

# Portugal

This country note provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in Portugal based on data from *Education at a Glance 2025*. In line with this year's thematic focus, it emphasises tertiary education while also covering other parts of the education system. The data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers interested in the reference years for the data should refer to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2025*.

## Highlights

- In the past decades, tertiary attainment has increased in Portugal as in most OECD countries, but the proportion of adults with a tertiary qualification is still lower than the OECD average. Between 2019 and 2024, the proportion of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary qualification increased from 38% to 43% in Portugal, compared to a change from 45% to 48% on average across OECD countries. Unlike most OECD countries, Portugal is one of the few countries where the most commonly held attainment level of education is below upper secondary (38% of the adult population do not have an upper secondary qualification, well above the OECD average of 19%).
- The share of lower secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes in Portugal decreased from 9% to 4% between 2013 and 2023, dropping below the OECD average of 7%. This decline has been largely attributed to severe cuts in funding for adult learning (leading to the discontinuation of the New Opportunities programme, the closure of adult education centres and a reduction in the number of adult educators).
- Labour market returns may help to increase tertiary attainment rates. Tertiary-educated workers in Portugal earn on average 74% more than workers with upper secondary attainment, above the OECD average of 34%. The earnings gap is also larger than the OECD average for the younger age group (58% compared to 39% on average across OECD countries). Individuals with greater educational attainment generally earn higher wages and face a higher employment rate and lower risk of unemployment. In Portugal, employment rates for those with an upper secondary qualification or a lower qualification level are lower than for those who attained tertiary level (91%), but are significantly higher than the OECD average (71% compared to 60% on average for those without an upper secondary qualification and 86% compared to 78% on average for those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment).
- Expenditure per student (from primary to tertiary level, including research and development) in Portugal is in the middle of OECD countries range, and lower than the average (USD 12 956 compared to USD 15 023 on average), but in relative terms, Portugal is among the countries with highest proportions of expenditure per student compared to GDP per capita (29%, above the OECD average of 25%).
- The lack of teachers at the start or during the school year is a growing concern in many countries. In Portugal, the percentage of students in schools whose principals reported that instruction is hindered by a lack of teaching staff increased by more than 30 percentage points between 2018 and 2022, above the average of 21 percentage points. The ageing of the teaching workforce may increase the need for teachers in the near future. In Portugal the share of teachers aged 50 and

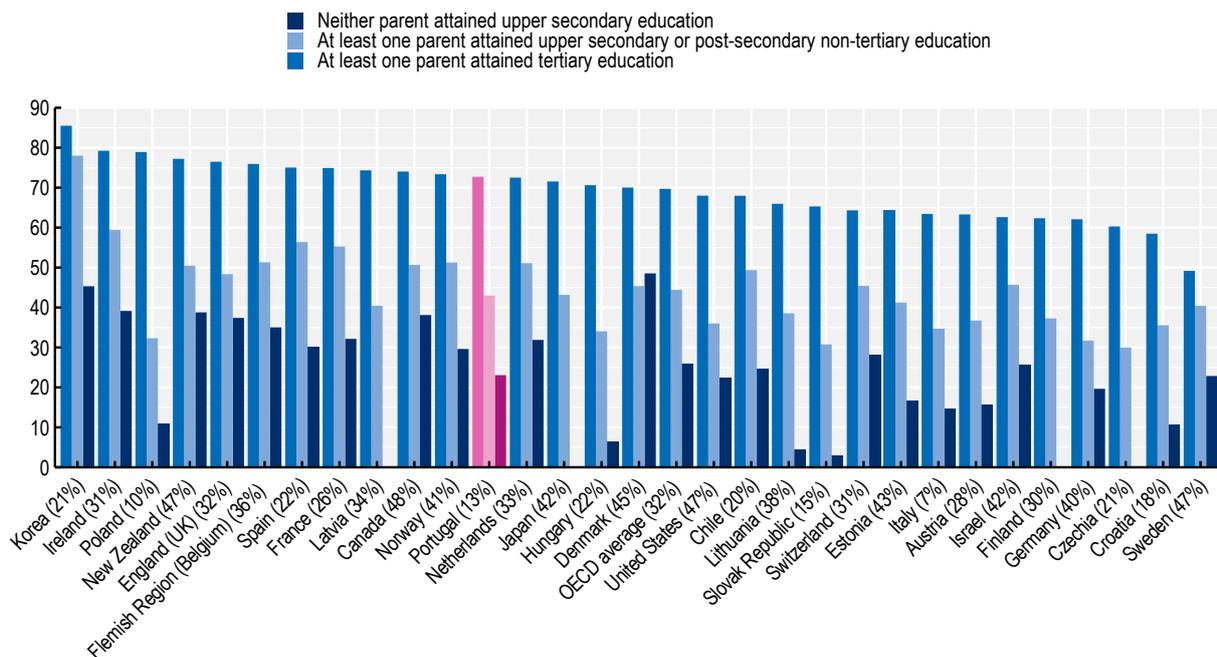
over in primary and secondary education increased significantly between 2013 and 2023 and exceeded 50% in 2023 (compared to 38% on average). Reflecting staffing pressure, Portugal experienced a rise in the share of non-fully qualified teachers, from 1.6% in 2014/15 to 6.5% 2022/23.

## The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- Educational inequalities persist across generations. In all countries with available data, young adults (25-34 year-olds) are significantly more likely to attain a tertiary qualification if their parents have also done so. In Portugal, 73% of 25-34 year-olds with at least one tertiary-educated parent have also attained a tertiary qualification, compared to only 23% among those whose parents did not complete upper secondary education. This tertiary-attainment gap of 50 percentage points is larger than the OECD average gap of 44 percentage points (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary education, by parental educational attainment (2023)**

Survey of Adult Skills, in per cent



Note: The percentage in parentheses represents the share of tertiary-educated parents.

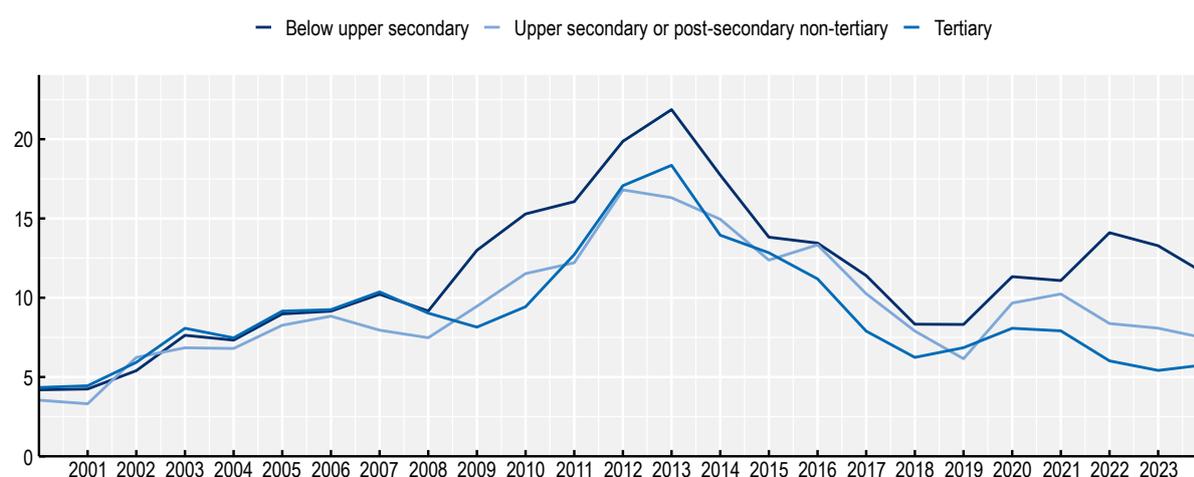
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table A1.4 (available on line).

- The share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) without upper secondary attainment continues to decline across the OECD, reaching an average of 13%. This trend also continues in Portugal, where the share fell from 24% to 16% between 2019 and 2024.
- Individuals with greater educational attainment generally face a lower risk of unemployment and earn higher wages. Completing upper secondary education is particularly important in reducing the risk of unemployment. On average across the OECD, 12.9% of economically active young adults (25-34 year-olds) without an upper secondary qualification are unemployed, compared to 6.9% of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. Those who go on to gain a

tertiary qualification see a relatively smaller further reduction in unemployment, with 4.9% of tertiary-educated young adults unemployed on average across the OECD. This pattern is similar in Portugal (albeit at a lower level): 11.5% of young adults without an upper secondary qualification are unemployed, compared to 7.4% of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and 5.8% of those with tertiary attainment (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Trends in unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds in Portugal, by educational attainment (2000 to 2024)**

In per cent



For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table A3.5.

- On average, individuals with a master's or equivalent degree have significantly higher employment rates and earnings than those with a bachelor's or equivalent degree. However, the share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) attaining a master's or equivalent qualification varies widely across OECD countries, ranging from 1% to 39% in 2024. In Portugal, 17% of 25-34 year-olds hold a master's or equivalent degree, which is similar to the OECD average of 16%. This represents a small increase since 2019, when the share was 16%.
- The average wage gap between individuals (25-64 year-olds) with and without upper secondary educational attainment is relatively modest across OECD countries. On average across the OECD, workers without upper secondary qualifications earn on average 17% less than those who have completed upper secondary education, while workers with tertiary attainment earn 54% more than those with upper secondary attainment. In Portugal, the wage gap between workers with and without upper secondary attainment is similar to the OECD average, at 16%. The gap between those with upper secondary and tertiary attainment is larger than the OECD average, at 74%.
- In most OECD countries, a significant share of adults have low levels of literacy proficiency, defined as at or below Level 1 (on a scale of 0-5) in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Individuals at this level can only understand very short texts with minimal distracting information. In Portugal, 46% of 25-64 year-olds have literacy skills at or below Level 1, which is above the OECD average of 27%.
- Educational attainment and skills are closely linked, although the strength of this relationship varies across countries. In Portugal, tertiary-educated adults score, on average, 36 points higher in

literacy proficiency than those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment in the Survey of Adult Skills. This gap is wider than the OECD average difference of 34 points.

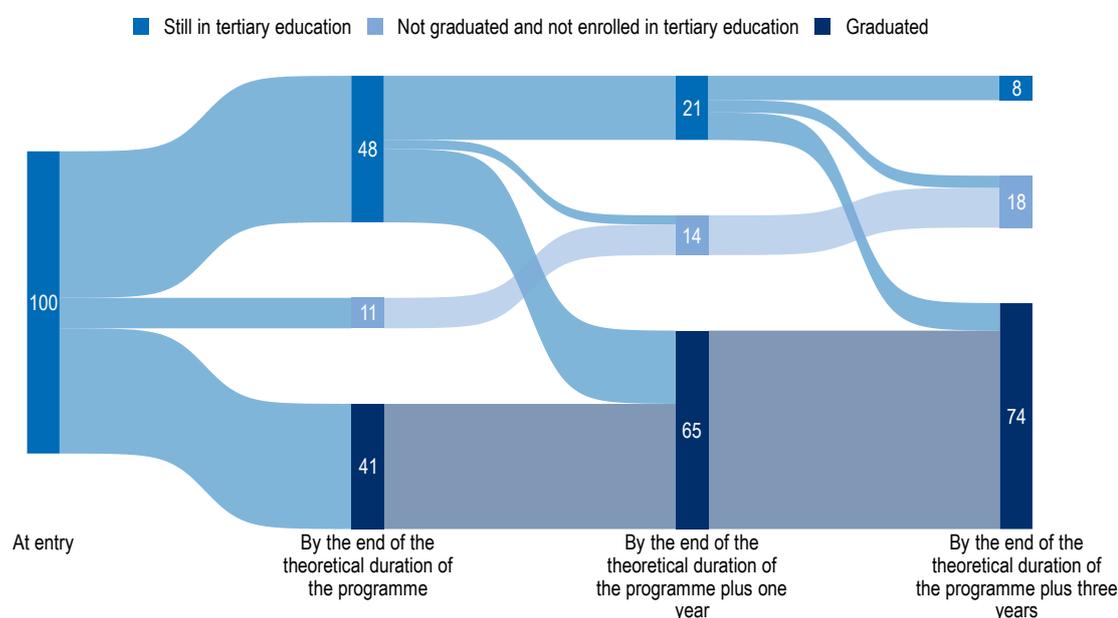
- In Portugal, as in all OECD countries, adults with better literacy skills are more likely to participate in education and training. In 2023, 80% of adults (25-64 year-olds) with high literacy proficiency (i.e. at or above Level 4) in the Survey of Adult Skills participated in formal and/or non-formal education and training in the last year, compared to just 22% of those with proficiency at or below Level 1.

## Access to education, participation and progression

- Education systems must adapt to changes in the number of children by expanding or reducing provision accordingly. In many countries, the population of children aged 0-4 changed significantly between 2013 and 2023 and is projected to change further by 2033. Portugal experienced a decline of 10% in the number of 0-4 year-olds, and is projected to see a decline of 2% between 2023 and 2033.
- The share of students in lower secondary education who are at least two years older than the expected age for their grade varies widely across OECD countries, ranging from virtually none in some countries to over 10% in others. In Portugal, the share is in the middle of the OECD distribution in 2023, at 7%.
- Bachelor's or equivalent programmes are the main entry point into tertiary education in most OECD countries, with an average of 78% of those starting tertiary education for the first time enrolling in such programmes. In Portugal, the share is even higher at 81%.
- Women make up the majority of first-time entrants to tertiary education in most OECD countries. In Portugal, they accounted for 53% of first-time entrants in 2023, down from 55% in 2013. Across the OECD, women make up 54% of new entrants on average, the same share as in 2013.
- Across the OECD, the two most popular broad fields of study are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and business, administration, and law, each accounting for 23% of graduates from bachelor's or equivalent programmes. They are closely followed by the broad field of arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information, at 22% of graduates. In Portugal, 24% of bachelor's degree students graduate from a STEM field, 22% from business, administration and law, and 25% from arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information.
- In many countries, it is common for new entrants to bachelor's programmes to take at least one gap year between the end of their upper secondary education and the start of their tertiary education. In Portugal, 39% of new entrants do so, below the OECD average of 44%.
- Completion rates reflect the share of new entrants to bachelor's programmes who successfully obtain a tertiary degree within specified timeframes. These rates remain low in most OECD countries. In Portugal, 41% of new entrants complete their bachelor's degree within the theoretical duration of the programme. This rises to 65% one year after the expected end date, and to 74% three years after. In comparison, the OECD average completion rate is 43% within the theoretical duration, increasing to 59% after an additional year and 70% after three years (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Status of new entrants into bachelor's programmes in Portugal, by timeframe**

In per cent



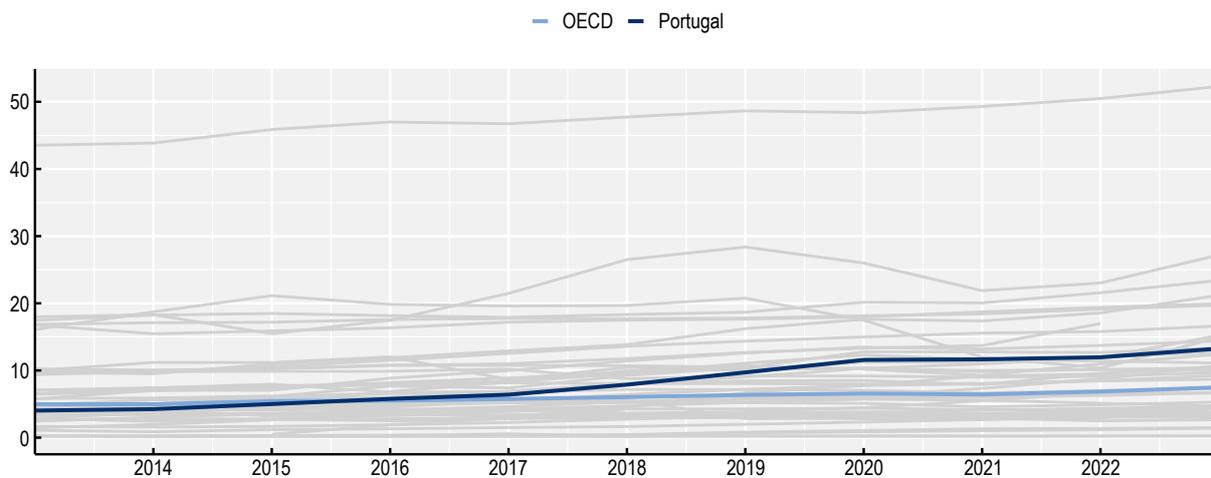
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table B5.1.

- In all countries, women starting bachelor's programmes are more likely than their male peers to successfully complete their tertiary studies within the three years after the theoretical end of their programme. In Portugal, the gender gap is 15 percentage points (81% for women compared to 66% for men), which is larger than the OECD average of 12 percentage points.
- Completion rates vary by field of study. On average across the OECD, only 58% of new entrants to bachelor's programmes in STEM fields have graduated at that level in the same field within three years after the expected end of their studies. Completion rates in the field of health and welfare are significantly higher, at 74%. In Portugal, STEM completion rates are 61%, lower than those for health and welfare, at 81%.
- Students who do not complete their tertiary education may drop out at various stages. High dropout rates in the first year can signal a mismatch between student expectations and the content or demands of their programmes, possibly reflecting a lack of career guidance for prospective students or insufficient support for new entrants. In Portugal, the share of first-time entrants in bachelor's programmes who drop out after the first year is lower than the OECD average, at 8% (compared to 13%).
- The 2023 completion rate data refers to students whose programme was expected to end in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some countries saw notable increases in completion rates during the pandemic, probably due to policies aimed at facilitating graduation, others experienced moderate declines. In Portugal, completion rates of new entrants to bachelor's programmes during the pandemic increased slightly, by nearly 4 percentage points compared to three years earlier (from 37.9% to 41.4%).
- International student mobility in tertiary education continues to rise across the OECD, with some countries experiencing substantial growth in the share of international students between 2018 and

2023. On average, 7.4% of all tertiary students across the OECD were international or foreign students, compared to 6% in 2018. Portugal saw an increase, with the share rising from 7.9% to 13.3% (Figure 4). In Portugal, large proportions of international mobile students come from Africa (42%) and from Latin America and the Caribbean (more than 30%), reflecting historical and cultural ties rooted in former colonial relationships, as well as the importance of the language of study.

**Figure 4. Trends in the share of international or foreign students in tertiary education (2013 to 2023)**

In per cent



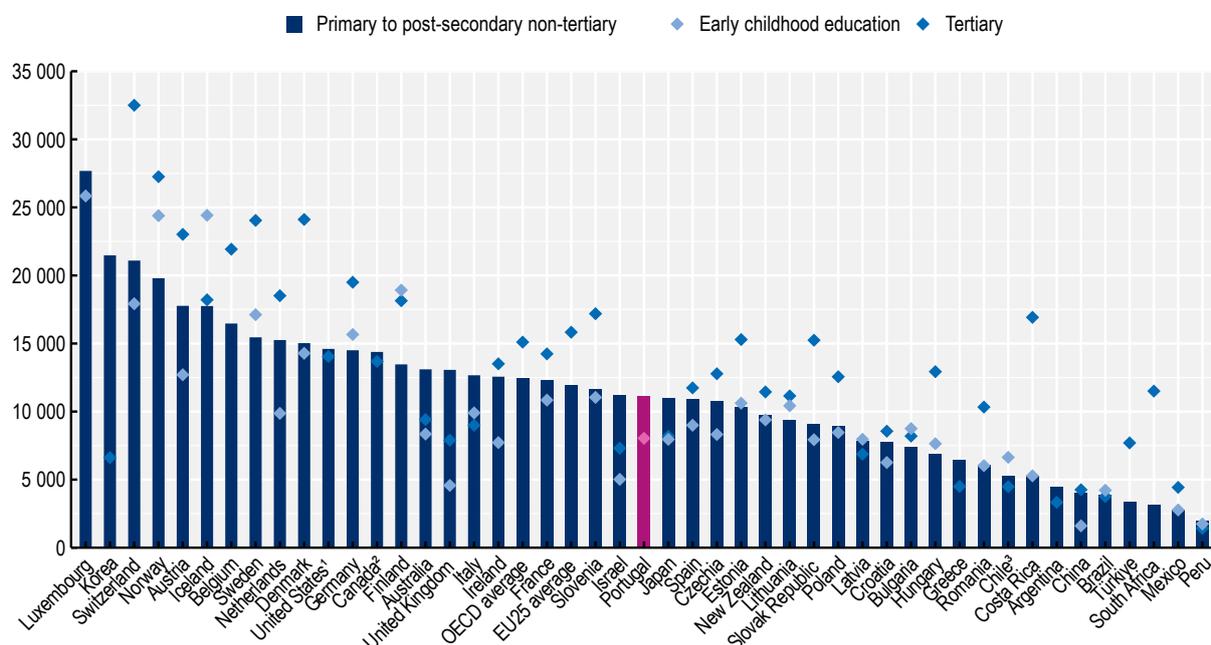
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table B4.3.

## Financial resources invested in education

- There are significant disparities in how much governments spend each year in education across OECD, partner and accession countries. Portugal spends USD 11 124 per student from primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels, placing it at the middle of the country range, which spans from less than USD 2 000 to more than USD 27 000 (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Government expenditure per full-time equivalent student, by level of education (2022)**

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs, expenditure on educational institutions



Note: Expenditure at tertiary level includes R&D. Expenditure per student in early childhood education is based on headcounts rather than full-time equivalent students. Expenditure at tertiary level for Luxembourg (USD 54 384) is not shown in the figure.

1. Year of reference differs from 2022.

2. Primary includes pre-primary education.

3. Includes payments by households outside educational institutions.

For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table C1.1 and Table C1.2.

- In contrast to most other countries, government expenditure in Portugal is lower at tertiary level, including research and development (R&D), than at primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels. Government expenditure in Portugal amounts to USD 8 038 per tertiary student compared to the OECD average of USD 15 102.
- A large part of the disparity in expenditure per student across OECD, partner and accession countries reflects differences in national income levels. When expenditure is measured as a share of GDP, cross-country differences tend to be smaller, ranging from 2.5% of GDP to 6.9%. In Portugal, education investment in primary to tertiary education stands at 4.8% of GDP, which is similar to the OECD average of 4.7% by this measure.
- Governments are the primary source of education funding in all OECD countries, especially for the levels covered by compulsory education. In Portugal, governments provide 88.3% of total funding for primary, secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary education (before transfers to the private sector), which is below the OECD average of 90.1%. At the pre-primary and tertiary levels, private funding often plays a larger role. In Portugal, 68.2% of pre-primary education funding (after transfers) and 56.1% of tertiary education funding (before transfers) come from public sources, compared to OECD averages of 85.6% and 71.9%, respectively.
- Although expenditure per student from primary to tertiary levels increased on average across OECD countries between 2015 and 2022 in real terms (from USD 11 955 to USD 13 210), government spending on education declined in relative terms from 10.9% of public budgets to

10.1%. This suggests the relative priority given to education in overall public spending has fallen across the OECD. In Portugal, expenditure per student increased from USD 10 855 to USD 11 655, while the share devoted to education increased from 9.1% of public budgets to 9.5% over this period.

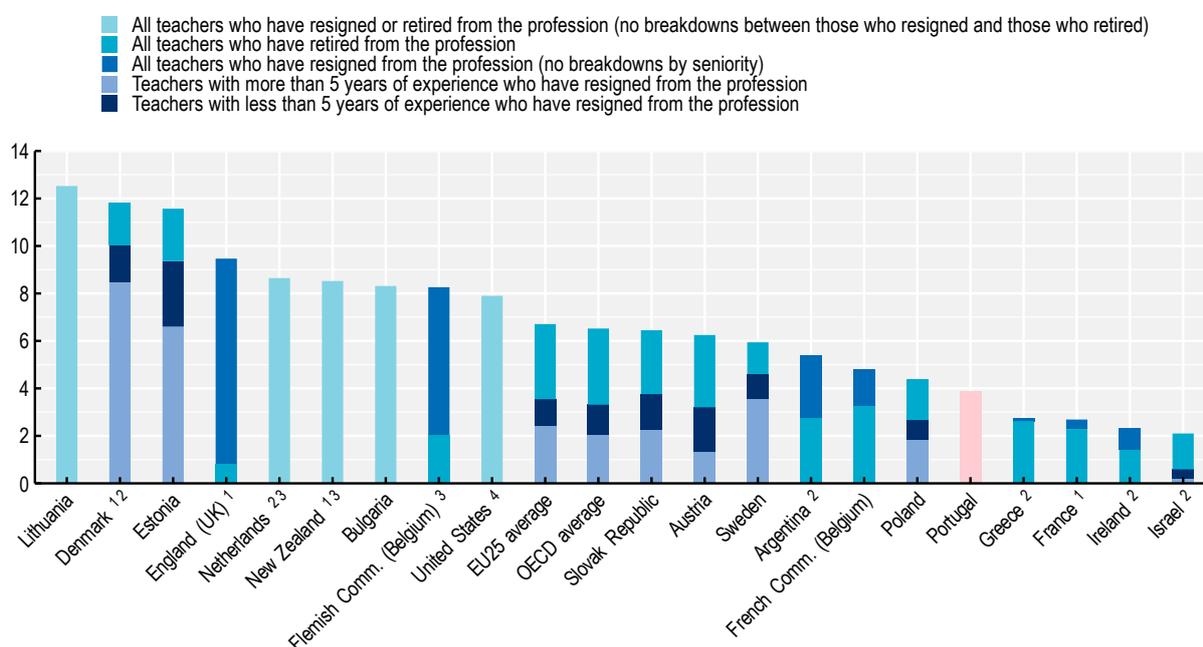
- At pre-primary level, government expenditure in Portugal increased by 9.3% between 2015 and 2022. This is despite a decrease of 0.8% in the number of children enrolled. As a result, government expenditure per child has increased, by 10.2%, compared to an average increase of 24% across the OECD since 2015.

## Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- High teacher turnover can place additional pressure on recruitment, while very low turnover may limit the renewal of the teaching workforce. In most countries with available data, between 1% and 3% of teachers retire each year. However, the share of teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement varies more widely, ranging from almost none in some countries to nearly 10% in others. Portugal is among the countries with moderate turnover, with no further breakdown between retirements and resignations available (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Share of fully qualified teachers who left the profession by resigning or retiring in pre-primary, primary and secondary education (2022/23)**

In per cent, full-time and part-time, public institutions



1. Academic year 2021/22 for Denmark, England (UK), France and New Zealand.

2. Only primary education in Argentina. Excluding pre-primary education in Greece and Ireland. Excluding upper secondary education in Denmark and Israel. Excluding upper secondary vocational education in the Netherlands.

3. Includes non-fully qualified teachers.

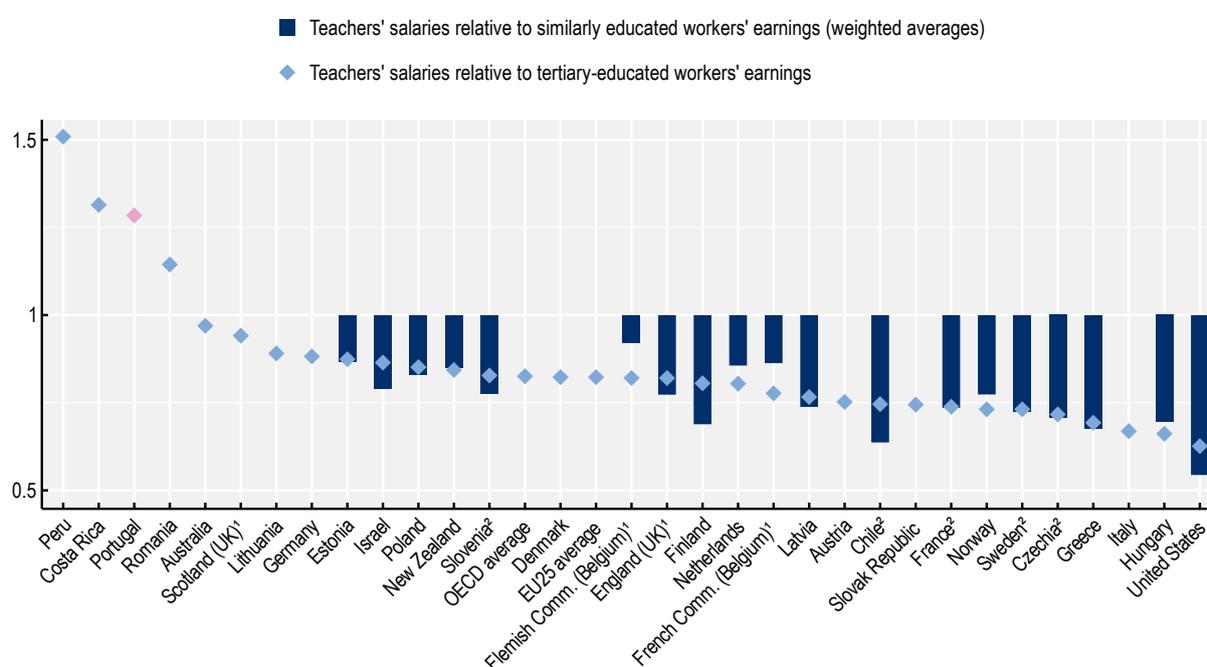
4. Includes teachers who left the profession because they were appointed to other positions in the education sector.

For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table D8.4.

- Competitive salaries can make the teaching profession more attractive, particularly since teachers in many countries earn less than other tertiary-educated workers. In Portugal, the actual salaries of primary teachers are 28% higher than those of tertiary-educated, full-time, full year workers, compared to an average of 17% lower across the OECD. However, increasing teacher salaries can be financially challenging, as staff costs make up the largest share of education expenditure (Figure 7). This may be partly explained by the fact that the share of teachers aged 50 has significantly increased in Portugal (from 31% in 2013 to 56% in 2023), and consequently, a large proportion of teachers may be close to the top of their teaching career.

**Figure 7. Actual salaries of primary teachers relative to earnings of tertiary-educated workers (2024)**

Ratio of salaries to the earnings of full-time, full-year workers aged 25-64



Note: Data refer to the ratio of annual average salaries (including bonuses and allowances) of teachers and school heads in public institutions relative to the earnings of workers with similar educational attainment (weighted average) and to the earnings of full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education. Earnings of workers with similar educational attainment to teachers are weighted by the distribution of teachers (or school heads) by qualification level (see Tables X2.10 and X2.11). As values close to one may be difficult to identify in the figure, please refer to the source table.

1. Data on earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education refer to the whole country.

2. Year of reference for salaries of teachers differs from 2024.

For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>, Table D3.2.

- Since 2015, actual average salaries of primary teachers have increased in real terms by 14.6% on average across the OECD. In Portugal, they decreased by 1.8% between 2015 and 2024.
- The amount of compulsory instruction time affects teacher salary costs as it influences the number of teachers needed, combined with other factors such as class size and teaching time of teachers. In Portugal, students receive 874 hours of compulsory instruction per year in primary education and 818 hours in lower secondary education, respectively above and below the OECD average of 804 hours in primary and 909 hours in lower secondary education (over primary and lower

secondary education the number of compulsory instruction hours in Portugal is slightly lower than the OECD average).

- School holidays in primary education last 15.4 weeks per year in Portugal (all breaks combined), compared to 13.4 weeks across the OECD.
- In Portugal, 38% of instruction time in primary education is allocated to mathematics and reading, writing and literature, falling to 27% in lower secondary education. In comparison, the OECD average is for 41% of instruction time in primary education and 27% in lower secondary education to be devoted to these core subjects.
- Across the OECD, the average class size at primary level has not changed since 2013, at 20.6 students. In Portugal, the average class size in primary education in 2023 was 20.4 students, down by 0.6 since 2013.
- At tertiary level, the average ratio of students to academic staff varies across different types of institutions. In many countries, institutions with a strong research focus, defined as those with more than three doctoral graduates per 100 graduates, tend to have lower student staff ratios than those with a smaller share of doctoral graduates. This is not the case in Portugal, where institutions with greater research focus have an average of 11 students per academic staff member, compared to 10 students per academic staff member at institutions with a smaller share of doctoral graduates.
- Countries use a range of admission systems to tertiary public education institutions. These vary as to whether admission is open or selective, and whether applications are submitted directly to institutions or to a central body. In Portugal, admission is selective. Applicants submit their applications directly to institutions or to a central body, depending on the programme.
- In most countries, academic staff salaries vary significantly by seniority. Staff in junior academic positions often earn well below the average salary for tertiary-educated, full-time, full year workers, while staff in senior positions — such as full professors — typically earn well above this average. In Portugal, junior academic staff earn 82% more than workers with at least a bachelor's or equivalent degree, while senior academic staff earn 169% more.

## More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2025 and to access the full set of indicators, see: <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-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 2025: Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes, <https://doi.org/10.1787/fcfaf2d1-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://data-explorer.oecd.org/> 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](mailto:EDU.EAG@oecd.org).

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