. Furthermore, schools are entrusted with the responsibility of implementing learning and inclusion measures within the framework of the autonomy granted by DL 55/2018.

4

The legal framework is widely valued. The stakeholders consulted acknowledge that the decree has provided schools with greater autonomy and flexibility to adapt teaching strategies to students’ needs, legitimizing practices such as pedagogical differentiation, universal design for learning, and collaborative teacher work.

5

However, the absence of a rigorous prior assessment of the effects of previous legislation, along with a lack of clarity regarding key concepts and procedures, has resulted in divergent interpretations and uneven implementation across schools and regions. Persistent difficulties include clarifying critical concepts, such as the distinction between universal, selective, and additional measures, as well as the role of the CAA. This continues to lead to inconsistent practices and interpretations.

6

In terms of **Coherence**, the legal framework for inclusive education is formally aligned with other structural instruments—such as Decree-Law No. 55/2018, the Profile of Students Leaving

	<p>Compulsory Education, Essential Learning, and the National Strategy for Citizenship Education—which share a common set of values centred on equity and success for all students. This regulatory coherence provides a solid foundation for policy integration and the consolidation of an inclusive culture across the education system.</p>
7	<p>Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this coordination depends on schools’ capacity to translate legal principles to coherent educational practices. Persistent constraints—such as shortages of human resources, insufficient professional training, and the pressures of external evaluations—hinder the full implementation of the inclusive model in a fully coherent way.</p>
8	<p>Moreover, intersectoral coordination in fostering a culture of inclusive action—linking education with health, social security, local authorities, and other external resources—remains weak and fragmented, limiting the system’s capacity for an integrated and effective response. Achieving full coherence therefore requires a more coordinated strategy, capable of aligning school autonomy with robust external support and systematic policy monitoring.</p>
9	<p>The <b>effectiveness</b> of the law is reflected in a clear cultural shift: schools have increasingly embraced the principles of universal education, adopting more collaborative, flexible, and student-centred practices.</p>
10	<p>Analysis of the Educational Projects of School Clusters shows that inclusion occupies a central place in institutional discourse, understood as a dynamic and ongoing process. The most emphasized principles—valuing diversity, ensuring the universality of the right to education, and promoting equal opportunities—demonstrate strong alignment with the values enshrined in the legal framework.</p>
11	<p>At the same time, there has been a growing and diversified use of educational support measures to promote learning and inclusion. Between the 2020/21 and 2023/24 school years, both the absolute number of Technical-Pedagogical Reports (RTPs) and their prevalence increased, from 7.5% to 8.7% (excluding preschool). However, these rates vary by educational level—most notably in the 2nd cycle (10.9% in 2023/24), followed by the 3rd cycle (10.6%), and secondary education (5.9%)—and by region, with the highest prevalence in Alentejo (12.5%) and the lowest in the North (7.3%).</p>
12	<p>The vast majority of RTPs involve selective measures (97%), while around 21% include additional measures. Although these measures are applied at all education levels, selective measures decrease in higher cycles, while additional measures are more frequent in the 2nd cycle and secondary education.</p>
13	<p>Stakeholders’ perceptions of the adequacy and quality of measures and support are generally positive, though differences exist across professional groups and structures. Internal staff—particularly special education teachers and technicians—receive the highest evaluations, while operational assistants are also valued by parents. External support structures tend to be rated more modestly. Principals typically provide more positive assessments of measure adequacy, whereas teachers and technicians offer more moderate evaluations, reflecting the challenges of working with students covered by these measures.</p>
14	<p>The principles of the law are further reflected in the establishment of Multidisciplinary Teams for Inclusive Education Support (EMAEI) and Learning Support Centres (CAA), which are widely</p>

implemented and play a central role in promoting inclusion and fostering differentiated, collaborative teaching practices.

15

Regarding resources, despite the increase in special education teachers and the reinforcement of professionals directly hired by schools, their adequacy is often considered insufficient, based on indirect indicators of pressure — such as the decrease in the number of teachers per student with an IEP, the intensification of assigned duties, and contractual instability — as well as on the convergent perceptions of different educational actors. The shortage of operational assistants with specialized training, alongside a lack of special education teachers and specialized technicians, remains a pervasive concern, exacerbated by staff turnover, precarious employment conditions, and the diversity of students with specific needs.

16

In terms of **efficiency**, the analysis indicates that the model relies heavily on human and organizational resources. While some schools demonstrate strong capacity to mobilize and adapt, implementing inclusive practices effectively, others achieve less consistent results.

17

Overall, school principals perceive the inclusive education system under Decree-Law No. 54/2018 positively in terms of efficiency, although areas of disagreement persist. Surveys reveal that the accessibility and availability of financial, material, and human resources are generally considered only partially adequate, with this category cited most frequently (34–58% of responses).

18

Critical concerns include the budgets of the Ministry of Education and individual schools, the availability of specialized personnel, and the adequacy of school facilities, highlighting the need for greater investment and coordinated planning between schools, local authorities, and the Ministry.

19

The law has triggered notable changes in school management, promoting greater strategic and operational coherence. The creation of EMAEI and the establishment of CAA exemplify this progress: by strengthening collegial decision-making and coordinating universal, selective, and additional measures, these structures have helped align school practices with inclusion principles, fostering shared responsibility and pedagogical coordination. Strategic planning within Educational Projects has also intensified, with inclusive measures increasingly integrated into curriculum plans, reinforcing collective accountability across the school community.

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Stakeholders acknowledge that school management strives to optimize available resources, yet several limitations persist. These include: dependence on external partnerships that are often informal or irregular; scarcity and instability of specialized staff; high teaching workloads; overburdened internal structures such as EMAEI and CAA; resistance to change and persistence of segregating practices and traditional evaluation methods; insufficient and poorly practice-oriented training; weak intersectoral coordination, limiting integrated responses; limited monitoring and lack of systematic data on outcomes; and low family involvement, which often remains more formal than substantive. Finally, there are limitations associated with human resources, namely the scarcity and instability of specialized professionals and the high teaching workload. Regarding human resources, these limitations stem not only from their insufficiency but also from the absence of common reference frameworks to guide their allocation and use, leading to a high dependence on the individual capacities of school leadership teams and on local conditions.

- 21 Coordination between educational, social, and health services remains insufficient, reducing overall efficiency and leading to reactive rather than strategic management, which constrains the development of truly integrated responses—essential for effective inclusion. Municipalities play a key role in maintaining facilities, transporting students, and hiring technical and operational staff; however, their capacity varies according to local financial resources, creating territorial disparities in access.
- 22 Municipalities play a crucial role in maintaining school facilities, transporting students, and hiring technical and operational staff, but municipal response capacity is uneven, depending on the financial capacity of each local authority, thus creating territorial asymmetries in access to the same resources.
- 23 Administrative complexity, along with the proliferation of records and reports, further reduces operational efficiency, diverting time from educational intervention. Enhancing efficiency will require streamlining procedures, optimizing the coordination and management of human and technical resources, and developing operational criteria that allow the allocation of human resources to be aligned with the intensity of identified educational needs, thereby reinforcing predictability and equity in the response across schools and territories, as well as investing in practical training.
- 24 The **impact** of the policy is particularly evident in school cultures, teaching practices, and the perceptions of educational actors. The law has helped shift the focus from disability to barriers to learning and participation, fostering a more equitable and student-centred approach. Inclusion is no longer seen as an exceptional or “special” response but has become a fundamental principle of educational practice, with increased involvement of students and families in educational processes. Analysis of educational projects and action plans reveals a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and non-discrimination, as well as the consolidation of an organizational culture that values and respects differences.
- 25 Schools demonstrate greater awareness of the importance of student and family engagement, reflected in more consistent collaborative practices, such as direct contact with EMAEI and the joint development of measures and Technical-Pedagogical Reports (RTPs). However, involving parents as active partners remains challenging, with participation often limited to formal validation, insufficient communication, and a lack of structured and systematic mediation mechanisms. Efforts to promote student participation and engagement projects continue, though they are not always implemented systematically.
- 26 Implementation of DL 54/2018 has made teaching more flexible, equitable, and personalized, ensuring that every student can access the curriculum and progress without discrimination. Positive outcomes have been observed in learning quality, socialization, communication, reduced labelling, greater academic success, and social cohesion. These changes are reflected in concrete classroom practices, including adapted materials and assessments, literacy workshops, targeted curricular responses, and faster decision-making involving teachers, families, and EMAEI.
- 27 The impact on assessment results and indicators of educational achievements is less pronounced: there is no robust evidence of significant improvements in academic success, retention, or

transitions to employment. Challenges persist in post-school transitions and in linking secondary education with higher education and the labour market.

28 Significant progress has been made in professional development for educational staff in inclusive education, with a particular focus on collaborative work among technicians, special education teachers, and general teachers, as well as coordination between different educational agents. Schools have increasingly organized professional development through pedagogical workshops, EMAEI-led training, local networks, and regional or national meetings, involving operational assistants, technicians, and families. Nevertheless, many initiatives remain sporadic, overly focused on legislation, and insufficiently oriented toward practical application and collaborative planning.

29 Key factors driving these changes include the pedagogical reorientation introduced by DL 54/2018, which emphasizes student potential and individual success; the structuring of EMAEI, which supports implementation and ensures pedagogical coherence; and flexible, proactive school leadership, which manages resources strategically and fosters collaboration with external services and partners. Continuing education complements these factors by reinforcing inclusive and effective practices.

30 The impact of implementation varies across educational cycles. In early childhood and preschool education, universal measures, classroom differentiation, and collaboration between teachers, EMAEI, and families yield more consistent results, facilitated by simpler class structures and the versatility of lead teachers. In the 2nd and 3rd cycles, improvements are concentrated in resource coordination and networking, although constraints related to scheduling, student–teacher ratios, and fragmented practices remain; EMAEI plays a key role here. In secondary education, impact is more uneven due to curricular rigidity, assessment pressures, and exam demands, which limit the application of universal measures and co-teaching, though effectiveness increases when leaders introduce flexibility, diversify learning pathways, and deploy specialized staff.

31 Despite advances, significant challenges persist in student transitions to subsequent stages, primarily due to insufficient alternatives and weak coordination between secondary education, vocational education, higher education, and the labour market. The report highlights that many students encounter obstacles in post-school transitions, with re-enrolment requests often resulting from a lack of options and inadequate coordination with relevant services and institutions.

32 The **sustainability** of the policy now depends on the ability of schools and the education system to consolidate lasting practices, supported by stable resources, strong pedagogical leadership, and effective monitoring.

33 Although monitoring mechanisms exist, they are often uneven across schools, focusing primarily on administrative data and lacking qualitative insights on well-being, participation, and the impact of practices. There is a clear need for more robust internal tools and regular consultation with educational stakeholders—including students, teachers, and families—to ensure a more comprehensive and reliable assessment of the inclusive environment and the effectiveness of implemented measures.

34 Decree-Law No. 54/2018 established a strong regulatory and conceptual framework and fostered an inclusive culture across all levels of the education system. Schools have gradually consolidated

inclusive practices, supported by structured foundations that enable continuity, including the mobilization of human resources to sustain inclusive actions in the medium and long term, as well as the coordination of local resources and external partners, albeit often informally. This strengthening was decisively supported by the intervention of the European Funds, through the POCH, which made it possible to upskill professionals, reinforce specialized human resources, support differentiated measures for students, and promote more flexible and equitable pedagogical practices, representing a clear European added value in the implementation of Decree-Law No. 54/2018.

35 However, risks and opportunities for improvement remain, particularly regarding the need to strengthen and stabilize the workforce directly involved in inclusive education and to establish guiding criteria for their allocation, sensitive to the diversity and intensity of educational needs, enhance ongoing theoretical and practical training for teaching and non-teaching staff, formalize external partnerships, and improve infrastructure conditions.

36 Collaborative work between special education teachers, specialized technicians, and general subject teachers has been strengthened, driven by the decisive role of school management and EMAEI in promoting strategies and mechanisms that favour coordination across teams. Nevertheless, resistance persists among some teaching staff, due either to perceived time constraints for joint work or to the incomplete consolidation of inclusive principles in practice, despite their acceptance in discourse.

37 Continuity of inclusive practices requires strengthened monitoring mechanisms, consolidated interinstitutional networks, and a training policy that ensures territorial equity and consistent application of measures.

38 The consolidation of inclusive education in Portugal depends not only on legislative and organizational advances and effective implementation, but also on fostering a positive and informed social perception of the model, which remains difficult to fully grasp.

39 In summary, Decree-Law No. 54/2018 has reinforced the value of inclusive education in Portugal, representing a significant step forward in equity and personalized educational responses. The law’s relevance and social impact are undeniable, yet its full coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency depend on the sustained consolidation of implementation conditions. Ensuring lasting impact and sustainability requires strengthened practical training, optimized resource management, and the consolidation of a collaborative culture supported by continuous monitoring, ensuring the continuity of measures funded and supported by structuring mechanisms such as the European Funds.

## Recommendations

Considering the above, a comprehensive revision of Decree-Law 54/2018 does not appear necessary. However, it is recommended that certain concepts be clarified and refined, and that inclusive education be strengthened, particularly through updated guidelines and enhanced resources.

### Clarification and Consolidation of the Regulatory Framework

Nº	Link to Conclusions	Recommendation	Description/implementation	Target audience/ stakeholders
R1	C5, C11, C12, C20, C30	<b>Consolidate key concepts</b>	Continue to produce technical guidelines and operating manuals that clarify the distinction between universal, selective, and additional measures, the role of EMAEI and CAA, and certification criteria.	Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation (MECI), in collaboration with scientific research institutions.
R2	C7, C26, C29, C30	<b>Review policies on curriculum and student assessment</b>	Review policies on curriculum and student assessment with the aim of removing practices that create barriers to inclusion and enable all students to reach their potential, by reviewing the national examination system and skills assessment mechanisms, adapting them to the diversity of student profiles.	MECI
R3	C5, C11, C12, C30, C33	<b>Produce guidelines to support the signalling process</b>	3.1 Produce guidelines to support the process of selecting and classifying groups to focus on the most common learning difficulties for each type of student.	MECI, in collaboration with scientific research institutions. Implementation and feedback by EAE and EMAEI.
	C5, C11, C12, C30, C33		3.2 Produce guidelines to support the review of procedures for identifying students eligible for additional and selective measures, avoiding disparities between schools and preventing the risk of over-identification of students.	MECI, in collaboration with scientific research institutions. Implementation and feedback by EAE and EMAEI.
R4	C11, C12, C27, C30, C31	<b>Ensure the continuity of Additional Measures in secondary education and post-school transitions</b>	Ensure the continuity of additional measures in secondary education, including vocational education, and in post-school transitions, improving coordination with the IEFP, ensuring the effective participation of the IEFP and business partners in the design and implementation of transition plans, and reviewing the assessment of students with additional measures, as recommended in recommendation 2.	Coordination by MECI with the collaboration of other ministries responsible for the sectors. Implementation and feedback by EAE and vocational education and training and higher education institutions.

### Capacity building and awareness raising

Nº	Link to Conclusions	Recommendation	Description/implementation	Recipients
R5	C28, C36	Empowering stakeholders	5.1 Implement additional training programmes for managers, teachers and professionals, focusing on inclusive work planning, the development of universal design for learning and the classification of audiences to help clarify the focus of each level of measures.	Coordination by MECI, with the collaboration of scientific research institutions. Implementation through School Association Training Centres (CFAE)
	C7, C15, C20, C23, C28, C35		5.2 Implement continuous, practical and contextualised training programmes for teachers, operational assistants and technicians with a view to making school routines more inclusive, strengthening leadership and empowering teachers and operational assistants to adopt more inclusive practices.	Coordination by MECI, with the collaboration of scientific research institutions. Implementation through Higher Education Institutions and School Association Training Centres (CFAE)
	C28, C37		5.3 Carry out a programme to disseminate recommended practices, including the publication of new manuals to support practice and the development of benchmarks that allow schools to be more objective in their choice of measures and projects according to the classification of learning difficulties presented by students with different problems that hinder learning, and the organisation of workshops and training activities on good practices.	Coordination by MECI, with the collaboration of scientific research institutions. Dissemination through School Association Training Centres (CFAE)
	C29, C37		5.4 Establish a network of IE promoters to monitor each AE in the implementation of training actions.	MECI
R6	C1, C38	Raising awareness	Strengthen public communication on the benefits of inclusive education, combating negative perceptions and promoting social confidence in the model.	MECI, Schools and School Clusters (EAE), in partnership with the media and civil society organisations.

### Resources and management

Nº	Link to Conclusions	Recommendation	Description/implementation	Recipients
R7	C7, C15, C16, C17, C18, C20	Strengthen resources	7.1 Increase the number of hours allocated to EMAEI and reduce the	Definition and technical guidelines to be carried

“Evaluation of Inclusive Education” for the Demography, Qualifications and Inclusion Thematic Programme (PESSOAS 2030)

Executive Summary

Nº	Link to Conclusions	Recommendation	Description/implementation	Recipients
			teaching load of its members to enable joint planning and personalised monitoring.	out by MECI. Application by EAE management.
	<b>C7, C15, C16, C17, C18, C20, C35</b>		7.2 Define, update, and clarify national ratios and reference frameworks for the allocation of human resources — special education teachers, specialised technicians, and operational assistants — ensuring their contractual stability and specific training.	Definition of ratios and reference frameworks and development of training profiles by MECI. Identification of needs by EAE management. Training by Higher Education Institutions and CFAE.
	<b>C17, C18, C20, C22</b>		7.3 Review support for CRI and commitments to engage with schools, together with a review of the resources to be made available to schools, particularly in terms of equipment and infrastructure, to enable them to fulfil their functions.	MECI coordination of a multi-level participatory process involving local authorities, EAE and CRI.
<b>R8</b>	<b>C8, C16, C18, C22, C37</b>	<b>Improve coordination</b>	8.1 Foster collaboration networks between EMAEI, schools, local authorities and local institutions, promoting shared and equitable territorial solutions.	Territorial coordination by local authorities.
	<b>C8, C20, C21</b>		8.2 Develop permanent intersectoral coordination mechanisms between education, health, social security, local authorities and employment services, with clear protocols for action and information sharing.	Coordination by MECI with the collaboration of other ministries responsible for the sectors. Territorial coordination by local authorities, using existing participatory structures such as the Social Network or other partnership structures, provided they are mandated for this purpose.
<b>R9</b>	<b>C23</b>	<b>Simplify procedures</b>	Simplify administrative procedures by streamlining administrative flows and registration tools, reducing duplication and simplifying document processing.	Definition by MECI. Implementation and feedback from EAE.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Nº	Link to Conclusions	Recommendation	Description/implementation	Recipients
R10	C33, C39	Strengthen monitoring	10.1 Use school self-assessment tools to assess the implementation of universal measures and promote regular consultation with different stakeholders (students, teachers, families) on the inclusive environment.	National guidelines from the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation (MECI). Implementation by EAE and EMAEI.
	C27, C33, C39		10.2 Develop a system of indicators to monitor the impact of inclusive education, combining administrative data with indicators on changes in practices, individual progress, student well-being and participation, and on students' educational pathways and their transitions between levels of education and into the labour market.	Coordination by MECI, with the collaboration of scientific research institutions.
	C20, C23, C27, C33, C39		10.3 Implement integrated management and monitoring systems for inclusive education data that enable the AE/ENA and MECI to monitor the implementation, results and impact of measures and support.	Coordination by MECI. Implementation and feedback by EAE and EMAEI.
	C20, C33		10.4 Develop a culture of assessing the real impact of practices throughout the education system, using administrative statistics to be produced and standardised self-assessment procedures.	Coordination by MECI. Implementation and feedback by EAE and EMAEI.

### Participation and engagement

Nº	Link to Conclusions	Recommendation	Description/implementation	Recipients
R11	C20, C25	Promote the participation and involvement of parents, schools and students	11.1 Strengthen the involvement of families and students in defining and monitoring RTPs and PITs, promoting co-creation and co-responsibility from the outset of the process.	EAE and EMAEI, with the participation of families and students.
	C25		11.2 Develop parental training actions and school-family mediation mechanisms.	Coordination by MECI. Implementation and feedback by EAE and EMAEI, in partnership with local authorities and local partners.