

YOUNG PEOPLE'S AWARENESS OF FOREST FIRES PREVENTION: THE ROLE OF FORMAL EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL

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Abstract

Disaster risk education is a key priority area for action outlined in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. In June 2006 the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Director launched the campaign “Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School”, which includes as one of its objectives to make disaster reduction education part of primary and secondary schools curricula.

Children are among the most vulnerable population group. Experiences in several countries prove that the inclusion of risk management in schools curricula reduces significantly the impact of disasters. Education promotes a better understanding of the interaction man-environment and is the key of prevention.

In Portugal, the experience at this level is still in an early stage, although civil protection law states that schools curricula should include in the subject of civic training themes such as civil protection and self-protection, intended at diffusing practical knowledge and behaviour rules to be adopted in case of serious accident or disaster.

The Plano Nacional de Defesa da Floresta contra Incêndios (the Portuguese forest fire management plan), released in May 2006, states that although school curricula have underwent a positive evolution in approaching environmental issues, it is acknowledged that further improvement is still expected in this area.

In this paper it is our intention to assess how forest fires are considered in schools curricula (primary and basic education levels) in Portugal and how this approach is capable of raising awareness among young people of forest fire prevention. Based on the data collected, we will then propose a set of suggestions possible to be included in schools curricula of the above mentioned levels.

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