

Senior universities - Portuguese legal framework

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Abstract: This article intends to present some fundamental documents, from international organizations and from the Portuguese government, establishing the importance of lifelong learning, purpose that can be achieved, for instance, with the support of senior universities. Promote lifelong learning in particular for seniors is one of the three objectives stated for the International Scientific Conference of Educational Projects for Seniors by its organization.

Keywords: lifelong learning, senior universities.

1.

In 2002, World Health Organization (WHO) published a booklet presenting a policy framework concerning active ageing². For WHO, active ageing is defined as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age”³. Some of the key determinants of active ageing are those related to social environment, which includes “opportunities for education and lifelong learning”, by opposition to “illiteracy and a lack of education” as realities that “greatly increase older people’s risk for disabilities and early death”⁴. That’s why an effective action is mandatory and a policy response is issued by WHO, including multiple concerns, such as participation, one of the “three pillars of a policy framework for Active Aging” (the others being health and security)⁵. Lifelong learning is seen as a way of enabling “full participation of older people”, by promoting new skills such as those related to information technologies⁶.

2.

Within the European Union, it was issued, in 15.11.2006, the Decision No. 1720/2006/EC, of the European Parliament and of the Council, establishing an action

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² World Health Organization, 2002.

³ World Health Organization, 2002, p. 12.

⁴ World Health Organization, 2002, p. 28.

⁵ World Health Organization, 2002, pp. 45-46.

⁶ World Health Organization, 2002, p. 51.

programme in the field of lifelong learning⁷. One of the sub-programmes is intended to address “adult education” (article 3, 1. (d)), aiming “to assist people from vulnerable social groups and in marginal social contexts, in particular older people ...” (article 29, 2. (c)).

3.

The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (CPR) includes, among the fundamental rights stated, an article specially addressed to the social rights of the elderly (article 72)⁸. Article 72 establishes that “The elderly have the right to economic security and to conditions in terms of housing and family and community life that respect their personal autonomy and avoid and overcome isolation or social marginalization.” (No 1) and that “The policy for the elderly shall include measures of an economic, social and cultural nature that tend to provide elderly persons with opportunities for personal fulfilment by means of an active participation in community life.” (No. 2).

4. Recently it was issued a Resolution from the Portuguese Council of Ministers concerning senior universities. The Resolution from the Council of Ministers No. 76/2016, published at 29.11.2016⁹, was approved under the administrative competences attributed to the Government in order “To undertake all the acts and make all the dispositions needed to promote economic and social development and fulfil collective needs.” (article 199º g) CPR).

With this Resolution, the Government recognizes the importance of senior universities, decides to give support to that kind of institutions and establishes “*Associação Rede de Universidades da Terceira Idade*” (RUTIS, or Association of Third Age Universities Network) as a governmental partner concerning active aging policies.

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⁷ Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1391456397680&uri=CELEX:32006D1720> (accessed 20.01.2017)

⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.en.parlamento.pt/Legislation/CRP/Constitution7th.pdf> (accessed 20.01.2017).

⁹ Retrieved from <http://data.dre.pt/eli/resolconsmin/76/2016/p/dre/pt/html> (accessed 20.01.2017).