Education and Training
MONITOR 2018
Portugal
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Education and Training Monitor 2018

Portugal
Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2018 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2017. It therefore complements other sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.

Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country’s education and training system. Section 3 looks at investment in education and training. Section 4 focuses on citizenship education. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and training, while section 8 covers adult learning.

The manuscript was completed on 1 September 2018. Additional contextual data can be found online (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)
1. Key indicators

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Education and training 2020 benchmarks</th>
<th>Portugal 2014</th>
<th>Portugal 2017</th>
<th>EU average 2014</th>
<th>EU average 2017</th>
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<td>Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
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<td>Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)</td>
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<td>Science</td>
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<td>Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year) ISCED 3-8 (total)</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
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<td>Adult participation in learning (age 25-64) ISCED 0-8 (total)</td>
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<td>10.8%</td>
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<td>Learning mobility Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
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<td>Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)</td>
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<td>7.7%</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
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| Other contextual indicators | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Education investment | Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP | 5.7% | 4.9% | 4.9% | 4.7% |
| | Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPP | €5 340 | : | €6 494 | : |
| | ISCED 1-2 | : | : | ISCED 3-4 | : |
| | ISCED 3-4 | : | : | ISCED 5-8 | : |
| | ISCED 5-8 | : | : | Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP | 4.9% | 4.7% |
| Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24) Native-born | 17.4% | 12.5% | 10.4% | 9.6% |
| Foreign-born | 18.3% | 13.9% | 20.2% | 19.4% |
| Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34) Native-born | 31.0% | 33.5% | 38.6% | 40.6% |
| Foreign-born | 34.2% | 32.6% | 34.3% | 36.3% |
| Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year) ISCED 3-4 | 65.2% | 77.2% | 70.7% | 74.1% |
| ISCED 5-8 | 73.6% | 83.9% | 80.5% | 84.9% |

Sources: Eurostat (see section 10 for more details); OECD (PISA).
Notes: data refer to weighted EU averages, covering different numbers of Member States depending on the source; d = definition differs, 12 = 2012, 13 = 2013, 15 = 2015, 16 = 2016. On credit graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by DG EAC on the available countries; on degree graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by JRC over Eurostat and OECD data. Further information can be found in the relevant section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)

Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2017, UOE 2016) and OECD (PISA 2015). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers represented by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers represented by the centre of the figure).
2. Highlights

- Spending on education remains stable. Funding is not sufficiently linked to performance and is not flexible in response to challenges.
- Portugal is implementing a national strategy for citizenship education in all schools.
- Despite considerable improvement, Portugal still faces high levels of early school leaving and grade repetition. An ageing teacher population is a major challenge for the future.
- Participation in higher education is rising, particularly in the polytechnic sector. Graduate rates in ICT, natural sciences and mathematics are below the EU average.
- The country faces a major educational challenge with more than half the adult population at a low level of educational attainment.

3. Investing in education and training

Spending on education remains stable and is slightly above the EU-28 average. In 2016, general government expenditure on education was 4.9 % as a share of GDP and 10.8 % as a share of total government spending (EU averages were 4.7 % and 10.2 % respectively). Since 2015, spending has fallen by about 3 % in real terms, mainly for tertiary education. Secondary education takes the highest share of general government expenditure on education (35.4 %), followed by pre-primary and primary education (31.4 %) and higher education (12.9 %). The annual expenditure on Portuguese educational institutions per student is below the EU average.

Funding is not allocated on the basis of any comprehensive evaluation strategy and does not have flexibility to address specific challenges. Most public education funding goes to public or government dependent private schools. According to national data, over 90 % of expenditure is for salaries (IGeFE, 2018). Investment in education infrastructure is heavily dependent on EU financial support. Schools have very limited budgetary autonomy to respond to challenges. School funding is not related to any goals or assessment of results.

4. Citizenship education

Portugal is implementing a national education strategy for citizenship in public and private schools. Launched in September 2017, the strategy is addressed by the 'Autonomy and Curricula Flexibility' project, in line with the 'Student's Profile at the End of Compulsory Education' and by 'Core Curriculum Competencies/Essential Learning' (Roldão et al., 2017). 'Citizenship and Development' is a compulsory school subject in grades 5 to 9 of primary and lower-secondary education (Eurydice, 2017a). The principles, values and areas of competence covered aim to support the education and development of active citizens. Schools are guided by a local coordinator who teaches citizenship and equality and develops training activities on these subjects (Governo de Portugal, 2016a).

Box 1: A new national strategy for citizenship education

The national strategy for citizenship education (ENEC) arose out of the proposal presented in May 2016 by the national Working Group on Education for Citizenship. For the elaboration of the strategy, background documents from national institutions and international organisations such as the European Union, the European Council and UNESCO, were taken into account. The ENEC was implemented in public and private schools in the 2017/2018 school year.

Citizenship education covers several areas such as human rights, gender equality, interculturalism, sustainable development, institutions and democratic participation, consumer education, animal welfare and volunteering.
In pre-primary and primary education, citizenship is integrated transversally in the curriculum and is under the responsibility of the class teacher. It is defined by the national Council of Teachers in the Strategy for citizenship education in the school. In education and training courses for young people in primary and secondary education, the citizenship and development curriculum is developed with input from all disciplines and training components.

The training of teachers in the humanities is fundamental to developing the citizenship and development curriculum and better enables them to teach the course. Teacher training in citizenship and the use of tailored teaching methodologies also facilitate the process.


5. Modernising school education

Participation in pre-primary education for children 4 to 6 years old is decreasing, with Portugal moving away from the Education and Training 2020 benchmark of 95%. In 2016, the ECEC participation rate was 92.5%, below the European Union average (95.3%). The participation rate for 4-year-olds decreased from 91.6% in 2011/2012 to 90.1% in 2015/2016 and for 5-year-olds from 97.9% to 94.8%. Among 3-yea-olds, however, participation increased from 78% to 79.9% (DGEEC, 2018).

Participation in early childhood education and care is significantly influenced by household income. Only 36% of children whose families are in the bottom third of the disposable income distribution are enrolled in formal early childhood care (OECD, 2017b). In 2015/2016, 47.6% of children enrolled in pre-school education were in fully private or state dependent private establishments, well above the EU average of 25% (DGEEC, 2018). From 2016 to 2018, 193 new public pre-school classrooms were opened. The government aims to extend the network to provide universal access for children ages 3 to 5 by 2019. It also intends to improve teacher training, within the scope of the new curricula guidelines for pre-primary education (Silva et al, 2016). Plans also include employing 500 more support staff in pre-schools in 2018/2019, ensuring a minimum of one assistant per classroom (Governo de Portugal, 2017a).

Portugal still struggles with early school leaving but is making headway to reduce it. Considerable progress has been made in the last decade in reducing the early school leaving rate (from 28.3% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2017; rates are, however, over 20% in the autonomous regions of Madeira and Azores). This positive trend can be explained by, among other things, the increase in the compulsory school age up to the age of 18, the launch of the national programme for school success in 2016, along with the autonomy and curricular flexibility process (launched in 2017) and the gradual increase in parents’ education levels. Nonetheless, 12.6% of 18-24-year-olds who completed only lower secondary education are not enrolled in further education or training. Policy measures such as the government distribution of free schoolbooks and manuals to students in public primary schools are expected to further reduce school dropout, in particular among disadvantaged students. For the 2018/2019 school year, schoolbooks will also be free for students in lower secondary education, from the 1st to the 6th grades (Governo de Portugal, 2017a).

Grade repetition is high, with about one third of 15-year-olds having repeated at least one grade. The repetition rate varies across education levels and regions and is significantly higher in the Lisbon and southern regions than in the North and Centre (OECD, 2018). Policy measures to provide extra support to students at risk of failing and to increase the vocational education offer have helped to steadily reduce repetition rates in recent years (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2015). A mentoring programme (Programa de Tutorias no Ensino Básico) to support students who have at least two retentions in their school career has been made a priority in 2018 (Governo de Portugal, 2016b). The 2018 State budget also envisages hiring 200 psychologists to improve student support. In addition, the government plans to gradually reduce the number of students per classroom in the first year of primary education and in the first and third years of lower secondary education.
Decentralisation of the school system and promotion of school autonomy remain priorities. During the 2017/2018 school year, 235 public and private schools and school clusters were involved in the implementation of an experimental programme of autonomy and partial curriculum flexibility in lower and upper secondary education (Governo de Portugal, 2017b). This project defines the principles and guidelines on how the schools, in an autonomous way, may develop, operationalise and assess the school curricula in lower and upper secondary education, so that students may successfully complete their ‘profiles at the end of compulsory education’ (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2017; Governo de Portugal, 2017c). Adopted in 2017, the profile is based on a learning outcomes approach: it sets out a vision of what young people are expected to achieve at the end of secondary education (or up to age 18). It is complemented by core curricular competencies and essential learning (Aprendizagens Essenciais) guidance documents for each education level. In July 2018 a new Decree-Law (DL 55/2018) was published extending curriculum autonomy and flexibility to all Portuguese schools (Governo de Portugal, 2018).

Additional resources are needed to identify and support teaching for students with special educational needs (SEN). Education of students identified as SEN is almost exclusively provided in mainstream schools (88 %), and such students are fully integrated in regular classes. A network of 93 specialised resource centres for inclusion (centros de recursos para a inclusão) complements the specialised support to SEN students within schools, together with 25 ICT resource centres for special education. The quality of SEN education is hampered by insufficient resources and teaching skill gaps (OECD, 2018). There are regional and school-level variations in the proportion of identified SEN students. Providing enough special education teachers to meet the increasing demand is problematic. In 2017/2018, SEN students will benefit from the employment of an additional 1 500 non-teaching staff to support them (Governo de Portugal, 2017b).

The ageing teacher population will pose challenges. In the past 15 years, there has been a substantial ageing of the teacher population: currently Portuguese teachers are on average in their upper 40s (DGEEC, 2018). Only around 1 % of teachers are under 30 (DGEEC, 2018). When they reach 50, teachers benefit from a reduction in compulsory teaching hours (between 2 to 5 hours
depending on age and education level). The ageing teaching population is absent more often due to illness: there is an increase of 2.78 days of sick leave per annum per year of age. Absenteeism may mean an insufficient number of teaching staff to meet school needs. From 2009 to 2014, the number of people entering the teaching profession has been going down, but is now increasing (DGEEC, 2018). New binding contracts have been proposed to allow teachers who have had temporary contracts for three consecutive years to become permanent staff.

The career progression of teachers in the public sector has been reinstated. As a consequence of the economic crisis, teachers’ salaries and progression through steps in the career ladder were frozen. Public funding for professional development also decreased. Teachers can now resume their progress up the career ladder. The Ministry of Education will decide every year how many teachers who have been evaluated with ‘good’ can reach the fifth and seventh seniority steps (out of a total of 10 steps).

Portugal has improved foreign language teaching but challenges remain. Since 2016/2017, English is a compulsory subject for all students ages 8 to 15 (Eurydice, 2017b). A second foreign language (chosen between French, German and Spanish) is compulsory for all students from 12 to 15. From 15 to 17, only one foreign language remains compulsory for all students (which can be English, the second language students have learnt in lower secondary or a third language). From 17 to 18, foreign languages are optional. Pupils in vocational education and training (VET) have fewer years of second and third language education than in the general education path.

6. Modernising higher education

Measures are being implemented to strengthen the attractiveness and completion rate in higher education. Portugal’s tertiary educational attainment level among the 30-34 years old cohort (33.5 %) is still below the EU average (39.9 %). However, the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates (80.7 %) is close to the EU average (80.2 %). Measures to increase higher education enrolment include bolstering the social support mechanisms to students from disadvantaged backgrounds through a significant increase in scholarships, a social scheme for paying tuition fees in multiple instalments, and the implementation of a redefined ‘+Superior’ programme to promote and support enrolment in less densely populated regions and in regions where demand is lower. Other measures seek to diversify the supply of courses, mainly in the polytechnic sector and for professional higher education courses, and to make Portugal more attractive to young graduates living abroad, in particular by offering research or teaching positions and more stable contracts to young PhD graduates.

Enrolment in higher education is growing. In its 2018 European Semester country-specific recommendation, the Council of the EU recommended that Portugal take measures ‘to improve higher education uptake, namely in science and technology fields’ (Council of the European Union, 2018). Compared to 2016/2017, the number of students enrolled in public higher education increased in 2017/2018 by 10 % (reaching 73 000 new students). Enrolment in public higher education institutions located in regions with a lower population density increased by 13 % and in polytechnics by 20 %. Although it did not take part in the Commission’s pilot project following the Council Recommendation on Graduate Tracking, Portugal is working on improving its own current tracking mechanism to monitor the employability of graduates and will participate in the Commission expert group on graduate tracking.

The number of graduates in ICT, the natural sciences and mathematics is lower than the EU average. The number of people per 1 000 inhabitants ages 20 to 29 holding science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) degrees in Portugal (18.6) is roughly in line with the EU average of 19.1. However, in 2016 the share of total graduates in information and communication technologies (1.2 %) and in the natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (6.6 %) was well below the EU-28 average (3.5 % and 7.6 % respectively). To promote enrolment in information and communications technologies, electronics and physics, the government adopted a strategy in 2017 to increase the study places available in these areas. In 2017, around 40 % of the students newly enrolled in higher VET courses (Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais) were in STEM areas.
Figure 3. STEM students as share of total number of students per ISCED (2015)

Source: Eurostat. Online data code: educ_uoe_grad02.

Less than 10 % of Portuguese higher education graduates undertook credit mobility programmes in foreign countries. In 2016, 5,709 graduates in ISCED 5-8 spent 3 months studying abroad (7.6 % of total graduates). Of these, 90 % benefitted from EU mobility programmes such as Erasmus+, almost 70 % at Bachelor or an equivalent level.

Following the presentation in early 2018 of the OECD Review on higher education, science, technology and innovation systems, the government approved several legislative and policy initiatives. These include a number of new legal frameworks for degrees and diplomas, for access of international students to higher education and recognition of foreign degrees, and for research and academic centres involved in clinical research and space activities. To bring the scientific community closer to society, the government is drafting new legislation to promote science (Proposta de Lei da Ciência). The aim is to modernise the legal framework for research and development institutions, improve scientific and employment conditions and modernise the institutional structure.

Cooperation between universities and business is not sufficiently incentivised. Career progression still follows a rigid and pyramidal track mostly based on publications, which does not incentivise researchers to explore avenues of ‘entrepreneurial research’. Firms in general do not recognise the added value of cooperation with higher education institutions. The lack of contractual standardisation of intellectual property rights hinders the economic exploitation of research results. The public sector still employs around two thirds of the available researchers in Portugal. New policy instruments to encourage the employment of PhDs in academic and non-academic sectors are noticeable, including through the public ‘INTERFACE’ programme launched in 2017 and the Scientific Employment Programme. The programmes have the ambition of supporting 300 new PhDs in interface centres, 500 new PhDs in businesses and 400 researchers to work on applied research.

7. Modernising vocational education and training

Portugal is gradually addressing the challenge of transparency and attractiveness of VET. The enrolment share in VET at upper secondary level (ISCED 3) dropped in 2016 to 41.0 % (45.0 % in 2015), below the EU average of 49 %. At the same time, the employment rate of recent VET graduates increased from 69.8 % in 2016 to 78.9 % in 2017, slightly above the EU average of 76.6 %. Some efforts have been made to tackle overlaps of VET programmes. This has been done mainly through the publication of the national credit system (applied only to double certification
programmes), the launch of the ‘Qualifica’ Programme and the implementation of Passe Jovem whose aim is to support the recognition and validation of non-formal learning acquired by young people ages 12 to 18. A youth pass certificate can be delivered when a minimum of 25 hours of activities is reached, including by accumulating interventions and experiences of shorter duration. This is expected to help young people searching for a job and to raise awareness of learning in a diversity of contexts. The initiative follows the EU recommendations and resolutions on validation of non-formal and informal learning and on key competences for lifelong learning.

Box 2: Qualifying and improving the employability of young people and adults

The Escola Profissional de Aveiro (EPA) has been a VET school for more than 25 years. It belongs to the non-profit education association of the Aveiro region: Associação para a Educação e Valorização da Região de Aveiro (AEVA) (North-West Portugal). The association has international partnerships in all EU countries, Portuguese-speaking African countries and Brazil.

AEVA-EPA is considered the biggest vocational school in Portugal. It promotes education and training — vocational, technological and professional — for young people and adults and covers initial and lifelong learning. The school provides training classes and training in real job contexts, in order to promote training in an ‘employment’ environment and to build employability at the end of each course. AEVA-EPA offers diverse apprenticeships, education and training and vocational courses.

AEVA-EPA has been supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), in particular by the various support programmes for education (currently in Portugal's Operational programme for human capital). Since 2014, AEVA-EPA has received about EUR 3 million in ESF funding for the qualification of young people.


8. Promoting adult learning

Portugal is facing a major skills challenge. In its 2018 European Semester country-specific recommendation, the Council of the EU recommended that Portugal take measures 'to increase the skills level of the adult population, including digital literacy, by strengthening and broadening the coverage of the training component in adult qualification programmes' (Council of the European Union, 2018). About 52 % of the adult population have low educational attainment levels (well above the EU average of 22.5 %). Adult participation in learning has slightly increased from 9.6 % in 2016 to 9.8 % in 2017 but remains below the EU average of 10.9 %. Portugal is implementing the action phase of its national skills strategy. The strategy lists recommendations under three headings: awareness of the value of skills and motivation for adult learning; access, quality and relevance; and governance and financing.

Knowledge of digital skills is still very low among the Portuguese population and there is a lack of ICT specialists. Only half of the population has basic digital skills and a quarter has no digital skills at all (27 %), far below the EU average (17 %). In the 2018 Digital Society Index (DESI), Portugal ranks 16th out of 28 EU Member States (European Commission, 2018). Low digital skills levels, particularly among the elderly and those with low levels of education or on low incomes, continue to pose the risk of digital exclusion. The share of professionals in total employment with specialised ICT skills reached 2.4 % in 2016, below the EU average of 3.7 %. However, the share of businesses employing ICT specialists is slightly above the EU average, at nearly 20 %. The INCoDe.2030 programme aims to tackle this skills shortage by improving digital competences, including digital literacy.
9. References


10. Annex I: Key indicator sources

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11. Annex II: Structure of the education system


Comments and questions on this report are welcome and can be sent by email to:
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