

Youth unemployment is an increasingly critical issue in Portugal despite improving levels of educational attainment. A survey of 15–34 year-olds by Statistics Portugal in the second quarter of 2009 found that the average age of leaving formal education was 19 years-old. Over 90% of respondents who were not still studying were in a job lasting more than three months. The average time taken to find the first job was 20.4 months (excluding those who did work while at school).

Introduction

In 2009, Eurostat's ad hoc module programmes focused on young people's transition between school and working life. In Portugal this was a novel but already relevant topic, which alongside growing youth unemployment was becoming a major issue.

Over the past 10 years, the resident population in Portugal rose by 2%, reaching over 10.5 million in 2011. The share of young people declined from 16% to 15% between 2001 and 2011, while the share of older people increased from 16% to 19% over the same period.

About the survey

The ad hoc module 'Entry of young people into the labour market' is a sample statistical programme that was included in Eurostat's ad hoc module programmes for the period from 2007 to 2009. The module examined the transition between school and working life, and was addressed at young people aged 15–34. The links between level of educational attainment and the labour market, as well as a period of longer than three months between leaving formal education and starting the first job attracted particular attention.

Statistics Portugal ([INE](#)) was responsible for collecting, processing and analysing data from the ad hoc module for Portugal through its Demographic and Social Statistics Department, and the Information and Knowledge Society Statistics Service. Information was collected through computer-assisted face-to-face interviews. The survey questionnaire, which was based on a Eurostat questionnaire template, sought to analyse the characteristics of respondent's first job and the factors influencing their entry into the labour market. Work for the module was carried out jointly with the Labour Force Survey in the second quarter of 2009.

Results from the ad hoc module are given in an [INE press release in April 2010 \(in Portuguese, 355Kb PDF\)](#) (INE, 2010a) and [INE's employment statistics report for the second quarter of 2010 \(in Portuguese, 1.01Mb PDF\)](#) (INE, 2010b).

Increasing levels of educational attainment

The Portuguese population is becoming increasingly well educated. In 2011, the percentage of individuals with a higher level of educational attainment reached 15%, doubling the percentage of 2001. For the first time half the population had at least nine years' schooling, although the percentage of those without any qualifications (19%) was still significant. In 2011, women had a relatively higher level of qualification than men, with about 70% of graduates (that is, those with a university degree) being female. There were 248,264 women with a higher level educational attainment in 2011, an increase of 45.4% compared with 2001 (Table 1).

Today's young people in Portugal have the highest level of educational attainment ever of this generation. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of young people with secondary education increased by 31.9%. The same trend is noted for higher education; in 2011, there were 115,916 more young people with higher education than in 2001, an increase of 43.9% (Table 1).

Table 1: Educational attainment level of young people aged 15–34 (thousands)

Educational attainment level		2001	2011
Without formal education	Total	27,519	24,188
	Men	14,958	12,174
	Women	12,561	12,014
Basic education – 3rd cycle	Total	862,275	505,593
	Men	558,699	295,142
	Women	303,576	210,451
Secondary/post-secondary	Total	348,136	459,337
	Men	158,391	217,543
	Women	189,745	241,794
Higher education	Total	263,807	379,723
	Men	93,114	131,459
	Women	170,693	248,264

Source: Census 2001 and 2011, Statistics Portugal ([INE](#))

Youth unemployment

Despite the improvement in the levels of educational attainment, youth unemployment has become a critical issue in Portugal, particularly as a result of the economic recession in the past few years. The number of employed young people has fallen significantly since 2001. In 2011, there were 488,600 fewer young people employed than in 2001 (that is, a reduction of 24.5%). In parallel, the number of young unemployed rose from 123,300 to 328,200, an increase of 166.2%. In 2011, the youth unemployment rate was 17.9%, 12.1 percentage points higher than in 2001 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Youth unemployment rate (%)

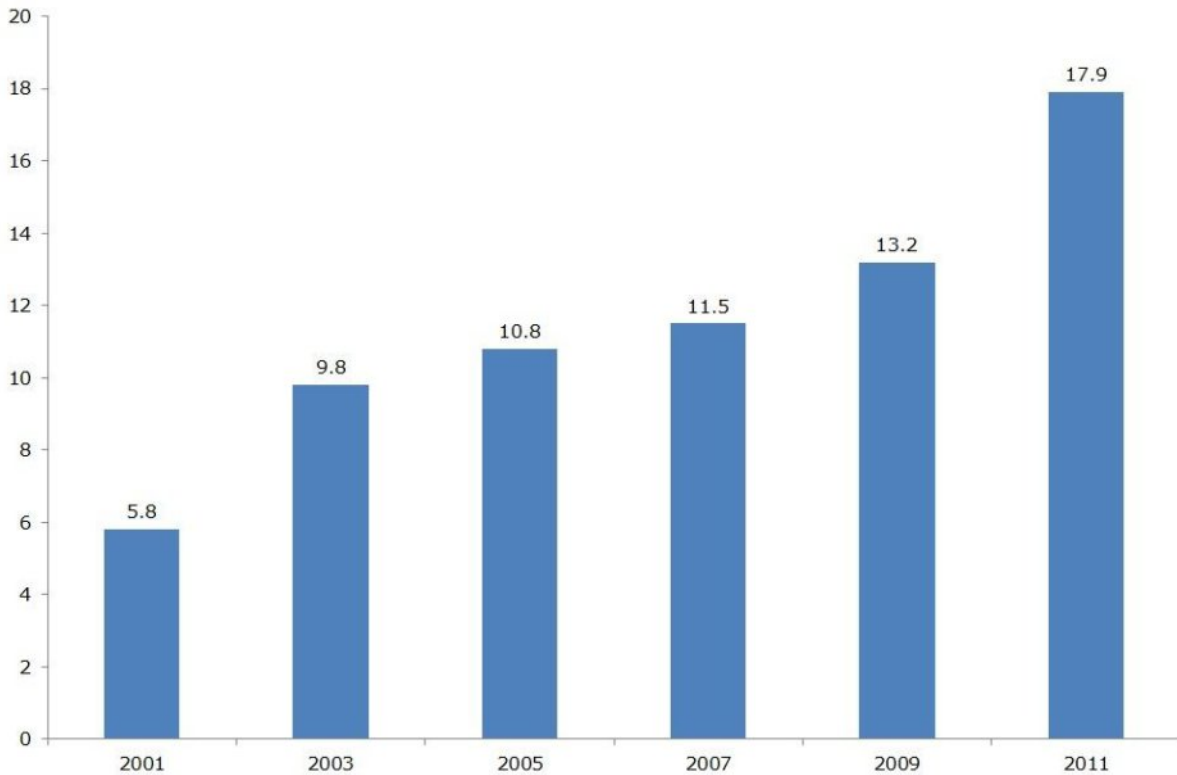


Figure 1: Youth unemployment rate (%)

Notes: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Break in data series in 2010.

Source: Labour Force Survey (INE unpublished data)

[Unemployment data](#) from INE show that, in the third quarter of 2012, the unemployment rate among young people aged between 15 and 24 was 39%, the highest rate ever. Young women are particularly vulnerable to unemployment since their unemployment rate in this period was 41.1%, 3.9 percentage points more than men.

The level of educational attainment still offers protection against unemployment. In 2011, the unemployment rate among young people with a higher level of educational attainment was 14.8% compared with over 20% among those who had only attained a basic level of education (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Youth unemployment rate by educational attainment level (%)

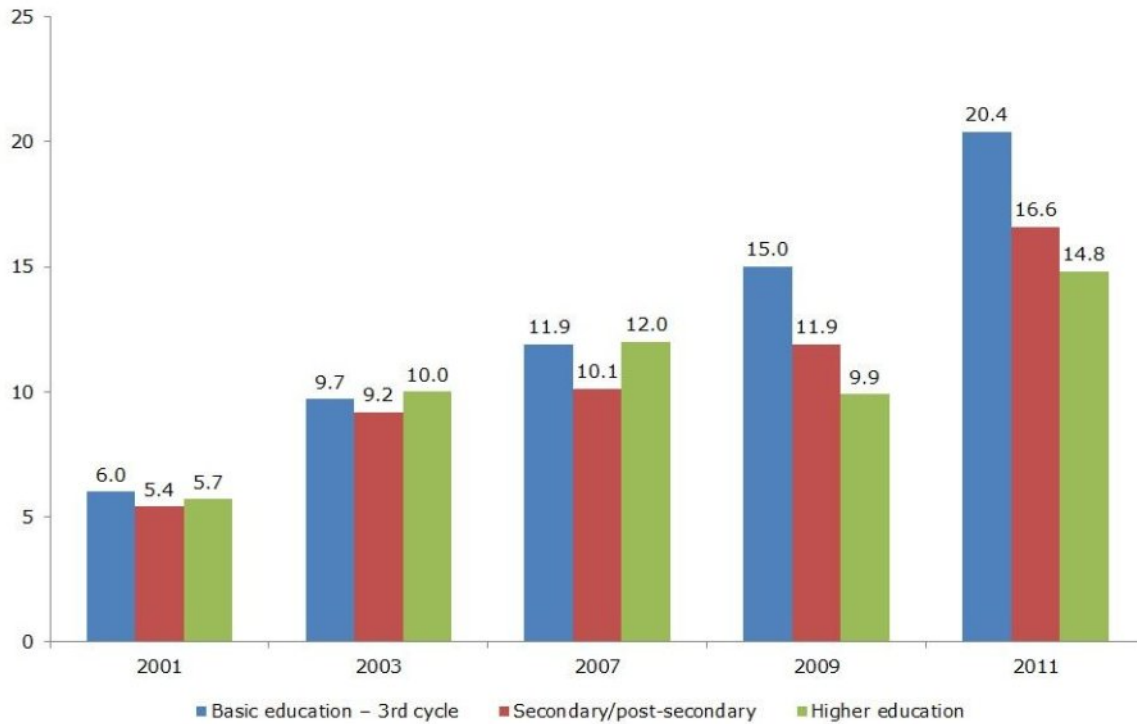


Figure 2: Youth unemployment rate by educational attainment level (%)

Notes: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Break in data series in 2010.

Source: Labour Force Survey (INE unpublished data)

Age when leaving formal education

In the second quarter of 2009, an INE survey found that 65.7% of the young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old had attained some level of education and were not studying at the time of the survey. Men and women presented similar patterns (65.8% and 65.5% respectively). As expected, the proportion of young people among those active in the labour market who had left formal education was much higher at 89.3%. The proportion of those inactive in the labour market had reached 15.1%.

The average age when leaving formal education was 19 years-old for women and 18 years-old for men (Figure 3). As expected, there are significant differences in the average age when leaving formal education according to educational attainment level. This average age was 16 years-old for those who attained the lowest level of education. In contrast, individuals attaining a higher education level left formal education, on average, when they were 24 years-old (Figure 3).

Young people who attended general education courses left formal education relatively earlier than those who attended vocational education courses, 17 and 20 years-old, respectively (Figure 3).

The survey found that a majority of the respondents (63%) left formal education having attained the basic education only.

Figure 3: Average age of young people when leaving formal education

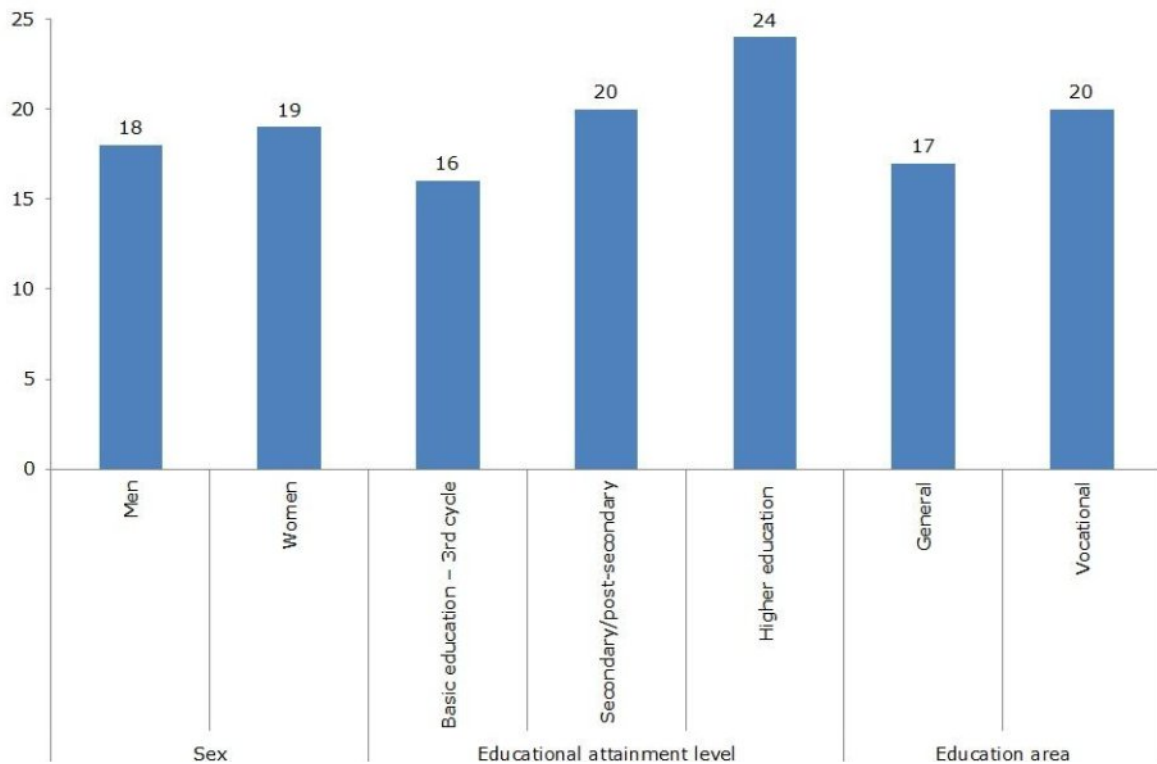


Figure 3: Average age of young people when leaving formal education

Note: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Source: INE (2010a, Figure 1)

An analysis of the survey data highlighted differences in the average age when leaving formal education depending on where young people lived in Portugal. The average age of 20 years-old in the capital Lisbon was higher than the national average of 19 years-old, whereas young people tended to leave formal education earlier in the North region of Portugal, the Autonomous Region of Azores and the Autonomous Region of Madeira (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Average age of young people when leaving formal education by place of residence

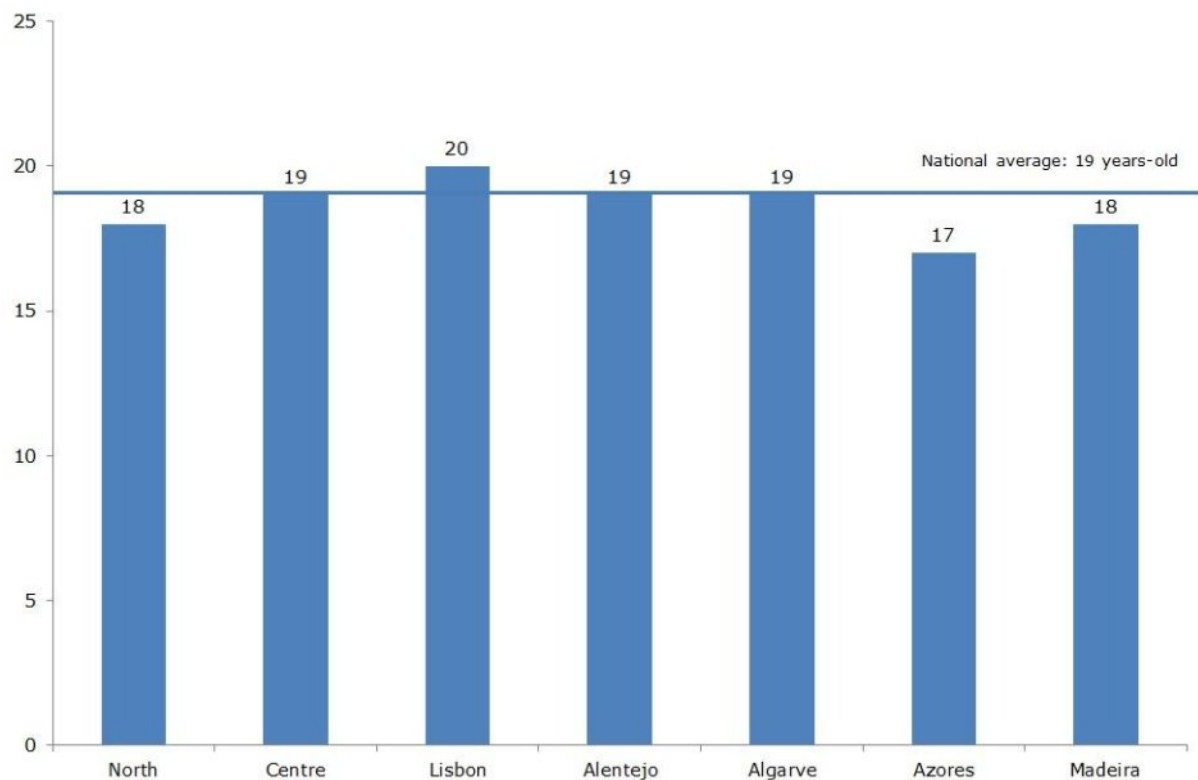


Figure 4: Average age of young people when leaving formal education by place of residence

Note: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Source: INE (2010a, Figure 2)

Transition to the labour market

Work experience while studying

The survey found that 20.6% of those interviewed had a job with a duration of at least a month during their time at school (INE, 2010a). This job was integrated into their curricular plan for only 8% of the young people. The older the respondents, the higher the proportion of those who stated they had done work experience while studying. A similar relationship was observed with level of educational attainment. Having a job during their time at school was more common among young people who attended vocational education than among those who attended general education (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Young people with a job lasting at least a month while at school (%)

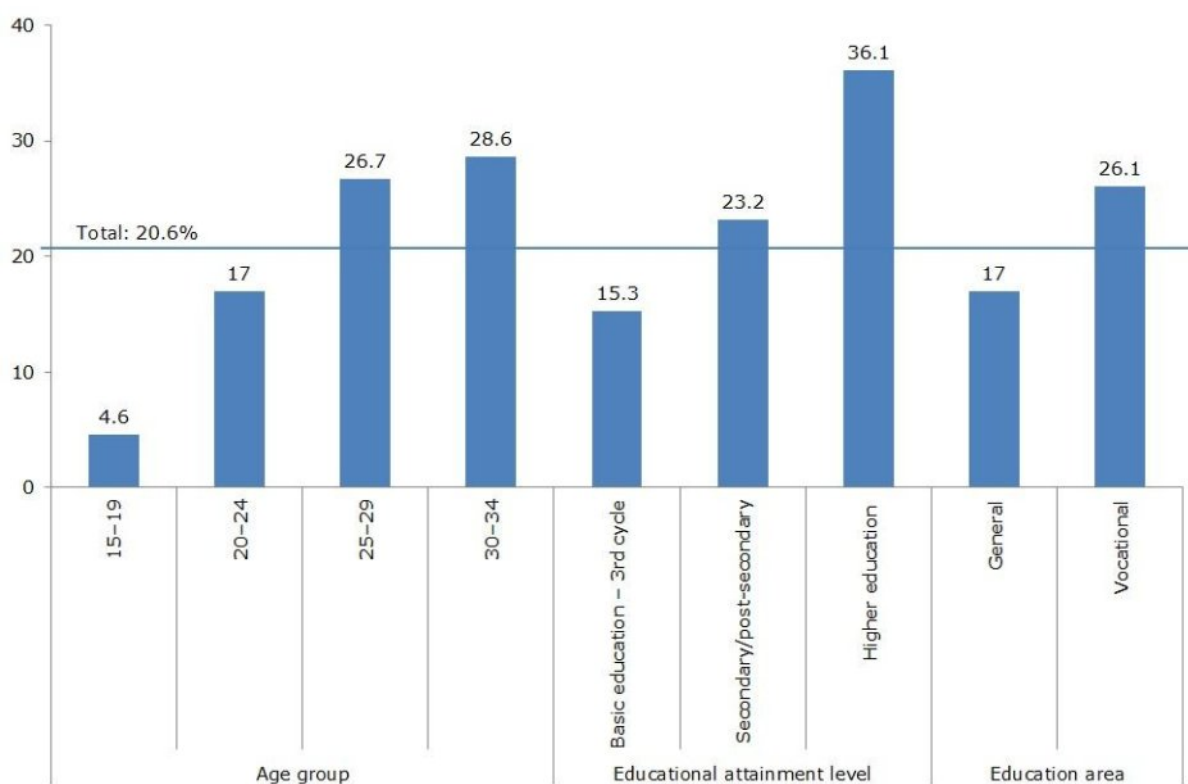


Figure 5: Young people with a job lasting at least a month while at school (%)

Note: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Source: INE (2010a, Figure 4)

First job after leaving formal education

The majority (92.7%) of the young people interviewed who had attained some level of education and were not studying at the time of the survey had held a job lasting more than three months since leaving formal education. For 43.1% of them, this first job was the one held at the time of the survey (INE, 2010a).

Over half of respondents (52.5%) reported they had held jobs lasting more than 2 years, of which 22.8% were jobs lasting between 4 and 10 years, and 10.6% had been for more than 10 years. Only 10.4% had held a job lasting six months or less (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Duration of first job held by young people after leaving formal education (%)

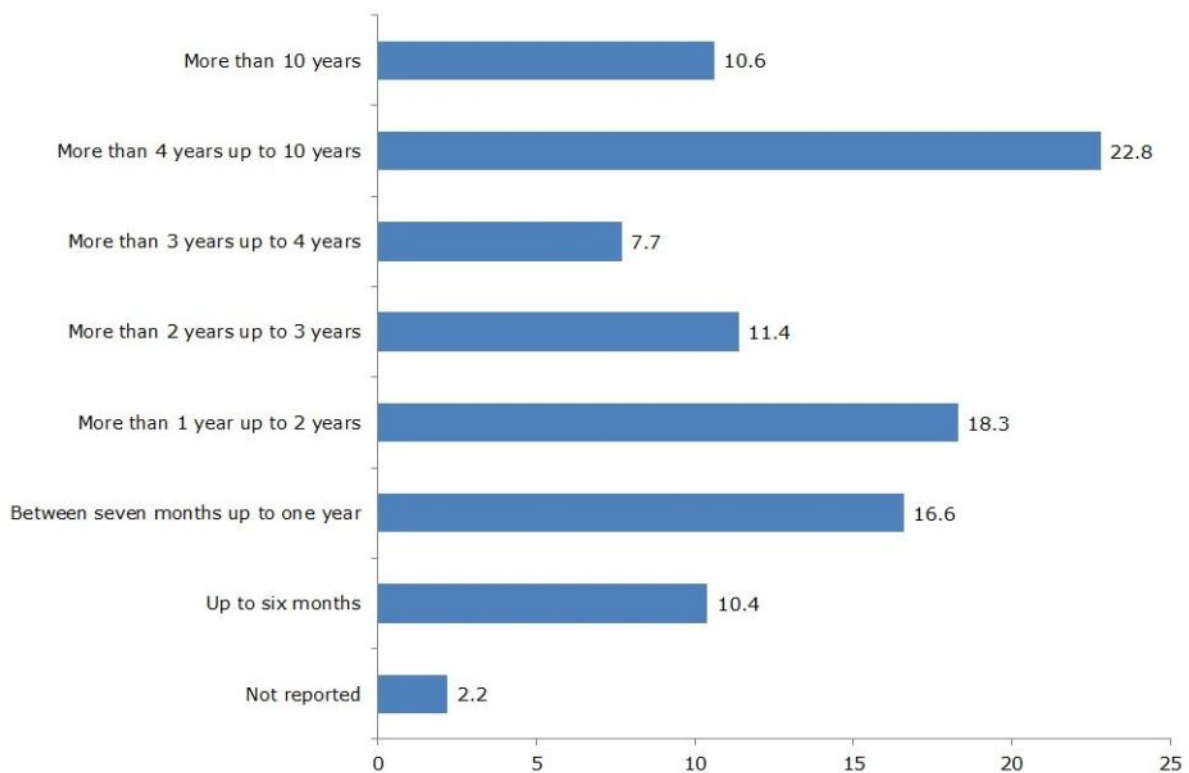


Figure 6: Duration of first job held by young people after leaving formal education (%)

Notes: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Only jobs lasting three months or longer.

Source: INE (2010a, Figure 5)

The first job experience was as 'service and sales workers' for 22.6% of respondents, followed by 'craft and related trades' reported by 20.8%. For 12.5% of young school leavers the first job experience was as 'clerical support workers' while 10.7% of them reported their first job as 'professionals' (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Occupation in first job of young people after leaving formal education (%)

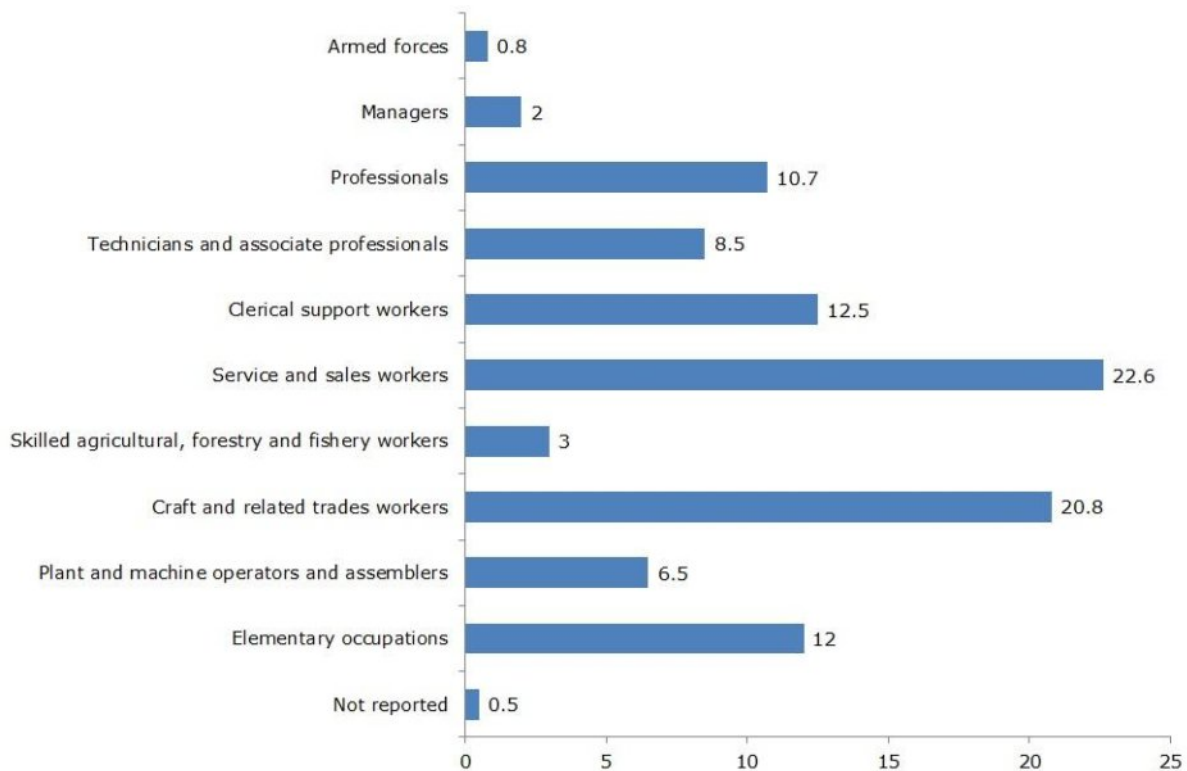


Figure 7: Occupation in first job of young people after leaving formal education (%)

Notes: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Only jobs lasting three months or longer.

Source: INE (2010a)

Of the young people interviewed with a job, 93.2% were employees, 4.9% were self-employed and 1.5% were family workers. Just over half (51.2%) had a permanent contract, 40.7% had a fixed-term contract, 7.8% had a contract for the delivery of services and 0.4% did not know. Almost all (94.4%) were full-time workers (INE, 2010a).

Almost half (45.1%) of the young people aged 15–34 who had left formal education found their first job through family and friends. Around a third (31.2%) got their first job on their own through unrequested applications and 8.6% through newspaper or online job advertisements (INE, 2010a).

Time between leaving formal education and starting the first job

Entry to the labour market took up to three months for 25.6% of respondents, between one and two years for 14.9%, between two and four years for 11.5%, and over four years for 10.1%. Over 20% started working while still studying.

A longer wait to enter the labour market seems to be related to a lower age when leaving school. Respondents who started working during their time at school had, on average, left formal education by the age of 23 years-old. However, those who took more than two years to find their first job had, on average, left formal education by the age of 16 (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Time between leaving formal education and first job by average age of leaving formal education

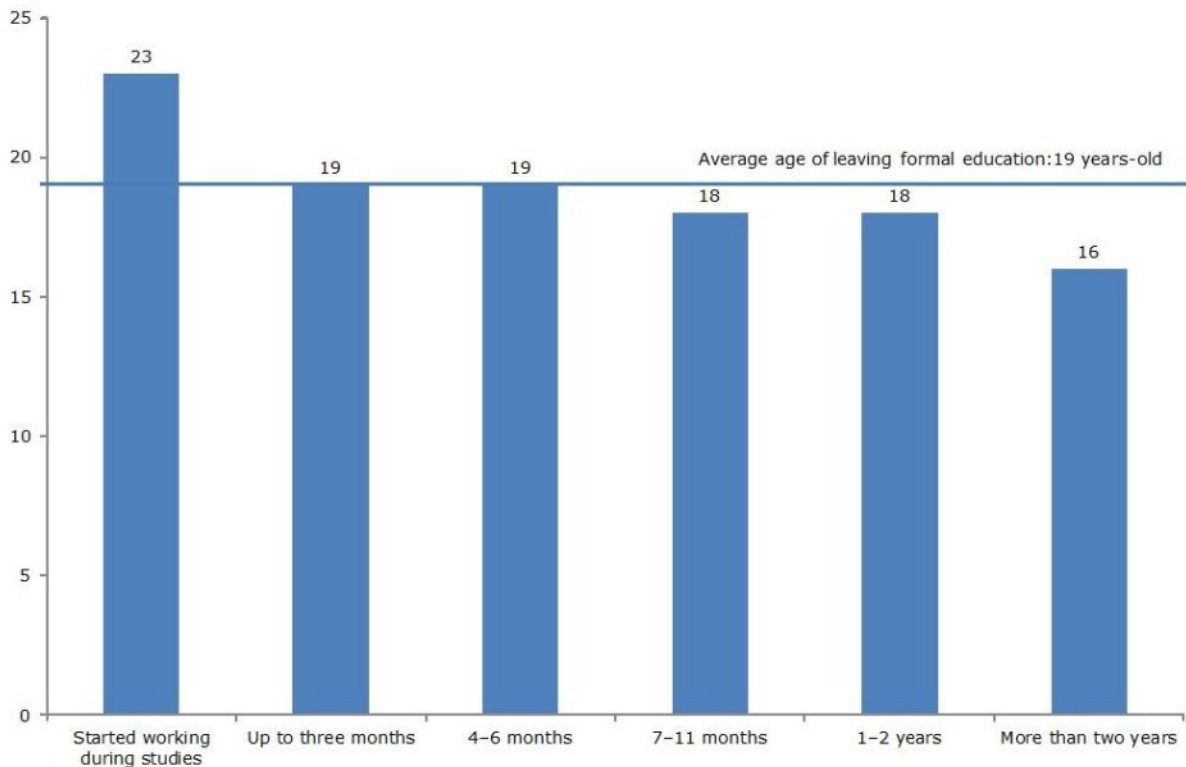


Figure 8: Time between leaving formal education and first job by average age of leaving formal education

Notes: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Only jobs lasting three months or longer.

Source: INE (2010b, p. 38)

The average time between respondents leaving formal education and starting their first job was 20.4 months (excluding those who started working during their time at school). Men and women showed a similar pattern of transition between school and the labour market at 20.3 and 20.6 months, respectively (Figure 9).

The time between leaving formal education and the first experience of work increased with age, with young people aged between 30 and 34 taking an above-average time (25.2 months). Those aged between 15 and 19 were the ones who spent least time (11.4 months) finding their first job after leaving formal education (Figure 9).

Attendance at educational programmes targeted at the labour market, such as those on electronics, multimedia, informatics and construction, appeared to enable easier access to employment. Those who had attended vocational education took less time to find their first job after leaving formal education than those who had attended general education, the difference being on average almost a year (Figure 9).

The level of educational attainment also appeared to influence the average time between leaving formal education and the first job. Those who attained a higher level of education took less time on average to find their first job (9.5 months) compared with those who only attained a basic level of education, who took on average 26 months (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Average time between leaving formal education and starting first job (months)

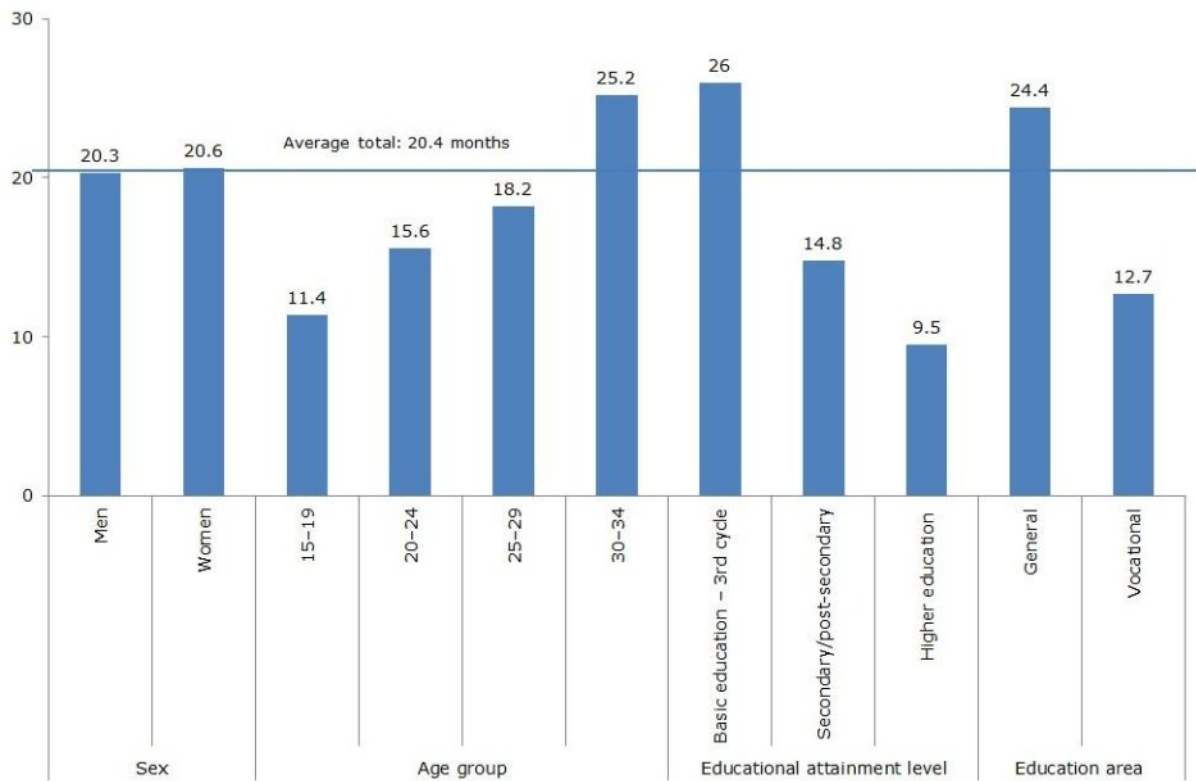


Figure 9: Average time between leaving formal education and starting first job (months)

Notes: Young people aged between 15 and 34 years-old.

Only jobs lasting three months or longer.

Source: INE (2010a, Figure 6)

Commentary

The entry of young people into the labour market is a critical issue in Portuguese society today. The growth in the youth unemployment rate, as a consequence of the financial and social crisis, has made this topic even more relevant. In 2012, the number of unemployed young people reached a new historical level and many of those entering the labour market for the first time are only obtaining low-quality and low-paid short-term jobs, even if they are highly qualified. Many highly qualified young Portuguese are now turning to emigration to seek an adequate job or even any job.

Given the anticipated trends for the next few years, regular monitoring of the following indicators will be vital to a greater understanding of the dynamics of societal change and the underpinning of adequate employment policies:

- level of educational attainment by young people;
- average age when leaving formal education;
- first job characteristics;
- average time between leaving formal education and starting the first job.

References

INE (Instituto Nacional de Estatística) (2010a), [Entry of young people into the labour market \(in Spanish, 355KB PDF\)](#), press release, 30 April 2010, INE, Lisbon.

INE (Instituto Nacional de Estatística) (2010b), 'Transição escola – mercado de trabalho: duração da procura do 1º emprego [Transition school – labour market: duration of search for first job], in [Estatísticas do Emprego 2010, 2.º trimestre \(1.01MB PDF\)](#), INE, Lisbon, Chapter 6, pp. 36–42.

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