

Education at a Glance 2023

Country note

Portugal

This country note provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in Portugal. It draws on data from *Education at a Glance 2023*. In line with the thematic focus of this year's *Education at a Glance*, it emphasises vocational education and training (VET), while also covering other parts of the education system. Data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers interested in the reference years for the data are referred to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2023*.

Highlights

- In Portugal, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment increased substantially in recent years (from 33% in 2015 to 44% in 2022). Although the tertiary education is the most common highest level of attainment among young adults, there is still 17% of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary attainment, 3 percentage points higher than the OECD average.
- Over this period, in Portugal the share of 25-34 year-olds without an upper secondary qualification decreased significantly (by 16 percentage points, from 33% to 17%), whereas the share of the 25-34 year-olds with an upper secondary qualification as their highest attainment increased by 5 percentage points, mostly as a result of the increase in the proportion of those attaining a vocational upper secondary qualification (from 14% to 20%).
- In Portugal, an above-average proportion of students in vocational programmes are enrolled at upper secondary level (80%, compared with 69% of students on average in OECD countries). Nevertheless, fewer upper secondary students are enrolled in vocational programmes in Portugal than on average across OECD countries (39% compared with 44% on average).
- Two years after the end of the theoretical duration of upper secondary programmes completion rates of upper secondary education in Portugal are at the OECD average (86% compared with 87% across OECD countries). Two years after the end of the theoretical duration, completion of rates in vocational upper secondary programmes are lower than the OECD average (69% compared with 73% on average).
- In Portugal, one year after their graduation only 18% of upper secondary graduates from vocational programmes are enrolled in formal education, compared to 80% of those graduated from general programmes.
- Portugal spent 5.1% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions in 2020, a similar share than the average across OECD countries. However, spending per student across primary to tertiary education in Portugal is about 14% lower than on average across OECD countries (USD 10 816 per full-time equivalent student in 2020 in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, compared with the OECD average of USD 12 647). Compared to the OECD average, expenditure per students in Portugal are much lower at the tertiary level than at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels.

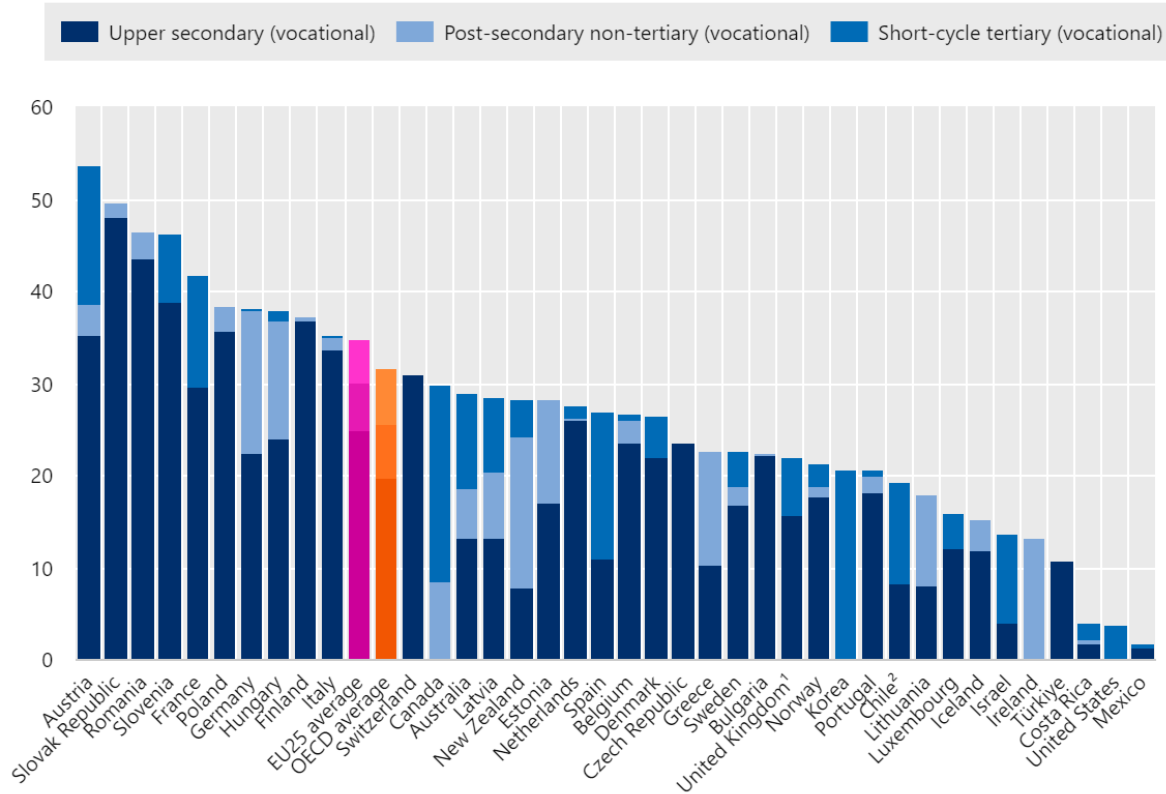
- Between 2015 and 2022, the statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes (after 15 years of experience and with most prevalent qualification) did not change much (in constant price), whereas they increased by 4% on average across OECD countries. In Portugal the unfreezing of salaries of teachers in 2018 (frozen in the context of the period of financial contingency that Portugal experienced) allowed for the gradual recovery of teachers' salaries up to 2022. Nevertheless, upper secondary (general programmes) teachers in Portugal earn 42% more than tertiary-educated workers. Portugal is among the few countries where teachers' average actual salaries remain higher than earnings of tertiary educated workers since the teaching population is ageing and, consequently, a large proportion of teachers are close to the top of their teaching career.
- Above-average student instruction time and below-average classes in Portugal are the main factors explaining that teachers' salary cost per primary student is higher than the OECD average (USD 4 074 compared with an OECD average of USD 3 614), even if above-average teaching hours reduce this cost. Actual salaries of teachers, slightly above the average, only have a small impact on the salary cost per primary student.

The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- High-quality VET programmes integrate learners into labour markets and open pathways for further personal and professional development. However, the quality and importance of VET programmes differ greatly across countries. In some countries, half of all young adults (25-34 year-olds) have a vocational qualification as their highest level of educational attainment, while the share is in the low single digits in other countries. In Portugal, 21% of 25-34 year-olds have a VET qualification as their highest level of attainment: 18% at upper secondary level, 2% at post-secondary non-tertiary level, and 1% at short-cycle tertiary level (the OECD average is 20% at upper secondary level, 6% at post-secondary non-tertiary level, and 6% at short-cycle tertiary level) (Figure 1).
- Across the OECD, unemployment rates for 25-34 year-olds with vocational upper secondary attainment are lower than for their peers with general upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. This is also the case in Portugal, where 8.1% of young adults with a vocational upper secondary attainment are unemployed, compared to 8.4% of those with a general upper secondary attainment.
- Although an upper secondary qualification is often the minimum attainment needed for successful labour-market participation, some 25-34 year-olds still leave education without such a qualification. On average across the OECD, 14% of young adults have not attained an upper secondary qualification. In Portugal, the share is 3 percentage points higher than the OECD average (17%).
- Tertiary attainment continues to increase among the working age population. On average across the OECD, tertiary attainment is becoming as common as upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment among 25-64 year-olds. In Portugal, 31% of 25-64 year-olds have a tertiary attainment, a larger share than the 29% with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment.
- While the inactivity rate (the share of people who are neither working nor actively looking for a job) decreases when educational attainment increases for both men and for women across the OECD, this rate may differ between men and women. Among the 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary education, Portugal is the only country with available data where the inactivity rate is lower for women than men (by 2 percentage points). On average across OECD the inactivity rate is 6 percentage points higher for women than men.

Figure 1. Share of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of education has a vocational orientation, by level of educational attainment (2022)

In per cent



1. Data for upper secondary attainment include completion of a sufficient volume and standard of programmes that would be classified individually as completion of intermediate upper secondary programmes (9% of adults aged 25-34 are in this group).

2. Year of reference differs from 2022. Refer to the source table for more details.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of 25-34 year-olds who attained vocational upper secondary, vocational post-secondary non-tertiary or vocational short-cycle tertiary education.

Source: OECD (2023), Table A1.3. For more information see Source section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[11]).

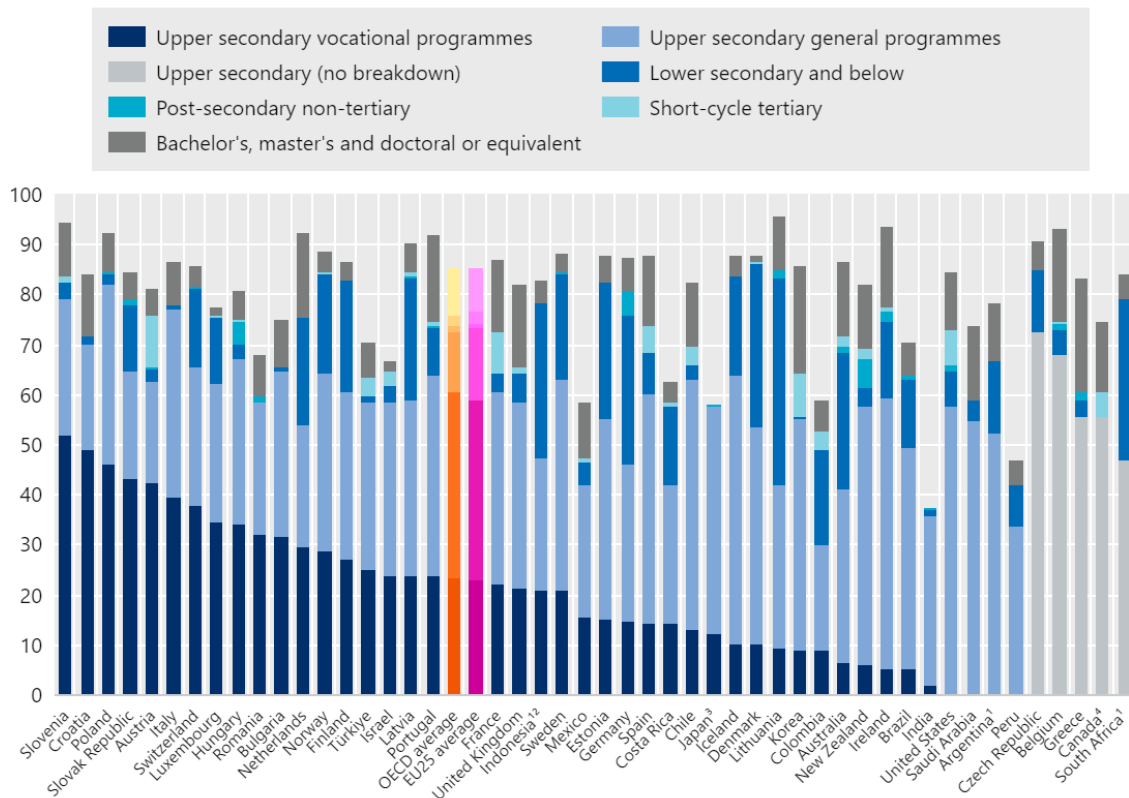
- On average across OECD countries, 14.7% of young adults aged 18-24 are not in education, employment or training (NEET), while in Portugal the corresponding figure is 11.4%. Reducing NEET rates among young adults is a particularly important challenge in all countries because those who become NEET face worse labour-market outcomes later in life than their peers who remained in education or training at this age.
- As the demand for skills in the workplace changes ever more quickly, the importance of lifelong learning continues to grow. In Portugal, the share of adults who participated in non-formal job-related education over a four-week reference period is 9% among 25-64 year-olds with vocational upper secondary attainment, 10% among those with general upper secondary attainment and 17% among those with tertiary attainment. This compares to average shares of 7% (vocational upper secondary), 8% (general upper secondary) and 14% (tertiary) across the OECD.

Access to education, participation and progress

- Participation in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) has a positive effect on children's well-being, learning and development in the first years of their lives. In Portugal, the proportion of children enrolled in ECE (in pre-primary education) increases from 78% of 3-year-olds, to 95% of 4-year-olds and 98% of 5-year-olds.
- Compulsory education in Portugal starts at the age of 6 and continues until the age of 18. Students typically graduate at age 17 from general upper secondary programmes. The age range for completing vocational programmes is wider, with students typically graduating from vocational upper secondary programmes between 17 and 18. This is similar to most OECD countries, where graduates from vocational upper secondary programmes have a wider age range, reflecting the greater diversity of pathways into these programmes than for general ones.
- The large majority of 15-19 year-olds across the OECD are enrolled in education. This is also the case in Portugal, where 40% of this age group are enrolled in general upper secondary education and 24% in vocational upper secondary education. A further 10% are enrolled in lower secondary programmes and 18% in tertiary programmes. This compares to an OECD average of 37% enrolled in general upper secondary programmes, 23% in vocational upper secondary programmes, 12% in lower secondary programmes and 12% in tertiary programmes (Figure 2).
- In Portugal, 80% of students in vocational programmes are enrolled at upper secondary level, compared with 69% of students on average in OECD countries. Still the proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes in Portugal is lower than the OECD average (39% compared with 44% on average). In OECD countries, another 20% of students in a vocational track are enrolled in short-cycle tertiary programmes, but this is the case of 10% of students in vocational track in Portugal.
- On average across countries and other participants with comparable data, 77% of entrants into general upper secondary education successfully complete their upper secondary studies (either in general or in vocational programmes) within the theoretical duration of the programme. The completion rate increases by an average 10 percentage points within two years after the end of the theoretical duration to reach on average of 87%. In Portugal, 63% of entrants into general upper secondary education complete their programme within the theoretical duration, but this share increases to 86% after allowing an additional two years.
- In most countries with available data, completion rates in vocational upper secondary programmes are lower than in general upper secondary programmes. In Portugal, 63% of vocational students complete upper secondary education (either general or vocational programmes) within the expected duration and 69% complete their programme after an additional two years (compared with 73% on average). Two years after the theoretical duration, 28% of these VET students dropped out of education in Portugal, which create risks for these young people to become NEET (neither employed nor in formal education or training).
- In some countries, most students enrol in another education programme shortly after completing their upper secondary education. In other countries, it is common for upper secondary graduates to enter the labour market or take a gap year and return to education later. Consequently, the share of general upper secondary graduates in education one year after their graduation ranges from less than 40% in Sweden to more than 90% in Slovenia. In all countries, general upper secondary graduates are more likely to be enrolled in formal education one year after their graduation than those who graduated from a VET programme. In Portugal, 80% of general upper secondary graduates are in education one year after their graduation compared to 18% of vocational graduates.

Figure 2. Enrolment rates of 15-19 year-olds, by level of education (2021)

In per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2021: 2020 for Argentina and South Africa; 2018 for Indonesia.
2. Excludes students enrolled at tertiary levels.
3. Breakdown by age not available after 15 years old.
4. Excludes post-secondary non-tertiary education.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of students enrolled in upper secondary vocational education.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table B1.2. For more information see [Source section](#) and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[1]).

- Bachelor’s programmes are the most popular programmes for new entrants to tertiary education. On average across the OECD, they attract 76% of all new students, which is a similar proportion to Portugal. Short-cycle tertiary programmes are the second most common level of education for new entrants into tertiary education, but their importance differs widely across countries. In Portugal, they are chosen by 11% of all new entrants.
- Perhaps surprisingly, the share of international students at tertiary level has not been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in many OECD countries. However, a few countries experienced double digit declines in the share of international students. Portugal is not one of them, as the share of international students increased from 10% of all tertiary students in 2019 to 12% in 2021.

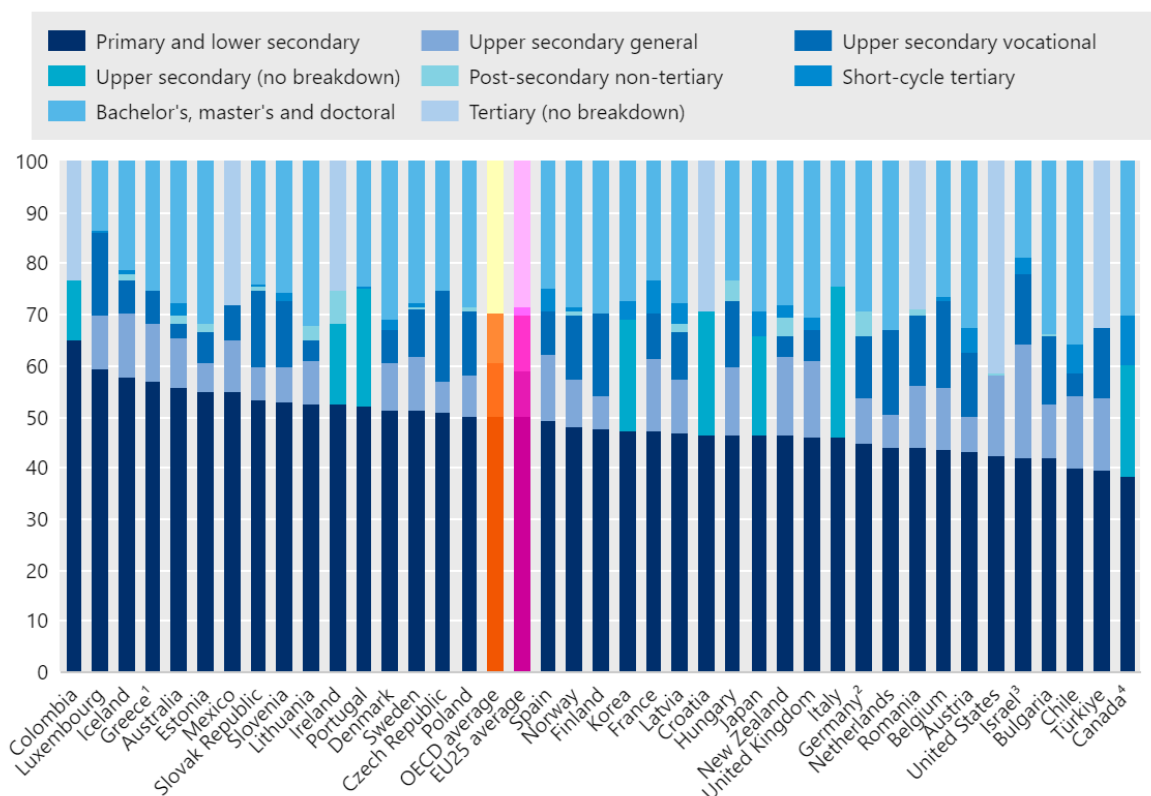
Financial resources invested in education

- All OECD and partner countries devote a substantial share of their domestic output to education. In 2020, OECD countries spent on average 5.1% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on primary

to tertiary educational institutions. In Portugal, the corresponding share was also 5.1% of GDP, of which 30% was dedicated to primary education, 22% to lower secondary education, 23% to upper secondary and post-secondary education combined, 1% to short-cycle tertiary programmes and 24% to bachelor's, master's and doctoral or equivalent programmes. In Portugal, the share devoted to primary education is similar to the OECD average, but the share devoted to secondary education is above the average (45% compared to 41%) and the share devoted to tertiary education is lower than the average (25% compared to 29%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Total expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions, by level of education (2020)

In per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2020. Refer to the source table for more details.

2. Upper secondary vocational programmes include lower secondary vocational programmes.

3. Upper secondary programmes include lower secondary programmes.

4. Primary education includes pre-primary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of total expenditure on primary and lower secondary institutions.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table C2.1. For more information see [Source section](#) and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[1]).

- Funding for education in absolute terms is strongly influenced by countries' income levels. Countries with higher per capita GDP tend to spend more per student than those with lower per capita GDP. Across all levels from primary to tertiary education, Portugal spends USD 10 816 annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power), compared to the OECD average of USD 12 647. Expenditure per student is equivalent to 31% of per capita GDP, which is above the OECD average of 27%.

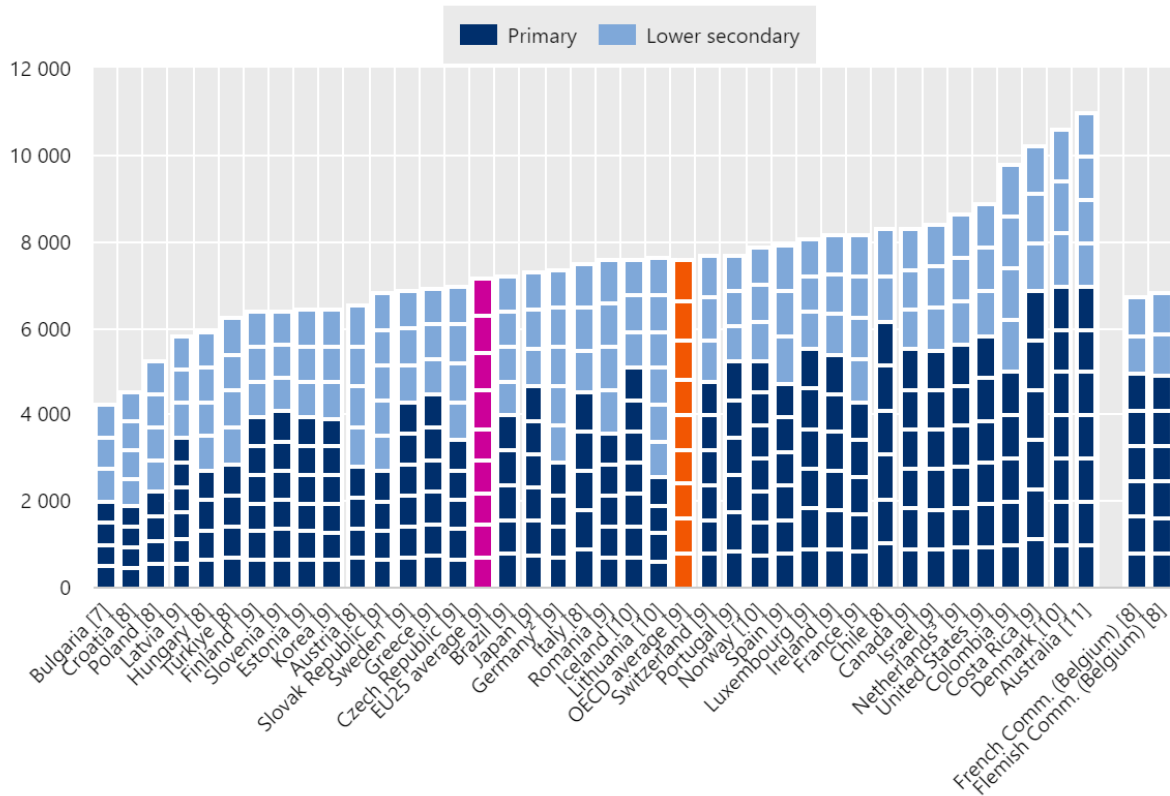
- Government sources dominate non-tertiary education funding in all OECD countries, while the private sector contributes 9% of the total expenditure on educational institutions on average. Private funding in Portugal accounted for 12% of expenditure at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels.
- On average across OECD countries, more than half of government expenditure on primary to post-secondary non-tertiary education comes from subnational governments. In Portugal, 82% of the funding comes from the central government, after transfers between government levels, 7% from the regional level and 11% from the local level.

Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- The total compulsory instruction time throughout primary and lower secondary education varies widely from country to country (Figure 4). Across the OECD, over the course of primary and lower secondary education, compulsory instruction time totals an average of 7 634 hours, distributed over nine grades. In Portugal, the total compulsory instruction time is higher, at 7 700 hours, over nine grades.
- On average across OECD countries, 25% of the compulsory instruction time in primary education is devoted to reading, writing and literature and 16% to mathematics. In lower secondary education, the share is 15% for reading, writing and literature and 13% for mathematics. In Portugal, 19% of time is devoted to reading, writing and literature and 19% to mathematics at primary level compared to 13% each to both subjects at lower secondary level.
- Teachers' salaries are an important determinant of the attractiveness of the teaching profession, but they also represent the single largest expenditure category in formal education. In most OECD countries, the salaries of teachers in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach, and also with experience. On average, annual statutory salaries for upper secondary teachers (in general programmes) with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience are USD 53 456 across the OECD. In Portugal, the corresponding salary adjusted for purchasing power is USD 44 277, which is equivalent to EUR 29 100. In Portugal upper secondary teachers in vocational programmes have the same similar statutory salaries than teachers in general programmes.
- Besides average teacher salaries themselves, annual teaching time requirements, annual hours of compulsory instruction time for students, and class size also impact total spending on teacher salaries. When combined, these factors can be used to estimate an average cost of teachers' salaries per student and show the relative impact of each individual factor on total salary spending. Total teacher salary costs per primary student are USD 4 074 in Portugal, higher than the OECD average of USD 3 614. This difference can be explained by four factors: higher teacher salaries increase costs (by USD 54), above-average teaching hours reduce costs (by USD 505), above-average student instruction time increases costs (by USD 476) and smaller classes increase costs (by USD 434). Between 2015 and 2021, the salary cost of teachers per student increased by 16% in Portugal (from USD 3 498 to USD 4 074).
- Between 2015 and 2022, statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes (with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience) declined in real terms in roughly half of all OECD countries with available data. In Portugal, upper secondary teachers' salaries decreased by 1% between 2015 and 2022.

Figure 4. Compulsory instruction time in general education (2023)

In hours, in primary and lower secondary education, in public institutions



Note: Instruction hours for each grade refer to average hours per grade for the level of education. Numbers in square brackets refer to the total number of years for primary and lower secondary education.

1. Estimated number of hours by level of education based on the average number of hours per year, as for some subjects, the allocation of instruction time across multiple levels is flexible.

2. Year of reference 2022.

3. The number of grades in lower secondary education is three or four, depending on the track. The fourth year of pre-vocational secondary education was excluded from the calculation.

Countries and other participants are ranked in ascending order of the total number of compulsory instruction hours.

Source: OECD (2023), Table D1.1. For more information see *Source* section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023_[11]).

References

- OECD (2023), *Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>. [1]
- OECD (2023), Education at a Glance Database, <https://stats.oecd.org/>. [2]
- OECD (2023), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>. [3]

More information

For more information on *Education at a Glance 2023* and to access the full set of indicators, see: <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-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 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-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 on line at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-data-en> and by following the *StatLinks 2* under the tables and charts in the publication.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS:

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Key facts for Portugal in *Education at a Glance 2023*

Indicator	Country		OECD average		Source	
Educational attainment of 25-34 year-olds by gender	2022		2022		Table A1.2	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	Below upper secondary	20%	14%	16%		12%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	43%	35%	44%		35%
	Tertiary	37%	52%	41%	54%	
NEET rates of 18-24 year-olds by gender	2022		2022		OECD (2023 ^[2])	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	12.2%	10.6%	14%	15.5%		
Employment rates of 25-64 year-olds by educational attainment and gender	2022		2022		OECD (2023 ^[2])	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	Below upper secondary	78%	62%	70%		48%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	87%	82%	84%		69%
	Tertiary	91%	91%	90%	83%	
Enrolment rate of children aged 3 in ECEC	2021		2021		Table B2.1	
		78%		73%		
Enrolment rate of 15-19 year-olds	2021		2021		Table B1.1	
		92%		84%		
Share of upper secondary students enrolled in VET programmes	2021		2021		Table B1.3	
		39%		44%		
Upper secondary completion rates by programme orientation	2021		2021		Table B3.1	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational		
	By the end of the programme duration	63%	63%	77%		62%
	Two years after the end of the programme duration	86%	69%	87%	73%	
Expenditure on educational institutions per full-time equivalent student by level of education (in USD PPP)	2020		2020		Table C1.1	
	Primary	USD 9 340		USD 10 658		
	Lower secondary	USD 11 715		USD 11 941		
	Upper secondary	USD 11 032		USD 12 312		
	Tertiary	USD 12 104		USD 18 105		
Total expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions as % of GDP	2020		2020		Table C2.1	
		5.1%		5.1%		
Share of total education expenditure on upper secondary educational institutions by programme orientation	2020		2020		Figure C2.2	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational		
	m	m	11%	10%		
Total compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education	2023		2023		Table D1.1	
		7 700 hours		7 634 hours		
Statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (in USD PPP)	2022		2022		Table D3.1.	
		USD 44 277		USD 53 456		
Change in statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (in real terms)	2015-2022		2015-2022		Table D3.7	
		-1%		4%		
Share of teachers in general upper secondary programmes aged 50 or older	2021		2021		Table D7.2.	
		m		39%		

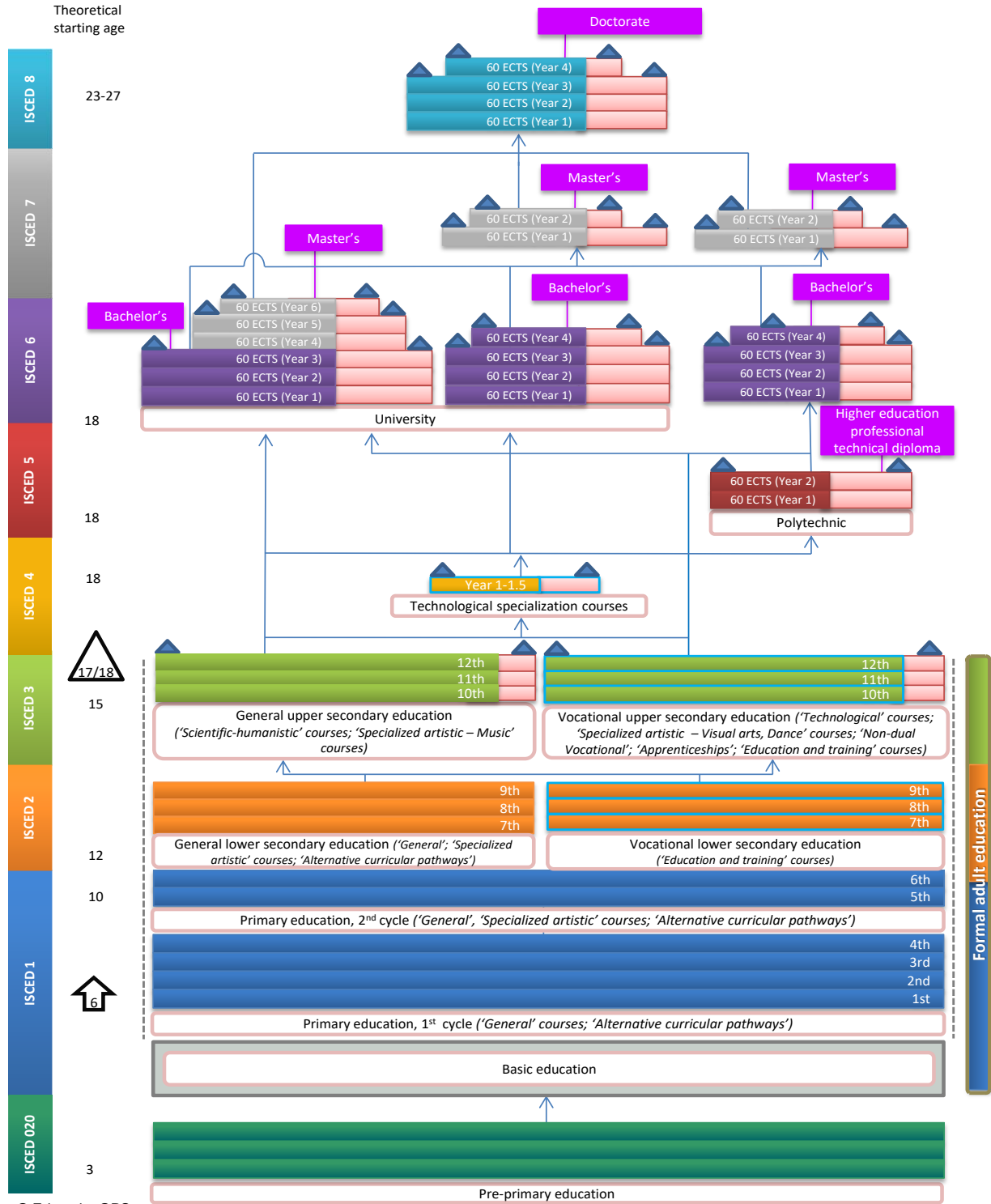
Note: The OECD average for completion rates reflects a different country coverage (see Indicator B3).

Source: OECD (2023^[2])

Diagram of the education system

Portugal

2023



Source: OECD (2023), "Portugal: Diagram of education system", OECD Education GPS, http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/PRT/PRT_2011_EN.pdf
 Please refer to "Portugal: Diagram of education system" for information on the keys.