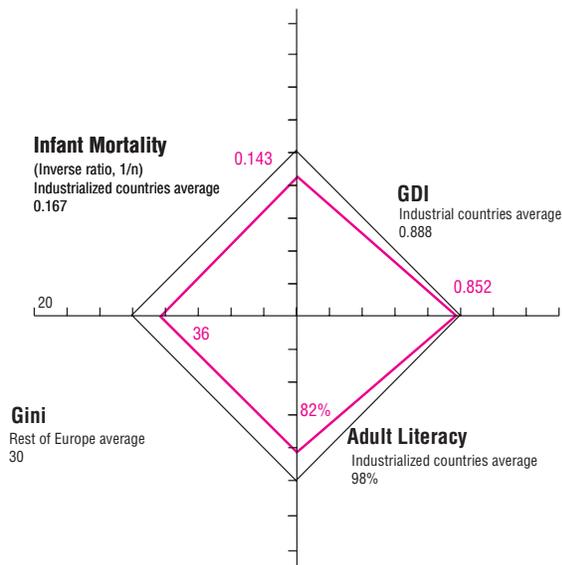


• GONÇALO PAES PARENTE



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by Social Watch).

The World Summit for Social Development and the World Conference on Women raised the problems of poverty and social exclusion. These are issues that worry the government as well. Several programmes and measures geared to dealing with this situation are currently in place. The following measures are being implemented in response to concern about poverty and social exclusion.

AGAINST POVERTY AND EXCLUSION

The National Anti-Poverty Programme's objective is to support projects that decrease the economic and social asymmetries and imbalances affecting the neediest and most excluded segments of the population by stepping up activities leading to sustainable development. The creation of anti-poverty commissions to coordinate the programme reflects the concern for these issues. The programme focuses on social groups at risk: economically needy families, children and young people with difficulties in achieving social insertion, the homeless, children and women at risk, drug addicts, persons with handicaps, and ethnic minorities. The creation in 1996 of the High Commissioner for Ethnic Minorities illustrates the importance accorded such groups in civil society.

GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME

This measure is the result of organised action and constitutes a right for families living in extreme poverty. It has had enormous national success. Target groups are economically precarious individuals and nuclear families who are excluded or at risk of exclusion, whose income is lower than the social welfare pension.

Through this measure, funding is allocated to the poorest of the poor and the most excluded of the excluded. Persons over 18 years of age and minors who are responsible for minors are entitled to this income, provided they live in Portugal, have low income, agree to participate in the Social Insertion Programme, and are willing to work or participate in vocational training. Guaranteed Minimum Income payments last for 12 months and are automatically renewed. **After a trial period, the Guaranteed Minimum Income programme was extended to all national territory in July 1997 and currently benefits 57 thousand families, equivalent to 185 thousand people.**

SOCIAL INSERTION PROGRAMME

This programme aims to achieve social and vocational integration of its beneficiaries, and includes attention to basic needs and access to vocational training and to work. It gives consideration

to the type of actions to be undertaken, the responsible entities, the support that will be given to the beneficiaries, and the obligations of the persons included. It is implemented by agreement between the local support commissions (CLA) and the members of the target nuclear family. Coordinated work with anti-poverty programmes and the Guaranteed Minimum Income programme made more solid progress possible. The latter's success depends on its links to other efforts at national level.

The INTEGRAR sub-programme operates nationwide with the general purpose of promoting economic and social integration of the most affected groups, with a view to decreasing poverty through:

- Support to comprehensive, multi-dimensional projects for improving living conditions in socially underprivileged communities;
- Actions that facilitate comprehensive access to training and to the job market;
- Action to train professionals involved in the process;
- Creation and adaptation of infrastructure and of equipment to carry out the other actions.

Yet the only programme that proved to be operating successfully after one year is the Guaranteed Minimum Income programme. This is in spite of a few errors in practical application, since certain groups of persons who are not entitled to the subsidy are taking advantage of it, and vice versa. As regards the INTEGRAR programme (but not only that programme), the government has shown significant legislative initiative, but this has not been translated into practical measures, and no assessment has been made of the resources needed to implement such measures.

There are other measures not specifically geared to combating poverty, which are positive in terms of social welfare, such as the family benefit and the increase in pensions at the lowest end of the scale. These have also benefitted the poorest families. From the institutional standpoint, a new organic law at the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity provides for the creation of the Social Development Institute, whose function would be to direct and coordinate anti-poverty programmes in Portugal. This has yet to be implemented.

Plans for eradicating poverty have not been formulated in close collaboration with organisations of civil society. Civil society's involvement is scant and local associations have very little room to maneuver in order to carry out the necessary actions.

There are many unemployed and long-term unemployed with higher education (university level). Part-time work is not regulated in the country. There is no clearly defined labour policy with practical applicability, to support the underprivileged.

EDUCATION

The government is seeking to combat the lack of primary school success. By adding a year to obligatory nine years of education, it seeks to provide a year of qualified instruction that would ensure obtainment of level II vocational training for youths holding a primary school diploma and who do not plan to go immediately to secondary school. Another objective is to improve primary or basic schooling by ensuring acquisition of basic aptitudes required at this educational level. These curricular alternatives are a new stimulus for young people finishing mandatory schooling and joining the work force.

In the area of adult education, a day session has been added to the night school classes that are now customary. Thus, students attending night school but not doing anything during the day can be occupied.

In Portugal, nearly 20% of young people do not complete primary schooling. Efforts are made to aid children with disabilities and those who require special teaching plans due to learning difficulties. A big effort is also made to improve the teaching of Portuguese abroad, primarily in European countries where there are many Portuguese immigrants.

Pre-school education will be a priority in the education budget for 1999 (USD 16 million to be invested). This is the year when the prime minister—after four years in office (1995–1999)—will fulfil his 1995 promise of allocating 1% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to the ministry of education. In 1999, the ministry of education will have USD 254 million more than it did last year (0.25% of GDP).

One measure to help the neediest pupils is the School Council's provision of free school bus transportation. Children in primary school grades 1, 2 and 3 are given two decilitres of milk a day and are exonerated from payment of school insurance. These measures demonstrate concern for improving education levels. The main obstacle is the government's failure to build relationships with civil society organisations—NGOs and grassroots groups. It is necessary to create mechanisms so that relevant organisations, such as NGO networks, can be represented and have their voices heard.

- OIKOS is an ecumenical organisation (in the generic sense) that seeks to join forces with other groups and organisations promoting the liberation of human beings in their individual and community dimensions.