

## 2. Taking part in education

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This chapter looks at the participation of Brazilian children and youth in education and how it compares with other countries. It explores their enrolment in schools and other educational institutions and how they progress through the different stages of education. It examines Brazil's key challenges: ensuring progression and improving equity.

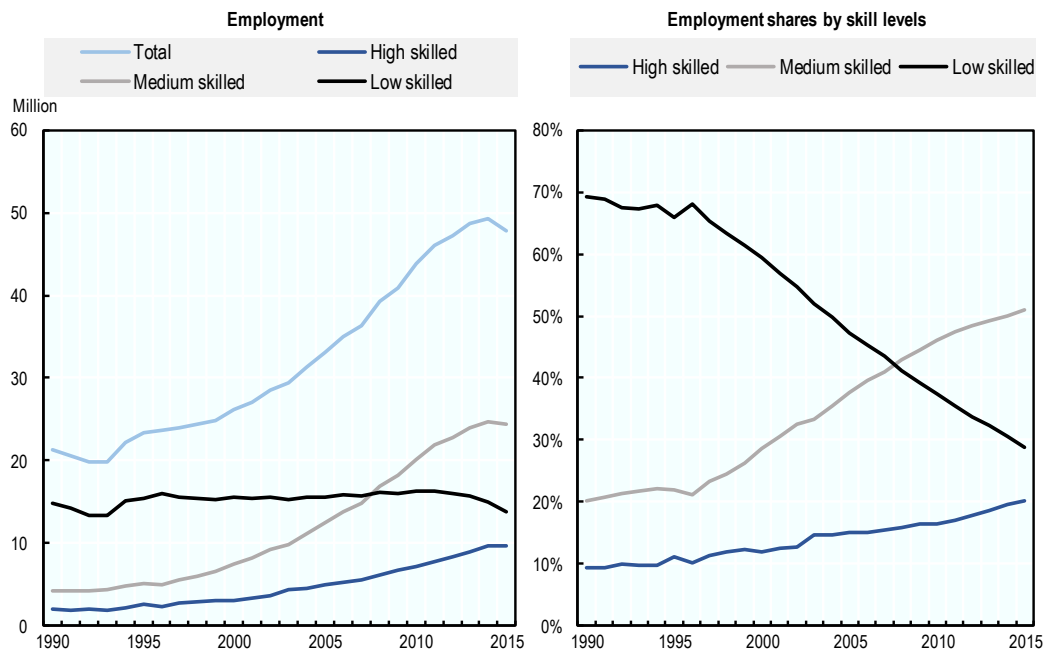
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## Taking part in education: progress and remaining barriers

### **Despite major advances, educational attainment in Brazil is still well behind the OECD average**

1. In Brazil, the types and distribution of skills in the labour market have changed dramatically over the last three decades, with many more high- and medium-skilled jobs, and fewer low-skilled jobs (see Figure 2.1). At the same time, the skills levels, as measured by educational attainment, of the adult population have increased markedly. In 2018<sup>1</sup>, nearly half (46%) of young adults (25-34 year-olds) had attained upper secondary education, more than twice the level in the older generation (22% among 55-64 year-olds) (OECD, n.d.<sup>[1]</sup>).

**Figure 2.1. Trend in total formal employment and employment shares by skill levels, 1990-2015**



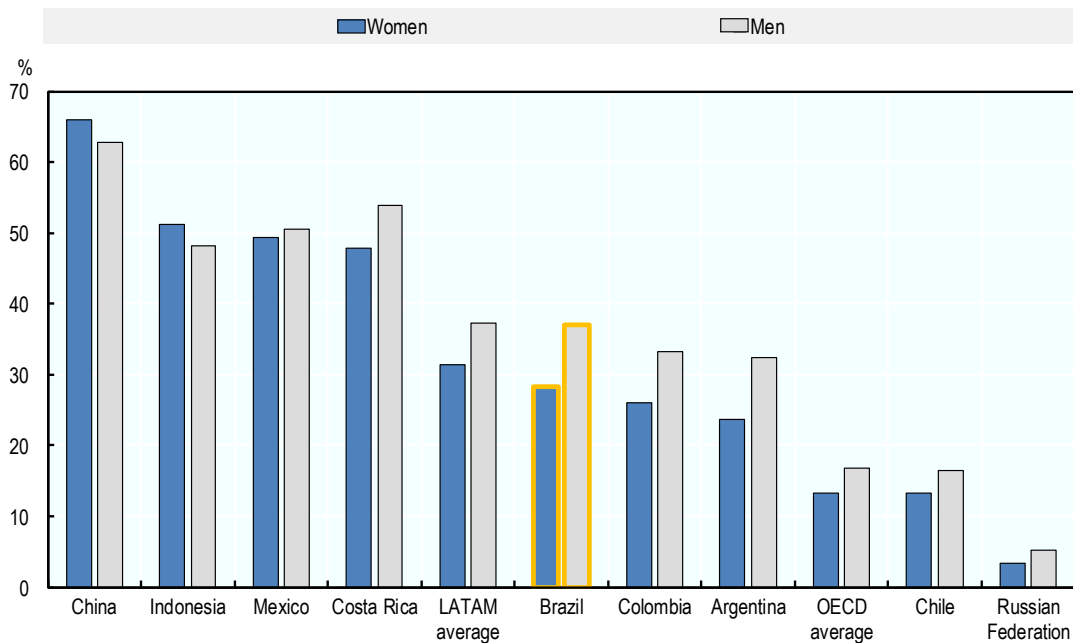
Note: Skill level is defined according to educational attainment: upper secondary not completed (low skilled), secondary completed and tertiary non-completed (medium skilled) and tertiary completed (high skilled).

Source: (OECD, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>), *OECD Economic Surveys: Brazil 2020*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/250240ad-en>.

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Despite these improvements, the qualification levels of the adult population are still far lower than those of OECD countries: in 2018 nearly half of those aged 25-64 had not completed upper secondary education (47%), more than double the OECD average of 22% (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>). In the same year, only around 18% of 25-64 year-olds had completed tertiary education, less than half the OECD average (39%) and also below some Latin American (LATAM) countries such as Chile and Colombia (OECD, 2019<sup>[4]</sup>). Even among younger adults aged 25-34, nearly 40% of Brazilian men and nearly 30% of women lacked upper secondary qualifications, a much higher proportion than found on average in OECD countries, though below that of Mexico (see Figure 2.2). Improvements in the levels of attainment and skills will be vital if Brazil is to advance with much-needed structural reforms and open up to the global economy. Higher skills will help boost productivity and prepare the future workforce for jobs that require higher levels of knowledge and skills (OECD, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>).

**Figure 2.2. Percentage of 25-34 year-olds without a qualification at upper secondary level or above, by gender, 2018**



Source: (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>.

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### ***Not all have shared the benefits of education expansion***

Despite major advances in education participation, some groups have been left behind, including the socio-economically disadvantaged, ethnic minorities and those living in rural areas (World Bank, 2018<sup>[5]</sup>). While socio-economic background is a factor everywhere, its impact is stronger in Brazil than in many comparable countries (see Box 2.1). In Brazil, among 18-29 year-olds, 59% of the poorest quintile had not completed upper-secondary education, several times the equivalent rate for the richest quintile (8%) (IBGE, 2019<sup>[6]</sup>). This gap is higher than in LATAM countries on average (see Figure 2.11). Similarly, repetition rates for the poorest quintile in Brazil are double those of the richest quintile (see Figure 2.9).

### Box 2.1. Addressing socio-economic inequality in and through education

In recent decades, Brazil has made strenuous efforts to reduce inequality (see Chapter 1) and education has been widely recognised as a powerful tool to this end. Since re-democratisation, Brazil has laid the foundations of a strong normative framework that promotes equality in education. The principles of equity and inclusion in education are firmly enshrined in the Federal Constitution and front and centre in national and sub-national strategies for education. Brazil has also signed up to international declarations that promote quality education for all, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Brazil has launched several initiatives designed to reduce inequality, including some designed to assist the poorest communities in accessing education. *Bolsa Família*, a major initiative designed to combat inequality and poverty, has helped increase school participation among disadvantaged groups. The programme, which was first introduced in 2001 and then expanded in 2003, offers a monthly payment to low-income families if, among other things, their children are enrolled and attend school regularly. Evaluations have found positive effects on enrolment, attendance, grade progression, and retention rates.

Recent initiatives have sought to make tertiary education more available to those from modest backgrounds, by offering funding for students to attend private universities, and reserving places in public universities for disadvantaged groups (e.g. students coming from public schools, black and mixed students, students from indigenous communities and those with disabilities) through a quota system. For example, since its creation in 2004, the “University for All” programme (*Programa Universidade para Todos*, ProUni) has already served around 2.5 million students with scholarships. These programmes have helped to increase the share of black, mixed and disadvantaged students in Brazil’s tertiary education system.

Sources: (Presidência da República, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>), *Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988* [1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil], [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm) (accessed on 19 August 2020); (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>), *Plano Nacional de Educação – Lei N° 13.005/2014* [National Education Plan – Law N° 13.005/2014], <http://pne.mec.gov.br/18-planos-subnacionais-de-educacao/543-plano-nacional-de-educacao-lei-n-13-005-2014> (accessed on 17 June 2020); (United Nations, 2015<sup>[9]</sup>), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, [https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr\\_booklet\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf) (accessed on 19 August 2020); (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.<sup>[10]</sup>), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/en/politica-externa/desenvolvimento-sustentavel-e-meio-ambiente/6298-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs> (accessed on 19 August 2020); (Bruns, Evans and Luque, 2012<sup>[11]</sup>), *Achieving World-Class Education in Brazil : The Next Agenda*, <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8854-9>; (OECD, 2015<sup>[12]</sup>), *Brazil Policy Brief: Inequality*, <https://www.oecd.org/policy-briefs/brazil-improving-policies-to-reduce-inequality-and-poverty.pdf> (accessed on 19 August 2020).

Large inequalities across ethnic groups remain. In 2018, among 18-29 year-olds, only 60% of the black or mixed population had at least attained upper-secondary education, compared to 76% among whites (IBGE, 2019<sup>[13]</sup>). The proportion of white 18-24 year-olds who were following or had already completed higher education was 36% in 2018, double the proportion found among the black and mixed population, at 18% (IBGE, 2019<sup>[13]</sup>). In 2019, nearly 25% of black and/or mixed individuals aged 18-24 were not enrolled in education or employed – much larger than the equivalent figure for whites (17%) (IBGE, 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). Data suggest that black and mixed students often drop out of school early to find a job, and because of social exclusion (Rodrigues, 2014<sup>[15]</sup>; Folha de São Paulo, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>).

Such education inequalities both reflect and contribute to Brazil’s large wealth and income disparities. As discussed in Chapter 1, despite a sharp decline in the 2000s, income inequality remains remarkably high (Medeiros, 2016<sup>[17]</sup>) and evidence suggests that some long-term improvements have been reversed – since the end of 2014, income inequality has started to rise again (Neri, 2018<sup>[18]</sup>). As discussed

in Chapter 1, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to further magnify disparities. Tackling disparities in access to education will be key for Brazil's social and economic development.

## Early childhood education and care

### ***Brazil increasingly recognises early childhood education and care as a vital element in education***

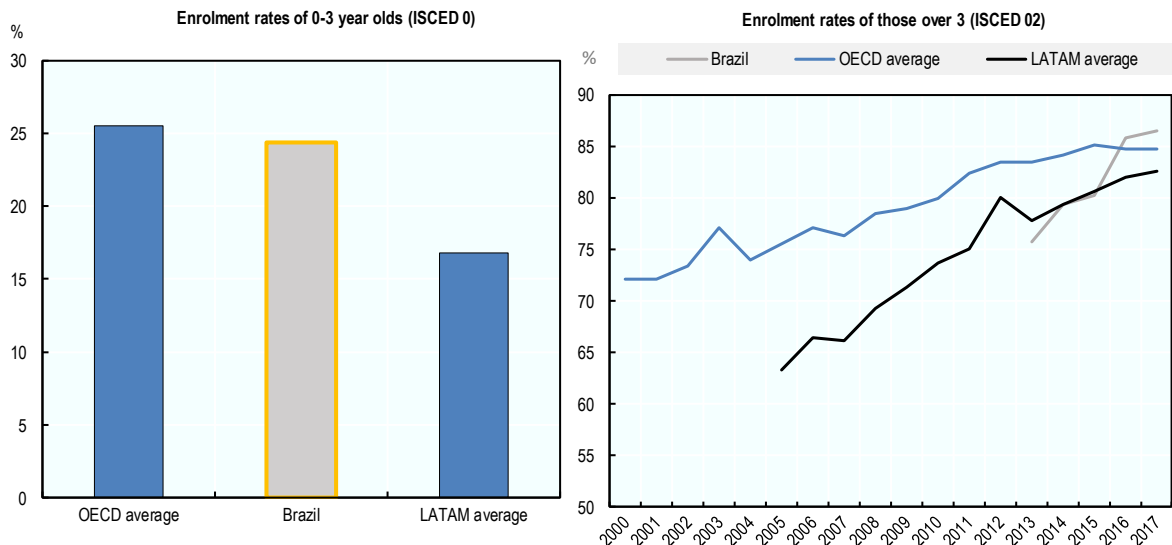
Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has three overlapping functions: first, as a form of care, keeping children healthy, well-nourished and safe while their parents are at work; second, as a means of socialising young children so that they acquire social and emotional skills; and third, as a vehicle for cognitive learning, including basic literacy and numeracy (OECD, 2001 - 2018<sup>[19]</sup>). The balance across these different roles has changed. Historically, ECEC was mainly seen as a form of childcare, rather than as part of the basic education system. Recent years have changed this perception, not least because of the weight of evidence demonstrating its importance in the development of young children, and its particular value in supporting the most disadvantaged. In Brazil, these factors are weighty, given a legacy of extreme poverty and inequity in some sections of Brazilian society, and the compelling evidence that ECEC, alongside good quality child health and nutrition measures, is one of the most powerful means of rectifying inequity.

In response, Brazil has given increased policy priority to expanding ECEC. A constitutional amendment redefined compulsory education so that it now starts at age 4 (Presidência da República, 2009<sup>[20]</sup>). In addition, Target 1 of the National Educational Plan (*Plano Nacional de Educação*, PNE) (see Chapter 1) is universal enrolment in pre-primary education for 4-5 year-old children by 2016, and increasing the offer in nurseries so as to enrol at least half of children aged 0-3 by 2024 (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>). Brazil's Early Childhood Legal Framework (*Marco Legal da Primeira Infância*) also recognised the importance of quality ECEC for young children's holistic development (Presidência da República, 2016<sup>[21]</sup>). The policy objectives in respect of young infants (0-3 year-olds), and slightly older children prior to their entry to primary school (3-years-old and above) have been different in emphasis:

- **Children under the age of 3.** An important area of focus, and of progress, in Brazil has been child health, and in particular child mortality. In recent decades, the infant mortality rate has declined dramatically, from 30 deaths per thousand live births in 2000 to 13 in 2018 – similar to Colombia (12), although above Costa Rica (8) and most OECD countries (6) (World Bank, 2020<sup>[22]</sup>). Progress has also been made in the enrolment of children under the age of 3 in ECEC, which increased from 10% in 2010 to 24% in 2018 (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>). Still, participation of young children in ECEC (ISCED 0) remains low, and slightly lower than the OECD average<sup>2</sup> (26%) (see Figure 2.3, left-hand chart).
- **Those aged over 3.** At this age, the focus has been on children's learning and participation in education. Since the 2000s Brazil has gradually expanded the duration of compulsory education to encompass the earlier years. In 2006 the starting age of primary education was lowered from 7 to 6, and in 2009 pre-primary education was officially included into compulsory education by law (Constitutional Amendment 59/2009) (Presidência da República, 2009<sup>[20]</sup>). International data show that enrolment in pre-primary education for children aged from 3 to the start of primary education increased from 76% in 2013 to 86% in 2017, slightly higher than the OECD average of 85% and above that of other LATAM countries (see Figure 2.3, right-hand chart).

**Figure 2.3. Participation in early childhood education (ISCED 0 and 02)**

Enrolment of children under the age of 3 in ECEC (ISCED 0), 2018 (on the left); enrolment of children aged from 3 to the start of primary education in pre-primary education (ISCED 02), from 2000 to 2017 (on the right).



Sources: (OECD, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>; (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>), *UIS dataset*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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The Brazilian government has also given increased attention to family literacy, with particular attention to the early years. Two federal programmes are relevant. *Conta pra Mim*, launched in 2019, seeks to improve interaction between children and their parents, and to incentivise reading habits. The basic literacy program *Tempo de Aprender* provides financial and pedagogical support to preschools.

### **Resources are not always targeted towards reducing inequalities in access to ECEC**

Despite improvements, access to ECEC remains unequal in Brazil. While more than half (51%) of 0-3 year-olds from the most affluent quintile of the population were enrolled in some form of early childhood education, the comparable figure for the poorest quintile was only 26% (INEP, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>). Similarly, 38% of 0-3 year-olds in urban areas were enrolled, compared with only 21% of their rural counterparts. Moreover, there are very large variations in enrolment rates between states, with enrolment rates for 0-3 year-olds varying between 11% in Amapá, and 49% in São Paulo states.

This means that certain segments of Brazilian society are less likely to benefit from the cognitive and non-cognitive developmental opportunities that take place in ECEC settings. As a result, they are not as well prepared for school. This has long-term impacts on their academic achievement, as observed in PISA findings (see Box 2.2 for more details).

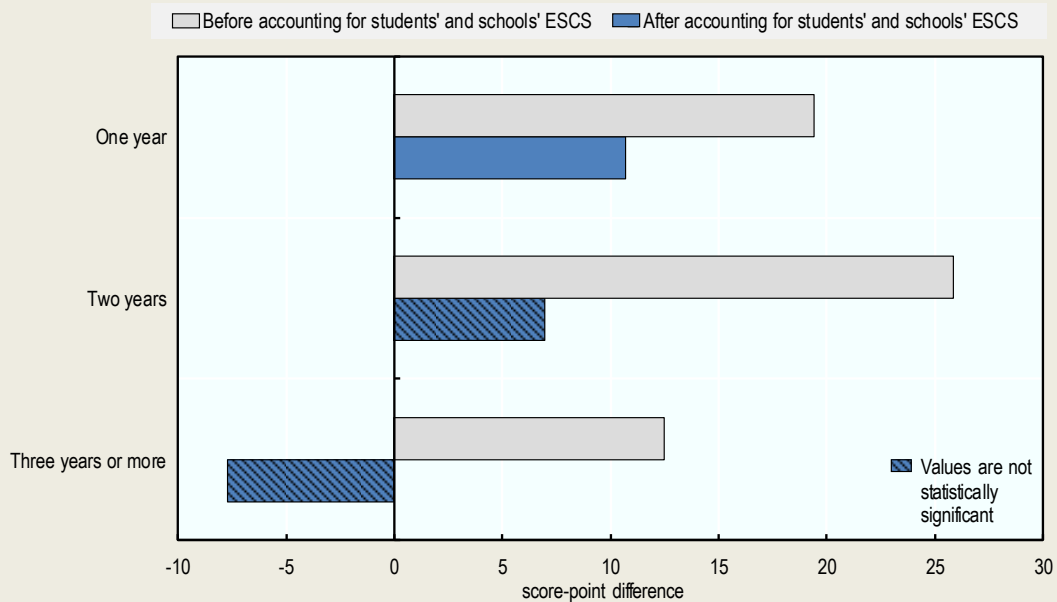
To tackle inequality, support for young children needs to be targeted at those most in need. Continued efforts to expand ECEC should be linked to measures designed to tackle extreme poverty, and to support the health and nutrition of very young children (OECD, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>). Specifically, government-supported ECEC might usefully be targeted at low-income households and single parents in order to close gaps in access and promote female labour force participation.

### Box 2.2. Attendance in pre-primary education and student performance in Brazil

PISA 2018 results show that, on average, pre-primary attendance is associated with slightly higher reading scores in the majority of PISA-participating countries, including in Brazil. According to PISA 2018 results, Brazilian students who attended pre-primary for at least one year but less than two years scored 19 points more in reading than their peers who had not attended pre-primary or attended for less than a year (OECD average: 26) (OECD, 2019<sup>[26]</sup>). However, this relationship is not linear: the benefits of pre-primary attendance become increasingly small with prolonged participation, as observed in Figure 2.4.


#### Figure 2.4. Number of years in pre-primary education and reading performance, PISA 2018

Score-point difference in reading relative to students who had not attended pre-primary school or had attended it for less than a year, before and after accounting for students' and school's socio-economic status (ESCS)



The gains associated with participation in pre-primary education are significantly lower once the students' and schools' socio-economic status (ESCS) is taken into account, and in certain cases even disappear. This raises questions about the average quality of the pre-primary education in Brazil.

Source: (OECD, 2019<sup>[26]</sup>), *PISA 2018 Database*, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed on 13 October 2020); (Balladares and Kankaraš, 2020<sup>[27]</sup>), *Attendance in early childhood education and care programmes and academic proficiencies at age 15*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f16c7ae5-en>; (OECD, 2020<sup>[28]</sup>) *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en>.

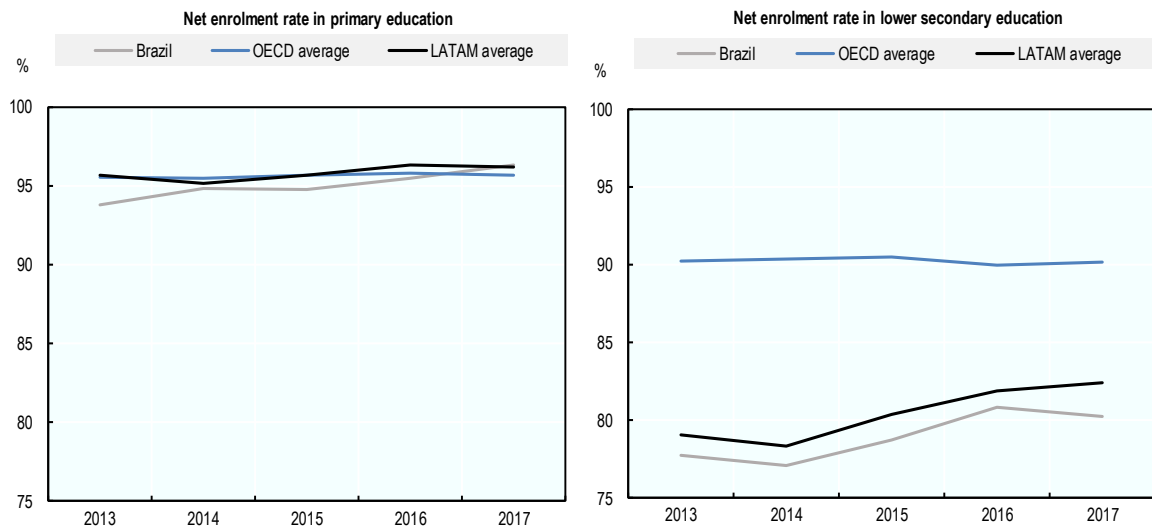
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## Primary and lower secondary levels

### ***Enrolment in primary education is near universal, but lower secondary enrolment rates are still low by international standards***

Since the 1990s, Brazil has made sustained efforts to ensure that all children attend primary school. Today, enrolment in primary school education (Years 1-5, usually 6-10 year-olds) is near universal (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>). In lower secondary education (Years 6-9, usually 11-14 year-olds), net enrolment rates are lower – 79% for boys and 82% for girls – which means that around 20% of young adolescents are not enrolled in this phase of education at the right age or, in some cases, at all (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>). Despite improvements, this remains much higher than in OECD countries, although similar to the LATAM average (see Figure 2.5). Moreover, national data reveal disparities across ethnicities and gender: boys, black and mixed students have lower enrolment rates in lower secondary education (IBGE, n.d.<sup>[29]</sup>).

**Figure 2.5. Trend in net enrolment in primary and lower secondary education, 2013-2017**



Source: (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>), *UIS dataset*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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## Upper secondary education

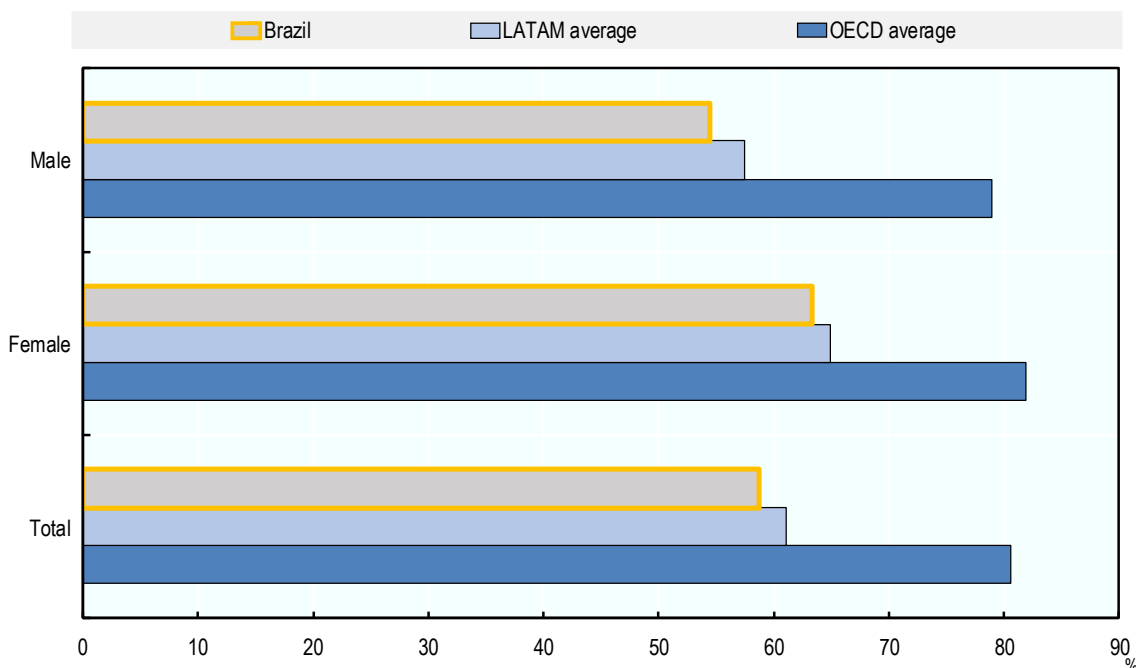
### ***Participation in upper secondary education remains lower than across OECD countries***

In Brazil, 59% of young people (usually 15-17 year-olds) are enrolled in upper secondary education. This is similar to the LATAM average but compares with around 80% in OECD countries (see Figure 2.6). In developed economies, this level of education is often considered the minimum for many types of jobs, in particular for medium-skilled jobs (OECD, 2020<sup>[21]</sup>). As the number of stable low-skilled jobs decreases in Brazil (see Figure 2.1), young people who do not complete upper secondary education will find it increasingly difficult to find good jobs. At the same time, growing participation in upper secondary education will also help Brazil's economy, increasing productivity and international competitiveness (OECD, 2020<sup>[21]</sup>). Recognising the importance of this issue, Brazil has ambitious plans to increase the net enrolment rate in upper secondary education to 85% by 2024 (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>).



**Figure 2.6. Net enrolment rates in upper secondary education, by gender, 2017**

For Brazil, the age range is 15-17 years-old



Note: Total number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

Source: (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sub>[24]</sub>), *UIS dataset*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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### **Participation in vocational programmes is low**

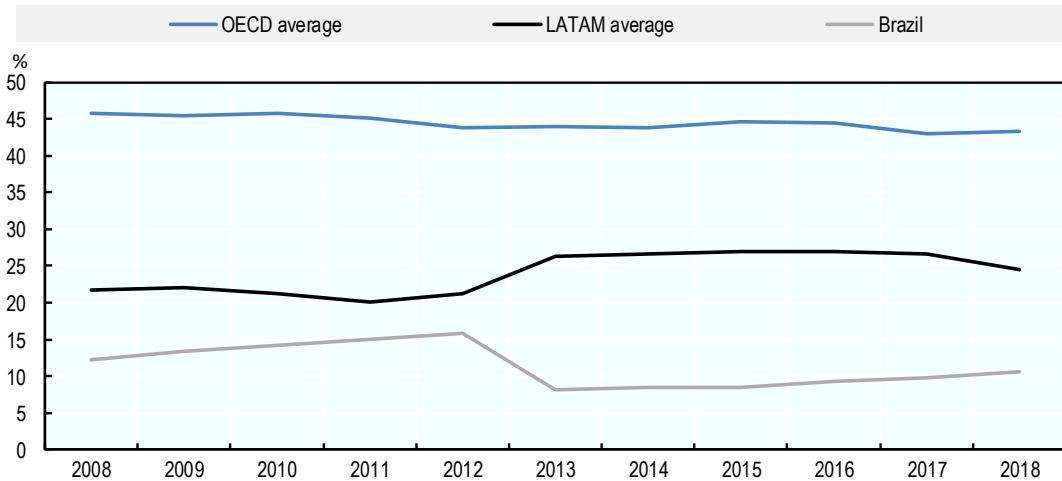
In many countries, vocational education and training (VET) programmes begin at upper secondary level, and in OECD countries on average more than 40% of those enrolled at this level pursue such programmes. While participation in vocational programmes in Brazil has risen significantly in the past decades (INEP, 2020<sub>[25]</sub>), it remains limited by international standards. Even among LATAM countries where participation in vocational programmes is generally low, Brazil stands out as having only 11% of students in vocational programmes (see Figure 2.7).

Until very recently, students in VET programmes in Brazil took academic *and* vocational courses as one programme in the same school (*ensino técnico de nível médio integrado*) or as separate programmes in the same or in separate institutions (*ensino técnico de nível médio concomitante*). These programmes have tended to attract high-performing students, many of which come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Studies also show that (outside the quite separate institution of apprenticeship) workplace learning have not been a standard part of VET programmes in Brazil. Internationally, many countries have developed hybrid VET models to allow students to obtain real on-the-job training. This has been shown to be effective for students' learning progression, allowing them to acquire practical experience and key technical skills. In addition, it can also facilitate a two-way flow of information between potential employers and employees, making recruitment more effective or less costly for the employer (World Bank, 2016<sub>[30]</sub>). Some studies suggest that low participation in VET programmes is also a result of low awareness of the programmes on offer (Almeida et al., 2015<sub>[31]</sub>).


In the PNE, Target 11 is to increase enrolment in upper secondary VET threefold, while ensuring the quality of the offer, and delivering at least 50% of this increase in the public sector (OECD, 2018<sup>[32]</sup>). The intention is that realisation of this target will not only help engage and keep less academically-oriented students in education, offering alternative pathways, but also support upskilling and, through this, improvements in labour market outcomes and productivity. This is particularly important in Brazil, given that a large share of young people enter the labour market directly after leaving school without undertaking tertiary education or further training.

**Figure 2.7. Trends in enrolment in upper secondary vocational programmes**

Percentage of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes



Source: (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>), *UIS dataset*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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### **Reform of upper secondary education is now under way and could enhance student engagement**

Traditionally, much of the focus of upper secondary education has been on preparation for the National Upper Secondary Exam (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*, ENEM), which plays a critical role in selection for tertiary education (see Box 2.3). In addition, upper secondary certification is required to access higher education, and is automatically provided by schools or local education authorities upon successful school completion. Upper-secondary certification can also be obtained through adult learning programmes (e.g. *Educação de Jovens e Adultos*, EJA) or by passing the National Examination for Certification of Youth and Adult Skills (*Exame Nacional para Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos*, ENCCEJA).

Currently, as described in Chapter 1, a major reform in this level of education is under way, designed to introduce a competence-based and more flexible curriculum coupled with an extension of the school day. If well implemented, it is anticipated that one effect will be to make the curriculum more relevant and engaging for students, and as a result dropout and repetition rates should decrease (World Bank, 2017<sup>[33]</sup>). The reform is intended to offer more flexibility, so that students would be able to combine professional and technical education with academic programmes of study. This should also help ensure that more students graduate with the technical skills and knowledge required by the labour market.

### Box 2.3. The ENEM: an examination for access into tertiary education

The ENEM was created in 1998 and is managed by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira*, INEP). While initially seen as a tool to evaluate Brazil's education system, it has progressively become the main examination gateway to tertiary education. This role has been enhanced, particularly since 2010 when scores in the exam became the only criterion used in the selection process for public federal universities. Private and state universities usually have their own exams and/or entry criteria but some also include the ENEM as part of their selection process. ENEM results are also used to select and determine the eligibility of students for ProUni scholarships or the Student Financing Fund (*Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil*, FIES) for those who wish to attend a private higher education institution.

The ENEM is widely respected as a transparent and objective competitive examination. However, the high stakes associated with this examination have contributed to the emergence of a shadow education sector in the country. The economic returns from higher education qualifications (see Chapter 3) and the fact that university places, in particular prestigious public universities, remain limited, lead many students and families – and in particular those from advantaged backgrounds – to seek out additional opportunities outside of school, in particular private tutoring and the *cursinho*. This situation contributes to disparities in access to higher education, as children from socio-economically advantaged households will be better prepared for university entrance examinations (see Chapter 3 for a discussion on disparities in the level of quality between the private and public sectors), including the ENEM (Medeiros, 2016<sup>[17]</sup>).

Current reforms will allow students to use their results in the Basic Education Assessment System's (*Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica*, SAEB) assessments taken in Grades 1, 2 and 3 of upper secondary (known as *ENEM seriado*) for entry into higher education institutions. While it is too early to tell, spreading out the SAEB assessments across three years could help mitigate the perception of high-stakes consequences associated with the ENEM, which will continue to be offered upon students' graduation. Conversely, this reform could encourage excessive "teaching to the test" during upper secondary education, taking time away from actual learning. Introducing an alternative entrance route to higher education may also pose risks to equity and the perception of fairness in the system.

Sources: (IBGE, 2019<sup>[6]</sup>), *Desigualdades Sociais por Cor ou Raça no Brasil [Social Inequalities by Colour or Race in Brazil]*, [https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101681\\_informativo.pdf](https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101681_informativo.pdf) (accessed on 5 May 2020); (MEC, 2018<sup>[34]</sup>), *ENEM: Apresentação [ENEM: Presentation]*, <http://portal.mec.gov.br/enem-sp-2094708791> (accessed on 8 April 2020); (INEP, 2020<sup>[35]</sup>), *Inep disponibiliza Caderno de Conceitos e Orientações do Censo Escolar 2020 e Glossário da Educação Especial*, [http://inep.gov.br/artigo/-/asset\\_publisher/B4AQV9zFY7Bv/content/enquete-sobre-nova-data-do-enem-comeca-neste-sabado-20-/21206%20](http://inep.gov.br/artigo/-/asset_publisher/B4AQV9zFY7Bv/content/enquete-sobre-nova-data-do-enem-comeca-neste-sabado-20-/21206%20) (accessed on 20 July 2020).

## Progressing through compulsory education: grade repetition, dropout and completion

### **Grade repetition remains common in Brazil**

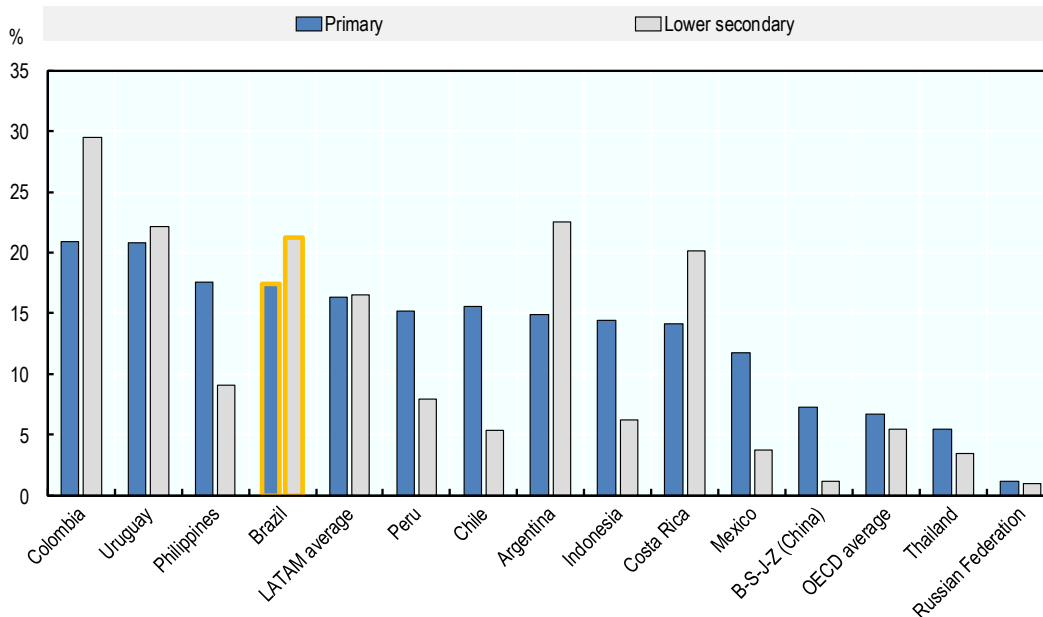
*Brazil has high rates of grade repetition*

In many countries, pupils need to demonstrate mastery of the work of a given grade before they can proceed to the next one. Those who fail to do so, according to their results in tests or assessments, are required to repeat the grade or year. However, research evidence suggests that repetition is very costly,

not effective in raising outcomes, and can have other negative effects such as further lowering student motivation and engagement (see Box 2.4). In Brazil, rates of grade repetition are much higher than in OECD countries, although comparable with other parts of Latin America (see Figure 2.8).


**Figure 2.8. Grade repetition rates, PISA 2018**

Percentage of 15-year-olds reporting that they had repeated grades in primary and lower secondary education



Note: B-S-J-Z (China), an acronym for the four Chinese provinces that participated in PISA 2018: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

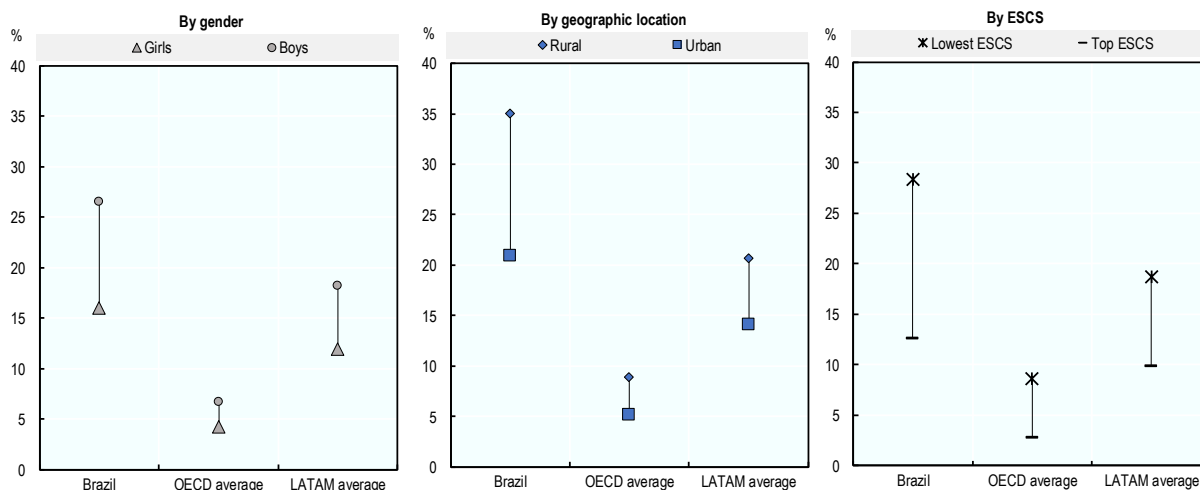
Source: (OECD, 2019<sup>[36]</sup>), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>.

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In Brazil, as in many other countries, repetition is more common among those from poorer and rural households, and among male students. Such disparities are greater in Brazil than in many comparable countries. For example, pupils from the lowest socio-economic quartile (as measured by PISA's ESCS index) are at least twice as likely to have repeated at least one grade than pupils from the highest quartile in lower secondary education (28% as opposed to 13%, respectively) (see Figure 2.9). In comparison, in OECD countries the absolute difference is much smaller, around 9% and 3%, respectively. One of the consequences of repeating grades is that students end their school careers at a later age than normal: 26% of all upper secondary students in Brazil are two or more years older than the expected age for their year (Todos Pela Educação, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>). This also means that while the vast majority (93%) of 15-17 year-olds are enrolled in school, many of them have not yet reached upper secondary education – only 71% of 15-17 year-olds are in upper secondary education (Todos Pela Educação, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>).

**Figure 2.9. Grade repetition rates by gender, geographic location and socio-economic background, PISA 2018**

Percentage of 15-year-olds reporting at least one year of repetition in lower secondary school by students' gender, school geographic location and students' and schools' socio-economic background (ESCS)



Note: PISA defines the profile of a school's location based on the principals' characterisation of the community in which it is located. The same definition is applied across all participating countries and includes five categories: villages, hamlets or rural areas (fewer than 3 000 people), small towns (3 000 to about 15 000 people), towns (15 000 to about 100 000 people), cities (100 000 to about 1 000 000 people) and large cities (with over 1 000 000 people). In line with OECD conventions, this report identifies "rural" in the PISA data as those in communities with fewer than 3 000 people and "urban" as those located in any city with more than 100 000 people, unless otherwise noted.

Source: (OECD, 2019<sup>[36]</sup>), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>.

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### Box 2.4. Research evidence on why grade repetition is undesirable

The effects of grade retention can be hard to measure through observational studies as it is difficult to distinguish these effects from other factors associated with the profile of students who have been held back. However, findings from randomised controlled experiments show that repetition can have a number of undesirable effects on education systems and students alike. They suggest that grade repetition

- **has high costs:** repetition means an extra year of schooling at public or private expense, and the individual pupil loses a year of potential earnings. Cross-country evidence estimates that widespread use of repetition increases the overall cost of primary and secondary education by around 5% in Brazil, Germany and Italy and up to 10-12% in Portugal and Spain.
- **is largely ineffective:** for those who struggle to learn, merely repeating the experience in which they have already failed is unlikely to succeed. Targeted support, to address students' specific needs and difficulties is a more effective approach.
- **lowers students' motivation and engagement:** pupils are often required to repeat all subjects, even those in which they have demonstrated adequate performance. This can further lower motivation and engagement, in particular since repetition may be triggered by weak performance in only some areas.
- **encourages higher dropout and lower educational attainment:** this is often a consequence of repeaters' low motivation and confidence.
- **leads to lower performance levels and higher inequalities, at the system level:** according to an OECD report from 2011, in countries where grade repetition is very common, overall performance tends to be lower and social background also tends to have a bigger impact on learning outcomes than is the case when compared to countries where fewer students are retained.

Sources: (Ikeda and García, 2014<sup>[38]</sup>), *Grade repetition: A comparative study of academic and non-academic consequences*, [https://doi.org/10.1787/eco\\_studies-2013-5k3w65mx3hnx](https://doi.org/10.1787/eco_studies-2013-5k3w65mx3hnx); (OECD, 2011<sup>[39]</sup>), *When Students Repeat Grades or Are Transferred Out of School: What Does it Mean for Education Systems?*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k9h362n5z45-en>; (Manacorda, 2012<sup>[40]</sup>), *The Cost of Grade Retention*, <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/manacorn/repetic.pdf> (accessed 17 June 2020); (Rebelo, 2009<sup>[41]</sup>), *Efeitos da retenção escolar, segundo os estudos científicos, e orientações para uma intervenção eficaz: Uma revisão [Effects of school retention, according to scientific studies, and guidelines for effective intervention: A review]*, [https://doi.org/10.14195/1647-8614\\_43-1\\_2](https://doi.org/10.14195/1647-8614_43-1_2); (Ribeiro, 1991<sup>[42]</sup>), *A pedagogia da repetência [The pedagogy of repetition]* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0103-40141991000200002>; (Instituto Unibanco, 2017<sup>[43]</sup>), *Reprovação não contribui para aprendizagem [Failing does not contribute to learning]*, *Aprendizagem em Foco* 32 <https://www.institutounibanco.org.br/aprendizagem-em-foco/32/> (accessed on 29 June 2020); (UNESCO-UIS, 2012<sup>[44]</sup>), *Opportunities lost: The impact of grade repetition and early school leaving*; [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/opportunities-lost-the-impact-of-grade-repetition-and-early-school-leaving-en\\_0.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/opportunities-lost-the-impact-of-grade-repetition-and-early-school-leaving-en_0.pdf) (accessed on 22 June 2020); (UNESCO, 2016<sup>[45]</sup>), *Reporte Técnico: Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo [Technical Report: Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study]*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247123> (accessed on 6 May 2020).

#### *Brazil is taking steps to reduce grade repetition*

In recent years, Brazil has taken major steps to reduce grade retention (see Box 2.5 for a discussion on OECD and partner countries' strategies). Target 3.5 of the PNE calls for measures “to correct student progression during Brazil's basic education through individualised support and practices such as tutoring in complementary shifts, recovery studies and partial progression, in order to reposition students in the school cycle in a manner compatible with their age” (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>). Some states, municipalities and schools have introduced transition models (e.g. “continuous progression”, which is also referred to as

“promotion with support” or “automatic promotion”) that help limit grade repetition as well as tutoring sessions for students falling behind. As a result, repetition rates in Brazil have been decreasing gradually.

Nevertheless the practice remains common, particularly in secondary education, from Year 6 onwards. There are multiple reasons. First, Brazilian families, teachers and schools appear to be attached to this approach (Instituto Unibanco, 2017<sup>[43]</sup>). Second, the alternative to grade repetition of “automatic promotion” or “continuous progression” is often misunderstood as lowering standards. In fact, the alternative to grade repetition is to offer a range of supports for struggling students. Such students might therefore receive targeted support and take remedial classes and/or tutoring sessions to help them catch up with their peers, and correct any gaps. Such targeted support is more effective and less costly than grade repetition in helping struggling students catch up. Therefore, assuming this support is in place, the effect is to raise rather than lower standards. Third, schools and sub-national units often lack the necessary policies, resources and capacity to identify struggling students and to offer individualised support to students. It is therefore very important to ensure that the cost savings arising from cutting back on grade repetition are cycled back to the schools so that they can invest in this capacity.

Other initiatives have also contributed to the gradual decrease in grade repetition. For example, schools following the Full-Time Upper Secondary programme (*Ensino Médio em Tempo Integral*, EMTI) are reporting lower repetition rates (MEC, 2018<sup>[46]</sup>). Box 2.5 reports different initiatives used in OECD and other countries to reduce repetition rates.

### Box 2.5. OECD and partner country strategies to reduce grade repetition

Several OECD countries have implemented strategies to reduce grade repetition while ensuring that students are indeed learning. They tend to focus on two or more of the approaches described below:

1. **Early and preventive interventions:** such initiatives often have a two-step approach. First, diagnostic assessments identify the first signs of students' learning difficulties. Second, students are offered early and targeted support. Studies show that this is an efficient and cost-effective strategy to reduce – or indeed eliminate – retention. Finland managed to drastically lower its retention rates after introducing automatic promotion in combination with early intervention methods.
2. **Tutoring programmes or remedial classes to attend to individual learning needs:** providing additional and individualised support to students that are falling behind has been identified as a powerful mechanism to reduce repetition. In 2008 as part of a wider reform to reduce grade repetition, France introduced two hours of individualised support and other catch up opportunities for students in the last two years of primary education. In Brazil, some schools and networks offer after-school remedial support to students who are falling behind. Teachers claim that these initiatives contribute to students' learning development and stronger outcomes.
3. **Smoothing transition:** some countries have introduced alternative transition models (also referred to as “promotion with support”) as a way of limiting retention. Some examples include:
  - a. allowing grade repetition only at specific points of a students' academic career (e.g. at the end of an education level/cycle), rather than in any grade. This is the case of the Brazilian states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais.
  - b. limiting retention only to the course(s) failed by students, so students repeat the course but not the whole year. This is the case in Canada, Finland and the United States. In Finland, students in upper-secondary education build their own learning schedules and are able to complete the courses selected at their own pace.

Research has highlighted that in order to correct educational deficits, these alternative models need to focus on scaffolding students' learning during the school year.
4. **Supporting teachers:** it is key that teachers be equipped with the tools and strategies to identify and address diverse individual learning requirements, recognising that a reduction in grade repetition will increase performance range within classrooms.
5. **Setting limits at the school and/or system level:** some countries have established “targets” for the maximum number of students who could be required to repeat in a year as a way to limit retention. This is the case of France where schools are held accountable for their repetition rates and school leaders are invited to explain their educational results. Others have limited the number of times that students may repeat. In Brazil, the national education quality index (*Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*, IDEB) includes a measure for grade repetition, such that schools, municipalities and states which make many students repeat receive lower IDEB scores.

In countries such as Brazil, where repetition is a widespread practice and embedded in the school culture, reform efforts meet resistance. Building stakeholder commitment and awareness is key to the success of reforms. The following strategies may be considered:

- **Educational authorities should raise teacher awareness of its consequences.** National campaigns and other materials may be used for this purpose.
- **Financial incentives can be used for schools to reduce repetition,** as per-capita funding gives schools few incentives to take into account the high costs of grade repetition. One option could be for schools to retain any savings made from reductions of grade repetition so that these savings can be used for other purposes, such as financing alternatives to repetition.
- **Reduction of repetition could also be introduced into accountability systems,** by making schools accountable for the number of students held back, and also ensuring they focus not



only on those just under the grade level but also the lowest achievers, so they support all those falling behind.

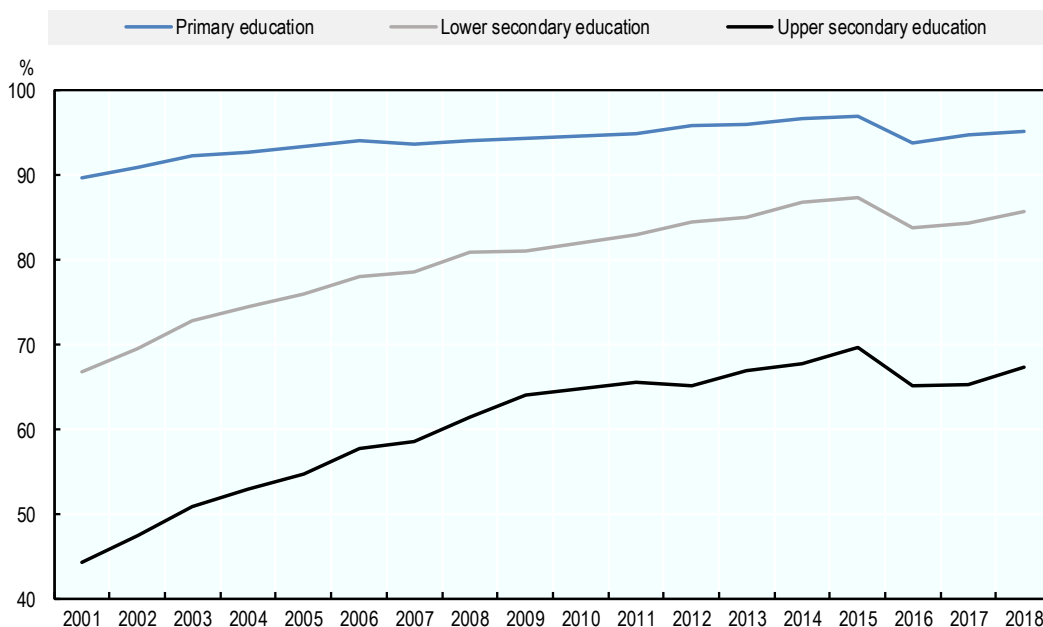
Sources: (UNESCO-UIS, 2012<sup>[44]</sup>), *Opportunities lost: The impact of grade repetition and early school leaving*, [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/opportunities-lost-the-impact-of-grade-repetition-and-early-school-leaving-en\\_0.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/opportunities-lost-the-impact-of-grade-repetition-and-early-school-leaving-en_0.pdf) (accessed on 22 June 2020); (OECD, 2012<sup>[47]</sup>), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en>; (Instituto Unibanco, 2017<sup>[43]</sup>), *Reprovação não contribui para aprendizagem [Repetition does not contribute to learning]*, *Aprendizagem em Foco* 32, <https://www.institutounibanco.org.br/aprendizagem-em-foco/32/> (accessed on 5 May 2020).

## Dropout and completion remain significant issues

### *Progress in tackling dropout and raising completion*


Completion rates have increased in Brazil. Over the period 2001-2018, the completion rate rose from 90% to 95% in primary education, from 67% to 86% in lower secondary education and from 44% to 67% in upper secondary education (see Figure 2.10), with current rates similar to those seen in other parts of Latin America.

**Figure 2.10. Trends in completion rates, 2000-2018**



Note: Completion rates refer to the percentage of students that complete a specific phase of education that they began and are therefore an inverse measure of dropout for that phase. Data for 2010 are missing.

Source: (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>), *UIS dataset*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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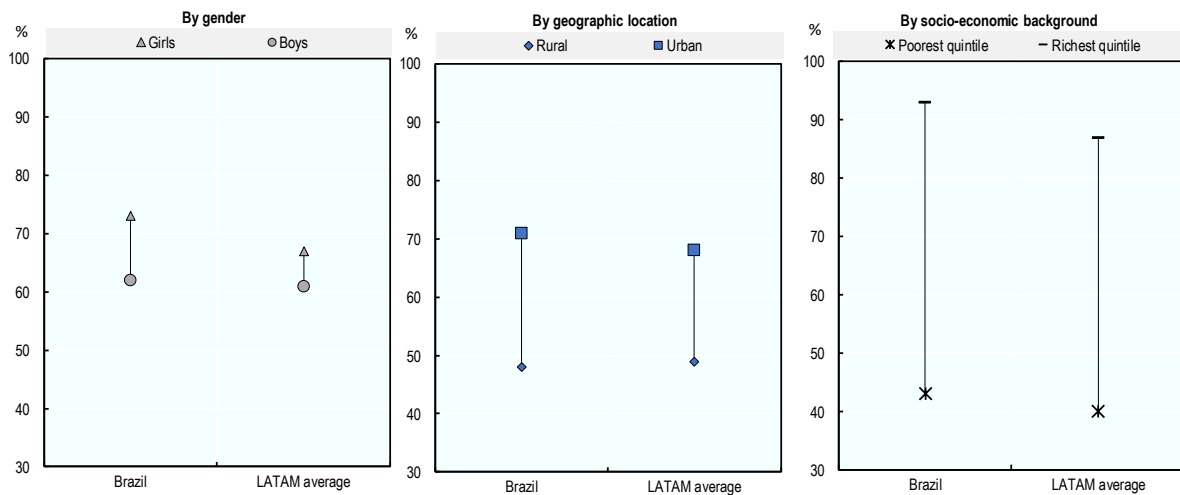
Despite progress, too many students still fail to complete, particularly at the upper secondary level. Nearly one-third of students did not complete upper secondary education in 2018, with most of the dropout taking place in the first year of upper secondary education (Todos Pela Educação, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>). National evidence suggests that two main reasons for students to drop out are lack of interest in their studies and the desire

to get a job (Packard, 2018<sup>[48]</sup>). While the current reform to Brazil's upper secondary model is expected to help reduce dropout (World Bank, 2017<sup>[33]</sup>) by making the curriculum more engaging and relevant for students, the challenging conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic may increase the risk of dropout, especially among students in difficult socio-economic and family situations (Gouédard, Pont and Viennet, 2020<sup>[49]</sup>; Saavedra, 2020<sup>[50]</sup>).

### *Wide disparities in completion rates across socio-economic groups*

In Brazil, completion rates tend to be higher for women, for those living in urban areas and for better-off families. The same pattern is found in other Latin American countries and globally, but in Brazil, the impact of socio-economic background is greater. For example, of those who start upper secondary education in Brazil, only 7% of students from the richest quintile failed to complete, compared with 57% for those from the poorest quintile. In LATAM countries on average, the comparable figures are 13% and 59% respectively (see Figure 2.11).

**Figure 2.11. Completion rates in upper secondary education, by gender, schools' geographic location and student's socio-economic background, 2018**



Source: (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.<sup>[24]</sup>), *UIS dataset*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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Factors associated with dropout are very different for female and male students. For example, in 2016, one in four women (26%) aged 14-29 said that they had abandoned education because of caring responsibilities for the household, children or elderly people, compared to less than 1% of men (IBGE, 2017<sup>[51]</sup>). Male students, on the other hand, might be expected to find a job in order to support their family financially. As a result, the type of activity which women enter upon leaving education differs markedly from men, with a much larger proportion of young women becoming inactive and men entering employment (OECD, 2014<sup>[52]</sup>).

### *Further steps are needed to tackle dropout*

Studies show that some initiatives such as *Bolsa Família* have had a positive impact on reducing dropout rates (Santos et al., 2019<sup>[53]</sup>; Bruns, Evans and Luque, 2012<sup>[11]</sup>). However, further measures are needed in order to meet Target 2 of the PNE, which is to ensure that at least 95% of students (aged 6-14) complete education at the recommended age (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>). Tackling dropout will require incentives and support

directed at students and their families to encourage students to remain in education, alongside measures at the school and classroom level to increase student engagement and motivation, and help accommodate children with different needs (Lyche, 2010<sup>[54]</sup>).

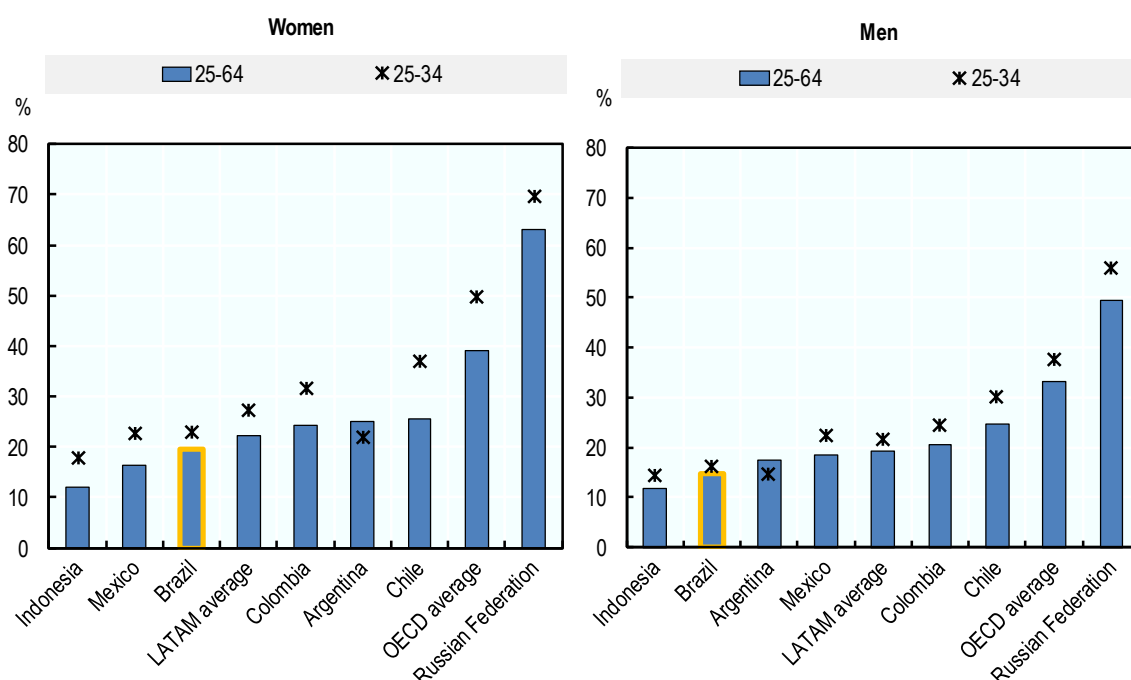
## Tertiary education

### *Tertiary attainment is low in Brazil, particularly at the most advanced levels*

Following decades of rapid growth, nearly half of young women and more than one-third of young men (aged 25-34) in OECD countries now have tertiary qualifications. In LATAM countries, about one-quarter of this age group has tertiary qualifications: in Chile one-third is qualified at this level (see Figure 2.12). In Brazil however, tertiary attainment, even among the younger generation is low, at 21% of 25-34 year-olds in 2018. Moreover, postgraduate study is uncommon in Brazil: less than one percent of 25-64 year-olds in Brazil have attained a master's degree, well below the OECD average of 13% (OECD, 2019<sup>[4]</sup>).

**Figure 2.12. Tertiary attainment by gender in different age groups, 2019**

Share of 25-64 year-olds and 25-34 year-olds who attained tertiary qualifications – ISCED 5 (short-cycle tertiary education) to ISCED 8 (doctoral or equivalent)



Note: Data for Argentina, Brazil, and the Russian Federation refer to 2018, and for Chile and Indonesia to 2017.

Source: (OECD, n.d.<sup>[1]</sup>), *Education and Training / Education at a Glance*, <https://stats.oecd.org/> (accessed on 26 November 2020).

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## ***A sequence of reforms has sought to expand tertiary education, but enrolment remains low***

Brazil has made substantial efforts to increase participation in tertiary education. Between 2003 and 2010, 16 new public federal universities were created, and enrolments in federal universities increased by 47% (Traina-Chacon and Calderón, 2015<sup>[55]</sup>). However, much of the expansion has taken place through growth in private higher education institutions, which more than doubled in number in the 1990s and early 2000s. This has been facilitated by federal financing (FIES) and scholarships, such as the ProUni programme (see Chapter 4). As a result, over three-quarters of bachelor's students in Brazil now attend private universities, compared with fewer than one-third of students in OECD countries (OECD, 2019<sup>[4]</sup>).

Despite this growth, only 21% of 20-24 year-olds in Brazil were enrolled in tertiary education in 2018, compared to 34% on average across OECD countries<sup>3</sup> (OECD, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>). Brazil's comparatively lower levels of participation in tertiary education also reflect very limited opportunities to enrol in advanced technical programmes (ISCED 5 between upper secondary and bachelor's programmes), which are common in many OECD countries.

Looking to the future, Target 12 of the PNE aims to increase the gross enrolment rate in undergraduate programmes to at least 50% (in 2019, at 37%) and the net enrolment rate<sup>4</sup> of 18-24 year-olds to 33% (in 2019, at 25.5%) (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>; INEP, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>; INEP, 2020<sup>[56]</sup>). Target 14 aims to increase postgraduate enrolment so as to graduate 60 000 masters students and 25 000 doctoral students (MEC, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>). Raising participation in advanced levels of education – and in particular in master and doctoral programmes – will be critical to developing the highly-skilled workforce needed to support Brazil's economic growth, as well as the development of a more knowledge-based economy.

### ***Barriers to tertiary education result in disparities in tertiary education participation***

Access to higher education has become more equitable in recent years as a result of policies such as FIES, ProUni and the quota system (see Box 2.6). The share of students from the two bottom income quintiles who attend higher education increased from 7% in 2002 to 17% in 2011 in the public sector, and from 2.6% to 10% in the private sector over the same period (IPEA, 2016<sup>[57]</sup>). Despite improvements, Brazil's tertiary education system remains highly unequal, with advantaged students much more likely to be enrolled in universities than young people from less privileged backgrounds (see Table 2.1). Chapter 4 further explores the implications of this for funding tertiary education, in a context where there are many competing demands on education budgets, including from sectors such as ECEC, where the contribution to equity is clearer.

**Table 2.1. Students enrolled in higher education by sector and household income, 2019**

Percentage of students enrolled in public and private higher education, by household income

Socio-economic quintile in ascending order per household per-capita income	Higher education (ISCED 6-8)	
	Public	Private
Up to 20%	10.8%	5.5%
More than 20% up to 40%	15.9%	11.5%
More than 40% up to 60%	20.5%	18.4%
More than 60% up to 80%	23.7%	29.9%
More than 80%	29.2%	34.7%

Source: Adapted from (IBGE, 2020<sup>[14]</sup>), *Síntese de Indicadores Sociais: Uma análise das condições de vida da população brasileira 2020* [Synthesis of Social Indicators: An analysis of the living conditions of the Brazilian population 2020], <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101760.pdf> (accessed on 12 April 2021).

Disadvantaged students face several barriers to access and success in tertiary education. First, as discussed in Box 2.3 and in Chapter 3, students from less privileged backgrounds tend to attend lower-quality public schools, and are less likely to have benefitted from private tutoring and extra classes. As a result, they are less prepared to pass the university entry examinations (Medeiros, 2016<sup>[17]</sup>). Second, even those who succeed and enter tertiary education programmes often receive inadequate financial and academic support. Ensuring that all students are offered the support they need can not only help all students make the most of their university experience, acquiring advanced skills and knowledge that will boost their personal and professional lives, but can also help reduce dropout and reduce completion time at the system level.

### Box 2.6. Quotas in public universities

The quota system in Brazil was implemented in 2012 to address socio-economic and racial gaps in access and participation in education. This policy followed decades of pressure and debate in civil society.

Law nº 12.711 established that at least 50% of places in undergraduate courses provided by federal institutions must be reserved for students who completed their upper secondary education in public schools. The reserved places are distributed based on the student's gross family income: half for those with a family income equal to or less than one and a half minimum salary per-capita and the other half, destined to families with an income per-capita higher than one and a half minimum salary. The distribution is also done in accordance with the proportion of black, mixed and indigenous people and special needs candidates, using data from the last census. The race criterion is self-declared by candidates, while income must be established through documents supplied to Ministry of Education (*Ministério da Educação*, MEC).

The system was implemented progressively over a 4-year period. In 2013, the year following the publication of the law, public federal universities were expected to reserve at least 12.5% of their places for the quota system. Partly as a result, in 2018, black and mixed students became, for the first time, the majority in public higher education institutions (50.3%).

The quotas system is due to be reviewed in 2022. Created as a temporary measure, many education experts and civil society stakeholders not only defend its extension, but also propose that it be accompanied by stronger financial assistance programmes and greater diversity in the academic content of university programmes.

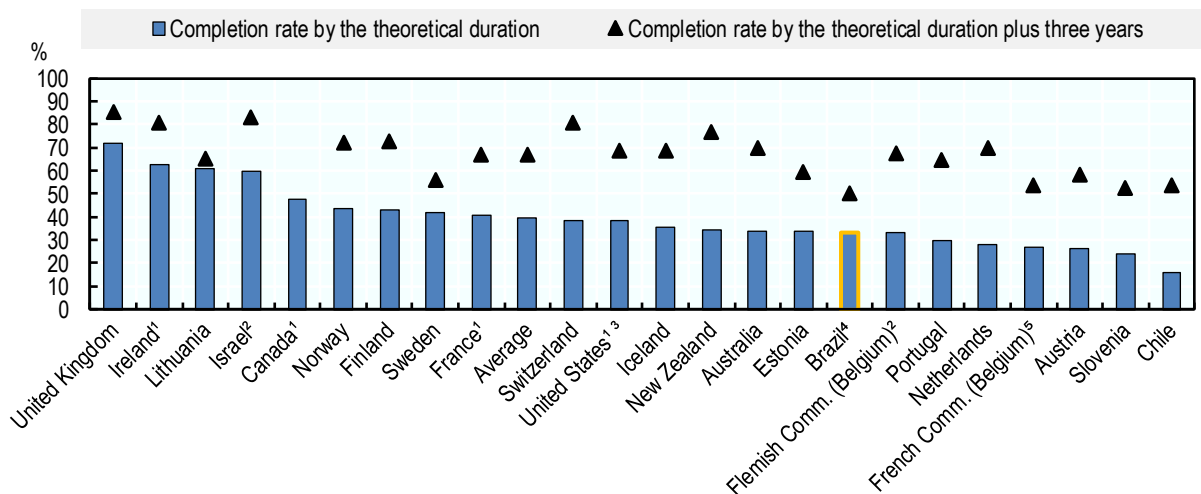
Sources: (IBGE, 2019<sup>[6]</sup>), *Desigualdades Sociais por Cor ou Raça no Brasil [Social Inequalities by Colour or Race in Brazil]*, [https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101681\\_informativo.pdf](https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101681_informativo.pdf) (accessed on 5 May 2020); (Neri, 2018<sup>[18]</sup>), *Qual foi o impacto da crise sobre a pobreza e a distribuição de renda? [What the crisis' impact on poverty and income distribution?]*, [https://www.cps.fgv.br/cps/bd/docs/NOTA-CURTA-Pobreza-Desigualdade-a-Crise-Recente\\_FGV\\_Social\\_Neri.pdf](https://www.cps.fgv.br/cps/bd/docs/NOTA-CURTA-Pobreza-Desigualdade-a-Crise-Recente_FGV_Social_Neri.pdf) (accessed on 1 May 2020); (MEC, 2012<sup>[58]</sup>), *Cotas: Perguntas Frequentes [Quotas: Frequently Asked Questions]*, <http://portal.mec.gov.br/cotas/perguntas-frequentes.html> (accessed on 23 July 2020); (Folha de S. Paulo, 2020<sup>[59]</sup>), *Lei de Cotas deve ser renovada, mas não garante permanência de alunos, dizem especialistas [Quota Law should be renewed, but does not guarantee permanence of students, experts say]*, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2020/06/lei-de-cotas-deve-ser-renovada-mas-nao-garante-permanencia-de-alunos-dizem-especialistas.shtml> (accessed on 10 June 2020); (Presidência da República, 2012<sup>[60]</sup>), *Decreto Nº 7.824, de 11 de Outubro de 2012 [Decree Nº 7.824, from October 11 2012]*, [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2011-2014/2012/decreto/d7824.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2012/decreto/d7824.htm) (accessed on 23 July 2020).

### Students often fail to graduate from tertiary education on time

Only one-third (33%) of students who enter a full-time bachelor's programme graduate within its theoretical duration of four or five years, compared to an average of 39% among countries with available data (see Figure 2.13) (OECD, 2019<sup>[4]</sup>). In part, this may reflect the fact that in Brazil, it is normal for students – including those undertaking a tertiary degree on a full-time basis – to have a part- or full-time job or internship on the side. In 2019, around 48% of students aged 18-24 also worked (Barcellos, 2020<sup>[61]</sup>). National research suggests that this is particularly common among students in private institutions (58%), in comparison to those in public institutions (36.7%) (Barcellos, 2020<sup>[61]</sup>). While the explanation for this disparity is unclear, it is likely a consequence of inadequate financial support to disadvantaged students in the private sector (see Chapter 4).

While working experience can enhance students' practical skills and knowledge, a busy schedule and heavy workload can prevent students from fully committing to their studies and, as a result, many fail courses or spread out their credits over a longer period. This is arguably an inefficient use of public resources and, at the individual level, can delay graduates' full entry into the labour market and increase their own private expenditure in education (Brocco and Zago, 2016<sup>[62]</sup>).

**Figure 2.13. Completion rate of full-time students who entered a bachelor's or equivalent programme, 2017**



Notes: The completion includes students who transferred and graduated from another tertiary level. 1. Year of reference differs from 2017. 2. Completion rate of students who entered a bachelor's programme does not include students who transferred to and graduated from short-cycle programmes. 3. The theoretical duration plus three years refers to the theoretical duration plus two years. 4. Data do not include entrants to 6-year bachelor's programmes, which correspond to about 2% of total entrants at this level. 5. Data refer only to the *hautes écoles* and the *écoles des arts*, representing about 60% of entrants to bachelor's or equivalent programmes.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of completion rate by theoretical duration.

Source: Adapted from (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/n5bh2a>

## Conclusion

In the last two decades, Brazil has made significant progress in ensuring that all children take part in education. While the gap with the OECD has been narrowing, Brazil is still far from reaching OECD levels of participation. In order to sustain growth in participation, three challenges must be addressed.

- First, a large proportion of young people does not complete education on time or at all. This is the result of a number of factors, including grade repetition and an un-engaging curricula. Some students also abandon education to look for a job or take over caring responsibilities at home. The COVID-19 pandemic may have further encouraged this trend, especially among the most disengaged and disadvantaged. Higher completion rates can help raise the level of qualifications and skills of the Brazilian workforce, and support Brazil's development goals. In addition, ensuring timely completion can help reduce inefficiencies in expenditure.
- Second, disadvantaged individuals still face important barriers both in accessing education, particularly at higher levels, as well as obstacles to their success when they do enter programmes. As a result, levels of attainment and participation in education vary significantly across Brazil's population. While socio-economic background and regional differences are factors in all education systems, their impacts are stronger in Brazil than in many comparable countries. The disparities become particularly prominent in upper secondary and tertiary education, although they have their foundations in the early years. Addressing this issue is not only a moral imperative, but it can also contribute to raising living standards in Brazil.
- Third, the limited range of educational pathways in secondary education, and the scarcity of postsecondary programmes at ISCED 4 and 5, may discourage students, particularly those with more specific needs or who are less academically-oriented, from remaining or progressing in education. The recent reform of Brazil's upper secondary education (see Chapter 1) can not only help address this issue, but is designed also to ensure that individuals enter the labour market with a wider set of practical and vocational skills to meet the needs of the labour market and the economy. The reforms are also intended to support the development of a range of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, of wide value to those individuals and Brazilian society.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For information regarding educational attainment, Brazil's most recent data available in Education at a Glance (EAG) refers to 2018. For that reason, and to guarantee comparability, the OECD average presented here also refers to 2018, although information from 2019 is available in the latest EAG 2020 publication.

<sup>2</sup> To be classified in ISCED 0, ECEC services should: 1) have an adequate intentional educational properties; 2) be institutionalised (usually school-based or otherwise institutionalised for a group of children); 3) have an intensity of at least 2 hours per day of educational activities and a duration of at least 100 days a year; 4) have a regulatory framework recognised by the relevant national authorities (e.g. curriculum); and 5) have trained or accredited staff (e.g. requirement of pedagogical qualifications for educators). The average does not account for other registered ECEC services that are not in adherence with all ISCED criteria.

<sup>3</sup> LATAM average has not been included because of to the lack of available data for the minimum number of countries that compose this average.

<sup>4</sup> This national indicator, called net enrolment rate, is calculated by dividing the number of 18-24 year-olds who attend or have already completed undergraduate courses by the total number of 18-24 year-olds in the country. The result is then multiplied by 100.



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