Education and Training in Portugal
# Table of Contents

- Foreword (Minister of Education) 4-5
- 1. The Portuguese education system 6-7
- 2. Schooling and qualification patterns 8-9
- 3. The educational network 10-11
- 4. Pre-school education: towards universalization 12-13
- 5. Basic education: learning quality 14-15
- 6. Secondary education and VET: multiple paths 16-17
- 7. Tertiary education: knowledge society 18-19
- 8. Adult education & training: literacy and qualification 20-21
- 9. Equity and inclusion 22-23
- 10. Education and digital skills 24-25
- 11. Evaluation as a lever for development 26-27
Foreword

“Europe with us” was the inspired motto that Mário Soares, a devoted European, chose to guide our approach, integration and participation in Europe, since the foundation of our democracy. What sounded like a prophecy back then; today, almost five decades later, can be quoted as common sense, as Portugal is already Europe; and Europe is already Portugal.

The same mindset underpins this short booklet, which provides, on the occasion of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a brief overview of the Portuguese education and training system, the evolution of its key indicators and the main policies currently in place, available for a wide and international audience.

These data show how education and training in Portugal have recently progressed to provide all those who live in this country similar conditions to those observed in the rest of Europe for learning and developing. This becomes apparent when we realise – using the main indicator for education at European level – that only twenty years ago, around 45% of youngsters had to leave school beforehand to join the ranks of low-skilled jobs, whereas nowadays, in line with the European average, this situation affects only 10% of young people. The same can be said about our improvements in pre-schooling attendance, international test scores, school retention or vocational and higher education graduation rates.

A more careful look will find particularities and innovative features in Portuguese public policies and in the way the education system has been organized, which support the evolution of the abovementioned indicators, as
growingly recognized at the international level. It is this duality – convergence and plurality – that fuels the European Education Area, which we intend to reinforce with the Portuguese Presidency and over the next years. In other words, an Area that ensures rights and expands opportunities for all citizens who live in Europe, valuing diversity and learning from the best of what is done in each country.

Today, we are struggling with a complex, challenging and unpredictable global pandemic. The best way to face it is to start building our common future in education and training now, in a joint effort of 27. A future that certainly involves being able to make the technological leap towards pedagogical innovation; the social leap towards a more effective fight against inequalities; and an educational leap to accelerate the path of equal opportunities and school success. These are the strategic challenges ahead and the steps we invite you to take with us.

Tiago Brandão Rodrigues
Minister of Education
Portuguese Republic
XXII Constitutional Government
1. The Portuguese education system

Since the approval of the Education Act, in 1986, the Portuguese education system is composed by the following stages:

• Pre-School Education, for children aged 3 to 5, with the aim of contributing to their development, stability, security, integration and participation;

• Basic Education, for students from 6 years old on, comprising 9 years of schooling, divided in three different cycles (the first in a single-teacher regime), in order to provide a common general curriculum to all citizens;

• Secondary Education, following the completion of basic education, including 3 years of schooling and organized in different courses, with the purpose of developing reasoning, critical thinking and curiosity, a humanistic, artistic, scientific and technical culture, preparing the access to higher studies and to active life (compulsory since 2009);

• Higher Education, for students who completed upper secondary education or equivalent, aiming at developing competences in different areas of knowledge, as well as to develop critical awareness and participation in society.

The Portuguese education and training system also entails the following modalities: a) special education; b) vocational education and training; c) adult education; d) distance learning; e) Portuguese education abroad.
Education and Training

Courses

Pre-school Education

Basic Education

1st Cycle
2nd Cycle
3rd Cycle

Secondary Education

Courses

CTeSP

Higher Education

Bachelor's
Master's
PhD

Expected age

1st Cycle
2nd Cycle
3rd Cycle
Secondary

Adult Education and Training

EFA/RVCC B1
EFA/RVCC B2
EFA/RVCC B3
EFA/RVCC Sec

1st Cycle
2nd Cycle
3rd Cycle
Secondary
2. Schooling and qualification patterns

Until the 1970’s, Portugal was characterized by massive illiteracy rates. By then, only a minority of the population completed upper secondary and tertiary education. This reality is still visible in the qualification gap of the working population by comparison to the European averages, especially among older generations. This gap remains a key challenge for the country’s competitiveness and cohesion.

Still, the improvement of the education system in recent decades enabled an impressive increase in schooling and qualification rates, bringing higher education graduation rates closer to European standards. Key policies enabling such development include:

• the extension of compulsory education for 12 years, from 6 to 18, since 2009;
• the diversification of education and training offers;
• requalification programmes for school buildings;
• more curriculum flexibility and autonomy for schools;
• new legislation, projects and initiatives for school success and inclusive education;
• an enlargement of social supports to students and their families;
• territorial policies and network with different entities, as municipalities, social services, security forces, health centres, social, cultural, sports and youth organizations, etc.
Illiteracy rate: Total and by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: INE

Percentage of the population with tertiary and [upper] secondary education, in 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>EU27</th>
<th>PT - Portugal</th>
<th>Tertiary Education [ISCED 5-8]</th>
<th>Upper Secondary Education [ISCED 3-4]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: INE / Eurostat
3. The educational network

The educational network is composed of different type of schools, responding to territories’ needs, specificities and strategies. The most common typologies are kindergarten, 1st cycle basic school (formerly, “primary school”), 2nd and 3rd cycles basic school, secondary school, vocational school (with or without the 3rd cycle), polytechnic institute and university.

An increasing number of schools combine different educational cycles, from pre-school up to secondary education, within a policy framework striving to adjust the school network to demographic changes, through more integrated, qualified and diverse school buildings and educational responses.

With the same purpose, since 1998, kindergartens, basic and secondary schools were aggregated, in accordance with their location and proximity, in school clusters, with a common governing boards, administrative services and education projects, fostering a more efficient shared resources use, an enriched curriculum offer and a more effective monitoring of students’ pathways.

Besides the public-school network (which hosts around ¾ of all students), there are also private schools, under public licences to operate and to grant educational degrees. Usually, their choice is optional, even though in exceptional cases this offer fulfils state’ needs and, in those cases, these schools are able to receive public funds.
Nr. of students in different education stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-school Education</th>
<th>1st Cycle Basic Education</th>
<th>2nd Cycle Basic Education</th>
<th>3rd Cycle Basic Education</th>
<th>Upper Secondary and Vocational Education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970/71</td>
<td>5792</td>
<td>2252</td>
<td>3540</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>1970/71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974/75</td>
<td>4140</td>
<td>3623</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>1974/75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>1462</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>1142</td>
<td>1980/81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984/85</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>1984/85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>1990/91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>1994/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000/01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2004/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2010/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2014/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2018/19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DGEEC

Nr. of schools offering each education stage, in 2018/2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Stage</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-School Education</td>
<td>5792</td>
<td>2252</td>
<td>4140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Cycle Basic Education</td>
<td>3540</td>
<td>3623</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Cycle Basic Education</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>1142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Cycle Basic Education</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary and Vocational Education</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DGEEC
4. Pre-school education: towards universalization

In 1980, four out of five children did not attend any educational offer before the age of 6. Although maintaining this stage as optional for parents, in only four decades, Portugal generalized the access to pre-school education for children aged between 3 and 5 (in 2018/2019 the enrolment rates were 84% and 98%, respectively), a key achievement for the development of all young people and the reduction of social inequalities.

In this process, the consistent commitment of successive governments shall be highlighted, as well as the growing involvement of local authorities and the virtuous articulation between the following dimensions of educational policy:

- Expansion of the pre-school network across the country, adjusted to the changing needs in each territory, through both new public establishments and protocols with private and social institutions;
- Raising the public awareness of the importance of pre-school education for children development and subsequent educational success;
- Increasing the number of pre-school human recourses and assignment of a pre-school teacher and a teacher’s aide to each pre-school children group (20–25 children per group);
- Elaboration of Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education, in order to establish the pedagogical principles and standards, the educational purpose and the spatial organization, for all children aged between 3 to 5.
Pre-Schooling Rate in Portugal

Staff with a minimum of a Bachelor’s level qualification (ISCED 6)

Source: Eurydice Brief Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe 2019

Source: DGEEC
5. Basic education: learning quality

Progressively, learning quality is being identified, worldwide, as a key factor for growth and cohesion.

In this regard, assessment data on basic education in Portugal shows a consistent decrease of retention rates and school failure over the past decades, a trend that has accelerated in the last years. Besides, the main international assessment reports, such as PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS, have shown a very relevant increase of learning patterns in Portugal, over the past twenty years, which is particularly noteworthy considering that this evolution has not been observed across Europe.

This progress has been leveraged by a set of educational programmes, based on schools’ autonomy and innovation, as for instance:

• National Reading Plan;
• “Ciência Viva” - Science Clubs at School;
• School External Evaluation;
• New Opportunities / Qualifica;
• National Programme for School Success Promotion;
• Innovation Plans;

We shall underline that the development of these programmes was coupled with the following advances: i) the publication of the Students’ Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling in 2017; ii) the curricular reorganization based on giving more autonomy and flexibility to schools, since 2018; iii) the new legal framework for inclusive education and iv) the implementation of essential learnings. These advances contributed to a broader involvement of educational communities, setting a vision for the current generations’ education.
Retention and dropout rate in basic education, by cycle of education
[Portugal 2000/01 to 2018/19]

Portugal average scores in PISA tests [OECD], 2000 to 2018

In 2018 Portugal obtained 492 points in the 3 domains, along side the OECD average.

Source: IA VE

Source: DGEEC, Educação em Números 2020
6. Secondary education and VET: multiple paths

After a common curriculum throughout the 9-year basic education, Portuguese students may choose among a wide range of education and training offers to complete upper secondary education. This offer includes four different scientific-humanistic courses (sciences and technologies, socioeconomic sciences, arts, and humanities) and dozens of other courses (vocational education and training, technological, artistic, apprenticeships). All VET programmes attribute a dual certification (ISCED-4), allowing both the pursuit of tertiary education and a qualified access to the labour market.

In the VET area, it is worthwhile to highlight some recent and ongoing measures:

- Adequacy of education and training offers to the National Qualifications Catalogue;
- Annual adjustment of the VET offers to the dynamics of the labour market, through a Qualification Needs Anticipation System;
- Quality assurance of vocational education according to European standards (EQAVET);
- Modular organization of courses and attribution of credits in line with the European system (ECVET), reinforcing the flexibility, mobility and recognition of training paths;
- Systematization and dissemination of all existing courses and programmes on the “Portal da Oferta Formativa”, as well as the results obtained by each school in the “InfoEscolas” website.
Rate of upper secondary completion, by education and training programme (Portugal, 2000/01 to 2018/19)

Overall
- 64.5%
- 72.5%
- 77.8%
- 93.9%
- 76.8%

Scientific-humanistic courses
- 42.6%
- 55.7%
- 52.3%
- 55.3%
- 48.7%

Technological courses
- 48.8%
- 55.7%
- 55.3%
- 48.7%

Professional courses
- 77.4%
- 76.8%

Young people's situation one year after upper secondary completion, by education and training programme

Overall
- 2%
- 6%
- 8%
- 23%
- 62%

CCH
- 3%
- 6%
- 7%
- 25%
- 83%

CP
- 12%
- 9%
- 51%
- 25%
- 51%

Source: DGEEC, Educação em Números 2020
7. Tertiary education: knowledge society

Tertiary education in Portugal has known a remarkable development, up to a situation close to its European counterparts. This growth has been evident, above all, at the PhD level (four times more thesis completed than twenty years ago), along with the creation of Higher Education Professional Technical Courses. Such growth is particularly significant, if we consider the falling birth rate. In 2000, only 7.5% of the active population held a tertiary education diploma. In 2019, they were already 23.8% (36.2% in the 30-34 age group, close to the European average).

Such education improvement was possible due to the persistence of public policies focused on qualification, including:

• Enlargement (and reducing the bureaucracy for) the support to students from more vulnerable backgrounds;
• Independent assessment and accreditation of all institutions and study programmes;
• A commitment to internationalization, with the establishment of strategic partnerships and the attraction of foreign students, teachers and researchers;
• Greater openness and knowledge transfer to civil society and to the labour market;
• The stimulus for the adoption of flexible management systems by institutions, with respect for their autonomy and articulation with regional development policies.
Nr. of tertiary education graduates, by ISCED [Portugal 2000/01 to 2018/19]

Source: DGEEC
Adult education and training, in Portugal, have had moments of great vitality interspersed with periods of scarcity of offers. In the recent past, the system was deeply affected by the economic crisis and austerity policies, but it has been growing recently, through the launch of the Qualifica programme, in 2017, based on a network of more than 300 local, located in schools, employment offices and other community structures. Those centres are responsible for:

- Diagnosis, guidance and referral of adults to education and training offers;
- Recognition, validation and certification of competences;
- Mobilizing local partnerships to promote adult qualification.

The growth has been more evident at the upper secondary education level and less expressive in the lower levels of education and training, which we aim to tackled with the recent National Plan for Adult Literacy.
Nr. of graduates of the adult education and training system
[Portugal, 2014/15 to 2018/19]

Source: DGEEC

Distribution of Qualifica Centres, 2020
Source: Qualifica portal, www.qualifica.gov.pt
9. Equity and inclusion

Based on equal opportunities as a constitutional principle, the Portuguese education system has shown, over the past few decades, a remarkable progress in the ability to ensure to all students the opportunities of access and success at school. The rate of Early Leaving from Education and Training has been reduced from more than 40% at the beginning of this century to 10%, reaching the European average. It shall be considered that Portuguese students today have 12-years of compulsory schooling, including a 9-year common basic education, and that only 0.06% attends to special education institutions.

Such trend has been anchored in a set of public programmes, namely:

• **School Social Action**, including meals, transportation, school supplies, etc. to students with a more vulnerable background;
• **Inclusive Education**, whose new legal framework was approved in 2018;
• **National Programme for the Promotion of School Success (PNPSE)**;
• **Priority Intervention Education Territories**, providing additional support to schools in more vulnerable contexts;
• **National System for Early Intervention (SNIPI)**;
• **National Strategy of Education for Citizenship**;
• **Teaching of Portuguese as a Non-Native Language**;
• **Specific Tutorial Support**, to all students retained more than once.
Levels of equity, inclusion and justice in European Education Systems

Source: Eurydice
Equity in School Education in Europe 2020
10. Education and digital skills

Education and training play a key role in preparing citizens to lead the current digital transition, mobilizing new technologies to enhance their life projects, as well as to face the challenges of present times. Such skills are acknowledged as decisive for economic growth, social cohesion and democratic life.

In this context, the Portuguese education system has a long heritage, starting with the Minerva project in the 1980s, and passing through the Technological Plan for Education, in the first decade of the 21st century, which was deeply affected by the economic crisis and the austerity policies. In recent years, this work has been resumed, with redoubled ambitions, within the framework of an intergovernmental policy, embodied in INCoDe.2030 and in the Action Plan for the Digital Transition.

In the education field, some improvements shall be highlighted, such as: i) the introduction of ICT as a mandatory subject in basic education curriculum; ii) the increase of tertiary education openings in ICT related courses; iii) the development of code/programming and robotics projects in hundreds of schools; iv) the ongoing actions for making computers and connectivity available to all students, starting with those in more vulnerable contexts; and v) the teachers’ training national programme on digital skills.
Evolution of the % of tertiary education graduates in ICT study programmes, in Portugal


Goals for the next decade in Portugal

• To improve the coverage and quality of the internet access through the update of the wi-fi network all over the country;
• To expand the capacity of the public schools’ connection up to 300 Gbps, until 2024;
• To provide technological resources to all students and teachers;
• To create Digital Education Labs, until 2025;
• To produce high-quality digital educational contents;
• To dematerialize national tests and examinations in primary and secondary education, until 2025.
11. Evaluation as a lever for development

Evaluation has also been an area of key improvements in the Portuguese education system, as a dimension of development, self-regulation and accountability, in line with European standards and recommendations in this area.

In this regard, it is important to stress:

• Student’s continuous learning assessment throughout the whole education and training pathway;
• (External) standardized national assessment tests applied in intermediate moments of basic education, as well as national exams at the end of basic (9\textsuperscript{th} grade) and upper secondary (12\textsuperscript{th} grade) education, elaborated by the Educational Evaluation Institute (IAVE);
• Teacher evaluation system, linked with career development;
• Valuing of students’ aptitude professional tests and artistic aptitude tests at the conclusion of double certification courses – Vocational Education and Training;
• External Evaluation of Schools, coordinated by the Inspectorate–General for Education and Science (IGEC), with the collaboration of academic experts (the external evaluation of 3\textsuperscript{rd} cycle was recently launched);
• Vocational education quality assurance system, aligned with EQAVET and implemented by the National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education (ANQEP);
• Higher education institutions and study programmes assessed on a regular basis, by the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES).
Evolution in the nr. of schools / school clusters assessed by the External Evaluation of Schools

Source: DGEEC, Example of a page of the InfoEscolas Portal, with annual updates of each school context, projects, performance and external assessment report.
For a more detailed description of the Portuguese education and training system, within the European context, both in Portuguese and in English, visit the Eurydice Network website: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/

For a deeper analysis of the Portuguese education and training system indicators, visit the Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics: www.dgeec.mec.pt