Executive Summary

Education at a Glance is the definitive guide to the state of education around the world. It analyses all levels of education and provides data on topics such as attainment, enrolment, finance and the organisation of education systems. The 2023 edition focuses on vocational education and training (VET) - a vital part of a country's education system that offers students an alternative to academic-focused education. Readers interested in a summary of the main findings on VET are referred to the accompanying Spotlight on VET (OECD, 2023).

Early childhood education and care enrolment common at age 2 or 3

High-quality early childhood education and care helps to give all children an equitable start in life and is especially vital for the most disadvantaged children. It is also a key tool for enabling both parents to work and for increasing women's participation in the labour market. Across the OECD, on average, 18% of children under the age of 2 are enrolled in early childhood education and care. Among 2-year-olds, the average rate rises to 43%, but the situation varies widely. Although enrolment at this age exceeds 90% in Iceland, Korea, Norway and Sweden, it remains in the single digits in nine other OECD countries. Once children reach the age of 3, early childhood education and care is the norm in the vast majority of OECD countries, with an average enrolment rate of 74%. Nevertheless, in four countries the proportion of children enrolled remains in the single digits, with potentially negative impacts on equity.

More young adults completing upper secondary education

Upper secondary attainment is often considered the minimum requirement for successful participation in the labour market. However, on average, 14% of all 25-34 year-olds across the OECD had not completed upper secondary education in 2022. While this share is still too high, it represents a significant improvement compared with 2015, when it was 18%. The share of young adults without upper secondary attainment fell in all but two OECD countries and some countries have made especially significant progress. For instance Portugal has reduced the share of young adults without upper secondary education by 17 percentage points while Türkiye has reduced it by 15 percentage points.

Higher upper secondary completion rates help create a more educated workforce, with better careers, pay and prospects. Currently, 77% of those entering general upper secondary education complete it on time, and a further 10% complete it within the following two years. The rate is lower for those entering vocational upper secondary education. Only 62% per cent complete their programme on time and another 11% within the following two years. Of the remaining 27%, many are unlikely to successfully complete their programme at all.

Less than half of VET students enrol in combined school- and work-based programmes

VET is an important and popular element of most education systems in OECD countries, with on average 44% of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes. These programmes vary considerably from country to country, but there are common features that contribute to high-quality vocational education. One of the most important is the inclusion of work-based learning. This provides many advantages, including allowing students to apply their skills in a practical setting and easing the transition from school to work. However, combined school- and work-based programmes remain a rarity in many countries. On average only 45% of all upper secondary VET students are enrolled in such schemes across the OECD.

Effective pathways from upper secondary vocational education to higher education are another characteristic of high-quality programmes. While most upper secondary VET students have access to tertiary education upon successful completion of their programmes, a quarter of them are enrolled in programmes that do not provide access to tertiary education upon completion.

Spending per student varies greatly across OECD countries

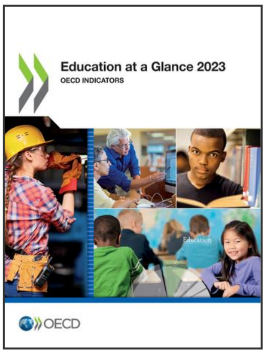
Adequate funding is a precondition for providing high-quality education. Most OECD countries invest 3-4% of their GDP in primary and secondary education, rising to at least 5% of GDP in Colombia and Israel. In contrast, six OECD countries invest less than 3% of GDP in primary and secondary education.

Investment in education as a share of GDP is a measure of the priority that countries give to education, but it does not reflect the resources available within education systems as GDP levels vary between countries. Expenditure per student varies greatly across OECD countries. Colombia, Mexico and Türkiye spend less than USD 5 000 per student annually, while Luxembourg spends almost USD 25 000. There are also significant differences in expenditure per student by type of programme. On average across the OECD, annual spending per student is USD 11 400 in general upper secondary education, while it is USD 13 200 in vocational upper secondary education. This often reflects the costs of specialised equipment and infrastructure that are needed in VET programmes.

Low wages reduce the attractiveness of the teaching profession

Many OECD countries are facing teacher shortages. Competitive salaries are crucial to retaining teachers and attracting more individuals to the profession, although other factors are also important. In many OECD countries teaching is not a financially attractive career choice. On average, lower secondary teachers’ actual salaries are 10% below those of tertiary-educated workers, but in some countries the gap is over 30%.

Low wage growth for teachers partly explains the gap between teachers' salaries and those of other tertiary-educated workers. In all but six OECD countries, statutory wages for lower secondary teachers have grown by less than 1% per year in real terms since 2015. Even worse, real statutory wages have actually fallen in almost half of all OECD countries for which data are available. This follows a period of low or even negative wage growth in many countries in the aftermath of the 2008-09 financial crisis.



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