

# Executive summary

*Education at a Glance* is an authoritative compendium of internationally harmonised indicators on education systems in OECD and partner countries. It covers all levels of education, with the 2022 edition focusing on tertiary education. This executive summary presents selected results from *Education at a Glance 2022* without aiming to give a comprehensive overview of its content. Readers interested in a summary of the key findings on tertiary education are referred to the accompanying *Spotlight on Tertiary Education* (OECD, 2022).

## A gradual return to normality after the COVID-19 pandemic

The second half of 2021 and first half of 2022 were marked by persistent challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by a gradual return to normality thanks to widespread vaccinations. Although a few countries still had periods of school closures, these were much more limited than during earlier stages of the pandemic. In contrast, teacher and student absences, whether due to COVID-19 infections or to quarantine periods, continued to disrupt the learning process. However, many countries struggled to monitor absences systematically and only 11 OECD countries and other participants were able to provide comparable figures on teacher absences. Of those, eight noted an increase in teacher absences in at least one educational level compared to previous years.

As the focus shifted from crisis management to recovery, evaluating the impact of the pandemic and remediating its consequences became a priority. Almost all OECD countries implemented standardised assessments to quantify learning losses at various levels of education. Most countries also provided additional support for students to alleviate the effects of the pandemic. At primary and secondary level, around 80% of countries with available data implemented such recovery programmes. At pre-primary level, these were less common, but were offered in 19 out of 28 countries with available data. Additional psychological and socio-emotional support for primary and secondary students was made available in 19 out of 29 countries.

## Most children aged 3-5 are enrolled in early childhood education

High-quality early childhood education is crucial to give students from all backgrounds an equitable start to their education. Across OECD countries, 83% of children aged 3-5 are enrolled in early childhood education and another 4% are already enrolled in primary education. On average, enrolment rates of 3-5 year-olds rose by 8 percentage points between 2005 and 2020, with especially large increases in many countries with low rates in 2005. In contrast, children under 3 are often cared for at home or in programmes that are not classified as early childhood education. Only 27% of children in this age group are enrolled in early childhood education across the OECD.

## Teaching requirements at primary and secondary level differ across countries

Teachers spend an important share of their working hours on tasks other than teaching, such as preparing lessons and assessing examinations. In some countries, upper secondary teachers are expected to teach for less than one-third of their total working time, whereas in other countries, they are expected to teach for almost two-thirds of their working time. Based on official regulations, teachers across the OECD have to teach on average close to 1 000 hours per year at pre-primary level, almost 800 hours at primary level and approximately 700 hours at secondary level. However, the variation in statutory teaching time across countries is large. At upper secondary level, for example, statutory teaching hours vary from 483 hours annually in Poland to 1 248 hours in Costa Rica.

## Tertiary attainment has increased strongly in recent decades...

The average share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary qualification increased from 27% in 2000 to 48% in 2021 across OECD countries. On average, tertiary education is now the most common attainment level among 25-34 year-olds and will soon be the most common among all working-age adults across the OECD. The increase in tertiary attainment was especially strong among women. Women now make up a clear majority of young adults with a bachelor's master's or doctoral degree, at 57% of 25-34 year-olds compared to 43% for their male peers.

An important driver behind the increase in tertiary attainment are the labour-market advantages that it brings. In 2021, the average unemployment rate for individuals with tertiary attainment was 4%, whereas it was 6% for those with upper secondary attainment and 11% for those with below upper secondary attainment across OECD countries. Likewise, full-time workers with tertiary attainment earn on average approximately 50% more than workers with upper secondary attainment and nearly twice as much as workers without upper secondary attainment.

## ...but tertiary completion rates are low in many countries

Despite the benefits of obtaining a tertiary degree, many tertiary students do not complete their programmes of study. Only 39% of bachelor's students graduate within the expected timeframe for their programme. Three years after the expected end date of the programme, the completion rate has risen, but only to 68%. Completion rates are particularly low among men in all OECD countries. On average, men are 11 percentage points less likely to complete their tertiary programme within its theoretical duration than women.

## Budgets for tertiary education have outpaced the growth in students

Spending per student is higher at tertiary level than at other levels of education in almost all OECD countries. In 2019, expenditure per student averaged USD 17 600 at the tertiary level, compared to USD 11 400 at secondary level and USD 9 900 at primary level. The gap in spending can partly be explained by higher teachers' salaries at tertiary level, but also by the research and development that takes place at this level of education.

Spending on tertiary education per student has increased despite the growth in the number of students at that level. Since 2012, the number of tertiary students has increased by 0.4% per year across the OECD, but spending on tertiary educational institutions increased by 1.6% per year in real terms over the same period. This led to an increase in average real spending per student of 1.2% annually.



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