

# SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF ADMISSIONS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH REMAINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL

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## ABSTRACT

The text discusses higher education as a field of dispute, inserted in global market demands (Dale, 2004), of expanding access, institutional differentiation and diplomas. The qualitative research, of the case study type, carried out in the Bachelor's Degree in Education and Training at the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon, seeks to understand the relationship between the socioeconomic profile of students and the conditions for remaining in and completing the course. The data from the application of the "Scale for Assessing Student Permanence" (Castelo Branco, Nakamura and Jezine, 2017), adapted to the sociocultural and educational reality of Portugal, reveal the profile of graduates of the Education and Training course: young people, mostly women, with a family income of 1 to 3 salaries and with parents with low levels of education, in which one of the factors that favors remaining in and completing the course is family support. Thus indicating the importance of greater investments in educational policies to promote social and educational equity.

**Keywords:** Global agenda. Access to Higher Education. Admission profile. Democratization of Education.

## RESUMEN

### PERFIL SOCIOECONÓMICO DE LAS ADMISIONES Y SU RELACIÓN CON LA PERMANENCIA EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR EN PORTUGAL

El texto analiza la educación superior como un campo de disputa, inserto en las demandas del mercado global (Dale, 2004), de ampliación del acceso, diferenciación institucional y diplomas. La investigación cualitativa, del tipo

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estudio de caso, realizada en la Licenciatura en Educación y Formación del Instituto de Educación de la Universidad de Lisboa, busca comprender la relación entre el perfil socioeconómico de los estudiantes y las condiciones de permanencia y finalización del curso. Los datos de la aplicación de la “Escala de Evaluación de la Permanencia de los Estudiantes” (Castelo Branco, Nakamura y Jezine, 2017), adaptada a la realidad sociocultural y educativa de Portugal, revelan el perfil de los graduados del curso de Educación y Formación: jóvenes, en su mayoría mujeres, con una renta familiar de 1 a 3 salarios y con padres con bajos niveles de escolaridad, en los que uno de los factores que favorece la permanencia y la finalización del curso es el apoyo familiar. Lo que indica la importancia de mayores inversiones en políticas educativas para promover la equidad social y educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Agenda Global. Acceso a la Educación Superior. Perfil de entrada. Democratización de la Educación.

## RESUMO

### PERFIL SOCIOECONÔMICO DE INGRESSOS E A RELAÇÃO COM A PERMANÊNCIA EM CURSO SUPERIOR EM PORTUGAL

O texto discute o ensino superior como um campo de disputa, inserido em demandas do mercado global (Dale, 2004), de alargamento do acesso, diferenciação institucional e diplomação. A investigação de base qualitativa, do tipo estudo de caso, realizada no curso de Licenciatura em Educação e Formação do Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, busca compreender a relação entre o perfil socioeconômico dos estudantes e as condições para a permanência e a conclusão do curso. Os dados obtidos por meio da aplicação da “Escala para Avaliação da Permanência Discente” (Castelo Branco, Nakamura e Jezine, 2017), adaptada à realidade sociocultural e educacional de Portugal, revelam o perfil dos egressos do curso de Educação e Formação: jovens, majoritariamente mulheres, com renda familiar entre 1 e 3 salários mínimos e pais com baixa escolarização. Entre os fatores que favorecem a permanência e a conclusão do curso, destaca-se o apoio familiar, o que evidencia a necessidade de maiores investimentos em políticas educacionais voltadas à promoção da equidade social e educacional.

**Palavras-Chave:** Agenda Global. Acesso à Educação Superior. Democratização da Educação.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

During times of financial crises, globalization emerges as a strategy for the renewal of the *modus operandi* that keeps the capitalist system sustained. It's considered a way to make the system operate more efficiently. This is viewed from a global and neoliberal perspective. It constitutes a process of economic, political, and cultural expansion worldwide, which seeks to sustain a new reconfiguration of capital in the context of the technical-scientific-informational revolution and breaks down territorial barriers to the sovereignty of nations. At the same time, it also highlights the contradictions between central and peripheral countries in their modes of production and forms of consumption of goods and services, revealing the prevailing relations of power and control.

Globalization uses education as a strategy to achieve its economic, social, political, and structural goals in strengthening capitalist society. This society is supported by forced relationships in the international division of labor and the creation of wealth between countries. Roger Dale (2004, p. 436) created the theory of the Globally Structured Agenda for Education (AGEE). In this theory, he defines globalization as "a set of political and economic tools used to organize the global economy. These tools are driven by the need to maintain the capitalist system, more than any other set of values. People respect these rules because they are afraid of economic consequences and because they think it is in their country's best interest."

At this stage, education is considered a way to help the economy. Multinational organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are involved. These organizations suggest that educational systems should be evaluated based on their results. They also suggest public policies for

quality education that have economic goals. These goals are similar to neoliberal market policy, which is the idea that education can help the economy and society grow.

Regarding higher education, the proposals of international organizations infer the reformulation of the system based on policies of expansion, institutional diversification, privatization, and the provision of services to the consumer market. According to international organizations, higher education is a strategy that follows neoliberal policies of reducing public spending to make education private and profitable. According to Sousa, Almeida, and Perske (2023, p. 79), the proposals made by different international organizations have promoted political, economic, and sociocultural reforms. These reforms "create a dependent model of higher education, guiding neoliberal reforms that seek to make it a commodity, which is in direct opposition to its conception as a public good and a social/universal right."

The European Higher Education Area is an important part of this plan. It was created by the Bologna Agreement (1999) and the Lisbon Strategy (2000). The Bologna Agreement aims to create a system that is competitive and attractive to other countries. The Lisbon Strategy suggests ways to increase employment, education, and training. It also talks about health and housing<sup>2</sup>. In Portugal, the massive expansion of access to higher education has been especially significant, with a growth in the number of students (Cerqueira, Cabrito, and Mucharreira, 2021).

To this regard, in the European context of growth in higher education, the text aims to describe the socioeconomic profile of students and understand the relationship between the conditions for access, permanence, and completion of the course. The research used a case study with a total of 33 students from the

1 Article translated by Silvia Iacovacci

2 **BrochLisbonPT-2\_1. ETC. European Trade Union Confederation.** You can find it here: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/BrochLisbonPT-2\\_1.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/BrochLisbonPT-2_1.pdf). Last visited: April 12, 2025.

Bachelor's Degree in Education and Training at the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon. The data was collected using the "Scale for Assessing Student Retention"<sup>3</sup> (Castelo Branco, Nakamura, and Jezine, 2017), adapted to the sociocultural and educational reality of Portugal.

The Scale was structured around three Dimensions: 1. Socioeconomic profile – multiple-choice questions on age, gender, marital status, type of secondary school attended, family income, occupational status of father and mother and profession, and educational level of father and mother; 2. Scale of levels of agreement and/or disagreement (strongly agree, partially agree/strongly disagree, partially disagree) regarding choice of course, conditions for remaining in the course, and motivations for completing the course; 3. Scale of levels of agreement and/or disagreement about the program regarding conditions for remaining in and completing the course, participation in the Scholarship Program and Student Social Action Program. It was applied using the Google Forms questionnaire between April and June 2023 to students in the first cycle of higher education in the Education and Training course, which asks what the conditions are for permanence and completion of the course in Public Higher Education Institutions in Portugal in the face of the risk of poverty. To this end, the objective of the data is to recognize the socioeconomic profile of students, the material conditions for remaining in the course, and the prospects for completing it.

The qualitative survey, based on a case study approach, understood as a methodology that allows for the analysis of specific aspects of a phenomenon, situation, or problem (Yin, 2001), had the sample composed of 94% of students from the Bachelor's Degree in Education

and Training at the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon, 3% from the Accounting course at the Higher Institute of Accounting and Administration of Lisbon (ISCAL), and 3% from the Basic Education course at the Higher Institute of Lisbon and Vale do Tejo (ISCE).

## Higher education in Portugal is in between the pursuit of competitiveness and democracy

The Bologna Declaration (1999), as an agreement signed by 29 European countries, was endorsed with the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy<sup>4</sup> in order to establish the European Higher Education Area through intergovernmental reform aimed at creating a convergent, competitive, and internationally attractive system, with the goal of developing internal/external mobility for students/teachers and adapting to the market dynamics of capitalism through competitiveness, productivity, and technological innovation with a view to improving employability.

However, the agreement is about more than just changing higher education. It's also about restoring prestige, following European university traditions, and taking back a leading role in culture. For millennia, Europe has exercised hegemony in all fields, establishing what has been called a "Eurocentric" view of the world (Lander, 2005). Postcolonial and decolonial studies and theories (Hall, 2003; Quijano, 2005 and 2014) change how we see the hierarchy of Western thought and knowledge. Postcolonial criticism questions whether the Eurocentric way of thinking is the only valid option for

3 The survey was based on a special training program for college students at the Center for Study and Research in Higher Education and Society (NEPES/UFPB - <https://www.ufpb.br/nepes>) and the Unit for Research and Development in Education and Training (UIDEF/UL - <http://www.ie.ulisboa.pt/>).

4 The Lisbon Strategy or Lisbon Agenda is a set of interdependent policy lines aimed at the modernization and sustainable growth of the European economy through increased productivity, based on the enhancement of human resources and the European model of social protection. It was outlined in March 2000, under the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (2005, 03). Accessed on: Mar. 27, 2025. Available at: <https://ces.pt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2005-parecer4.pdf>.

knowledge. This is because the Eurocentric way of thinking focuses on Europe, its values, and the way it has developed science and culture.

Quijano's studies (2005 and 2014) use the idea of coloniality of power to explain how countries have come to dominate the world. They also look at how modernity has played a key role in making capitalism make sense. The processes of colonization involved the human and social existence of the subjects involved. These subjects and nations were viewed from the point of view of subalternity. This meant that they were modified in the interest of capital accumulation. The coloniality of power also extends to the coloniality of knowledge. This means that it imposes a Eurocentric view of culture and knowledge, and it controls the way knowledge is organized geopolitically.

In this context, Eurocentrism functions as an epistemic locus from which a model of knowledge is constructed that, on the one hand, universalizes the local European experience as a normative model to be followed and, on the other, designates its knowledge mechanisms as the only valid ones. The specific link between knowledge and power is also based on the naturalizing effectiveness of the discursive construction of modern social knowledge, thus legitimizing the current asymmetrical power relations. (QUINTERO, FIGUEIRA, and ELIZALDE, 2010, p. 07)

Portugal, as a member of the European bloc, was part of the colonial system, seeking to expand its territory through navigation and the "conquest" of new lands along the coast of Africa and the Atlantic Ocean. Despite its maritime expansion, the country did not keep pace with Europe's economic development. It was damaged by the 1755 earthquake and the French invasions in the early 19th century, which led to the end of the monarchy in 1910. The Republic in Portugal was unable to overcome the ills of the colonial period, such as economic and social difficulties, accompanied by a low level of public education, which resulted in a fascist dictatorship in 1926, interrupted

by the Carnation Revolution on April 25, 1974<sup>5</sup>, which established democracy in the country.

The 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution is a time to celebrate the country's progress. The revolution led to the formation of a democratic government, and the country has made significant progress in areas like social welfare and education. By making changes in education to support the goals of globalization, new forms of governance are created that will affect the structure of higher education courses.

Considering the inseparable relationship between education and the capitalist mode of production, Portugal views education as a strategy for the country's economic and social development, as a significant expansion of access and a development agenda that seeks to meet the neoliberal logic of reducing the social responsibility of the state, as well as the promotion of education as a private market offering, implementing the predictability of the Bologna principles, and the establishment of a European higher education market.

The studies by Jezine, Chaves, and Cabrito (2011, p. 66) point to the expansion of access. "In April 1973/1974, less than 50,000 students attended higher education. This number increased dramatically to 383,627 students enrolled in higher education in the 2009/2010 academic year." They also note the increase in the enrollment rate among young people aged 18 to 22 in higher education, which rose from 6-7% in 1973/74 to over 25% in 2009/10. The authors point to a notable trend toward the growth of private institutions, with an increase in supply from a diversity of forms of institutional organization.

Despite the economic crisis that began in 2008, accompanied by deindustrialization and

5 The Revolution was an important moment in the Portuguese people's fight for democracy and to make big changes in the economic and social structures that were stopping the country from moving forward. **José Reinaldo Carvalho**. The Revolution that changed the history of Portugal. You can find it here: <https://fpabramo.org.br/cooperacao-internacional/a-revolucao-que-mudou-a-historia-de-portugal/>. Last visited: The date is March 27, 2025.

the intensification of technological globalization processes as well as Portugal's indebtedness, a "gross external debt ratio for Portugal: index used by the World Bank and IMF at the end of 2010 (240.6% in 2009)"<sup>6</sup>, Portugal managed to overcome the period of economic austerity experienced between 2011 and 2014. It now ranks among the European Union (EU) countries with economic and educational development, having made a significant investment in increasing access to higher education, leading to a substantial growth in the number of students. According to Cerdeira (2014), two factors contributed to this: the expansion of the private education system and the granting of pedagogical-scientific, administrative, and financial autonomy to public higher education institutions.

Data from the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation Statistical Portal (PORDATA)<sup>7</sup> show that in Portugal, in 2023, there was an increase in schooling among the population aged 15–64, with up to basic education (levels 0–2), with a percentage of 41.1%, whereas in 1992, in the same age group, the total was 79.8%, meaning that the majority of the population only reached this level of education. When considering higher education levels for the same age group, only 27.1% of the population is registered, placing Portugal in 20th position among EU countries. This reflects the country's historical educational backwardness among the older population.

Investments in higher education among the population aged 25-34 show better results, as in this age group, boasting higher education (ISCED 5-8)<sup>8</sup>, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral

degrees, 41.5% of the population is registered, reaching 17th place among the 27 countries of the European Union. In 1992, the percentage of the total population in the same age group with higher education was 14.4%, demonstrating the growth in the level of education of the country's population at this level.

Nonetheless, the study by Cerdeira (2008) and Cabrito and Castro (2021), when considering the expansion of Portuguese higher education offerings, points to contradictory processes, less democracy, and greater elitism, since higher education is still unattainable for the lower strata of society due to the increased cost of living and tuition fees paid to public and/or private institutions. Even with the growth in education levels among the population, there are still gaps in social inequalities, with repercussions on access to and completion of higher education courses, due to either the socioeconomic status of students or the reduction in funding from the State Budget (OE) for higher education institutions.

However, data on the increase in educational achievements, when related to the risk of poverty, according to a study by the Inequality Observatory on "Analysis of poverty, deprivation, and inequalities in Portugal: recent trends in a persistently unequal country" (Tavares and Do Carmo, 2023, p. 06), reveal an increase in all age groups based on the evolutionary analysis of the poverty risk rate.

Between 2021 and 2022, the last year for which data is available, there was an increase in the poverty risk rate across all age groups, albeit to varying degrees: the under-18 age group (20.7% in 2022), which was the most affected by poverty, as has been the case throughout the period analyzed, increased by +2.2 p.p., which was the most significant increase. The working-age population increased by +0.4 p.p. to 16%, remaining,

licies between different educational systems. "An instrument capable of enabling the collection, compilation, and processing of education statistics at the national and international levels." Wikipedia. International Standard Classification of Education. Available at: [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classifica%C3%A7%C3%A3o\\_Internacional\\_Normalizada\\_da\\_Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classifica%C3%A7%C3%A3o_Internacional_Normalizada_da_Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o). Accessed on: April 12, 2025.

6 Santos, António Duarte. Portuguese and European Economy: the crisis of 2008-2013 Support manual. Available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefndmkaj/https://repositorio.grupoautonoma.pt/server/api/core/bitstreams/ec41373e-60a2-4331-87d6-8700f8f5de74/content>. Accessed on: April 12, 2025.

7 Statistical Portal of the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation (PORDATA). Available at: <https://www.pordata.pt/pt/estatisticas/educacao/qualificacoes-da-populacao/populacao-15-64-anos-por-sexo-grupo-etario-e-nivel>. Accessed on: April 12, 2025.

8 **International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)** is a classification of educational levels designed to enable the comparison of statistics and educational po-

as in previous years, the group with the lowest poverty risk rate, and those aged 65 or over increased by +0.1 p.p. to 17.1%.

The authors clearly show the difference between the level of education and the poverty risk rate. They say that “in the comparison between 2021 and 2022, both the ‘up until primary education’ and ‘higher education’ categories saw an increase in the poverty risk rate, while those with secondary or post-secondary education saw a decrease of 0.3 percentage points” (Tavares and Do Carmo, 2023, p. 11).

When we think about how social inequalities are a way for societies to reproduce their wealth, we can see that colonialism is one of the things that makes poverty more likely. Poverty is spreading around the world, and it’s growing faster because borders are falling down. The report on “The Origin of Wealth and the Construction of Injustice in Colonialism” (Taneja, [et. al.], 2025, p. 04) starts with the words of President Sukarno of Indonesia, in a speech he gave at the Bandung Conference in 1995, which states

Colonialism also has its modern guise, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, and actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation. It is a skilled and determined enemy, and it appears in many forms.

Under this perspective, Portugal, as a country that underwent a slow process of decolonization, putting an end to its colonial imperialist period with the handover of Macau to the People’s Republic of China in 1999, also suffers from pressure from the neocolonialists of the European Community, which affects issues of sovereignty, social justice, and sustainable development, as economic powers are always seeking to shape the destiny of emerging nations.

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the goal of Quality Education is one of the “Sustainable Development Goals,” namely, “to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” In this regard, Portugal, as

one of the countries in the EU bloc, continues to pursue the challenge of economic and educational development and the elimination of inequalities. This is despite the “[...] tensions that manifest themselves in society between social strata and groups, between labor and capital” (Cerqueira, Mucharreira, & Cabrito, 2021, p. 199) in the contrast between the social state and the public and private initiative and capital.

Regarding higher education in the neoliberal globalization agenda, UN institutions are adopting a new form of colonialism, based on proposals that education should constitute a market for goods, services, and direct investments by national and multinational companies, as expressed by the authors:

What is recommended are liberal reforms on a global scale that have the following complementary pillars: reducing costs that are covered by public expenditure; introducing market mechanisms and values; and prioritizing the economic objectives of education. Characteristics such as decentralization, standardization of methods and content, as well as new school management and teacher professionalization, are essentially competitiveness-centered. (Lobo and Castro, 2023, p. 03).

In this respect, the definition of an educational policy in Portugal replicates the European Community’s efforts to implement the Bologna principles for quality assurance, evaluation, and accountability under the logic of New Public Management (NPM)<sup>9</sup>, an administrative model inspired by private sector practices that seeks to introduce the concepts of efficiency, effectiveness, economy, accountability for results, and performance evaluation into public institutions (Benck, 2025; Lobo & Castro, 2023).

Among the effects of this form of management of the education agenda in Portugal, Cerqueira, Mucharreira, and Cabrito (2021, p.

<sup>9</sup> A management model inspired by private sector practices that seeks to introduce the concepts of efficiency, effectiveness, economy, accountability for results, and performance evaluation into public institutions.

200) point to the privatization and managerialization of public higher education, “namely the establishment or increase of tuition fees and the precariousness of teachers, putting the very quality of education at risk.” Claudia Sarrico<sup>10</sup> writes in *Observador*:<sup>11</sup>

The fact that higher education is largely paid for by taxpayers does not mean that access is extended to all those who are able and motivated to study. Rather, it means giving a financial advantage to people who are already privileged for the most part, and who will become even more so by graduating, at the expense of many who pay taxes and have never had that privilege.

This is due to the mandatory payment of tuition fees, approved for the 2023/2024 academic year at €697, and/or the reduction in funding for public higher education institutions due to the decrease in EU participation, reallocating funding from public institutions to the State, according to a study on Public Funding of Higher Education in Portugal (Aguar-Conraria, Cerdeira, and Sarrico, 2022).

Furthermore, the dual structure of higher education in Portugal, namely university education versus polytechnic education, reflects levels of social inequality based on the material conditions of young people and their families, thus frustrating expectations regarding professional advancement and social mobility, or even the country’s economic and social development. as well as contributing to competition between institutions, teachers, and students, fragmenting the “educational market,” but generally following the logic of New Public Management.

Thus, to understand the perspectives of those entering higher education and the conditions for increasing educational attainment after completing the course, it is important to question the socioeconomic profile of those enrolling in higher education courses in Portugal.

10 Professor at the School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho.

11 See Sarrico, C. Tuition fees in higher education: study now, pay later. *Observador*, Dec. 20, 2022. Available at: <https://observador.pt/opiniao/propinas-no-ensino-superior-estude-agora-pague-depois/>. Accessed on Apr. 17, 2025.

Moreover, furthermore, how are the conditions for continuing and completing the course established, especially considering the increased risk of poverty and financial difficulties faced by families?

## Socioeconomic profile of enrollments and motivations for continuing and completing the course

The Likert scale, adapted to the sociocultural and educational reality of Portugal, seeks to assess, beyond the socioeconomic and educational profile, the levels of agreement and/or disagreement (strongly agree, partially agree, strongly disagree, partially disagree) regarding the student’s perception of the course, choice of course, conditions for remaining in the course, and motivations for completing the course, as well as participation in institutional programs and the conditions for remaining in and completing the course.

The dimension that relates the indicators on the profile of the 33 respondents corresponds to 91% women and 9% men, although there were other gender options that were not marked; 94% are Portuguese nationals and 6% are foreigners; 100% are single; 82% completed secondary education only in public schools, 9.1% partly in public schools and partly in private schools, having spent more time in public schools; 63.6% completed secondary education in 2022 and 24.0% completed secondary education in 2021, with 3% of students completing secondary school in 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2012, respectively; 78.8% are non-displaced and 21.2% are displaced.

In 2023, the resident population in Portugal was estimated at 10,639,726 people, 5,083,568 men and 5,556,158 women<sup>12</sup>, with women accounting for more than 50% of the population.

12 National Statistics Institute (INE). Estimates of the resident population in Portugal 2023. Available at: [www.ine.pt](http://www.ine.pt). Accessed on April 17, 2025.

This data corroborates the respective case study and confirms a young audience, despite “the general aging of the population in Portugal over the last 50 years, especially among women<sup>13</sup>. High school graduates from public schools, with a higher percentage of women choosing Education and Training courses, generally a female career, corroborating the data from the 2024 Statistical Bulletin: Gender Equality in Portugal, in which the area of education has a feminization rate of 76.2%.

As for the socioeconomic status of respondents, in terms of family income, 33.3% of respondents earn between 1 and 2 minimum wages, another 33.3% earn between 2 and 3 minimum wages, 15.2% earn between 3 and 5 minimum wages, and 12.1% earn up to 1 minimum wage. When asked about paid work, 60.6% indicated that they did not engage in any paid activity, 21.2% engaged in part-time paid work for 20 hours, and 18.2% engaged in sporadic paid work. Regarding housing, 93.9% confirmed that they live with their parents, 3% in rented rooms, and 3% in university residences.

In the European *Ranking*, Portugal is the 4th country in terms of unequal income distribution. The Manoel dos Santos Foundation study on Income and Inequality highlights recent developments in family income and key indicators of inequality<sup>14</sup>. In 2023, the average income per equivalent adult increased by 4.1% in nominal terms, from €1,197 per month to €1,246. Taking into account the recorded inflation rate (4.3%), the average household income, in real terms, remained virtually unchanged. We can therefore infer that 48.5% of respondents, with incomes of 1 to 3 minimum wages, are on the threshold of poverty.

13 CIG – Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality. Gender Equality in Portugal. Statistical Bulletin 2024. Available at: PDF ([www.cig.gov.pt](http://www.cig.gov.pt)). Accessed on April 17, 2025.

14 Manoel dos Santos Foundation. **Income and Inequality**. Recent developments in household income and key indicators of inequality. Date: January 6, 2025. Available at: <https://ffms.pt/pt-pt/estudos/rendimentos-e-desigualdade>. Accessed on April 17, 2025.

In this regard, it is possible to relate the socioeconomic data of the respondents to the working conditions and education level of their parents, since 76% of parents are formally employed, 15% live on income, 3% work without formal employment, 3% are unemployed, and 3% are retired. About mothers, 94% of respondents indicate that their mothers are formally employed, 3% are unemployed, and 3% live on income. The level of education is represented as follows: 33% of fathers have secondary education, 27% have basic education up to the 3rd cycle, 12% have postgraduate education, 9% have completed higher education, 6% have completed higher education, and 6% have incomplete basic education. The mothers' educational status shows a lower level of education, with 49% having secondary education or equivalent, 24% having completed higher education, 12% having completed basic education up to the third cycle, 6% having incomplete higher education, and 6% having postgraduate degrees.

From the data, it can be inferred that in many families, the first child to attend higher education is the first in the family to do so, since young people aged 18 to 24 without parents with higher education are 55% less likely to enter higher education than other young people in the same age group (In. Sarrico, 2022). However, as Bourdieu (2011, p. 07) expresses, the position of an individual or group in the social structure cannot be defined solely from a strictly static perspective (upper, middle, or lower). “The point on the trajectory, which a synchronic cross-section captures, always contains the meaning of the *social trajectory*.”

Regarding the second dimension of the scale, which refers to levels of agreement and/or disagreement regarding admission to the course, conditions for continuing in the course, and motivations for completing the course, it is important to note that 64% of students in this class say they are undecided about their choice of course, and 21% did not

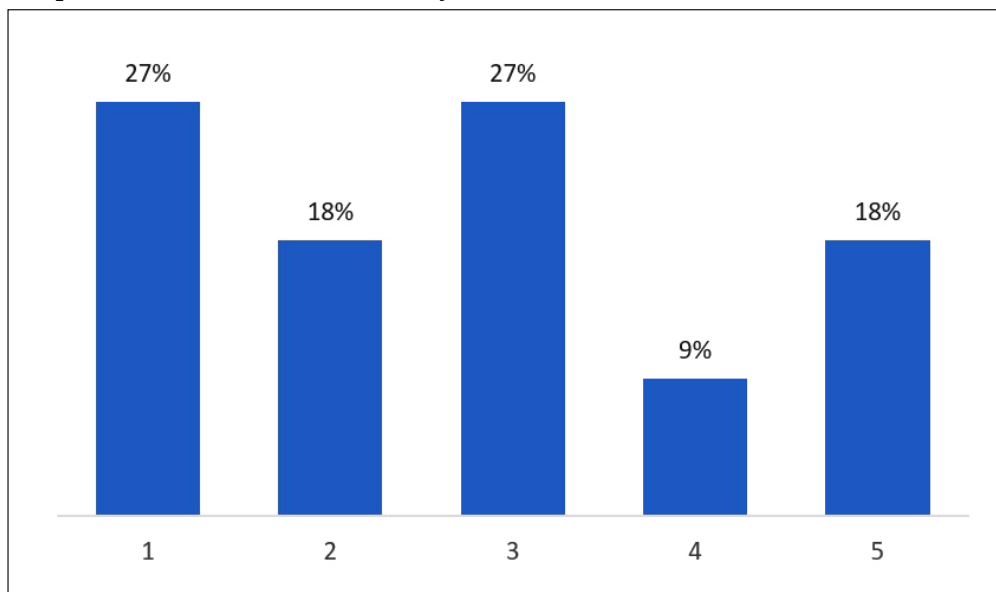
encounter any difficulties. 36% agree that they chose the course because it was easier, and 39% agree that they chose the education and training course because they identified with it.

In this sense, Bourdieu (2012, p. 47) asserts that there is a relationship between the wishes of families and the decisions made regarding their children's schooling, which are largely limited by objective opportunities. "If members of the lower and middle classes assume reality to be their desires, it is because, in this area as in others, aspirations, and demands are defined, in form and content, by objective conditions that exclude the possibility of desiring the impossible."

When asked about the purpose of education in relation to the job market, 30% of respondents believe that it prepares them for the job market, while another 30% disagree with this purpose. When asked about choosing a course based on social prestige, 42% agree with this possibility.

However, there is a dispersion of opinion regarding the statement "remain in the course you always wanted." Of the total of 33 respondents, 27% totally disagree with the statement, 18% partially disagree, and 27% did not respond, showing that many students aspire to another academic situation rather than remaining and completing the course they entered, as shown in the graph below:

**Graph 1** - I am in the course I always wanted to take

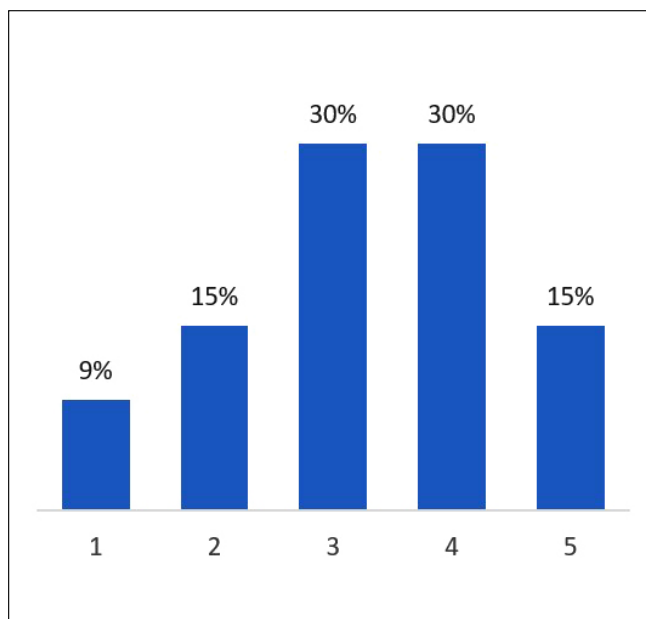


Source: survey data.

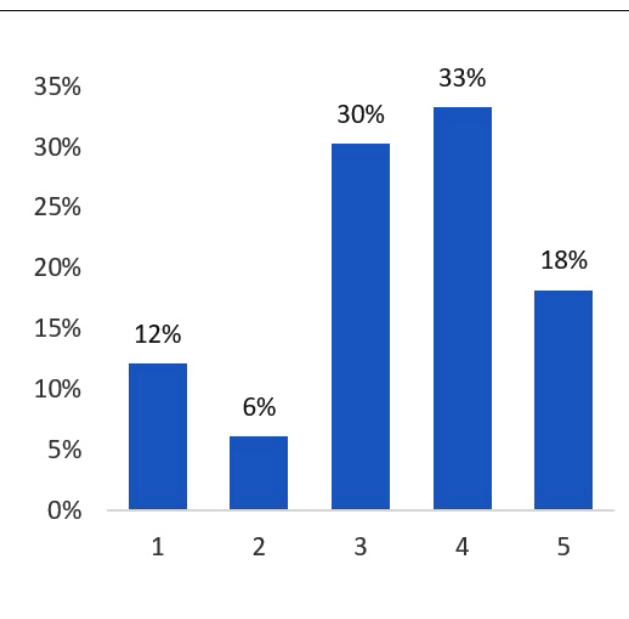
Nevertheless, when asked about their intentions to remain enrolled in the course, 61% strongly agree that they will remain enrolled. When asked about their motivations for remaining enrolled, 72% agree that they remain in the course because their families help them. In contrast, 70% totally disagree and 6% partially disagree that they remain in the course because they are enrolled in a

scholarship program. The same applies to enrollment in social action programs, as 85% totally disagree that they remain in the course because they are enrolled in social support programs. There is a dispersion of opinion when asked about remaining in the course due to the possibility of providing good professional prospects and social advancement, as shown in graphs 2 and 3.

**Graph 2** - I am continuing with the course because it offers me good career prospects



**Graph 3** - I'm continuing with the course because it gives me social advancement



Source: survey data.

Respondents disagree that the course can provide good professional prospects and/or opportunities for social advancement, with a total of 30% of respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement. The position of those surveyed can be associated with the social disrepute of the teaching profession, low salaries, precarious working conditions for teachers, low social recognition, and other social and historical factors. As a result, this has led to a shortage of teachers to meet the demand for education at all stages of schooling.

[...] it is estimated that by 2030 there will be a shortage of 44 million teachers worldwide, affecting both developed and developing countries. Of these, approximately 70% are required in secondary education, with an even more critical need in rural and peripheral areas, whose educational systems already face serious difficulties. This situation not only compromises

the quality of education but also contributes to student demotivation, exacerbates social inequality, and hinders the economic development of nations (Garofalo, 2025)<sup>15</sup>

This phenomenon affects Portugal, as pointed out in the study “Teacher reserves under scrutiny: forecast of teachers needed and available” (Flores, 2024, p. 17). In 2021, the main shortages resulted from the difficulty of replacing temporary absences. In 2031, if current conditions remain unchanged, these shortages will be visible in terms of permanent placements and the total inability to replace absent teachers, at least with equally qualified teachers.

In this regard, in the quest to understand the factors that favor permanence and course completion, the chart below presents some indicators that may favor permanence in higher education courses.

15 **Débora Garofalo**. First South American finalist for the Global Teacher Prize, an award that placed her among the 10 best teachers in the world. Education Magazine>Public Policies>The world will need 44 million teachers by 2030, warns UNESCO. Published on 04/14/2025

**Chart 1** – Motivation and conditions for continuing the course

AFFIRMATIVE STATEMENTS	TOTALLY DISAGREE	PARTIALLY DISAGREE	DID NOT RESPOND	TOTALLY AGREE	PARTIALLY AGREE
Overall, I am satisfied with the course.	12%	9%	18%	33%	27%
The classrooms are comfortable.	39%	36%	12%	12%	0,0%
Labs are well equipped and comfortable.	21%	24%	39%	15%	0,0%
I always find what I need in the libraries.	3%	12%	58%	9%	18%
I am continuing with the course because I have accommodation provided by the institution.	100%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
I'm continuing with the course because I have accommodation.	64%	9%	9%	9%	9%
I'm continuing with the course because I have friends to share accommodations with.	91%	3%	3%	3%	0,0
I am continuing with the course because my parents provide me with accommodation.	30%	9%	18%	3%	39%
I'm continuing with the course because I have good transportation options.	21%	15%	24%	24%	15%
My family's support helped me stay in the program.	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100%
My permanence in the course was favored by being in a research scholarship program.	100%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%

**Source:** survey data.

Respondents in the case study said that the family support network indicator is the main reason they stay in and finish the course. The socioeconomic background of the respondents and their parents, including their job history and educational levels, suggests that there is a tendency to keep the costs of higher education high, even for public institutions.

Although 60% of the people asked are happy with their chosen course of study, they doubt that the conditions of the classrooms, laboratories, libraries, transportation, and housing encourage them to continue their education. This is mostly because of their family's support. They are not convinced that the Scholarship Program and/or Social Support Program are important reasons for them to keep going to school.

The relationship between education and financing is controversial. Education is a uni-

versal right, but the requirement to pay tuition fees can be a barrier to access and completion of the course. This depends on family income and education costs.

The country's democratization after the Carnation Revolution has led to the growth and variety of higher education in Portugal. This is good for the idea of education for all people. However, it is difficult to keep and finish different courses because more people can access them. One of the greatest challenges is making sure families and students can pay for things like tuition, transportation, food, school supplies, and housing so they can go to college.

Overall, it is undeniable that access to education has expanded and the population's level of education has increased, despite the expansive growth of the private sector in parallel with the public sector, as shown by PORDATA data,

considering the evolution from 1978 to 2024, which highlights that there are five times more students in higher education. The number of students enrolled increased from 81,582 in 1978 to a total of 448,235 in 2024. Of these students, 80% were enrolled in public institutions and 20% were enrolled in private institutions.

However, a 2018 study by Cerdeira and Cabrito, titled “Economic Conditions of Portuguese Higher Education Students in 2010 and 2015,” shows a slight improvement in how much students can afford to pay for college in Portugal, which has remained stable. It adds that “young people from middle- and low-income groups grew by 1.4%. Although this is a very low figure, it nevertheless represents a trend towards the democratization and universalization of the system.”

This situation has been worsening recently, according to a study by the Academic Association of Coimbra (AAC), which indicates that the average tuition fee in the country, currently set at €697 per year, is almost double the European average of €381<sup>16</sup>. They also highlight the decline in European contribution in funding education, which has been left to public higher education institutions and the state. In addition, the AAC report highlights the difficulties students face in accessing financial support. In Portugal, average governmental support per student is only €872 per year, significantly lower than the European average of €2,336.77. “The European trend shows strong investment in student support, while Portugal maintains a more restrictive funding model, which can have negative consequences on access and equal opportunities in higher education.”

## Conclusions

In the globalization process, based on a worldwide structured education agenda, the focus is on expanding the importance of the educational

16 Sapo. Higher Education: Portugal has the seventh most expensive tuition fees in the European Union, study reveals. Executive Digest. February 19, 2025. Accessed on: April 21, 2025.

policy, recognizing how, by whom, and through which structures, institutions, and processes educational organizations are defined: “What are the social and individual consequences of these structures and processes?” (Dale, 2004, p. 439).

From this perspective, as the expansion of higher education and the increase in the educational level of the population become a strategy for social development, they cannot be subject to the logic of economism and neoliberal capitalism. Issues of gender and class equity in access to higher education need to be considered in terms of the support that governments provide to promote the optimization of fairness in the system and thus encourage the increase of access for those from lower social backgrounds.

The structure of higher education in Portugal, despite the expansion of the system and the quest for democratization of access, reflects levels of social inequality produced by a capitalist society and the policies of international financing organizations, which associate education with a strategy for expanding the service market.

Despite the general aspects related to the research, the results presented correspond to a case study that included 33 higher education students in Portugal. However, the data point to the need for specific studies on the trajectory of enrollment, permanence, and completion of higher education courses, considering the social conditions of young people and their families, expectations regarding professional advancement and social mobility, as well as the economic and social development of the country.

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