

Recommendations for the Role of Learning and Support Assistants in Inclusive Educational Settings in Portugal

About this document

For easy reading the following terminology is used throughout the document:

- Along the UN-CRPD Terminology we use the wording “**persons with disabilities**”.
- When we refer in this document to “**pupils**” we mean all children and young adults up to 25.
- The word “**school**” refers to any educational setting.

Dimensions

<p>Legal framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law for assistance services in school There has to be a strong and clear legal framework at a national and local level, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (UN CRPD) defining the role of assistance services (performance description) within an inclusive educational system and clearly articulate the necessity to establish and maintain assistance services throughout all levels of education, from preschool to secondary education. Higher education should also be considered, whenever going to the university is part of the student’s life project. A law which clarifies the rights of the student with a disability, but also a law which describes how this should be done in education is needed.
<p>Financial Framework of the service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds available Resources for assistance services, whether from federal, local or regional budgets, have to be available so that every pupil who needs assistance in every school has access to the service. The overall resources for every educational institution should come from the global budget of the Ministry of Education. The institutions should have the possibility to manage the resources in an autonomous and flexible way, according administrative guidelines from the Government and to the needs of the school community in general and of every student in particular. • Funds for all Every school needs dedicated resources for supporting the learning

	<p>and development of all pupils in school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available Resources The resources needed for every child should be set up by the School Groups, Municipalities and Social Service Providers, as a network of collaboration towards inclusive practices. <p>The second should provide a task force of school assistants, with adequate training, as well as open access to services in the community, according to the availability.</p> • Additional funds for some If pupils need additional assistance which is different from what is ordinarily provided for all pupils, adequate funds should be available for this too. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessment independent of provision The amount and type of resources should be decided by the School Groups, Municipalities and Social Service Providers, in a collaboration process. ○ Timeframe Such decisions should be taken within a timeframe consistent with statutory guidance, or emergency procedures put in place until a considered position is reached. • Remuneration of assistants In determining remuneration, special consideration should be given to all duties of assistants: the main focus is working with children but additional time should be allocated for preparation, supervision, liaison with other staff, participation at relevant meetings, etc.
<p>Organization/Admin of the service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External monitoring If there is suspicion that the individual right of a pupil to fully participate in school life is threatened, independent monitoring boards (e.g. a local arbitration committee - following UN-CRPD Art. 33) should be installed, which are local and education specific, with the power to mediate between conflicting positions. Parents, teachers, assistants and pupils can appeal to these boards for help. The members of such boards should represent the relevant stakeholders of inclusive educational systems (parents, teachers, assistants, persons with disabilities etc.) • Who is the employer? Benefits of assistants being appointed by an organization outside of

	<p>school (e.g. employed by a social service provider or the municipality) are to maintain the independence of the service and to allow the assistant to advocate the individual right to participate in every aspect of school life of every pupil. In this case, a clarification of responsibilities between the employer (Municipality) and school (School Group) is needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment Because of the close and often intimate relationship between assistants and pupils, parents and pupils should be involved when new assistants are hired. • Position in school hierarchy In cases where it is felt that upholding a pupil's individual right to participate in every aspect of school life comes into conflict with the way teaching and learning are organized in the school, it is important that the pupil's voice, and that of its allies and advocates, is heard. That is why the position of assistants within the hierarchy of a school should allow them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain an independence status from the educational service; - advocate for the individual right to participate in every aspect of school life for every pupil; - collaborate with the staff from the School Group (teachers and specialists) and from Social Services Providers (specialists). It is very important that the collaboration and cooperation of school teaching and non-teaching staff (especially assistants of pupils with disabilities) is well established, regardless of the job contract or employment model of assistants. Assistants should be part of the school community and should be involved in the decision making process for relevant issues of school life.
<p>Cooperation of the assistant with other staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full participation Assistants should be seen by everyone as an integral part of the school community. They should be included in all school activities and all relevant communication processes between pupils, parents, teachers, external and internal supporters etc. Assistants should be integrated in the class community, they should work all together as a team with one another, with teachers, pupils and their families. Everyone according to their role is equally important.

<p>Target group of the assistants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistance for 100% of pupils Assistants should work with pupils from 3-18 years: from Pre-School to Secondary School (12th Grade). Pupils aged between 0-3 years should receive assistance from the National Early Intervention Services, including assistance in educational settings, when applicable. For pupils with 16 years of age and older an Independent Life Assistance Service should be enabled, allowing for continuity in his/her life course. Assistants should see themselves responsible for all individuals in class according to their needs, not only for one with special needs e.g. immigrants, talents etc.
<p>Qualifications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At European level Recommendations for qualification standards according to European Qualification Framework (EQF) criteria should be defined at European level. These should refer to the established legal framework. At national level Standards for the qualification of assistants should be set up, which should be consistent with the European Union recommendations. It should also be ensured that professional development for active and future staff is available and affordable. Vocational training organizations and employers should collaborate to ensure this is available. At individual level The educational system has to offer a vocational education and training and continuous professional development for assistants. Assistants should be encouraged and enabled to get the qualification needed. Vocational training organizations and employers should collaborate to ensure this is available.
<p>Aims and tasks</p>	<p>The aims and tasks of assistants should be in accordance with the relevant qualification standards in each country as well as with the assistants' legal status.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedagogical/Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational support with tasks in class, in best case according to individual learning plans focus on learning support instead of tasks completion execute the tasks set up by the teacher in the lessons plan developing resources in cooperation with teachers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ health support ○ hygienic support ○ safety and orientation support ○ feeding support ○ emotional regulation ○ personal programs in cooperation with therapists • Social/Emotional development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supporting independence ○ enabling/structuring social interaction to make and keep friends ○ graduated approaches to facilitate playing interaction ○ anti-bullying ○ establishing the position as a valued member of the school community • Advocacy and Self-Determination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ being an ally ○ encouraging other pupils to act as allies ○ supporting the child to advocate for themselves
Access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the school community Schools should proactively inform the school community about every aspect of diversity, including different types of impairments, inclusive approaches and the work of assistants. • For assistants Assistants should have access to all information relevant to educational, personal and social issues about pupils in class (under consideration of confidentiality).
Roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for all Assistants in every school should be enabled to work in an autonomous and flexible way, according to the needs of the school community in general and the needs of every pupil in particular. This guarantees that the character of the assistance service can develop in relation to the development of each pupil. (e.g. from direct support at the beginning to enabling social interaction through working with all pupils in class). The distribution of resources within a school should be set up in a collaborative process where all stakeholders (parents, pupils, teachers,

	<p>assistants) are able to have their voice heard.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breadth of responsibility Assistants should support all school related activities (including leisure activities offered and organized by schools). The responsibilities of the assistants should be legally regulated and in accordance with their qualification. • Distribution of responsibility Overall responsibility for pupil’s learning remains with their teacher at all times. The assistant may not be responsible for structuring the process or making pedagogical decisions, although his/her opinion should be collected and valued.
<p>Support for assistants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional support Assistants should be supported by all parties involved – at the place of work (School Group), from the employer (Municipality) and from relevant partners (Social Service Providers). Professionalization of the job also means that constructive systems of appraisal need to be in place, e.g. supervision, coaching, critical friends, reflection, monitoring talks.
<p>Conditions of employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling the employer Adequate funds need to be provided so that employers can develop clear and effective business models for the recruitment and retention of assistants. In this way employers can establish long term labor relations with the employees and can offer professional development and career progression. • Enabling the assistants Assistants should have stable working conditions and job security with contracts of employment according to national employment laws. The salary of assistants should correlate to the legal status, the qualification profile, to the duties and the responsibilities of the assistants. • Enabling the pupils In best case long term relationships between assistants and the class communities they are responsible for should be established, also at times of transition.
<p>profile of workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of workforce Those offering training and employment for school assistants need to strengthen their efforts to attract more assistants from diverse backgrounds reflecting their local communities. More persons with

	<p>disabilities as well as other groups at risk by exclusion (e.g. emigrant people) should be encouraged to work as assistants. The gender and age ratio of the staff also should be balanced as far as possible.</p>
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