

Special competitions to access higher education

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 PORTUGAL

Timeline



ID number 29212

Background

This measure is the result of a wide-ranging debate and was based on a study carried out by OECD. This study concluded that the current national competition for access to higher education was fully aligned with the curriculum of general education, obliging VET learners to take exams in subjects that were not part of their curriculum. This placed them in an uneven situation, creating obstacles in accessing higher education and hindering permeability.

Objectives

The main objectives are:

- (a) to introduce flexibility and increase equal opportunities in accessing higher education.
- (b) to increase the number of VET graduates in higher education, ensuring that, by the end of 2023, approximately 10 000 VET graduates (40%) will continue their studies at this education level.

The government is seeking to broaden participation in higher education, aiming to reach the EU average by 2030. The benchmark set for 2030 is for 60% of 20-year-olds to attend higher education and 50% of 30 to 34-year-olds.

Description

Legislation passed in 2020 introduced special conditions for upper secondary VET graduates to access higher education. They consider VET graduate scores in the final evaluation and aptitude tests, as well as specific tests carried out by each institution to assess if candidates have the necessary knowledge and competences to undertake a particular tertiary education programme. Participation in the exams is voluntary and each higher education institution determines the number of VET graduates that it will accept.

To ensure the best alignment between the candidates' previous education and the study cycle to which they want to apply, the areas of the National classification of education and training areas (CNAEF) should be made available.

2020 Approved/Agreed

Legislation was introduced in April 2020 and came into effect in the school year 2020-21.

2021 Implementation

In 2021, an additional solution was created: the constitution of three regional consortia (North, Centre, South and Islands). Henceforth, students take regional tests in a specific higher education institution and these tests allows them to apply to all the higher education institutions in the same region, included in the consortia as long as the HE institutions provide vacancies in the relevant tertiary education programmes.

2022 Implementation

Due the war in Ukraine, an exceptional measure for Ukrainian students in higher education, university and polytechnic, benefiting from temporary protection was created. Decree-Law No 28-A/2022, of 25 March establishes that Ukrainian citizens may apply for emergency student status for humanitarian reasons. The admission is not subject to quantitative limitations arising from the prior establishment of vacancies and may occur in all study cycles. Also Dispatch No 3597/2022 of 25 March and Dispatch No 14161/2022 Of 9 December establish exceptional social support measures.

A new legislation, Dispatch No 8022-B/2022 of 30 June, defines special conditions for VET students, setting for the academic year 2022/23 that 15% of places in higher education study cycles is reserved for holders of secondary level dual certification courses and specialised artistic courses.

2023 Implementation

Decree-law (Decreto-Lei) No 64-A/2023 of 31 July and Ordinance (Portaria) No 248-A/2023 of 1 August approved the rules for special access and admission to higher education for:

- (a) Portuguese nationals of diplomatic missions abroad and their accompanying family members;
- (b) Portuguese scholarship holders abroad, Portuguese civil servants on official missions abroad and Portuguese officials of EU institutions and their accompanying family members;
- (c) military members of the Armed Forces in permanent service and under special military service contracts;
- (d) national scholarship holders from Portuguese-speaking African countries;
- (e) officials of foreign diplomatic missions accredited in Portugal and their family members;
- (f) high-performance sports practitioners;
- (g) nationals of East Timor.

2024 Implementation

National commission for access to higher education (CNAES) by the Deliberation No 555/2024 established conditions for the application of holders of dual certification training courses and specialised artistic courses to bachelor's and integrated master's degree study cycles. CNAES recommends that the theoretical and practical tests for assessing knowledge and skills considered indispensable for access and admission should be assigned a weighting of between 20% and 30%.

PESSOAS-2025-19 is to support scholarships for students attending higher education in the 2025/26 academic year. More than EUR 129 million were allocated, with an investment of EUR 110 million from the ESF+, to increase the number of people with higher education and promote academic success. It aimed to support scholarships for underprivileged students and to support higher education students attending

institutions with lower demand and in areas with less demographic pressure through mobility grants for displaced students. Students with disabilities can also be supported, promoting equal opportunities and social integration.

2025 Implementation

No progress or developments on this policy were reported by October 2025.

Bodies responsible

- Higher education institutions
- Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (until April 2024)
- Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation (MECI) (since April 2024)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Thematic categories

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and professional higher education

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

[Decree-Law No 11/2020, of 2 April 2020, that amended the Decree-Law No 113/2014, of 16 July 2014](#)

[Deliberation \(Deliberacao\) No 860/2021](#)

[Dispatch \(Despacho\) No 3597/2022, of 25 March 2022](#)

[Dispatch \(Despacho\) No 14161/2022, of 9 December 2022](#)

[Dispatch \(Despacho\) No 8022-B/2022, of 30 June 2022](#)

[Decree-Law \(Decreto-Lei\) No 28-A/2022, of 25 March 2022](#)

[Decree-law \(Decreto-Lei\) No 64-A/2023 of 31 July 2023](#)

[Ordinance \(Portaria\) No 248-A/2023 of 1st August 2023](#)

[Deliberation No 555/2024, of 26 March 2024](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Apprenticeship programmes

Apprenticeship courses allow for academic and vocational certification, emphasising inclusion in the job market, boosted by a strong training component undertaken in a work context and pursuing higher-level studies.

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Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET

2025 Implementation

Specialised artistic programmes

The ministry of education has approved the creation of a working group which will analyse the specialised artistic programmes. The main tasks of this working group are to:

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Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/29212>