

## 6.1 General context

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### Main trends in young people's participation in education and training

#### Inequalities and young people and inclusion challenges in the educational system

Under the 2020 Strategy, the goal to reduce the **rate for early school leaving** (ESL) to 10% was set. In the last decade, Portugal has been significantly reducing its ESL rate (18-24 years), approaching more and more the 10% target set under the Europe 2020 Strategy.

In 2006, the ESL rate in Portugal was 38,5%, more than double the European average (EU28), which was 15,3%. Since then, there has been a continuous reduction until 2019, where the ESL rate reached 10,6%, closer to the EU28 average that was 10,3% in that year (Eurostat 2020).

Unlike the EU28, in which the ESL rate is much higher among students that were born in a foreign country (19,49%), the difference in Portugal is only of 3,1 percentage points (ESL rate of 14,4% among students that were born outside of Portugal), according to the same source.

The biggest differences are in terms of gender, where the ESL rate is significantly higher among men (13,7%) than among women (7,4%) – below the European target of 10%.. In the EU28, although there is also a greater prevalence of ESL among men (11,9%), the difference between men and women is not so significant.

The **retention and dropout rate in secondary education (high school)** has also been declining in recent years. According to data from the [Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics](#), in the school year of 2000/01, 39,4% of students in secondary school (high school) were retained or dropped out. That percentage has dropped to less than half (13,1%) in the school year of 2018/19, but it is higher among men (14,8%) (DG Education and Science Statistics 2020).

An analysis made by education path and grade level shows that the retention and dropout rate is significantly higher in scientific-humanistic/general courses (14,6%) than in technological and professional courses (10,3%), being the retention and dropout rate higher in the last year of upper secondary education: 23,2% and 21,6%, respectively.

In turn, the **secondary education (high school) completion rate** has increased from 47,5%, in the school year of 2000/2001, to 77,4% in 2018/2019..

In 2019, the **NEET rate** (not in education, employment or training) between the ages of 15 and 29 was 9,2%, lower than the EU28 average of 12,5%, being that both in Portugal and in the EU28, this rate was higher among young people between the ages of 25 and 29: 11,5% and 16,6% respectively (Eurostat 2020).

### **Professional education and training**

In 2018, the **participation rate of adults** (25-64 years) in lifelong learning was 10,5%, close to the EU28 average of 11,3%, this rate being higher among young people between the ages of 25 to 34: 17,9% in the EU28 and 17,2% in Portugal (UOE 2020).

The participation of secondary education students in professional education and training was, in 2018, 39,7%, lower than the EU28 average of 48,4%.

### **Higher education**

In Portugal, the **higher education completion rate** for young people between the ages of 30 to 34 has increased in recent years, from 21,6%, in 2008, to 36,2% in 2019, still below the EU28 average of 41,6% and also below the goal of 40%, set under the Europe 2020 Strategy (Eurostat 2020). The **employment rate of recent graduates**, between the ages of 20 to 34, remained stable in the EU28 between the financial crisis period and 2019, with 81,5% in 2012 and 85,3% in 2019. In Portugal, in 2012 the rate was lower than the EU28 average, but the economic crisis had an impact on the employability of its recent graduates, the rate going from 69,9%, in 2012, to 85,3% in 2019 (same than the EU28 average).

The number of **people enrolled in higher education**, in all cycles of education, decreased around 8,6% in the economic crisis period between 2011 and 2014. However, there has been a slight recovery after that period: more 29.684 new students in 2019/2020, comparing with 2013/14 (DG Education and Science Statistics 2020).

## Organisation of the education and training system

In Portugal, access to education is a legal right stated in the [Constitution of the Portuguese Republic](#), which must be **universal, compulsory and free**. The education system also enshrines freedom in teaching and learning, with public education being defined as non-denominational.

**Compulsory education** is comprised of 12 years of schooling, comprising nine years of elementary education and three years of secondary education, for children and young people between the ages of 6 to 18.

The **Portuguese education system**, regulated by the Basic Law of the Education System, comprises preschool education, school education and out-of-school education. School education is developed at three levels: basic education, secondary education and higher education:

**Preschool education** is not compulsory and is intended for children between the ages of 3 and 6.

## Basic Education

Basic education has a 9-year duration and is organised in three sequential cycles, being that each cycle is responsible for completing and deepening the previous one, in a global perspective:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> cycle corresponds to the first four years of school;
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle corresponds to the following two years;
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle has the duration of three years.

The guiding principles of the organisation and management of the basic education curriculum must ensure to all citizens a basic education, general and common, through the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and aptitudes that will enable students to pursue further studies. For a more in-depth knowledge of the main objectives of basic education, please refer to the – [Eurydice Website – Fundamental Principles and National Policies](#).

In addition to the [general basic education](#), basic education also includes a [distance learning modality](#), a home-school modality, an individual-based modality and specialised artistic courses in the fields of music, dancing and Gregorian chant.

Basic education can also be completed and certified through other paths, adapted to the profile and specificities of the students, namely through the adoption of innovative pedagogical planning, such as, Alternative Curriculum Paths (PCA), together with other responses;

- Education and training course (CEF);
- Integrated Programme for Education and Training (PIEF).

## Secondary Education

Secondary education is a three-year cycle (ISCED 3 EQF/QNQ 3 and 4), from 15 to 18 years old, which aims to provide students with access to a diversified training and learning. It is in different manners depending if the students wish to exclusively pursue further studies or offers that, in addition to the pursuit of further studies, also aim to prepare them for active life. The permeability between offers is ensured, and they are structured as follows:

- Professional courses
- Programme-specific courses
- Specialised artistic courses
- [Scientific-Humanistic courses](#)
- [Secondary education in the form of recurrent education](#)

For a better understanding of the main objectives of secondary education, please refer to: [Eurydice Website – Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education](#).

## Higher education

Higher education in Portugal is organised in a binary system:

- **University education:** universities, university institutes and other education establishments guided by a perspective of promoting research and knowledge creation, with scientific training.

- **Polytechnic education:** polytechnic institutes and polytechnic educational establishments guided by a perspective of applied research and development, offering vocational training and advanced technical training.

Higher education institutions have **scientific, pedagogical, cultural and disciplinary autonomy**, namely in the framework and operational structure of the courses provided, such as conditions of admission, curriculum, etc.

Higher education establishments can be public or private. However, both are under the tutelage of the [Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education](#) (MCTES). Military and police public education institutions are also subject to double tutelage, from the MCTES and, respectively, from the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Internal Administration.

In Portugal, there is a public university specifically dedicated to long-distance learning (e-learning) – [Open University \(Universidade Aberta\)](#). Regarding private higher education, the [Catholic University of Portugal](#) has a legal regime of recognition by the State, with some specific features.

In 2005, there was a reform in the Basic Law of the Education System, with the implementation of the Bologna Process, changing the cycles of study that started to be structured in three cycles leading to bachelor's, masters' and doctorate degrees. In 2014, higher professional technical courses were created, which consist of higher education professional courses that grant a diploma.

## Higher professional technical Course

A higher education cycle of studies that does not grant an academic degree, with 120 credits (ECTS) and a duration of two years, whose successful completion gives a professional advanced technician diploma, corresponding to a level 5 qualification in the EQF/QNQ, as well as level 5 in ISCED. This cycle of studies is offered in polytechnic education and it lasts for four semesters of student work. This cycle is comprised of a set of curricular units organised in components of general and scientific training, technical training and training in a work context, which is carried out through an internship.

1st Cycle -The **bachelor's degree**: it is granted to those that have acquired the established number of credits, by being approved in all curricular units that integrate the curriculum of the degree.

2nd Cycle - **Masters' degree**: it corresponds to level 7 in the National Qualifications Framework and in the European Qualifications Framework (ISCED 7), with 90 and 120 credits (ECTS) and a length of three to four semesters.

In university education, it must ensure the acquisition of an academic specialisation, resorting to research, innovation and further development of professional skills. In polytechnic education, it must predominantly ensure the acquisition of a professional specialisation.

3rd Cycle - **PhD degree**: it corresponds to level 8 in the National Qualifications Framework and in the European Qualifications Framework (ISCED 8). The duration of the cycle of education that grants the doctorate degree is not defined, nor the number of ECTS. Usually, it lasts from 6 to 8 semesters and it grants 180 to 240 credits (ECTS).

The accreditation and quality assurance of higher education and study cycles is carried out by an independent entity – the [Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education \(A3ES\)](#).

The [general access and admission scheme](#) in higher education requires the compliance with a set of criteria: a secondary education course or equivalent; taking the required admission tests for the desired course, with a score equal or greater than the one established; meeting the required prerequisites for the course to which the student is applying to. This scheme applies to bachelor's degree and integrated masters' degree.

Also, there are [special regimes](#), special access tenders and access tenders to higher professional technical courses, intended for several types of candidates.

For a more in-depth knowledge about higher education, please refer to: [Eurydice Website – Higher Education](#).

## Adult Education and Training

Under the [Strategic Framework](#) for European cooperation in education and training and the [Commitment for Growth, Competitiveness and Employment](#) (for more detailed information refer to [Eurydice – Lifelong Learning Strategy](#)), the Portuguese education and training system has undergone a reform. This reform began with the creation of the National Qualifications Agency, in 2006, and the [National Qualifications Framework \(QNQ\)](#) in 2007, which promoted coordination between education, training and employment. The QNQ has been adapted from the [European Qualifications Framework](#), with the intention to create a common qualification

system framework in all Member States, in order to promote the mobility and portability of qualifications of European citizens.

The QNQ is structured in [eight levels of qualification](#), going from the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of basic education to a PhD.

## **Training offer**

There are several offers within the adult education and training context, with specific purposes and target audiences:

### **Offer aimed at increasing the acquisition of basic skills**

[Basic skills training programme](#): it aims at acquiring basic skills for reading, writing, calculation and use of information and communication technologies, and their subsequent integration in basic level courses of Education and Adult Training (EFA courses), or in basic level (equivalent to level 1 of ISCED and QNQ) Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies processes (RVCC).

[Portuguese Courses for Speakers of Other Languages](#): they are intended to meet the knowledge requirement of the Portuguese language provided for in the legal regimes to acquire Portuguese nationality, permanent or long duration residence, and to promote the command over the Portuguese language within the scope of reading, writing and speaking.

### **Offer for adults to achieve a recognised qualification**

[Adult education and training courses – EFA](#): provision of education and training for adults wishing to increase their qualifications.

### **Offer aimed at transitioning into the labour market**

[Certified Modular Training \(FMC\)](#): allows the creation of flexible learning pathways with a varied duration, characterised by the adaptation to different types of training, target groups, methodologies, training contexts and forms of validation, allowing to acquire professional and school competencies for future progression or reintegration in the labour market.

[Technological Specialisation Courses \(CET\)](#): courses that aim to answer to the needs of the socio-economic fabric, at the middle management level, being an alternative for the improvement of young people's qualification and the professional requalification of the working force.

### **Other offers for adult education**

The [European 2020 Strategy](#) highlights the importance of adult education and training and lifelong learning, and the importance of using all the competencies and knowledge acquired in various contexts (formal, informal and non-formal).

## Another type of training offers supported by the State

Lifelong learning – recurrent education: an offer in the framework of adult education, which corresponds to the secondary education level, created for students that did not benefit from education at the common age or have not completed their studies.

For more detailed information, please refer to Eurodyce Website [2.3 Organisation of the Education System and of its Structure](#)

### **Main concepts**

**Compulsory education**: 12 years of schooling for children and young people between the ages of 6 to 18, divided into nine years of elementary education and three years of secondary education.

**School groups**: organisational units consisting of educational establishments from different levels of education, ranging from preschool education to basic education and secondary education. They possess a common pedagogical project and their own administration and management bodies.

**Education charter**: instrument for planning educational buildings and equipment to be placed in the municipality, in accordance with the necessary education and training offers, under the demographic and socio-economic development of each municipality, while considering the best use of educational resources.

**Dual certification**: double certification, including school and professional certification.

**Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies (RVCC)**: a process where skills that adults have acquired throughout their life, in contexts likely to generate learning, outside the formal systems of education and training, are recognised.

**Early school leaving**: students between the ages of 18 and 24 that have left school early and that have concluded, at the most, the lower secondary education (which, in Portugal, corresponds to basic education) and that are not currently enrolled in the education or training systems.