

Growing Together (0–6 years)

A Parent's Guide

to Early Childhood Education in Portugal



NIALP

INTERCULTURAL ASSOCIATION LISBOA
(AN IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATION)



Financiador:

JUNTA DE FREGUESIA
STA. MARIA MAIOR

Parceiros:



USF
da Baixa



Title: Growing Together (0–6 years): A Parent’s Guide to Early Childhood Schools in Portugal

Project: Growing Together! | Crescer Juntos! Funded under the PDCSMM- Programa de Desenvolvimento Comunitário de Santa Maria Maior, promoted by the Junta de Freguesia de Santa Maria Maior

Partners: Centro Paroquial e Social de Alfama; Centro Social do Menino de Deus; Creche Encosta do Castelo (SCML); USF da Baixa

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Date of publication : December 2025

Place of publication : Lisbon

Language Version : English Guide

INTRODUCTION

This guide was developed by NIALP - Nepalese Intercultural Association Lisbon as part of the Growing Together! | “Crescer Juntos!” project funded under the Community Development Programme promoted by the “Junta de Freguesia de Santa Maria Maior”. This project was developed in partnership with the following early education institutions: Creche Encosta do Castelo (SCML); Creche do Centro Social do Menino de Deus; Creche do Centro Paroquial e Social de Alfama and the local health unit: USF da Baixa.

Many migrant families with young children (0–6 years old) face challenges when starting nursery or pre-school in Portugal. Parents often tell us that it is not easy to understand how the system works — from enrollment and regulations to food, communication with teachers, and daily routines. Schools also notice differences in expectations about education, cultural practices, or food habits, which can sometimes make it harder for children and families to feel fully included.

This guide was co-created together with parents and schools. It reflects the main concerns raised by families and the perspectives of teachers and staff. In total, 29 parents contributed through group discussions and co-writing sessions with three local education institutions.

Although the examples come from the parish of Santa Maria Maior in Lisbon, the situations described here are very similar to those you may find in other parts of Portugal. Our goal is to make it easier for parents to understand how nurseries and pre-schools work, to strengthen inclusion, and to support children’s development and well-being in their first years of education.

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CHAPTER N°1

Early Childhood Education in Portugal

● In this Chapter:

- 1.1. Early Childhood Education
- 1.2. An overview of the Portuguese Education System
- 1.3. How does the system work for early childhood education?
- 1.4. What costs are to be expected?
- 1.5. Admission and enrollment process in nurseries and preschool



1.1. Early Childhood Education

Growing evidence demonstrates that early childhood education (ages 0–6) provides children with a strong foundation for learning, social development, and well-being, with benefits that last a lifetime.

Key Benefits for Children

- **Supports learning and development:** children improve their language skills, memory, and emotional growth. Early education builds a strong foundation for future learning.
- **Encourages brain development:** the early years are critical for brain growth. Quality education during this time boosts thinking, language, and problem-solving skills.
- **Promotes social and emotional skills:** Children learn to share, cooperate, follow routines, take care of themselves, and build relationships with others.
- **Increases independence and self-confidence:** Children gain self-esteem as they explore, learn, and make decisions.
- **Uses play-based learning:** children learn through fun activities that encourage creativity, curiosity, and exploration.

Support for families: early childhood education also supports families. It provides childcare, allowing parents to work, study, or attend training. This is especially helpful for single-parent households or families with low income.

Equal Opportunities: Preschool helps children from different backgrounds — including migrant families and families with fewer resources — to have equal chances to succeed in school. It can help children learn Portuguese and adapt to the school environment early.

Promoting Values and Habits as it helps children to:

- Learn good habits and daily routines
- Develop basic literacy and numeracy skills
- Understand values like respect, empathy, and social responsibility
- Grow with self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

Cultural Diversity

It's important to know that **early childhood education practices can vary between countries**. Each culture may have different expectations for how young children are raised and educated. In Portugal, there is a strong focus on learning through play, social interaction, and preparing children for school in a caring and structured way.

IN CONTEXT OF INDIA: UNICEF India highlights that in India, children often grow up in multilingual environments where parents, grandparents, and even older siblings play a role in their early learning and care. To expand access, the government has launched programs under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme to provide early childhood education for children aged 0–8, combining pre-school learning with health and nutrition services. Alongside public provision, private schools also contribute to early childcare.

IN CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH: in Bangladesh, it is common for children aged 0 to 4 to be cared for mainly by their parents — especially mothers — and grandparents. During this time, children are introduced to language, values, and cultural practices through close contact with their family members and siblings. Formal early childhood education in Bangladesh usually begins between the ages of 4.5 and 6, as part of a national preschool program. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) has recognized the importance of pre-primary education and has developed a national plan to coordinate all early education activities across the country. The goal, as stated in the national framework, is to ensure that all children aged 3 to 5 can attend preschool programs. These programs aim not only to support early education, but also to provide social support and health services. By offering these additional services, the goal is to encourage more families to enroll their children in school and to reduce school dropouts by addressing some of the challenges parents and children face. In Bangladesh, primary school generally includes children from 6 years of age onward (UNICEF, 2013).

IN CONTEXT OF NEPAL: In Nepal, children aged 0 to 3 are usually raised within a close family environment, where care is shared among family members. While mothers often take the main role in caregiving, older sisters and other relatives also help, especially with basic manners and early learning at home. Family members play an important role in introducing children to early education and developmental activities through daily interaction. According to the UNICEF Nepal Working Paper Series, young children often engage in play and learning activities with the support of adults in the household. Most children in Nepal begin formal education around the age of 5, when they enroll in primary school. Public day care services have started to grow in recent years, but are not widely available yet or accessible to all families. Private schools often offer pre-primary classes for the children aged 3-5, but they have high fees for that.

IN THE CONTEXT OF PORTUGAL: In Portugal children from the age of 4 months can attend day care centres. This is often the case because maternity leave might be shorter: 2-3 months after birth and both parents need to work to ensure financial well being. Many parents prefer early childhood education and see day care as important for the child's social and cognitive development. It is also believed that day care but especially pre-school can help children to adjust themselves with a structured environment and make a smooth transition to formal schooling. In Portugal pre- primary school covers children from 3 years and compulsory school from 6 years. Under a national network, pre-primary schools consist of public and private schools and day cares to ensure early childhood education and cognitive development. Public schools are free and private schools have some fees (Eurodyce, 2025).

1.2. An overview of the Portuguese Education System

Day Care System (“*Creches*”)

In Portugal, day care (“creche”) is designed for children from 3 months to 3 years of age. It offers a safe environment where children are cared for while their parents work, and it also plays an important role in their early development. After “creche”, children usually move on to pre-school (“jardim de infância”), which is for ages 3 to 6.

Day care can be provided in different types of institutions. There are public centers supported by the government, private non-profit organizations (IPSS) often run by charities or community groups that are completely free of charge and private for-profit centers paid fully by families. The system is regulated at two levels. For children under 3 years old (“creche”), it is overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. From age 3 onwards (pre-school), responsibility shifts to the Ministry of Education.

The approach in Portuguese early childhood education focuses on play, creativity, social skills, and exploration. These activities prepare children not only for primary school but also for healthy personal and social development (Eurydice, 2025)

Pre-school education

(“*Educação Pré-escolar - Jardim de Infância*”)

Pre-school education in Portugal is available for children aged 3 to 6 and is widely chosen by working parents. It includes public and private options, as well as offerings from charities and social institutions. Enrolling your child at this level of education is not mandatory, but it is universally available for children from age three.

Primary Education (“*Ensino Básico*”)

Basic education in Portugal is universal, compulsory, and free, lasting for nine years. It consists of three sequential cycles:

1. The first cycle spans four years (grades one to four).
2. The second cycle covers two years (grades five and six).
3. The third cycle lasts for three years (grades seven to nine) and corresponds to lower secondary education.

The curriculum aims to provide a common general background education for all citizens, focusing on acquiring fundamental knowledge and skills for further study. The national curriculum is consistent across public schools and includes subjects such as Portuguese, mathematics, science, history, geography, and mandatory English from Grade 7. Additionally, students can choose to study another foreign language, typically French or Spanish, starting from Grade 7 (NIALP, 2024).

1.2. Secondary education (“*Ensino Secundário*”)

Once children have completed primary education, they must enroll in a secondary school. These schools, known as “*escolas secundárias*”, cater to students aged 15 to 18.

Secondary education in Portugal spans three years, covering Grades 10, 11, and 12. It is a crucial phase where students have the opportunity to choose from several educational streams based on their interests and career aspirations. The main objectives of secondary education are:

- **Academic Preparation:** Some streams are designed to prepare students for higher education. These courses are academically rigorous and focus on subjects that are essential for university admission.
- **Vocational Training:** Other streams are geared towards providing practical skills and direct work placements. These courses are ideal for students who aim to enter the workforce immediately after completing secondary school (NIALP, 2024).

Higher Education

Portugal has a dual higher education system, made up of universities and polytechnics. Universities focus on academic and scientific education, while polytechnics provide professional training with an emphasis on applied research and technical skills. Both types of institutions may be public or private, and all can award Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees.

The system is overseen by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES). Degrees are regulated by the Higher Education Assessment and Accreditation Agency (A3ES) and officially recognized by the Directorate-General for Higher Education (DGES).

Since the Bologna Process was adopted, studies are organized into three cycles. A Bachelor’s degree (“*Licenciatura*”) requires 180–240 ECTS over 6 to 8 semesters. A Master’s degree (“*Mestrado*”) usually takes 90–120 ECTS over 3 to 4 semesters and includes a dissertation, project, or traineeship. Certain fields, like medicine or engineering, offer Integrated Master’s programs (“*Mestrado Integrado*”), lasting 10 to 12 semesters. A Doctorate (“*Doutoramento*”) follows a Master’s degree and is awarded after exams and public defense of a thesis, with a typical duration of 6 to 8 semesters.

Admission to public institutions is limited by a numerus clausus system, meaning there are fixed places each year. Applicants compete in the General Access Contest (“*Concurso Geral de Acesso*”), where ranking depends on grades from secondary education and national exams. Special rules apply for international students, mature applicants (23+), and those from certain regions. Private institutions set their own admission criteria.

Grades are given on a 0–20 scale, with 10 as the minimum pass mark (Eurydice, 2025)

1.3. How does the system work for early childhood education?

Education 0 to 6 years old may be offered by different kinds of institutions:

1. **IPSS (Social Solidarity Institutions):** Non-profit institutions aimed at supporting families while providing quality services.
 - Non-profit schools that help families and children who need support.
 - They offer childcare and early education.
 - They get support from the government and donations.
 - Families do not pay any fee from 0 to 3 years old.
 - From 3 to 6 years old (pre-school) the amount to pay will depend on each family's earnings. If the family cannot afford to pay it may be exempted from paying any fee.
2. **Private Schools:** Managed by private entities and may have higher costs.
 - Run by private people or groups.
 - Families pay tuition fees to attend.
 - They may have special programs like bilingual classes or religious education.
3. **Public Schools:** Funded by the government, with no fees (for free), typically offered through local municipalities.
 - Run and paid for by the government.
 - Free for all children.
 - Follow the official national curriculum.
 - Available for all education levels, from nursery to university.

In Lisbon, SANTA CASA DA MISERICÓRDIA DE LISBOA works under the social security system hence it offers public education free of charge.

Please note that some day care centres or pre schools are part of religious institutions (IPSS or private) that means that there are religious symbols but this does not mean your child cannot have a different religion or that it is mandatory for your child to participate in any religious celebration.

Day Care Centres “Creches”

Daycare centers in Portugal are institutions that provide care and early education for children aged between 4 months and 3 years. These facilities provide a safe and healthy environment where children can grow and develop while their parents are at work.

1.3. You usually have educators (“educadores/as”) who have higher education training on early children development and you have supporting staff (“auxiliares educativos/as”) who usually also receive specific training.

These daycare centers or “Creches” are under the authority of the Ministry of Social Security and they are free of charge. They need to comply with specific rules. They usually are organized in 3 classrooms organized by age groups however some day care centres have mixed rooms where you have both 1 and 2 years old according to each developmental stage.

Here is an example of how a daycare centre is typically organized:

Nursery - “Berçário” :

4 to 12 months old class where you have a maximum of 10 babies in the room with two adults.

One years old class - “Sala de 1 ano”

Two year old class - “Sala de 2 anos”

There are no specific limits to the number of children in a class for 1st and 2nd years - the criteria is according to the room size (by m²). In these classes there is always an educator (not required for the bercario)

Pre-School “Jardim de Infância”

Pre-school in Portugal is more than preparation for academic learning; it is a fundamental stage for socialization, creativity, and personal growth, ensuring that children enter primary school with the confidence and skills they need to succeed. Pre-school education is for children aged 3 to 6 and it is optional but widely attended, and focuses on play-based learning, social skills, and holistic child development. Access can be competitive in some areas, so families often register early. In Portugal, early childhood education in pre-school is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and it is not free of charge. The amount each family pays will be determined by the institution (IPSS) in which you enroll your children and the calculation is made according to your household earnings and expenses.

1. **Public Pre-Schools**

- Free of charge for education.
- Families may still pay for meals, school transport, or extended hours
- Managed by the Ministry of Education.
- Places are limited, so priority is given to children living in the school area, children with siblings already enrolled, and families in need.

2. **IPSS (Instituições Particulares de Solidariedade Social) – Non-Profit, Subsidized Institutions**

- Run by charities, local associations, cooperatives, or parishes.
- Monthly Fees depend on family income (calculated using household salary brackets).
- Often cheaper than private schools, since 2025/26 they tend to be free of charge.

3. **Private Schools**

- Full tuition is charged, with wide variation
- Some follow special methodologies such as Montessori, Waldorf, or Reggio Emilia, or international curricula (British, American, IB).
- Families pay for all extras (meals, activities, materials).

1.4. What costs are to be expected?

As previously mentioned, **education 0 to 3 is free of charge in the IPSS or Public System.** However even if 0 to 3 education in Portugal tends to be free of charge there are some costs that are still expected to be supported by parents. Aside from all requested material that you need to bring to school (see chapter 3 for more information), families may still need to pay for extra items or activities such as uniforms, school smocks or “bibe”, field trips, theatre or music classes, concert visits, and similar activities. Some schools will ask for an enrollment fee (in some IPSS this amount is around 100 euros).

In the **pre-school level, 3 to 6 years old , in IPSS type of institutions you usually pay a monthly fee.** The amount each family pays will be determined by the institution (IPSS) in which you enroll your children and the calculation is made according to your earnings (income is calculated according to the Personal Income Tax Return or “IRS”). In this calculation each family’s expenses are also considered such as rent or health expenses for example. Please note that an enrollment fee may be required at the end of your child’s last year of day care to secure a place for the first year of pre-school (“pré-escolar”). Renewal fee in some IPSS might be around 80 euros.



1.5. Admission and Enrollment Process in Day Care Centres and Preschool

Day Care Centres ('Creche')

In Portugal, the admission process to day care centres ("creche") will vary from institution to institution.

How to apply?

You might be able to do it online, by email or in person. For creches part of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa the enrollment is online through the following link:

https://inscricoesacaosocial.scml.pt/priamws/Inscricoes?FormId=5&_gl=1*17xiqzg*_ga*MTYzOTg5NDM4Mi4xNjkwMTg5NjAz*_ga_7DTGXVIFSJ*MTcwNTQwMTk4OS42LjEuMTcwNTQwMjYINS4yOC4wLjA

Where to find a day care centre? You can download the "creche feliz" or "happy daycare" app on your phone to see the list of day care centers with free available places in your area of residence or work. It allows you to view contacts and location. You can also ask your "Junta de Freguesia" which is the local borough of your neighborhood for the contacts of day care centers in the area. Online you will find some websites with lists of daycare centers private and public and you need to contact each one of these individually.

When to apply?

This too will depend on each creche / day care centre. Some will allow you to apply any time during the year but demand that, if you want the child to start in September, to apply before May 31st for example. You will need to check with each individual school.

What Happens after you apply?

Usually between May and the end of June, all applications will be checked. You might be in a waiting list and receive a contact no later than the end of June if you get admitted. Families will then usually be asked to send the following documents by email:

For Parents

1. ID cards or passports or residence permit of everyone in your household or just the parents (it will depend)

Some Daycare Centres "Creches" might also ask for the following additional documents:

2. Proof of income (last 3 payslips, unemployment or pension papers, etc.) for all members of the household.
3. Proof of housing costs (rent or home loan receipt)
4. Proof of address (a water, electricity, or gas bill under your name for example)

5. IRS Declaration and Settlement note (Personal Income Tax Return)
6. Parents working schedule
7. Proof of unemployment (through social security you will ask for proof that you are looking for work).

For Children

1. Id card, passport or residence permit
2. Vaccination Booklet (from the Health Centre)
3. Paper with name and contact of the doctor who follows the child at the health centre (request this at the health centre).
4. 3 photos
5. NISS - Social Security Number
6. Some daycare centres ask for proof of family/household composition (this is found through 'portal das finanças' / finance online website)

You usually have 1 week to send the documents. After that, the creche will schedule a face-to-face interview, usually in July but this will also depend from institution to institution.

At the Interview

- You will sign 2 copies of the service agreement (you keep one and you can ask to take it home and give it back signed the next day for example - so you have time to read it thoroughly).
- The rules and schedule will be explained.
- You will agree on the time/schedule your child will attend the creche.

Start of the School Year

Usually in September or in the summer the educator will meet with your family to talk about:

- Your child's habits, personality, and needs
- The start date and a short adaptation period (normally 1 week or less)
- What to bring to the creche / day care
- Your child's food needs (some schools offer options for vegetarians and vegans too)
- More details about the contract and creche rules

Important Notes:

- The daycare centre ("creche") is free, so you don't need to pay fees.
- Some Day Care Centres organize, usually in mid-October, a welcome meeting for all parents. They explain the daycare centre's rules, teaching style, and yearly calendar.

Pre-School - “jardim de infância”

In Portugal, the admission process to pre-school will vary from institution to institution.

How to apply?

For public pre-schools (not IPSS) you need to enroll through the “Portal das Matrículas” the Enrollment Portal. This online platform serves as a central hub for submitting all the essential information and documentation required for the enrollment or renewal process, subject to prior consent. To initiate or renew registration on the Portal das Matrículas, it’s important to follow a series of steps to ensure a smooth process:

Step 1: Gather the necessary documents:

- Identification documents
- Digital photograph of your child
- Tax Identification Number (NIF)
- Social Security Identification Number (NISS)

Step 2: Go to the Enrollment Portal website at

<https://portaldasmaticulas.edu.gov.pt/>

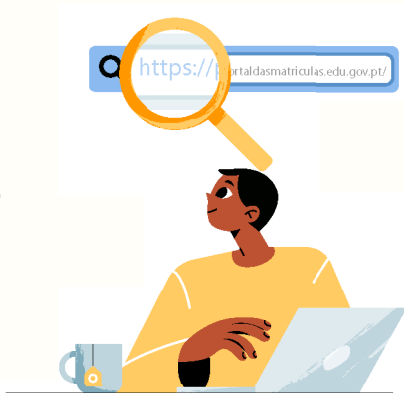
Step 3: Choose the “Parent Login” profile.

Step 4: Log in using one of the following options:

- Your Portal das Finanças credentials
- Digital Mobile Key: for authentication using the Digital Mobile Key, it is necessary to have previously requested a Key. You can consult the information regarding the Digital Mobile Key request and the authentication process in the following link: <https://www.autenticacao.gov.pt/a-chave-movel-digital>. To request this digital key you need to go to a “Espaço Cidadão” with your passport, NIF (ID from the Finances) and phone number.

Step 5: Once logged in, select either the “Enrollment” option for enrollment or renewal, or the “Transfers” option for school transfers.

Step 6: If you’ve chosen the “Enrollment” option, proceed by clicking on the “New Enrollment or Renewal” button.



If you encounter any difficulties or need further assistance you can contact the desired school or sometimes the current school might also support parents. You can also request support on the website of the Enrollment Portal.

When to apply?

You can apply in the month of April until the end of May.

What Happens after you apply?

Generally, the enrolment process in IPPS pre-schools in Portugal is similar. The required documents for enrolment are mentioned below:

For Parents

1. ID cards or passports or residence permit of everyone in your household.
2. IRS Declaration + settlement note.
3. Declaration from the employment centre in case of unemployment.

For Children

1. Id card, passport or residence permit
2. Vaccination Booklet (from the Health Centre)
3. Paper with name and contact of the doctor who follows the child at the health centre (request this at the health centre).
4. 3 photos
5. NISS(Number identification segurança social)
6. Some school ask for proof of family/household composition (this is found through 'portal das finanças' / finance online website)

Start of the School Year

Usually in September or in the summer the educator will meet with your family to talk about:

- Your child's habits, personality, and needs
- What to bring to the "Jardim de Infância" / Pre-school
- Your child's food needs (some schools offer options for vegetarians and vegans too)
- More details about the programme and rules

Important Notes

- Some Pre-Schools organize, usually in mid-October, a welcome meeting for all parents. They explain the school's rules, teaching style, and yearly calendar.



Summary Table

Stage	Age Range	Registration Period	How to Apply
Creche	0-3	Jan–May	Online or in person
Pré-escolar	3-6	Apr–May	Online or in person for IPSS and through the Enrollment Portal for Public Pre-schools



Required Docs	Priority Criteria	Costs
<p>ID cards or passports or residence permit of everyone in your household; Proof of income for all members of the household; Proof of housing costs; Proof of address; IRS Declaration and Settlement note; Parents working schedule; Proof of unemployment .</p> <p>Vaccination Booklet, Paper with name and contact of the doctor who follows the child at the health centre, 3 photos, NISS - Social Security Number, some daycare centres ask for proof of family/ household composition.</p>	<p>Medical needs, single parent, siblings, income, proximity</p>	<p>No cost but some extra activities or materials might have a cost associated.</p>
<p>ID cards or passports or residence permit; IRS Declaration+ settlement note; Declaration from the employment centre in case of unemployment;</p> <p>Vaccination Booklet; Paper with name and contact of the doctor who follows the child at the health centre; 3 photos; NISS(Number identification segurança social); Some schools ask for proof of family/household composition.</p>	<p>Age, special needs, siblings, ASE (being a beneficiary of School Social Action Support), proximity, work/study</p>	<p>Public Pre-School is Free. IPSS: Monthly fee according to each family's income</p>

CHAPTER N°2

Rules & Procedures

● In this Chapter:

- 2.1. Common rules and guidelines
- 2.2. Duties and Rights of parents & children
- 2.3. Typical School / Day Care Schedule
- 2.4. Common diseases in school context and what to do



2.1. Common rules and guidelines

Generally in Portugal the rules of the day care centres (“creches”) and pre-schools are similar to each other but there might be some differences between schools and day care centres so always read carefully the internal rules provided to you at the time of enrollment. The day care centre or pre-school internal rules (“Regulamento Interno”) will need to be followed and you may be asked to sign any required agreements or permissions from the Social Security Ministry (in the case of day care centres) or Ministry of Education (in the case of pre-school)

Here are some guiding principles:

- Submit necessary documents during enrollment.
- Drop-off and Pick-up Times: this will depend on each institution; some might have stricter rules than others. For example, late arrivals/pick-ups may result in warnings or extra charges.
- Always inform staff in advance if another adult is picking up the child. They might ask for ID verification.
- Bring and collect your child on time to support the daily routine.
- Health and Sickness Policy: sick children must stay home, particularly in cases of: fever, diarrhea, vomiting, contagious illnesses (e.g., chickenpox, flu etc.). You should notify the creche of illness promptly. A doctor’s note may be required before the child returns (see section 4 of this chapter for more information).
- Hygiene and Clothing: parents usually need to provide: an extra set of clothes; a set of bed sheets, diapers, wipes, lotions (if needed); indoor shoes or slippers. All items must be labeled with the child’s name. Dress children according to the weather and in comfortable, easy-to-manage clothing. Teach and support hygiene habits at home too — such as washing hands and using the toilet (after 2 years of age) — to promote healthy routines and your child’s autonomy.
- Food and Allergies: inform staff about any allergies or dietary restrictions; meals are usually provided (some creches allow packed lunches); avoid sending sweets, junk food, or nuts (due to allergy risks); special dietary needs must be supported by a doctor’s note, if necessary. See chapter 3 for more guidelines on adapting to food in the school environment.
- Communication with Staff: maintain open and respectful communication with educators; share important information about the child’s routines, behavior, or changes at home; attend scheduled parent-teacher meetings and development evaluations; use designated times for deeper discussions – avoid lengthy talks during busy hours. Stay informed about the child’s progress. You can use translation apps to support communication and/ or ask support from other parents who might help in translating. Communication with the school is very important so try to attend parents meetings, individual meetings and follow your children’s progress in school.

2.1.

- Behavior and Respect: encourage respect for creche rules, staff, and other children. Support the creche in teaching discipline, cooperation, and social skills. Parents should avoid interfering with staff duties during drop-off or pick-up. Encourage good behavior and cooperation with teachers and other children.

Payment of Fees

- Pay monthly fees on time to avoid penalties or suspension.
- Public creches and IPSS may offer sliding scale fees based on household income (see chapter 1 for more information).
- Keep payment receipts or confirmations



2.2. Duties and Rights of parents & children

Children's Rights

- The right to a safe, caring, and nurturing environment where they can play, learn, and grow.
- The right to healthy and age-appropriate meals, with menus shared with parents/guardians.
- The right to take part in educational and recreational activities that support their development.
- The right for their family to be informed and involved in their learning journey.

Children's Responsibilities

- To follow the school's rules (arrival and pick-up times, hygiene, meals, rest, and play).
- To respect classmates, educators, and all staff in the school community.
- To take part in activities with curiosity, cooperation, and respect.

Parents' / Guardians' Rights

- To be informed about the school's operation, educational methods, and their child's development.
- To participate in school life, including meetings, events, and shared activities.
- To have access to the internal regulations, schedules, menus, and other relevant information.
- Parents have the right to provide expressed breast milk for their child while in day care, and staff must handle, store, and feed it safely according to policy. If the mother chooses to breastfeed on-site, the day care should offer a comfortable and welcoming space for that purpose.



Parents' / Guardians' Responsibilities

- To ensure children are brought and picked up on time, following all safety procedures.
- To inform the school about any relevant situations (allergies, medication, health, or family changes).
- To cooperate with the educational team, attending meetings and supporting learning at home.
- To follow the school's internal rules and procedures respectfully.

PARENTS RIGHTS TO COMPLAIN: If a day care is not functioning properly, parents can first speak with the director or management to resolve the issue. Every day care or pre-school has a Complaints Book (Livro de Reclamações) where parents can register a complaint and receive a response within 15 working days. Complaints can also be submitted online through the Electronic Complaints Book or to the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (for “creche”) or the Ministry of Education (for “pre-ecolar”). If the issue remains unresolved, parents may contact the Ombudsman’s Office or the N-CID Unit (Children, Senior Citizens, and Persons with Disabilities). For urgent concerns or child protection issues, call the free helpline 800 20 66 56 for assistance with situations such as abuse, neglect, or risk.



2.3. Typical School / Day Care Schedule

Please be aware that it is important for the child's routine and for the group's dynamic to respect the pick up and drop off times. Usually you are not allowed to visit your child during the day as this would interfere with the daily routine and stability of your child and the rest of the group.

Day Care - Example

Drop off:

08:30 AM
to
10:00 AM

Pick Up:

04:00 PM
to
5:30 PM

Extra times will depend on each daycare centre's rules and might have a cost associated.

Pre School

Drop off:

08:00 AM
to
9:00 AM

Pick Up:

04:00 PM
to
7:00 PM

There are usually activities called "CAF – Componente de Apoio à Família", which provide extra support outside regular drop-off and pick-up hours.

For example, this may be available from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM and from 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM — please check with each individual pre-school.

Be aware that these activities may involve an additional cost.

2.4. Common diseases in school context and what to do

There are some common communicable illness seen in day care and pre school going children:

- Conjunctivitis / pink eyes
- Hand, foot and mouth disease
- Stomach flu
- Sore throat and Ear infection.
- RSV (respiratory syncytial virus infection)
- Chicken pox / varicella infection.

Some of these illnesses require isolation as these are extremely contagious. It is the case of chicken pox, hand ,foot and mouth disease and RSV. In these cases some days of isolation are mandatory.

Chicken Pox

What is Chicken Pox?

In Portugal chicken pox is usually addressed as “varicela”. It is a highly contagious and self limiting disease caused by Varicella zoster virus. Characterized by itchy rashes in body and fluid filled blisters. It spreads through air born droplets or direct contact with blisters.



How to treat it?

Treatment protocol involves supportive care:

- keeping nails short
- avoid scratching
- antihistamine for itching
- paracetamol for fever
- hydration (adequate fluid intake is important)
- isolation
- in some cases anti viral medication (at high risk of complication).
- Chicken pox vaccine is included in Portugal's childhood vaccination schedule.

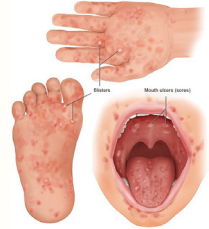
Does it require isolation?

Usually the daycare centre (“creche”) requires confirmation of chicken pox diagnosis, some schools may ask for a medical certificate as a confirmation of illness needs, when a child can return to creche just to ensure that he is no longer contagious to other children. During the disease period, children should be excluded from the facility until all the blisters have crusted over and formed a scab, typically around 5 to 7 days after a rash appears.

Hand, Foot And Mouth Disease (HFMD)

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Hand, Foot and Mouth (“Pés, Mãos e Boca”) disease is a common viral infection seen in day care centers or pre-school caused by virus coxackie A16 and Enterovirus 71. Characterized by fever, sore throat, rash and blisters in hand, feet and mouth, usually self limiting and children recover within 7-10 days. It spreads through respiratory droplets (coughing, sneezing), close contact, contact with infected surfaces.



Does it require isolation?

In hand, foot and mouth disease isolation is recommended but not mandatory to exclude children from day care or pre-school. As long as they are fever free for 24 hours they can join day care. It is not necessary to wait for the blister to completely heal before returning to creche. In addition, it doesn't require a medical certificate for sick days. In school it is important to keep proper hygiene practices, discourage sharing of personal items and should practice frequent handwashing.

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)

What is RSV?

RSV usually causes lower respiratory tract infection on young children and infants. Symptoms include fever, severe cough with wheezing (high pitched), rapid breathing / difficulties breathing, bluish discoloration of skin due to lack of oxygen and in severe cases needs hospitalization.

How to treat it?

Most RSV infections in children are mild and can be managed at home with supportive care and symptomatic management and hydration (adequate fluid intake is important).

Does it require isolation?

A child with RSV infection can return to daycare (“creche”) or pre-school when they are fever free, can participate in normal activities and are no longer exhibiting severe respiratory symptoms.

When to take a baby with RSV to the hospital

“Caving in” of their chest when breathing.

<p>Blue or gray lips, mouth or fingernails.</p>	<p>Short, shallow or fast breathing.</p>	<p>Flaring of nostrils when breathing.</p>
<p>Noisy breathing.</p>	<p>Signs of dehydration.</p>	<p>Pauses in breathing.</p>

What should you do if your son/daughter is sick in school?

In Portugal, when children are admitted to a daycare centre (“creche”) or a pre-school (“jardim de infância”), parents must provide a medical certificate confirming a recent health check-up, along with the child’s vaccination card. These documents ensure that the child has no major health issues and is up to date with vaccinations.

If a child has a chronic illness or disability their admission may be postponed and considered after consultation by doctors and the day care centre (“creche”) or a pre-school (“jardim de infância”) team.

If the child is unwell and has severe symptoms of illness such as diarrhea, vomiting, fever (over 37.5 C°) the school will call you to pick the child as soon as possible (the parents or authorized representative) and they are advised that they only return to school after symptoms resolve. Beware that in some daycare centres and pre-schools they might ask for a medical certificate if the symptoms are ongoing for over 3 days. Please consider that even if symptoms are not so serious in your child’s case, if it is a very infectious disease it might cause serious damage to people with other health issues such as cancer patients or even in pregnancy cases so it is important that you follow the schools’ isolation recommendations.

Sick children cannot receive medication prescribed by family doctors at school unless written consent is provided by the parents. For children on long-term medication, the medication must be supplied by the parents, clearly labelled with the child’s name and the dosage indicated on the packaging. In addition, during emergency situations, the school can act according to the child’s needs. Written consent is usually obtained at the time of admission, authorizing staff to make urgent medical decisions in the best interest of the child. Parents are also generally provided with a list of health-related exclusion criteria.

How to get this medical certificate? It is usually from the health centre where your child is enrolled. If you do not have a family doctor you can request an appointment with the doctor “on call” at the health centre where they are enrolled. In addition in some cases there is an option of video consultation where a doctor will assess the sick children condition and if need then he can issue a medical certificate and can send via parent email. Always call SNS 24(808 24 24 24) before going to a health centre or use the “portal SNS24” and SNS Mobile APP: you can register your child with a valid sns number and can access doctors’ prescription, certificate, schedule appointment and other health relevant information. (See “How to Access SNS” guide at www.nialp.pt for more information).

How many days of paid leave can parents take when their children are sick?

If your child gets sick or has an accident, working parents in Portugal have the right to stay home and still receive financial support. This benefit is called the Subsidy for Child Care Leave (“Subsídio para Assistência a Filho”).

To receive it, you must be registered with Social Security, and at least one parent in the couple must have paid contributions for 6 months or more. The subsidy replaces your income during the days you cannot work because you are caring for your child. This right applies to both employees and self-employed workers, as long as they contribute to Social Security. Families should remember to apply within the required timeframe (usually within 6 months of taking the leave).

Parents can receive the subsidy for up to 30 days per year if their child is under 12 years old, or up to 15 days per year if their child is over 12 years old. For each additional child, the family gets 1 extra day.

If a child under 12 years old, or a child with a disability or chronic illness, is hospitalized, one parent can receive the subsidy for the entire period of hospitalization. Parents cannot, however, take the leave at the same time.

Note: Parents of children with a disability or chronic illness have the right to stay at home to provide care and under certain conditions, receive financial support through the Subsidy for Assistance to a Child with Disability or Chronic Illness (“Subsídio para Assistência a Filho com Deficiência ou Doença Crónica”). To qualify, the parent must be registered with Social Security and have paid contributions for at least 6 months. This subsidy can be granted for a longer period than the regular child care leave, depending on the child’s needs and with medical confirmation.



CHAPTER N°3

Daily Routines and Activities

● In this Chapter:

- 3.1. A typical day in day care and pre-school
- 3.2. Other Activities
- 3.3. Birthdays and other celebrations
- 3.4. What should you bring to day care?
- 3.5. Food in school: what to expect?
- 3.6. Hygiene measures



3.1. A Typical Day in Day Care

This is an example of one day in a day care centre in Portugal (“*creche*”).

8:00am – 9:00am

Welcoming and free play

9:00am – 10:00am

Morning Snack and free play time

10:00am – 10:15am

Good morning and attendance marking

10:15am – 10:30am

Small group time

10:30am – 10:45am

Large Group Time

10:45am – 11:15am

Outdoor Time and Body Care Time

11:15am – 12:00pm

Mealtime (lunch) and hygiene

12:00pm – 3:15pm

Rest Time (nap) and hygiene

3:15pm – 4:00pm

Afternoon Snack and hygiene

4:00pm – 6:00pm

Free play or outdoor time and outings

This is an example of one day in a pre-school in Portugal (“*jardim de infancia*”).

8:00am – 9:00am

Arrival and free play (welcoming time)

9:00am – 10:00am

Morning snack and free play

10:00am – 10:15am

Good morning circle and attendance check

10:15am – 10:45am

Small group activities

10:45am – 11:15am

Large group activities (story, music, circle time)

11:15am – 11:45am

Outdoor play and body care time

11:45am – 12:30pm

Lunch and hygiene

12:30pm – 3:00pm

Rest / nap time and hygiene
(adjusted to pre-school age)

3:00pm – 3:30pm

Afternoon snack and hygiene

3:30pm – 5:30pm

Free play or outdoor activities, planned outings

5:30pm – 6:30pm

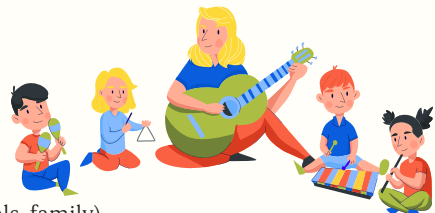
Late pick-up and free play until departure

Daily routines will differ depending on each institution and pedagogical approach.

3.2. Other Activities

Weekly routines might include, depending on each school, activities that will promote a healthy child development according to each age group such as:

- Storytelling sessions
- Music and rhythm
- Plastic arts / crafts
- Sensory play
- Motor development
- Cooking activities
- Thematic projects (e.g. seasons, animals, family)
- Celebrations – birthdays, national holidays, cultural days



3.3. A Typical Day in Day Care













Birthdays

In Portuguese creches (0–3 years) and pre-schools (3–6 years), birthdays are kept simple, warm, and inclusive. Parents usually let the teacher know beforehand if they would like their child's birthday to be marked at school.

Some schools don't allow homemade cakes for safety reasons. Instead, parents are asked to bring a small store-bought cake or healthy snacks with the ingredients clearly shown. In some places, the school itself may provide a simple cake so that all children are treated the same way. Ask the school how to proceed and if they allow you to come and sing along. This might not be allowed to avoid disrupting the child and the group's routine.

On this day, the celebration normally happens during snack time. The birthday child might wear a little crown or hat, everyone sings "Parabéns a Você" (Happy Birthday) and the group shares the cake or snacks together. No gifts are expected, keeping things equal and stress-free for families. Some pre-schools also prepare small gestures, like having classmates draw pictures, making a birthday card, or letting the birthday child choose a favorite activity. The focus is always on making the child feel special, included, and happy, rather than on big parties.

Celebrations

 Christmas Dec. 25	 Easter 15	 Assumption of Mary	 Freedom Day Apr. 25
 Portugal Day June	 Republic Day Oct. 5	 Labour Day May	 Restoration of Independence Day Dec. 1
 Immaculate Conception Dec. 8	 Carnival 1	 Carnival	 December 8

Celebrations

In Portugal, there are many public holidays celebrated throughout the year. Some of them are religious, while others mark important events in the country's history. For example, people celebrate Christmas (25 December) and Easter, which are both important Christian holidays. Other religious holidays include All Saints' Day (1 November), the Assumption of Mary (15 August), and the Immaculate Conception (8 December).

There are also national holidays, such as Freedom Day (25 April), which remembers the peaceful revolution that ended the dictatorship in 1974. Portugal Day (10 June) celebrates the country and the famous poet Luís de Camões. Republic Day (5 October) marks the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the republic, and Restoration of Independence Day (1 December) celebrates when Portugal regained its independence from Spain in 1640.

Other important holidays include Labour Day (1 May), which honors workers, and Carnival, which is not an official holiday but is widely celebrated with parades and parties including in some daycare centres and preschools. People in Portugal often enjoy time off with family and friends on these days, and when a holiday falls close to the weekend, they sometimes take an extra day off — called a “ponte” (bridge) — to make a long weekend.

These holidays are a big part of life in Portugal and show the mix of tradition, religion, and national pride that shapes the culture

3.4. What should you bring to day care?

Normally, day care centres and pre-schools ask parents to bring items for their child, such as:

- Diapers
- Wipes
- Bed linens
- 1 or 2 Extra set of clothes to change
- Hat
- Rash Lotion
- Sun Screen
- Water Bottle or a cup
- Bib (plastic)
- Pacifier (if they use)
- The child's favourite doll or toys.



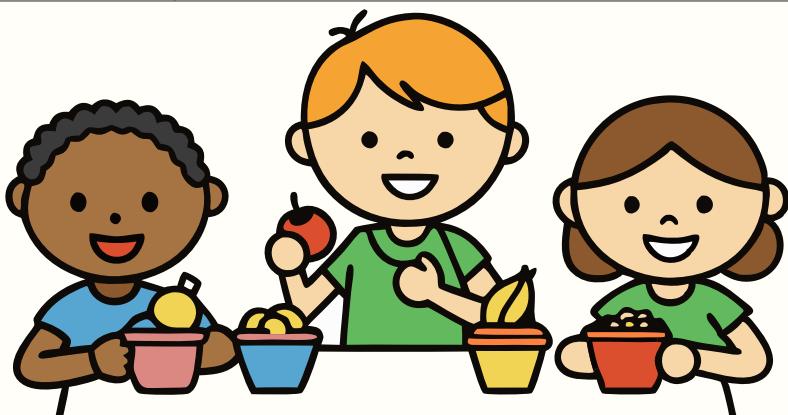
You may also be required to acquire the schools' uniform or “bibe” (smock).

3.5. Food in school: what to expect?

This is a real-life example of a lunch menu from a day care centre in Portugal, which includes different adaptations for children's needs.

MONDAY	
Soup	Vegetable cream soup with turnip greens / Vegetable cream soup (carrot, onion, and turnip)
General Diet	Chicken breast jardinière (potato, green beans, carrot) with salad
Light Diet	Chicken breast jardinière (potatoes, green beans, and carrots) with salad.
Vegan Diet	Spaghetti with stewed vegetables (mung bean sprouts, mushrooms, peppers, onion, cauliflower, broccoli, carrot)
Dessert	Fresh seasonal fruit

TUESDAY	
Soup	Spinach / Lettuce cream soup
General diet	Warm pollock salad with potato, coriander, and broccoli.
Light diet	Warm pollock salad with potato, white beans, coriander, and broccoli.
Vegan diet	Warm potato salad with white beans, coriander, and broccoli.
Dessert	Fresh seasonal fruit



WEDNESDAY

Soup	Carrot with turnip greens / Carrot cream soup
General diet	Baked mushroom omelette with rice and salad.
Light diet	Baked plain omelette with rice and salad.
Vegan diet	Stewed pinto beans with rice and salad.
Dessert	Sliced tropical fruit (<i>mango, papaya, pineapple, banana, and kiwi</i>)

THURSDAY

Soup	Pea cream soup / Zucchini cream soup
General diet	Baked salmon fillets with sautéed spinach with garlic and roasted sweet potato.
Light diet	Stew of chickpeas and pumpkin with roasted sweet potato and sautéed spinach
Dessert	Sliced tropical fruit (<i>mango, papaya, pineapple, banana, and kiwi</i>)

FRIDAY

Soup	Pinto beans with Portuguese kale / Broccoli cream soup
General Diet	Grilled turkey steak with fusilli and salad.
Light Diet	Grilled turkey steak with fusilli and salad.
Vegan Diet	Fusilli with peas and salad.
Dessert	Fresh seasonal fruit

3.5. Tips to adapt Portuguese food for children in creche and pre-school.

Helping children adapt to Portuguese food in day care centres and pre-schools can be achieved gradually with consistent support at home. Parents can start by introducing meals similar to those served at school, such as vegetable soups, rice, pasta, potatoes, and mild fish dishes. In Portuguese educational settings, lunch typically begins with a light vegetable soup, so offering soups at home helps children become familiar with this routine. Fish, such as cod, salmon, or hake, is commonly included, alongside meat, legumes, and vegetables like carrots, peas, zucchini, and green beans. For younger children in daycare (0–3 years), these foods are usually served in pureed or soft forms, so providing similar textures at home can facilitate adaptation.

For pre-school children (3–6 years), meals are more solid, and social aspects of eating are emphasized; encouraging children to eat together, sit at the table, and use polite Portuguese expressions such as “quero mais, por favor” (I want more, please) and “obrigado/obrigada” (thank you) supports both dietary and social adjustment.

Desserts in schools are usually fresh fruit rather than sweets, so limiting sugary snacks at home can help children accept this habit.

Maintaining a positive attitude during meals—sharing the same foods as a family at mealtimes, involving them in food preparation activities, encouraging tasting without pressure, and gradually introducing new dishes—further supports adaptation. A child may need to try a new ingredient 11 to 15 times before knowing if they like it, initial refusal is common at this age. Consulting the school’s weekly menu and preparing similar meals at home can also make the transition smoother. By providing gradual exposure, consistent encouragement, and familiar routines, children can successfully adapt to Portuguese food habits in day care centres and pre-school.

It is very important to work together with the school: maintain open dialogue with educators to align strategies, avoid divergent approaches and provide continuity between home and the daycare. You can always speak to the school about any specific dietary needs and see what options they have. In some cases, day care centres or pre-schools may allow families to bring food from home and this might be important especially in the beginning if they are new in the school and adapting to a new language and new environment. This can be a good option for some children, but try to keep in mind that if your child is the only one doing so, they might feel a bit different or left out during mealtimes.

If you choose this option, aim to provide healthy, balanced meals, avoiding salty foods, fried products, juices, and sweets whenever possible.

3.6. Hygiene Measures

In Portugal ensuring hygiene in creches is crucial and mandatory for preventing the spreading of infection and promoting child health.

It involves ensuring access to safe water, promoting hand hygiene practices and implementing proper sanitation procedures. All the staff should be skilled in implementation of those measures of hygiene and should ensure cleanliness of each child's water bottle during the schooling period.

Hygiene Oversight and Regulations

- Hygiene and safety standards in day care centres are overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS), while in pre-schools these fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, in coordination with local health and municipal authorities. They ensure that all childminders and institutions meet hygiene and safety requirements set by law.
- Regular Inspections: Day Care Centres and Pre-schools are subject to inspections to ensure compliance with hygiene and safety regulations. These inspections are conducted by local authorities and are part of the broader oversight by the MTSSS.

Safe Water and Hygiene Practices

- Safe Drinking Water: In Portugal, drinking tap water is generally safe. Day Care Centers and Pre-schools are required to ensure that children have access to safe drinking water at all times.

Proper Hygiene Practices: Staff are trained to implement proper hygiene procedures, including regular handwashing and maintaining cleanliness in all areas of the creche.

Clean Water Bottles: It's mandatory for staff to ensure that each child's water bottle is cleaned regularly during the schooling period to maintain hygiene standards.

Lices or “Piolhos”

Lice are small parasites that spread through direct contact with infected hair or by sharing combs, hats, or hair accessories. This issue is common among school-age children and causes itching of the scalp, especially in those with longer hair.

If a child shows signs of head itching or lice are detected by staff, parents are informed—usually verbally or by email—so they can begin anti-lice treatment at home. Treatment generally requires three cycles to fully eliminate lice and their eggs.

Children can usually return to pre-school or day care once treatment has started at home. Staff members should also check themselves and begin treatment if needed, to prevent further spread.

Key Words and Glossary

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE
Arrival / Drop-off	Entrada / Chegada
Pick-up / Dismissal	Saída / Recolha
Circle Time	Tempo de grupo / Roda
Snack Time	Lanche
Lunch Time	Almoço
Nap Time / Rest Time	Sesta / Hora de descanso
Play Time	Hora de brincar / Recreio
Outdoor Time	Atividades no exterior
Notebook / Communication Book	Agenda / Caderneta
Parent Meeting	Reunião com os pais
Observation Notes	Fichas de observação
Developmental Milestones	Marcos do desenvolvimento
Arts and Crafts	Expressão plástica
Sensory Play	Brincadeira sensorial
Free Play	Brincadeira livre
Dramatic Play / Pretend Play	Brincadeira simbólica
Puzzles / Construction Toys	Puzzles / Jogos de construção
Learning Centers	Cantinhos pedagógicos
Toy	Brinquedo

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE
Book	Livro
Blanket	Manta
Pillow	Almofada
Mat	Tapete
Chair	Cadeira
Table	Mesa
Bathroom	Casa de banho
Diaper (US) / Nappy (UK)	Fralda
Wipes / Wet Wipes	Toalhitas
Bottle	Biberão
Cup / Mug	Copo / Caneca
Apron (School Smock)	Bibe
Cleanup	Limpar
Stand up	Levantar-se
IPSS – Private Institution of Social Solidarity	IPSS – Instituição Particular de Solidariedade Social
Day Care Center / Nursery	Creche
Kindergarten / Pre-school	Jardim de infância

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www.nialp.pt

NIALP

INTERCULTURAL ASSOCIATION LISBOA
(AN IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATION)

NIALP is a non-profit association officially recognized by AIMA — the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum — as an immigrants' association representing the Nepali community in Portugal. Founded in 2019 by leaders of the Nepali community in Portugal, we work to empower the South Asian community while promoting inclusion and dialogue within Portuguese society. We support access to healthcare, education, and social services, encourage cultural exchange, and offer community-based resources that foster belonging, participation, and shared development.

Youtube

[@nialpinterculturalassociat9623](https://www.youtube.com/@nialpinterculturalassociat9623)

TikTok

[@nialp_](https://www.tiktok.com/@nialp_)

Facebook

[nialp.portugal/](https://www.facebook.com/nialp.portugal/)

Instagram

[nialpportugal/](https://www.instagram.com/nialpportugal/)

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