

Education and Training Monitor 2025

Portugal



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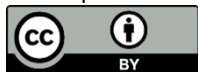
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The Education and Training Monitor's country reports present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy development at all education levels in the 27 EU Member States. They give the reader more in-depth insight into the performance of a country as regards the EU-level targets agreed within the European Education Area based on the latest available evidence. They take into account the new set of education and skills targets for 2030 proposed in the 2025 Union of Skills Communication of March 2025 as well as the targets suggested in the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area Strategic Framework.

The Key indicators section presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators.

Section 1 focuses on STEM education.

Section 2 covers early childhood education and care.

Section 3 deals with school education and basic skills.

Section 4 covers vocational education and training.

Section 5 discusses measures in tertiary education.

Section 6 covers adult skills and learning.

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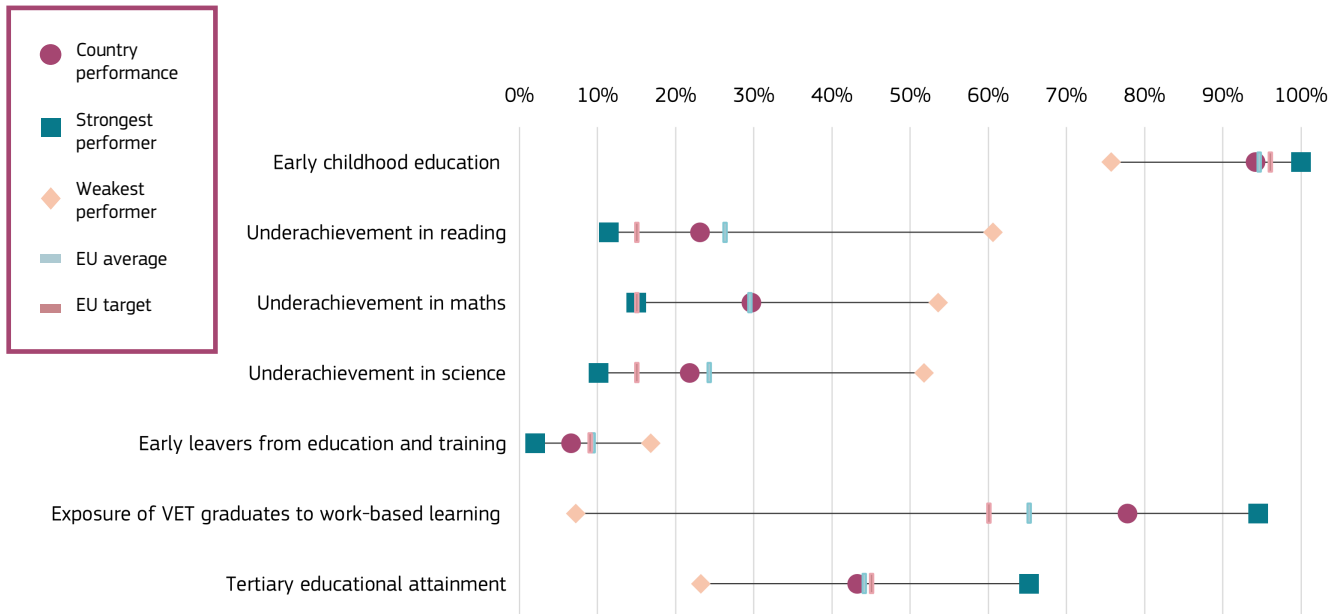
More background data at: op.europa.eu/etm

KEY INDICATORS

			Portugal		EU	
			2015	2024	2015	2024
EU-level targets			2030 target			
Participation in early childhood education (from age 3 to starting age of compulsory primary education) ¹	≥ 96%		88.7% ^d	94.2% ^{23, p}	91.9% ^d	94.6% ^{23, d}
Low-achieving eighth-graders in digital skills ²	< 15%		34.0% ^{18, †}	37.0% ^{23, ††}	: ^{18, z}	43.0% ²³
Low-achieving 15-year-olds in ³ :	Reading	< 15%	17.2%	23.1% ²²	20.0%	26.2% ²²
	Maths	< 15%	23.8%	29.7% ²²	22.2%	29.5% ²²
	Science	< 15%	17.4%	21.8% ²²	21.1%	24.2% ²²
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24) ⁴	< 9%*		13.5%	6.6%	11.0%	9.4%
Exposure of VET graduates to work-based learning ⁵	≥ 60% (2025)		76.8% ²¹	77.8%	60.3% ²¹	65.2%
Tertiary educational attainment (age 25-34) ⁶	≥ 45%**		33.2%	43.2%	36.5%	44.1%
Participation of adults in learning (age 25-64) ⁷	≥ 60%		38.0% ¹⁶	33.4% ²²	37.4% ¹⁶	39.5% ²²
Proposed EU-level targets						
Top-performing 15-year-olds in ³ :	Reading	≥ 15%	7.5%	4.7% ²²	8.6%	6.5% ²²
	Maths	≥ 15%	11.4%	6.7% ²²	10.7%	7.9% ²²
	Science	≥ 15%	7.4%	4.9% ²²	7.1%	6.9% ²²
Enrolment in STEM fields in initial medium-level VET ⁸	Overall	≥ 45%	33.0%	30.5% ²³	34.0% ^d	36.3% ^{23, d}
	Of which, female	≥ 25%	15.1%	10.9% ²³	14.0% ^d	15.4% ^{23, d}
Enrolment in STEM fields at tertiary level ⁹	Overall	≥ 32%	30.0%	28.9% ²³	27.6% ^d	26.9% ²³
	Of which, female	≥ 40%	32.0%	31.3% ²³	29.4% ^d	32.2% ²³
Enrolment in ICT PhD programmes ⁹	Overall	≥ 5%	2.7%	2.2% ²³	3.4% ^d	3.8% ²³
	Of which, female	≥ 33%	23.4%	22.3% ²³	20.5% ^d	24.3% ²³
Equity indicator ^{10, ***}	≥ 25%		21.0%	16.0% ²²	21.1%	16.3% ²²
Civic knowledge ^{11, ***}	≥ 85%		: ¹⁶	79.8% ²²	72.5% ¹⁶	63.1% ²²

Sources: 1 = Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enra21]; 2 = IEA (ICILS); 3 = OECD (PISA); 4 = Eurostat, [edat_lfse_14]; 5 = Eurostat, [edat_lfs_9919]; 6 = Eurostat, [edat_lfse_03]; 7 = Eurostat, [trng_aes_100], excluding guided on-the-job training; 8 = Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enra03]; 9 = Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enrt03]; 10 = European Commission (Joint Research Centre) calculations based on OECD PISA 2022 data; 11 = IEA (ICCS). More information (including gender breakdown or degree of urbanisation) can be found in the [Monitor Toolbox](#). Notes: the indicator used (ECE) refers to early childhood education and care programmes which are considered by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) to be 'educational' and therefore constitute the first level of education in education and training systems – ISCED level 0; the equity indicator shows the share of 15-year-olds from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds performing well (at least level 4) in at least one domain (reading, mathematics and science) in the PISA tests; b = break in time series, d = definition differs, f = Flanders-only figure, m = missing values, nr = North Rhine Westphalia-only figure, p = provisional, u = low reliability, z = EU average not calculated due to limited coverage of Member States, figures to be interpreted with caution, : = not available, 16 = 2016, 18 = 2018, 21 = 2021, 22 = 2022, 23 = 2023, * = proposed new target for early leavers from education and training: < 7%, ** = proposed new target for tertiary educational attainment: 50%, *** = target suggested in the European Education Area (EEA) mid-term evaluation report. † = Nearly met guidelines for sampling participation rates after replacement schools were included. †† = National defined population covers 90% to 95% of the national target population.

Position in relation to strongest and weakest performers



Source: DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2024, UOE 2023) and OECD (PISA 2022).





Snapshot

Portugal is strengthening the ability of its education system to respond to labour market needs. Portugal has also made progress in increasing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) enrolment and modernising vocational education and training (VET). However, challenges remain in skills acquisition and alignment. Tertiary educational attainment expanded steadily in the past decade and enrolment in STEM fields slightly exceeds the EU average. However, labour shortages persist, particularly in engineering and ICT, and female representation in these fields remains limited. At the VET level, efforts are underway to integrate more STEM content, supported by RRP investment in technological centres. Basic skills outcomes remain weak (Council of the EU, 2025). Almost one-third of 15 year-olds underperform in mathematics, and recent TIMSS results placed Portugal last among participating EU countries in maths and science. To address this, Portugal launched a new learning assessment system (ModA) and expanded priority intervention programmes in disadvantaged areas. Adult learning is also being strengthened, with EU-funded programmes targeting low-qualified groups. Yet, participation remains below the EU average, and a large share of the adult population lacks basic or digital skills. Effective monitoring of current initiatives will be key to boosting outcomes.





1. STEM EDUCATION

Despite relatively strong enrolment in engineering, Portugal faces notable labour shortages in both engineering and ICT sectors. In 2023, 28.9% of higher education students in Portugal enrolled in STEM fields, slightly exceeding the EU average of 26.9% but falling short of the proposed EU target of 32% by 2030¹. This share fell slightly from 29.2% in 2022 and 30.0% in 2015, reflecting a gradual decline in STEM participation. Engineering remains the most popular STEM field, attracting 68.5% of STEM enrolments, well above the EU average of 54.6%. Nevertheless, in 2023, the president of the Portuguese Order of Engineers also recently pointed to a shortage of engineers in the public sector², driven by financial constraints and low professional prestige, with civil engineering identified as one of the most understaffed professions. At the doctoral level, students pursuing ICT made up just 2.2% of all PhD enrolments, lagging behind the EU average (3.8%)³ and the proposed EU target of 5%.

Women remain underrepresented in STEM pathways, particularly in ICT and engineering. In 2023, women accounted for 31.3% of tertiary students enrolled in STEM in Portugal, standing below both the

EU average of 32.2%⁴ and the EU proposed target of 40%. Female participation was highest in natural sciences, where women made up 53.5% of students, slightly exceeding the EU average of 51.5%, though slightly down from 56% in 2015. By contrast, only 18.4% of ICT students were women (below the EU average of 20.3%), a figure that has remained virtually unchanged since 2015 (18.3%). At the PhD level in ICT, women made up 22.3% of doctoral students, falling short of both the EU average of 24.3% and the proposed target of 33%, and marking a slight decline from 23.3% in 2022 with 0.9 pps⁵.

Efforts to reinforce STEM studies in the vocational education and training system are ongoing. In 2023, 30.5% of pupils enrolled in medium-level VET in 2023 were in STEM fields, which is below the EU average of 36.3% and far from the proposed EU-level target of at least 45% by 2030). Among these learners, only 10.9% were female⁶, compared to an EU average of 15.4% in 2023 and a proposed target of at least 25% by 2030. Portugal has been working to further incorporate STEM courses into the national VET catalogue and syllabus. The most significant investment is supported under the national recovery

¹ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enrt03.

² Flash Eurobarometer.

³ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enrt03.

⁴ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enrt03.

⁵ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enrt03.

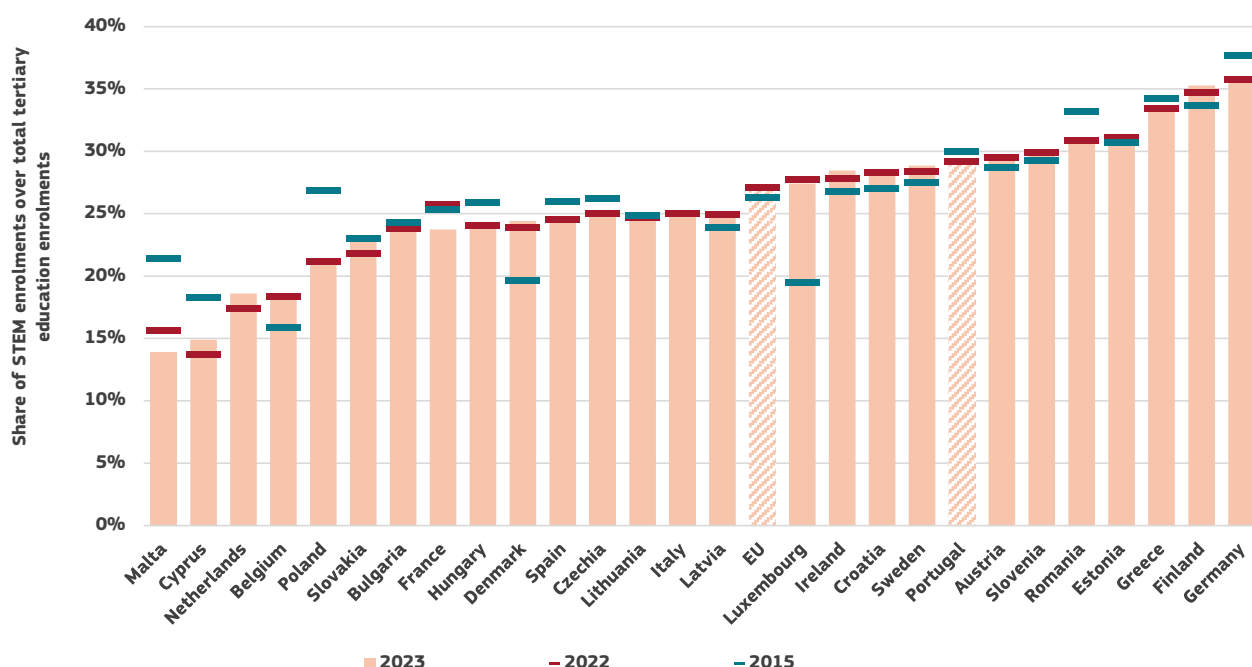
⁶ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enra03.

and resilience plan (RRP), namely the EUR 710 million investment 'Modernisation of vocational education and training provision and institutions'. This comprises the creation of specialised technological centres focused on high-potential sectors such as industry, renewable energy, ICT and digital occupations. In 2024, 404 modernisation projects were in progress.

Portugal has put in place several initiatives aimed at increasing interest and involvement in STEM. Engagement is being supported through the *Clubes Ciência Viva na Escola*, which as of 2023 operated 897 clubs across 718 school clusters, reaching over 717 000 students and more than 3 500 teachers. These clubs aim to create interest in science and technology through extracurricular activities and partnerships with research institutions. In general, Portugal has planned investments under its RRP in programmes such as *Impulso Jovens STEAM* and

Impulso Adultos, which target young people and adult learners. These aim to increase by 10 000 the number of tertiary STEAM graduates in first-cycle programmes and short-term courses, train more than 20 000 adults in cooperation with employers and higher education institutions and support adults with the recognition, validation or certification of their competences (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025). In 2023, 10 071 new STEM graduates were registered, exceeding the forecast by 166% (DGES, 2024). The Digital Transition Action Plan for Education, launched in 2020, is strengthening digital skills and infrastructure, and promoting the digital professional development of teachers (Ávila et al., 2024). Finally, ERDF investments of EUR 147 million for research infrastructure and EUR 339 million for research and innovation play a pivotal role in strengthening STEM career pathways and the competitiveness of Portuguese regions.

Figure 1: Despite a slight drop, Portuguese STEM enrolments still exceed the EU



Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_enrt03).

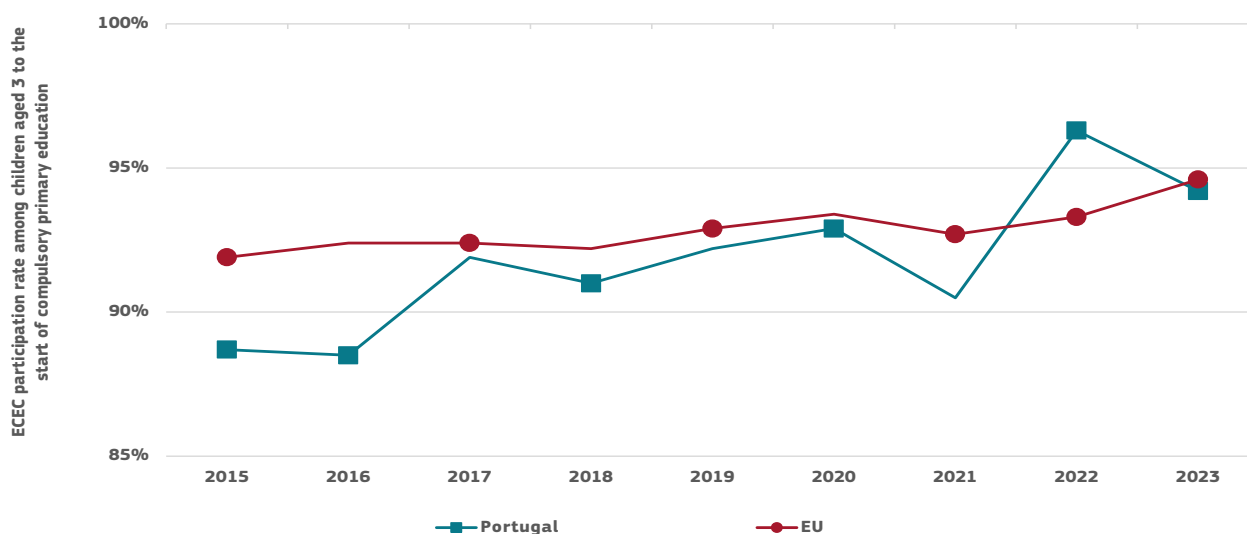
2. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Portugal continues to expand its early childhood education and care (ECEC) network, yet capacity gaps persist. Participation of children aged three to the age of starting compulsory education was 94.2% (EU: 94.6%) in 2023, slightly falling from 2022's 96.3%, but highlighting a positive trend since 2015 (88.7%)⁷. Among children under three, 59.5% were enrolled in formal care in 2024, steadily up from 47.2% in 2022 and significantly above the EU average of 39.3%⁸. However, children at risk of poverty or social exclusion were less likely to participate (46.7% vs 63.1%)⁹. The 'Creche Feliz' (Happy Childcare) programme has helped expand access for children under three. Introduced in 2022 and extended in 2023 to selected private and solidarity institutions, the programme has made daycare free of charge, helping reduce affordability barriers (Diário da República, 2024a). From September 2024, creches are free for all eligible children (Eurydice, 2025). From the age of three, children are legally entitled to pre-primary education in centre-based *jardins de infância*, which are free of charge for 25 hours a week (Eurydice, 2025). However, state supply of places lags behind demand. In 2024, an estimated 29 000 children completed daycare, including 12 070 under *Creche Feliz*, but about 12 000 remained without a pre-school placement due to a shortfall of 800 classrooms.



New partnerships aim to expand capacity and reduce regional disparities. The government is working with municipalities to add 170 new preschool classrooms. It has launched a EUR 42.5 million investment to create 200 classrooms in private social solidarity institutions between the 2025/2026 and 2027/2028 school years (Diário da República, 2024b). These measures respond to critical shortages in urban coastal municipalities such as Amadora, Sintra and Lisbon. National pedagogical guidelines for creches, aligned with existing preschool curricula, were approved in March 2024 (Eurydice, 2025). At the same time, staff shortages remain a challenge, with shortfalls observed throughout the entire ECEC cycle (Eurydice, 2025). Lastly, STEM and digital learning are not yet central in ECEC policy. However, the development of new national guidelines and the upcoming ECEC strategy could integrate age-appropriate science and numeracy learning, potentially building links to initiatives like RRP-funded *Clubes Ciência Viva na Escola*¹⁰ at later stages.

Figure 2: Portugal has closed the gap with the EU in ECEC rates among children aged 3+



Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_enra21).

⁷ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enra21.

⁸ Eurostat (EU-SILC): ilc_caindform25.

⁹ Eurostat (EU-SILC): ilc_caindform25. Participation figures for children under 3 remain less reliable due to limited and fragmented data coverage from private providers.

¹⁰ *Clubes Ciência Viva na Escola* – Government of Portugal.



3. SCHOOL EDUCATION AND BASIC SKILLS

Low levels of basic skills remain a major concern, also in terms of equity. PISA 2022 data show that 29.7% of 15 year-olds in Portugal fail to reach the minimum proficiency level in mathematics¹¹ (EU: 29.5%), a 5.9 percentage point increase since 2015 (OECD, 2023). The share of top performers (Level 5 or above) in maths fell from 11.4% (EU: 10.7%) to 6.7% (EU: 7.9%) over the same period – with potential repercussions on Portugal's competitiveness and innovation. Socio-economic background has a strong influence on educational outcomes, with 46.9% underachieving in maths in 2022, compared with 39.4% in 2018 (European Commission, 2024a). Inequalities have widened in line with EU trends with only 16.0% (EU: 16.3%) of low socio-economic status students performing well (at least at Level 4 in at least one domain) declining from 21.0% (EU: 21.1%) in 2015¹². TIMSS 2023 further highlighted a concerning drop in the performance of Portuguese students in maths and science, especially in the eighth grade, placing Portugal last among the 15 participating EU Member States (von Davier et al., 2024). In terms of civic knowledge, however, Portugal outperformed the EU average (63.1%) according the ICCS 2022 study, which found that 79.8% of Portuguese students have sufficient civic skills. Improving basic skills is a main objective of Portugal's programme for priority intervention educational areas (*Programa Territórios*

Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária - TEIP). In 2023, the fourth generation of the TEIP (TEIP4) was launched for the next six academic years, strengthening and refocusing previous measures while granting greater autonomy to educational communities.

National tests also point to worrying trends, but new tools could provide different insights. According to results from the 2024 *Provas de Aferição*¹³, only 11.1% of Year 5 students reached a sufficient level in Geometry and Measurement, and 22.5% in the data domain of mathematics, while in natural sciences, only 18.2% achieved satisfactory scores. Year 8 results showed particularly acute difficulties in language comprehension, with 84.5% of students in the lowest performance categories for reading and 79.2% for grammar. These figures show a decline since 2022, especially in receptive skills such as reading comprehension (IAVE, 2024). Geographical disparities persist: students in Alentejo, Algarve, and the Azores performed below the national average across most assessed areas (ibid.). To improve early identification of learning needs, new tools are being explored. During the 2024/2025 school year, the government replaced the *Provas de Aferição* with the new ModA – Learning Monitoring Tests. ModA assessments will be delivered digitally and national results will be published

¹¹ OECD (2023): Table I.B1.5.1.

¹² Own elaboration based on PISA 2022 and 2015 data.

¹³ The *Provas de Aferição* were national benchmarking tests aimed to provide an overlook of students' performance and learning in various subjects. They have been replaced by the ModA since school year 2024/2025.

every year in November, with the first full round covering Portuguese, mathematics and a discipline rotating each three years, in grades 4 and 6. In addition, ModA aim to provide diagnostic data at the level of pupil, class and school before the start of the academic year, allowing teachers to adjust their teaching accordingly (Government of Portugal, 2024a).

While overall basic skills outcomes are weak, a smaller group of students consistently demonstrates high performance in digital competencies. According to the 2023 International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) (IEA), 37.0% of eighth graders have a low level of digital skills (i.e. did not score at least level 2 proficiency in computer and information literacy (CIL). This stand below the EU average of 43.0% and far from the EU target of less than 15% by 2030. The home environment remains a key determinant of performance. Students with access to multiple computers at home scored 528 points in CIL while those without access scored 448 points on average, representing a gap of 80 points. The ICILS results also exposed gender differences. Girls outperformed boys in CIL (514 vs 505 points) while boys scored higher in computational thinking (489 vs 478 points; European Commission, 2024b; MESI, 2024). In this regard, Portugal has made major steps to promote the use of digital technologies in education. The national Digital Transition Action Plan and INCoDe.2030 framework continue to support professional development of teachers, the digital school infrastructure, and the provision of online resources, with a substantial contribution of EUR 674 million from the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Under INCoDe.2030, approximately 90% of primary and secondary teachers have voluntarily taken part in digital skills assessments based on the European DigCompEdu framework (Ávila et al., 2024). In addition, digital development plans have been implemented in most schools, encompassing organisational, pedagogical, and technological dimensions.

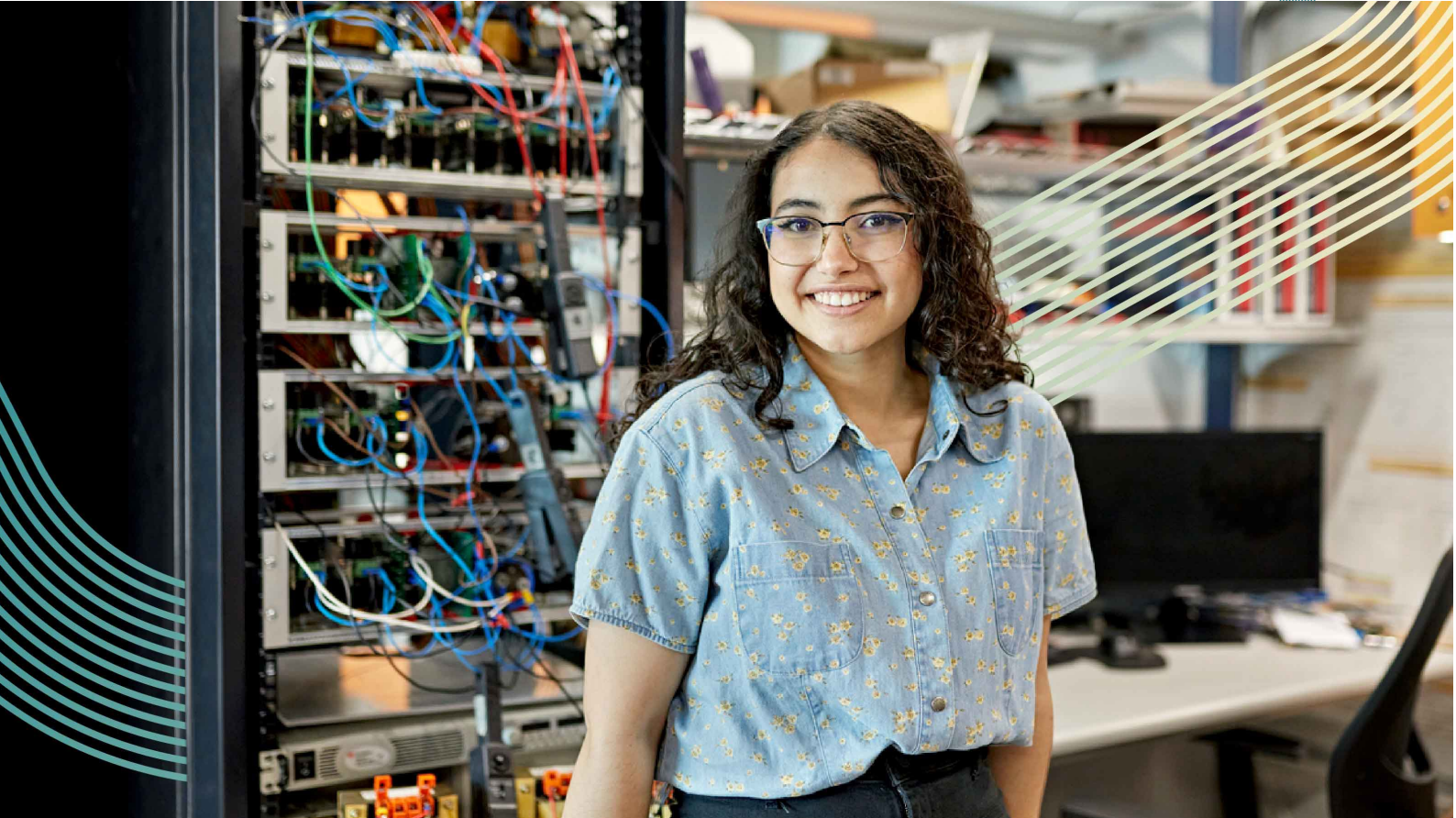
Socio-emotional well-being is a key policy priority. In 2025, Portugal published the most comprehensive national study to date on bullying and cyberbullying, based on a survey of 31 133 students aged 11-18. The study, led by the Task Force on Combating Bullying in Schools, found that 5.9% of students reported being victims of bullying and 6.1% of cyberbullying. Rates were higher among girls and non-binary students. The repercussions of bullying include lower educational outcomes, as students exposed to frequent bullying underperform in maths and other subjects (European Commission, 2024a). The report recommended shifting from punitive to restorative and preventive approaches, focusing on early detection, mediation, and

support networks (Government of Portugal, 2025a). In response, a national anti-bullying strategy was launched. It includes the creation of multidisciplinary school-based teams, a national reporting hotline, and targeted teacher training (Government of Portugal, 2025b).

Efforts to close learning gaps and reduce dropout risks are hampered by chronic shortages of qualified teachers. The flagship *Plano +Aulas +Sucesso* programme was introduced to support learning recovery and improve school outcomes, partly by reintegrating former professionals, but mostly by retaining and attracting teachers and enabling a more efficient management of educational staff. As of early 2025, the programme had retained 659 teachers and welcomed back 682 returning professionals, in addition to rehiring 55 retired teachers to teach on a flexible basis. However, concerns persist over the qualifications of newly recruited staff. Many possess only a first-cycle degree in education or related fields and lack teaching credentials or classroom experience. Stakeholders, including unions and school leaders, have warned that relying on underqualified staff risks undermining quality and the long-term effectiveness of equity-oriented reforms. Shortages are especially acute for special needs teachers. Several school clusters – set up to share resources more efficiently – report having only one or two specialist educators responsible for 50 to 60 students with special educational needs. This far exceeds the ratios required to ensure individualised support and inclusive education. These shortages are particularly problematic in rural or socio-economically disadvantaged regions, where recruiting specialised staff has proven most difficult.

Infrastructural upgrades are ongoing under the recovery and resilience plan. A total of €454 million has been allocated to build or modernise 77 schools – primarily 2nd and 3rd cycles and secondary education public schools.

The use of mobile phones in schools is emerging as a key topic of national debate. In 2024, the government issued a recommendation discouraging mobile phone use for students up to the start of high school and limiting usage during breaks in later years. In the summer of 2025, the Government announced a new decision to forbid the use of smartphones in schools for students from the 1st to the 6th grade starting from the 2025-2026 school year, with certain exceptions such as the use of phones for pedagogical activities. (Government of Portugal, 2025c). Teacher unions have been advocating for stricter regulation while parent associations support a more flexible approach based on school autonomy and pedagogical discretion.



4. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

VET investments and provision in Portugal have been increasing in recent years, yet further efforts are needed to align supply with labour market demand. In Portugal, 38.7% of pupils in medium-level education attend programmes with a vocational orientation (2023 data). More than three out of four (77.8% in 2024) recent VET graduates had experienced work-based learning (compared to 65.2% EU-wide)¹⁴. However, recent VET graduates have an employment rate below the EU average (75.5% vs 80.0%, in 2024)¹⁵. Portugal's main forecasting tool for skills needs SANQ (*Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidade de Qualificações*) serves as a solid base for VET provision across the entire country. However, more frequent forecast updates (currently every three years) would provide better curriculum and course offers that respond to labour market demand. The government intends to reorganise the VET system to further align it with business needs and the technological transition. It plans to do this with the revision of the national catalogue of qualifications to be finalised by March 2026. It also plans to review and systematise VET legislation and reform of the system that certifies training providers. Against the backdrop of high youth unemployment and labour shortages, aligning the VET offer with the labour market demand is crucial to improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness of VET.

EU funds provide substantial support to VET measures across the Portuguese mainland and its autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira. For instance, Component 6 of the RRP includes reforms and investments in labour and skills, with the VET reform being a key element. This reform is supported EUR 710million investment to modernise VET provision and establishments. Its goal is to install and modernise 365 specialised technological centres in vocational schools and schools offering professional courses and to enlarge and modernise the network of training centres of the public employment service (PES) and of the National Tourism Authority. The main thematic ESF+ programme – PESSOAS 2030 – includes an allocation of around EUR 1.5 billion for VET operations (*Cursos profissionais*), with a 2029 target of 366 000 participants. Moreover, the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira have accumulated allocations for VET of around EUR 118 million and EUR 80 million respectively.

¹⁴ Eurostat: edat_lfs_9919.

¹⁵ Eurostat: edat_lfs_24.

5. TERTIARY EDUCATION

Tertiary educational attainment in Portugal has shown a steady rise in the past decade. It stood at 43.2% among 25-34 year-olds in 2024 (EU: 44.1%), up from 33.2% in 2015¹⁶. Participation has increased steadily, with 428 206 students enrolled in 2023¹⁷. Increases have been observed over the past decade in both state (+18.2%) and private (+41.6%) institutions. Despite this progress, regional disparities persist. Tertiary attainment rates in 2024 vary from 22.3% in the Azores to 53.1% in the Lisbon metropolitan area¹⁸, which also hosts the highest number of students per head. To streamline access, 2024/2025 marked the first school year in which all general, special regime and contest-based admissions were launched simultaneously, offering 99 986 vacancies across state and private institutions.

Recent reforms aim to boost access, progression and completion. A salary bonus scheme was introduced for recent graduates under the age of 35, granting EUR 697 annually to those with a bachelor's degree and EUR 1 500 to those with a master's degree, disbursed over the same number of years as the completed cycle (Diário da República, 2024c). The scheme seeks to give value to academic qualifications and promote graduate retention in Portugal (Diário da República, 2024d). Efforts to address dropout rates include institutional learning success programmes supported by the RRP which establish mentoring and monitoring mechanisms, while the expansion of micro-credentials aims to offer flexible learning pathways that can re-engage students and support lifelong learning. Further RRP funding through the *Impulso Mais Digital* (More Digital Impulse) programme supports digital skills development and pedagogical innovation. In addition, a total of 33 consortia comprising 73 institutions have been selected to modernise undergraduate and postgraduate STEM offerings and establish pedagogical excellence centres, particularly outside metropolitan hubs.

International learning mobility remains modest. In 2023, the outward mobility rate of tertiary graduates (ISCED 5-8) was 10.2%, slightly below the EU average of 11.0%¹⁹. To address this, Portugal has introduced targeted policies promoting mobility and internationalisation. Performance-based funding tools have been deployed to incentivise institutions' engagement in mobility strategies. Complementary initiatives aim to expand awareness and access. For instance, the *Juventude Agitada* radio show in



Promoting green entrepreneurship through exchanges for young people

The project *Entrepreneurship for a Sustainable Future* brings together young people from across Europe, including Portugal's EducPro initiative, to build digital, green, and entrepreneurial skills through a dynamic youth exchange hosted in Denmark. Through workshops on business planning, sustainability, and responsible digital practices, participants explore how to develop socially and environmentally impactful ventures. Interactive activities, such as a Shark Tank-style pitch competition and a real-world 'Paperclip Challenge' in Aarhus encourage teamwork, creativity, and intercultural dialogue. The initiative promotes entrepreneurial resilience, sustainability literacy, and ethical innovation among young people while promoting cross-border networks. Participants also gain exposure to diverse perspectives through cultural exchange and shared learning, in line with Erasmus+ mobility objectives. Upon return, they act as multipliers, sharing knowledge within their communities. By empowering young people from different backgrounds to become agents of sustainable change, the project demonstrates the transformative potential of exchanges for developing inclusive and future-oriented skills.

Source: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2024-1-DK01-KA152-YOU-000233874>

the Azores, implemented by the youth association *Ajiter*, has successfully raised local interest in Erasmus+ opportunities and increased applications. The project uses informal radio segments to explain Erasmus+ options and promote European values. Broader participation by young people is also encouraged through initiatives like the Digital Youth Dialogue project, co-led by a Portuguese association under Erasmus+ Key Action 3. This project encouraged digital civic engagement among young people on European islands, including the Azores, facilitating e-participation in policy processes. Portugal's *QUALIFICA* programme further supports mobility and lifelong learning by offering guidance and tailored pathways to adults with low qualifications. Delivered via local *QUALIFICA* Centres in partnership with employers, municipalities, and education providers, it offers adults a second chance to engage with education, helping build a more mobile and skilled workforce (European Commission & PPMI, 2023).

¹⁶ Eurostat: edat_ifse_03.

¹⁷ Eurostat: educ_uoe_enrt02.

¹⁸ Eurostat: edat_ifse_04.

¹⁹ Eurostat: educ_uoe_mobg02.



6. ADULT SKILLS AND LEARNING

Despite some progress in recent years, the adult Portuguese population has a structural skills deficit, which hinders productivity and competitiveness. The most recent publication of the *Survey of Adult skills results*, from PIAAC (December 2024), presents a gloomy picture regarding the skills levels of the adult population in literacy, numeracy and problem solving (ranking among the poorest performers in the EU). The share of people aged 15-64 with an ISCED level of 2 or lower stood at 39% in 2023 is significantly above the EU average of 24.2%, confirming a trend over recent years. Although there is a sharp improvement from 2014, when the share was 56.4%, there is still a large pool of people with low educational attainment (particularly for the older cohorts).

EU funds provide substantial support for adult learning initiatives, but outreach towards low-qualified adults remains a challenge. The *QUALIFICA* programme remains the main instrument for adult education. The 2024 results show an increase in enrolments and the number of different training pathways for adults, compared to recent years. The national RRP invests EUR 225 million in the '*Adult Incentive*' programme to increase the qualification levels of the adult population. The ESF+ main thematic

programme PESSOAS 2030 allocates around EUR 178 million for adult education through the *QUALIFICA* centres with a target of 700 000 participants by 2029. The RRP also supports education and training for adults (*Educação e Formação de Adultos - EFA*), a double certification approach that allows low-qualified adults to improve their basic skills. Nevertheless, Portugal struggles to attract the low-qualified groups of the population and those living in poverty, including migrants. Weak outreach and participation capacity hinders the attainment of the 2030 goal of having at least 60% of adults participating in training each year (2022 data shows participation dropping to 33.4% (EU: 39.5%) from 38.0% in 2016)²⁰. On top of ongoing policy initiatives and implementation of measures for the adult learning system, Portugal needs to address remaining key challenges. An array of measures (mostly financed by ESF+ and the RRP) are in place to improve the qualifications of the adult population. Monitoring and evaluating their outcomes will be essential to improving their effectiveness.

²⁰ Eurostat: trng_aes_100.

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ANNEX: STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

[The structure of European education systems \(eurydice.eu\)](https://eurydice.eu/en/the-structure-of-european-education-systems)

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 'The structure of European education systems', Eurydice data and visuals, September 2025

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