

Portugal

This country note provides an overview of key characteristics of the education system in Portugal based on Education at a Glance 2024. In line with the thematic focus of Education at a Glance 2024, it highlights issues of equity in education. Data in this note are provided for the latest available year as indicated in Education at a Glance 2024.

The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- Adults without upper secondary qualification are at considerable risk of poor social and labour-market outcomes throughout their lives. Reducing the share of young adults without an upper secondary qualification has been a priority in many countries and their share has decreased between 2016 and 2023 in 28 out of 35 OECD member countries. This is also the case in Portugal. Their share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary educational attainment decreased by 12 percentage points between 2016 and 2023. At 18%, it is 4 percentage points above the OECD average in 2023 (Figure 1). However, there can still exist large regional differences. Portugal is among the few countries where the difference between the regions with the largest and the smallest shares of adults with below upper secondary attainment is 30 percentage points or more.
- The difficult labour-market situation faced by workers without an upper secondary qualification is reflected in employment rates among 25-34 year-olds. In Portugal, 72% of 25-34 year-olds without an upper secondary qualification are employed, compared to 85% of those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary qualification. The corresponding OECD averages are 61% and 79%, respectively. Moreover, workers without an upper secondary qualification are at risk of earning very low wages in most OECD countries. In Portugal, 9% of 25-64 year-olds with below upper secondary educational attainment earn at or below half the median income (953.70 EUR per month) compared to 6% of workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary educational attainment and 3% of workers with a tertiary qualification. Across the OECD, the respective shares are 28%, 17% and 10%.
- Strong labour markets and increasing participation in education have led to a decline in the share of 18-24 year-olds who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) in most OECD member countries. Across the OECD, the average NEET rate decreased from 15.8% to 13.8% between 2016 and 2023. In Portugal, the share of NEETs decreased from 18.3% to 13.2%.
- By almost all available measures, girls and women have better educational outcomes than boys and men, and in many cases the gap is widening. This is reflected in gender gaps in educational attainment. In all OECD member countries, women aged 25-34 are as likely or more likely than their male peers to have a tertiary qualification (54% compared to 41% on average across OECD countries). With a tertiary educational attainment rate of 47% for women and 34% for men, the gap is similar to the OECD average in Portugal (but Portugal is one of the few countries where the gender gap has narrowed by at least 3 percentage between 2016 and 2023).

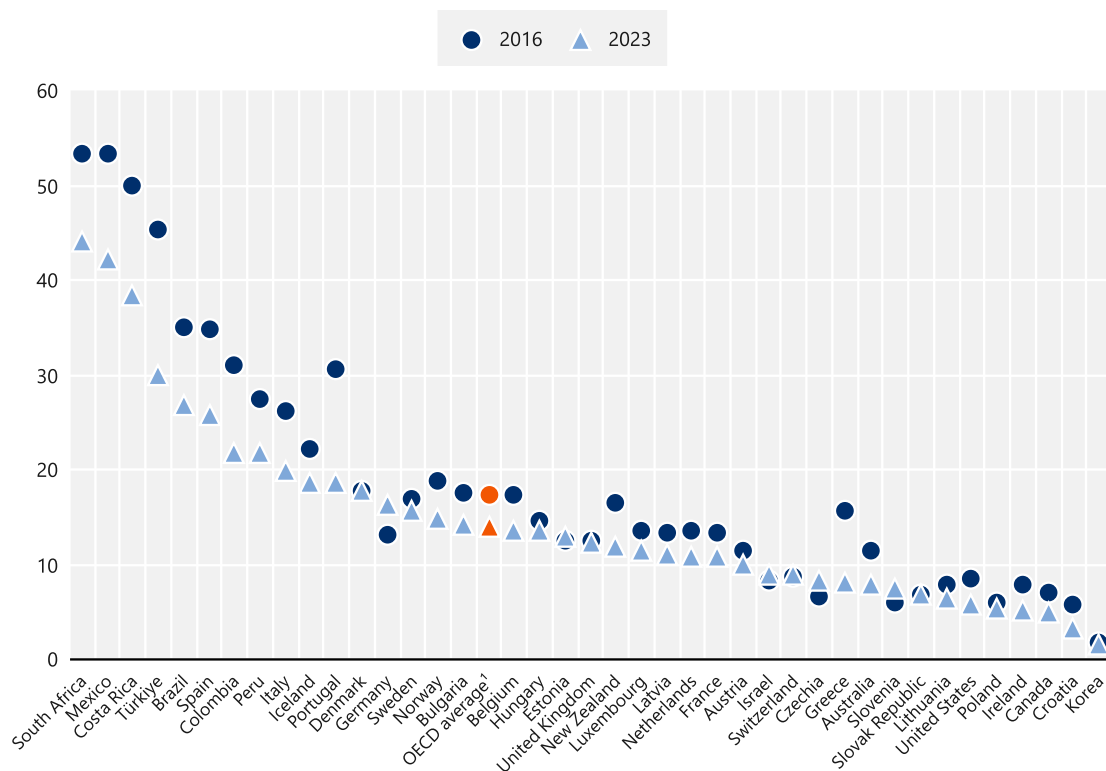


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- Although girls and women clearly outperform boys and men in education, the picture is reversed when they enter the labour market; the key measures of labour-market outcomes are generally worse for women than for men. Women aged 25-34 are less likely to be employed than men, with the gap typically widest for those with below upper secondary educational attainment and narrowest for those with tertiary attainment. In Portugal, only 61% of young women with educational attainment below upper secondary educational level are employed, while the corresponding share for young men is 79% (the corresponding OECD averages are 47% and 72%). In contrast, 89% of young women with a tertiary qualification are employed, while the corresponding share for young men is 87% (the corresponding OECD averages are 84% and 90%). However, tertiary attainment does not help to reduce the wage gap between men and women. Across the OECD, young women with a tertiary qualification earn on average 83% of the wage of their male peers, while the corresponding fraction is 80% in Portugal. Among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, young women earn on average 84% of the wage of their male peers across the OECD and 83% in Portugal.
- Parents' education has a strong impact on the educational attainment of their children. In Portugal, 79% of 25-64 year-olds who have at least one parent with tertiary attainment also attained a tertiary qualification. In contrast, only 21% of 25-64 year-olds with parents without an upper secondary qualification have obtained a tertiary qualification themselves. This compares to the OECD averages of 72% and 19%, respectively.

Figure 1. Trends in the share of 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary educational attainment (2016 and 2023)

In per cent



1. The OECD average is derived from the unweighted mean of all countries with available and comparable data for both years. Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary attainment in 2023.

Source: OECD (2024), Table A1.2. For more information see *Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

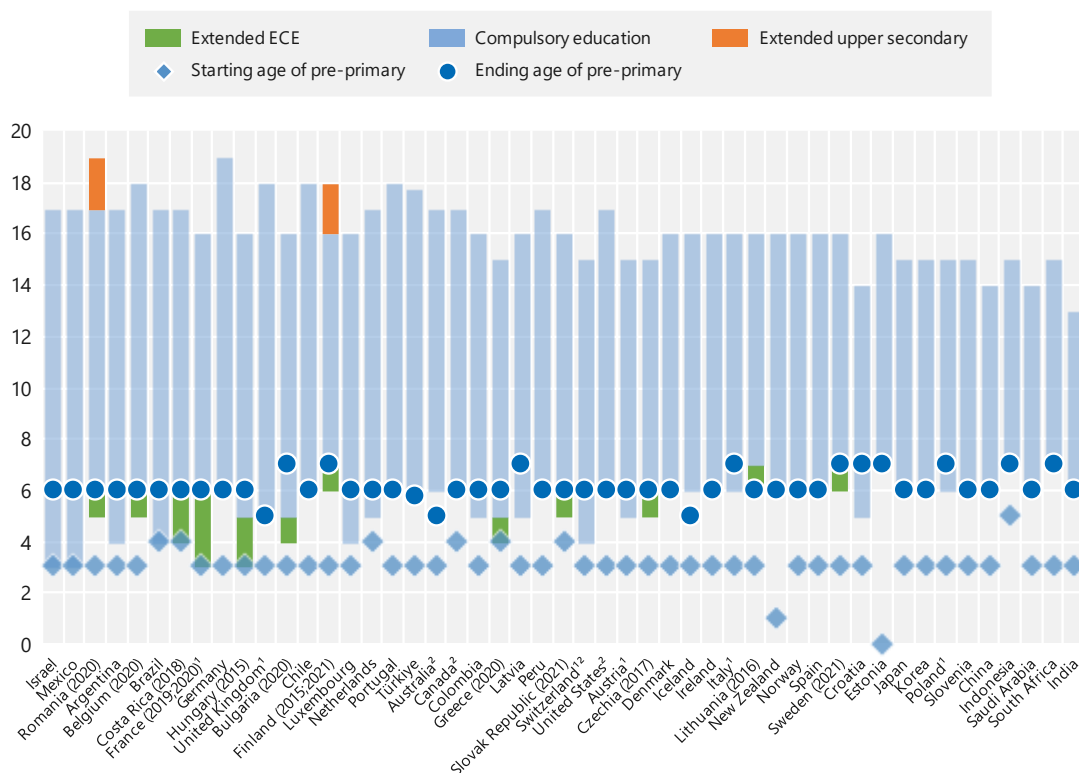
Access to education, participation and progression

- Childcare and parental leave policies vary considerably between countries. Of particular importance for low-income families is the so-called childcare gap, the period between the end of paid parental leave and the start of free early childhood education and care or compulsory education. In eight OECD countries, including Portugal, there is no childcare gap as free early childhood education or compulsory education starts immediately following the end of paid parental leave (but the demand exceeds the supply of available provision of early childhood education).
- Participation in early childhood education and care is particularly important for children from disadvantaged families. However, in Portugal, as in most other OECD countries, children aged 0-2 from families in the bottom income tertile are less likely to participate in childcare than children from the top income tertile (45% compared to 70%). The difference of 25 percentage points in participation between children from families in the top and bottom tertile is larger than the OECD average of 19 percentage points.

- Early childhood education can help to reduce the developmental gaps that put some children at a disadvantage when they enrol in primary education. In most OECD countries, the large majority of children are enrolled in early childhood education one year before the start of primary education. In Portugal, 100% of children in this age group (5 year-olds) are enrolled, compared with an OECD average of 96%.
- Although most children and youths participate in education in the years before and after compulsory education, not all do so. In order to increase enrolment in the early years or among youths, twelve OECD member and accession countries have increased the duration of compulsory education over the past decade. Portugal does not belong to this group. Compulsory education in Portugal lasts from the age of 6 to 18 for a total of 12 years, which is above the OECD average of 11 years. Portugal is one of the 12 countries where the full cycle of upper secondary education is compulsory and among the few countries where compulsory education ends either upon completing upper secondary education or reaching the ending age (Figure 2).
- Grade repetition is common in many countries to give students more time to master the content of a grade, although its effectiveness is debated. In Portugal, 2.2% of primary, 2.8% of lower secondary and 3.6% of general upper secondary students repeat a grade in their current level of education, while the OECD average is 1.5% at primary, 2.2% at lower secondary and 3.2% at general upper secondary level.
- The likelihood of tertiary students successfully completing their studies is related to their family background. In Portugal, 75% of students with at least one parent with tertiary attainment successfully completed their tertiary studies within three years of the theoretical duration of the programme, while 72% of students whose parents had less than upper secondary education did so.
- Women are significantly over-represented in tertiary education and the gap is widening in most countries. In Portugal, 54% of new entrants to tertiary education are women, compared with an OECD average of 56%. As women are also more likely than men to complete tertiary education, the gap is even greater among graduates (see Education at a Glance 2022). However, there are large differences between fields of study in all OECD countries. In Portugal, 18% of women entering tertiary education were studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, while only 2% of men were entering education-related fields.
- The proportion of mobile students (international or foreign) among all tertiary enrolments has risen in nearly all countries between 2013 and 2022. In Portugal, it increased from 4% to 12%. The most substantial increase has been in the share of mobile students enrolled in master's or equivalent programmes, rising from 10% in 2013 to 15% in 2022 on average across OECD countries. In Portugal the increase exceeded 10 percentage points (from 5% to 15%).

Figure 2. Duration of compulsory education (2022)

In years



Note: The year in parentheses indicates when policy changes were made to the duration of compulsory education. In addition, extended ECEC/extended upper secondary refers to the extension in the duration of the relevant level since 2013.

1. There are other compulsory activities to complete by the end of compulsory education (see Table B2.1).

Countries are ranked in descending order of the duration of compulsory education.

Source: OECD (2024), Table B2.1. For more information see Education at a Glance 2004 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

Financial resources invested in education

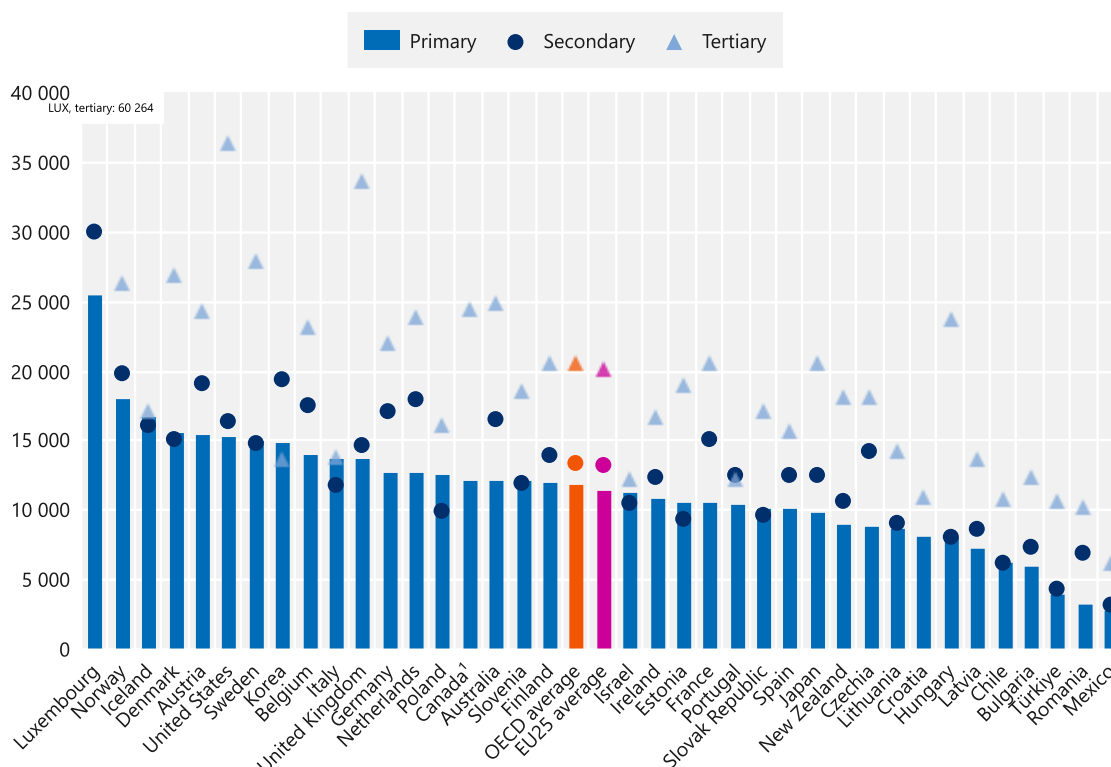
- The average annual expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education (including R&D) in Portugal is USD 11 752 compared to an average of USD 14 209 in OECD countries. In most countries, expenditure increases by level of education. In Portugal, spending per student is USD 10 469 in primary education, USD 12 511 in secondary education and USD 12 252 in tertiary education (Figure 3).¹
- Portugal spends 5.0% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on educational institutions at primary to tertiary levels (including R&D). This is similar to the OECD average of 4.9% of GDP. On average across the OECD, the share of GDP dedicated to educational institutions (from primary to tertiary

¹ All expenditure figures in this note are expressed in USD calculated based on purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates.

levels) has been broadly stable, with 4.9% in 2015 and 2021. However, trends vary considerably between countries. Portugal is among the countries where expenditure as a share of GDP remained roughly constant at 5%.

Figure 3. Total expenditure per full-time equivalent student in primary, secondary and tertiary education (2021)

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs, expenditure on educational institutions



1. Primary education includes pre-primary and lower secondary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the total expenditure per full-time equivalent student in primary education.

Source: OECD (2024), Table C1.1. For more information see *Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

- Across the OECD, public authorities are responsible for the vast majority of spending on education, particularly at compulsory levels. In Portugal, 89% of total expenditure on primary institutions comes from public sources, which is below the OECD average of 93%. Private expenditure makes up a greater share in pre-primary and tertiary education in many countries. In Portugal, the share of public expenditure on pre-primary education is 67%, below the OECD average of 86%, while for tertiary education it is 61%, compared to an OECD average of 68%.
- How private institutions are funded varies considerably across countries, with some fully or largely government funded, while others receive little or no public funding. In Portugal, government sources spend USD 10 537 per full-time equivalent student in public primary institutions, while the



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figure is USD 1 279 per full-time equivalent student in private ones (the OECD averages are USD 11 914 for public primary institutions and USD 7 867 for private ones).

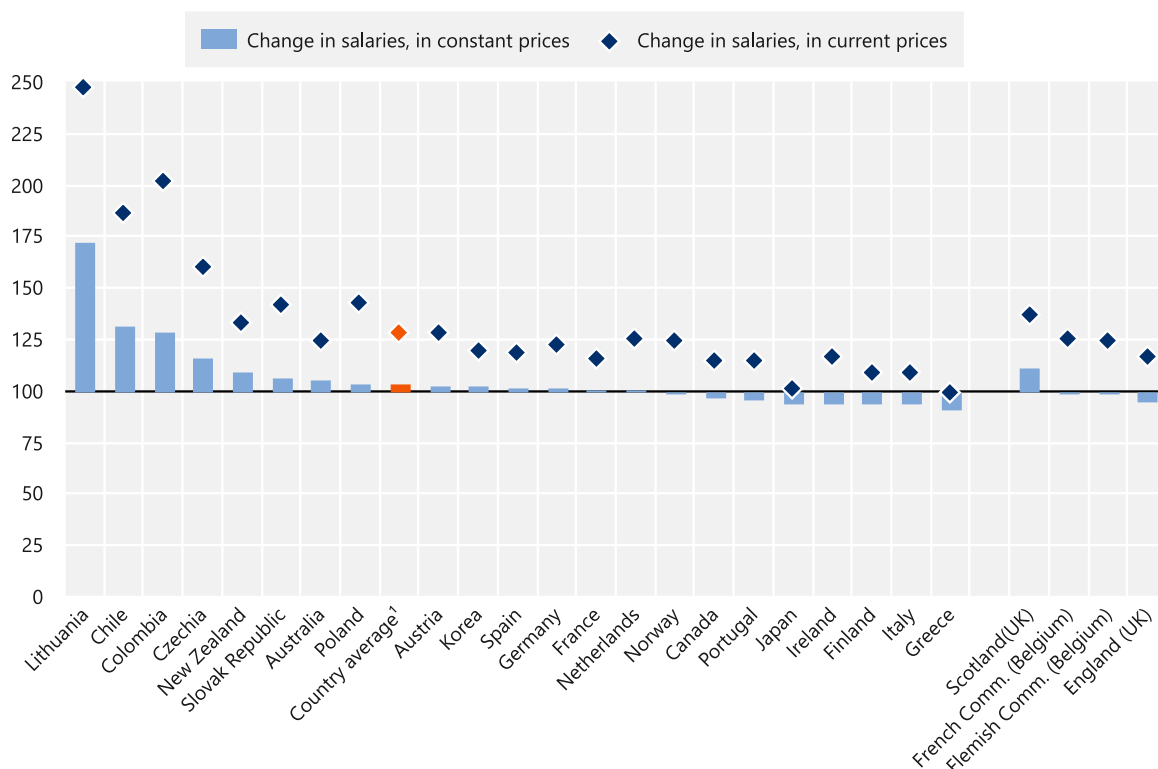
- The distribution of government expenditure on education by level of government differs between countries. In some countries, all final expenditure on education comes from central governments, whereas in other countries all final expenditure comes from local or regional governments. In Portugal, the central government is responsible for 78% of final expenditure on primary education, the regional governments are responsible for 7%, and local governments are responsible for 15%.
- Governments have to decide how to allocate funds across policy areas. Education (including R&D) is a major expenditure item and accounts for 10.0% of all public expenditure on average across the OECD. In Portugal, this share is similar with 9.2%.

Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- Between 2015 and 2023, nominal statutory salaries increased by 14% in Portugal for lower secondary teachers with 15 years of experience. This increase compensated only partially the rising cost of living. In real terms (i.e. adjusted for inflation), teachers' salaries decreased by 4% over the eight-year period compared to an average increase of 4% across countries with available data (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Change in lower secondary teachers' statutory salaries between 2015 and 2023

Index of change in annual salaries of teachers with most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (2015 = 100)



Note: The change in constant prices refers to the change in salaries assuming the same level of purchasing power between 2015 and 2023 (that is, in 2015 prices), whereas change in current prices refers to the nominal change in salary amount between 2015 and 2023.

1. Excludes Australia, Chile and Colombia as data for some years are missing between 2015 and 2023.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of the change in salaries in constant prices.

Source: OECD (2024), Table D3.6 and Table X2.5. For more information see *Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

- The work of teachers consists of a variety of tasks including teaching, but also preparing lessons, grading assignments and communicating with parents. The number of hours that teachers are contractually obliged to teach varies greatly across countries. In Portugal, teachers at lower secondary level have to teach 616 hours annually. This is below the OECD average of 706 hours per year.
- Student-teacher ratios vary between countries and between levels of education. On average across the OECD, there are 14 students per teacher in primary education, 13 students in lower secondary education and 13 students in upper secondary education. In Portugal, the corresponding numbers are 12 in primary education, 9 in lower secondary education and 9 in upper secondary education. While lower student teacher ratios allow teachers to focus more on the needs of the individual, they require higher overall spending on teacher salaries and have to be weighed against alternative spending priorities.

- Between 2013 and 2022, the average age of teachers has increased across the OECD. In lower secondary education, 36% of teachers are 50 years or older, compared to 35% in 2013. Portugal has more teachers aged 50 or older, with 57% of teachers being in this age category, up from 33% in 2013.

More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2024 and to access the full set of indicators, see: <https://doi.org/10.1787/c00cad36-en>.

For more information on the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, see Education at a Glance 2024: Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

For general information on the methodology, please refer to the *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics 2018* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en>).

Updated data can be found online at <http://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/5q> and by following the StatLinks  in the publication.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS: <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/>.

Questions can be directed to the Education at a Glance team at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills: EDU.EAG@oecd.org.

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