Netherlands

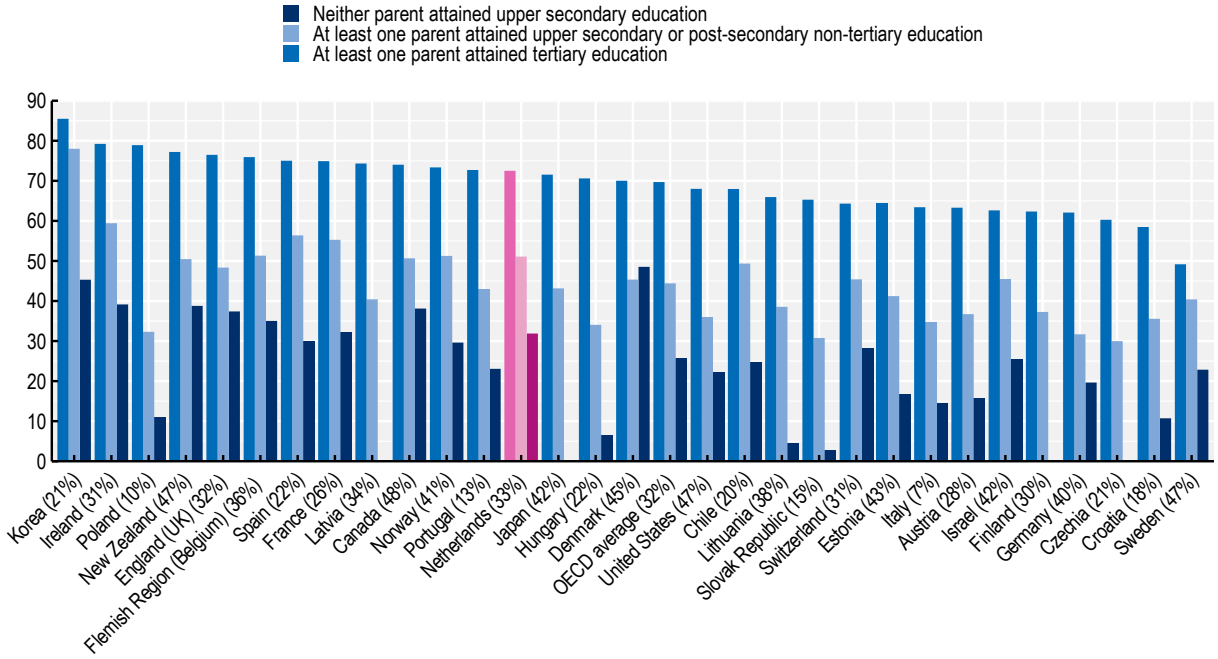
This country note provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in the Netherlands based on data from *Education at a Glance 2025*. In line with this year's thematic focus, it emphasises tertiary education while also covering other parts of the education system. The data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers interested in the reference years for the data should refer to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2025*.

The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- Educational inequalities persist across generations. In all countries with available data, young adults (25-34 year-olds) are significantly more likely to attain a tertiary qualification if their parents have also done so. In the Netherlands, 73% of 25-34 year-olds with at least one tertiary-educated parent have also attained a tertiary qualification, compared to only 32% among those whose parents did not complete upper secondary education. This tertiary-attainment gap of 41 percentage points is smaller than the OECD average gap of 44 percentage points (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary education, by parental educational attainment (2023)

Survey of Adult Skills, in per cent



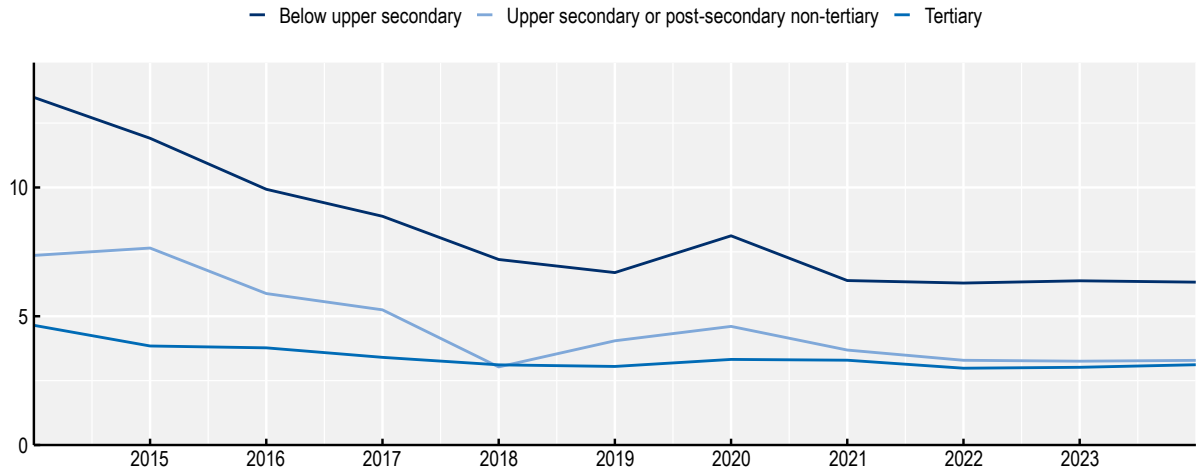
Note: The percentage in parentheses represents the share of tertiary-educated parents.

For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table A1.4 (available on line).

- The share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) without upper secondary attainment continues to decline across the OECD, reaching an average of 13%. This trend also continues in the Netherlands, where the share fell from 12% to 10% between 2019 and 2024.
- Individuals with greater educational attainment generally face a lower risk of unemployment and earn higher wages. Completing upper secondary education is particularly important in reducing the risk of unemployment. On average across the OECD, 12.9% of economically active young adults (25-34 year-olds) without an upper secondary qualification are unemployed, compared to 6.9% of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. Those who go on to gain a tertiary qualification see a relatively smaller further reduction in unemployment, with 4.9% of tertiary-educated young adults unemployed on average across the OECD. This pattern is similar in the Netherlands (albeit at a lower level): 6.3% of young adults without an upper secondary qualification are unemployed, compared to 3.3% of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and 3.1% of those with tertiary attainment (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trends in unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds in the Netherlands, by educational attainment (2014 to 2024)

In per cent



For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table A3.5.

- On average, individuals with a master's or equivalent degree have significantly higher employment rates and earnings than those with a bachelor's or equivalent degree. However, the share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) attaining a master's or equivalent qualification varies widely across OECD countries, ranging from 1% to 39% in 2024. In the Netherlands, 22% of 25-34 year-olds hold a master's or equivalent degree, which is above the OECD average of 16%. This represents an increase since 2019, when the share was 19%.
- The average wage gap between individuals (25-64 year-olds) with and without upper secondary educational attainment is relatively modest across OECD countries. On average across the OECD, workers without upper secondary qualifications earn on average 17% less than those who have completed upper secondary education, while workers with tertiary attainment earn 54% more than those with upper secondary attainment. In the Netherlands, the wage gap between workers with and without upper secondary attainment is smaller than the OECD average, at 14%. The gap

between those with upper secondary and tertiary attainment is also smaller than the OECD average, at 45%. This suggests a generally more compressed wage distribution by educational attainment in the Netherlands, which may indicate lower relative returns to education but also a lower level of income inequality compared to the OECD average.

- In most OECD countries, a significant share of adults have low levels of literacy proficiency, defined as at or below Level 1 (on a scale of 0-5) in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Individuals at this level can only understand very short texts with minimal distracting information. In the Netherlands, 16% of 25-64 year-olds have literacy skills at or below Level 1, which is below the OECD average of 27%.
- Educational attainment and skills are closely linked, although the strength of this relationship varies across countries. In the Netherlands, tertiary-educated adults score, on average, 27 points higher in literacy proficiency than those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment in the Survey of Adult Skills. This gap is smaller than the OECD average difference of 34 points.
- Average literacy scores fell between Cycle 1 (2012-15) and Cycle 2 (2023) of the Survey of Adult Skills[1]. On average across OECD countries, the fall among adults with tertiary attainment was 9 score points, smaller than the average drop of 19 score points among adults without upper secondary qualifications. In the Netherlands, average literacy scores for adults with tertiary attainment decreased by 7 points (from 310 to 303), while the score for adults without upper secondary attainment decreased by 15 points (from 246 to 231).
- In the Netherlands, as in all OECD countries, adults with better literacy skills are more likely to participate in education and training. In 2023, 75% of adults (25-64 year-olds) with high literacy proficiency (i.e. at or above Level 4) in the Survey of Adult Skills participated in formal and/or non-formal education and training in the last year, compared to just 27% of those with proficiency at or below Level 1.

Access to education, participation and progression

- Education systems must adapt to changes in the number of children by expanding or reducing provision accordingly. In many countries, the population of children aged 0-4 changed significantly between 2013 and 2023 and is projected to change further by 2033. The Netherlands experienced a decline of 4% in the number of 0-4 year-olds, and is projected to see an increase of 17% between 2023 and 2033.
- Bachelor's or equivalent programmes are the main entry point into tertiary education in most OECD countries, with an average of 78% of those starting tertiary education for the first time enrolling in such programmes. In the Netherlands, the share is even higher at 96%.
- Women make up the majority of first-time entrants to tertiary education in most OECD countries. In the Netherlands, they accounted for 54% of first-time entrants in 2023, up from 52% in 2013. Across the OECD, women make up 54% of new entrants on average, the same share as in 2013.
- Across the OECD, the two most popular broad fields of study are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and business, administration, and law, each accounting for 23% of graduates from bachelor's or equivalent programmes. They are closely followed by the broad field of arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information, at 22% of graduates. In the Netherlands, 18% of bachelor's degree students graduate from a STEM field, 27% from business,

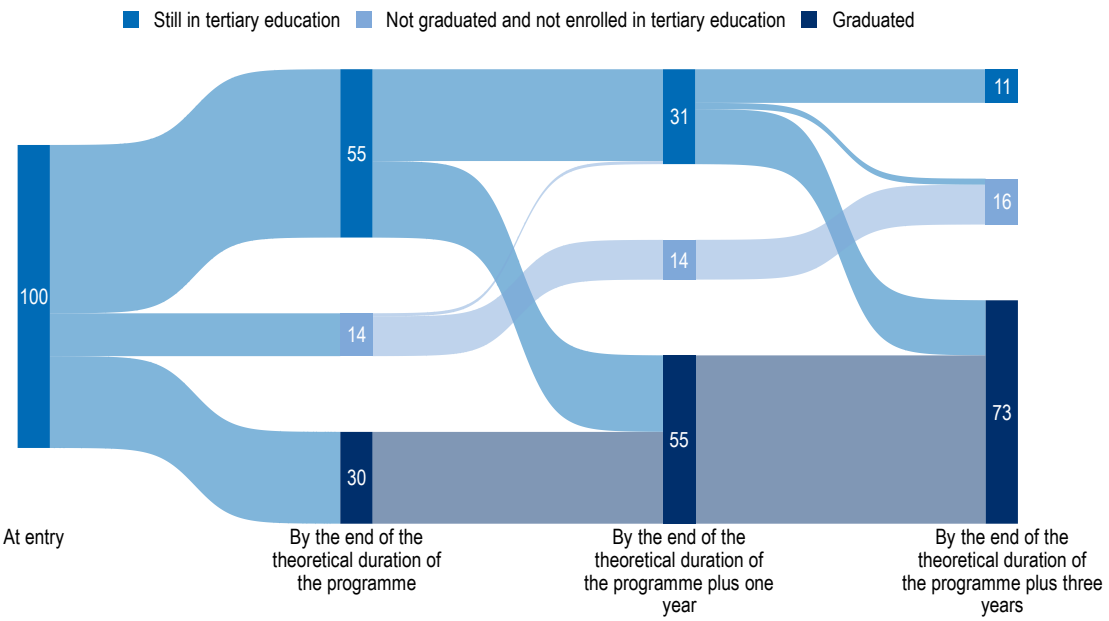
[1] Does not include adults who in Cycle 2 were only administered the doorstep interview due to a language barrier.

administration and law, and 22% from arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information.

- In many countries, it is common for new entrants to bachelor's programmes to take at least one gap year between the end of their upper secondary education and the start of their tertiary education. In the Netherlands, 14% of new entrants do so, well below the OECD average of 44%.
- Completion rates reflect the share of new entrants to bachelor's programmes who successfully obtain a tertiary degree within specified timeframes. These rates remain low in most OECD countries. In the Netherlands, 30% of new entrants complete their bachelor's degree within the theoretical duration of the programme. This rises to 55% one year after the expected end date, and to 73% three years after. In comparison, the OECD average completion rate is 43% within the theoretical duration, increasing to 59% after an additional year and 70% after three years (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Status of new entrants into bachelor's programmes in the Netherlands, by timeframe

In per cent



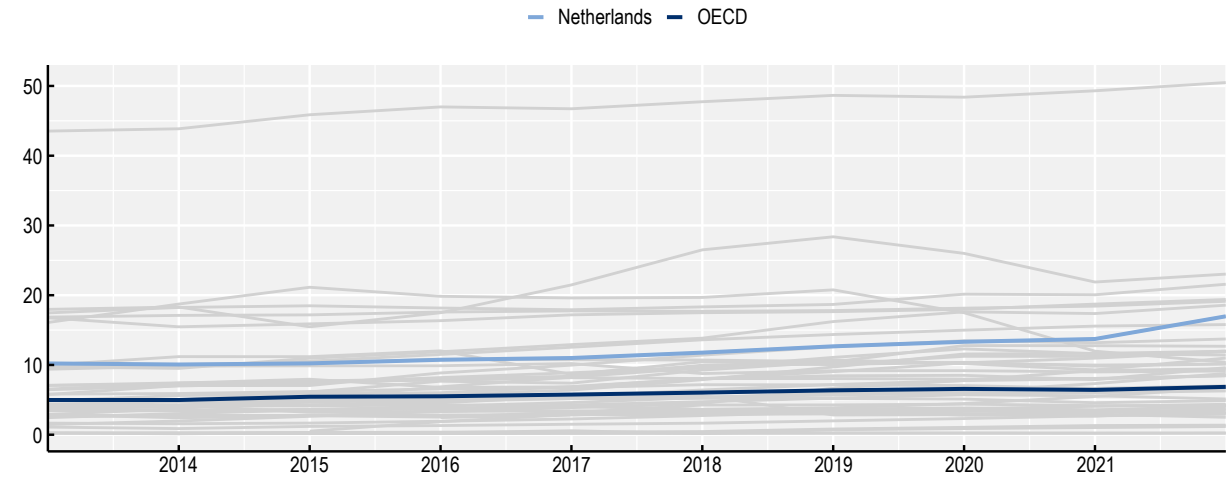
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table B5.1.

- In all countries, women starting bachelor's programmes are more likely than their male peers to successfully complete their tertiary studies within the three years after the theoretical end of their programme. In the Netherlands, the gender gap is 15 percentage points (80% for women compared to 65% for men), which is larger than the OECD average of 12 percentage points.
- Completion rates vary by field of study. On average across the OECD, only 58% of new entrants to bachelor's programmes in STEM fields have graduated at that level in the same field within three years after the expected end of their studies. Completion rates in the field of health and welfare are significantly higher, at 74%. In the Netherlands, STEM completion rates are 58%, lower than those for health and welfare, at 68%.

- Students who do not complete their tertiary education may drop out at various stages. High dropout rates in the first year can signal a mismatch between student expectations and the content or demands of their programmes, possibly reflecting a lack of career guidance for prospective students or insufficient support for new entrants. In the Netherlands, the share of first-time entrants in bachelor's programmes who drop out after the first year is lower than the OECD average, at 11% (compared to 13%).
- The 2023 completion rate data refers to students whose programme was expected to end in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some countries saw notable increases in completion rates during the pandemic, probably due to policies aimed at facilitating graduation, others experienced moderate declines. In the Netherlands, completion rates of new entrants to bachelor's programmes during the pandemic increased slightly, by 1 percentage point compared to three years earlier (from 29% to 30%).
- International student mobility in tertiary education continues to rise across the OECD, with some countries experiencing substantial growth in the share of international students between 2018 and 2023. On average, 7.4% of all tertiary students across the OECD were international or foreign students, compared to 6% in 2018. The Netherlands was among the countries with a substantial increase, with the share rising from 11.8% to 17.9% (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Trends in the share of international or foreign students in tertiary education (2013 to 2022)

In per cent



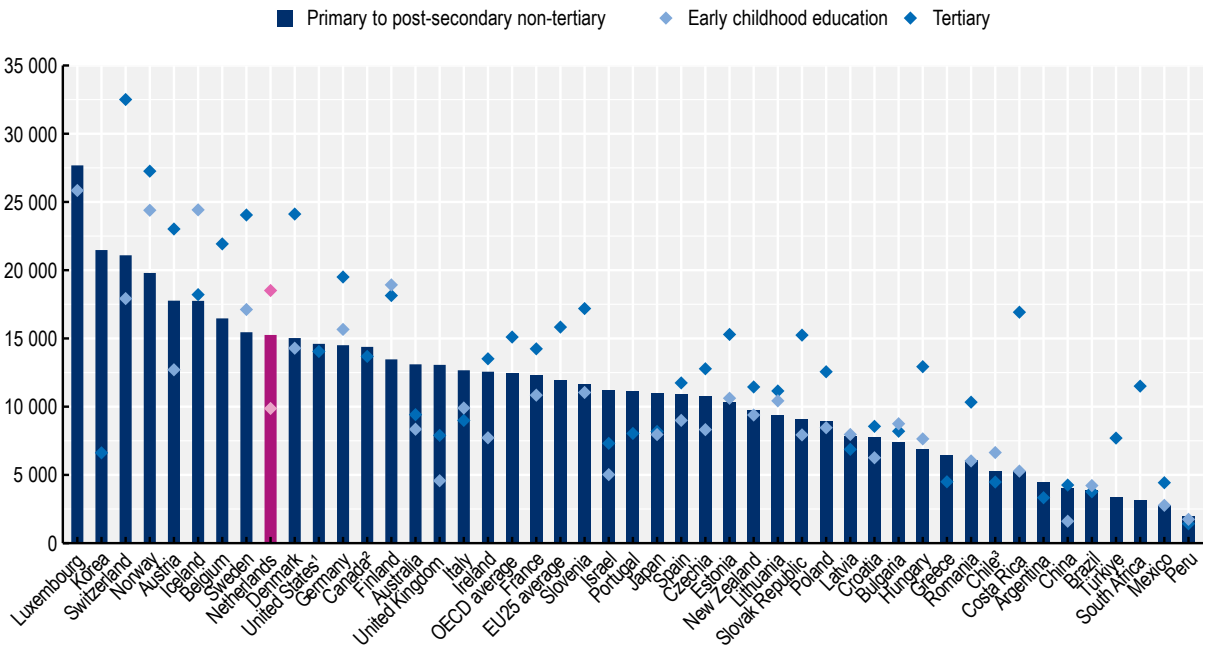
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table B4.3.

Financial resources invested in education

- There are significant disparities in how much governments spend each year in education across OECD, partner and accession countries. The Netherlands spends USD 15 254 per student from primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels, placing it at the upper end of the country range, which spans from less than USD 2 000 to more than USD 27 000 (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Government expenditure per full-time equivalent student, by level of education (2022)

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs, expenditure on educational institutions



Note: Expenditure at tertiary level includes R&D. Expenditure per student in early childhood education is based on headcounts rather than full-time equivalent students. Expenditure at tertiary level for Luxembourg (USD 54 384) is not shown in the figure.
1. Year of reference differs from 2022.
2. Primary includes pre-primary education.
3. Includes payments by households outside educational institutions.
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table C1.1 and Table C1.2.

- As in most other countries, government expenditure in the Netherlands is higher at tertiary level, including research and development (R&D), than at primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels. Government expenditure in the Netherlands amounts to USD 18 511 per tertiary student compared to the OECD average of USD 15 102.
- A large part of the disparity in expenditure per student across OECD, partner and accession countries reflects differences in national income levels. When expenditure is measured as a share of GDP, cross-country differences tend to be smaller, ranging from 2.5% of GDP to 6.9%. In the Netherlands, education investment in primary to tertiary education stands at 5% of GDP, which is above the OECD average of 4.7% by this measure.
- Governments are the primary source of education funding in all OECD countries, especially for the levels covered by compulsory education. In the Netherlands, governments provide 88.2% of total funding for primary, secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary education (after transfers to the private sector), which is below the OECD average of 90.4%. At the pre-primary and tertiary levels, private funding often plays a larger role. In the Netherlands, 86.3% of pre-primary education funding (after transfers) and 74.4% of tertiary education funding (after transfers) come from public sources, compared to OECD averages of 85.6% and 67.4%, respectively.
- Although expenditure per student from primary to tertiary levels increased on average across OECD countries between 2015 and 2022 in real terms (from USD 11 955 to USD 13 210), government spending on education declined in relative terms from 10.9% of public budgets to

10.1%. This suggests the relative priority given to education in overall public spending has fallen across the OECD. In the Netherlands, expenditure per student increased from USD 15 295 to USD 17 117, while the share devoted to education increased from 10.9% of public budgets to 11.1% over this period.

- At pre-primary level, government expenditure in the Netherlands increased by 23.9% between 2015 and 2022. This is despite a decrease of 4.7% in the number of children enrolled. As a result, government expenditure per child has increased, by 30.1%, compared to an average increase of 24% across the OECD since 2015.
- Some countries impose significantly higher tuition fees on foreign students at master's level in public institutions, including the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, average annual tuition fees for foreign students[2] at master's level are USD 20 328 on average, which is well above the fees charged to national students (USD 3 041).

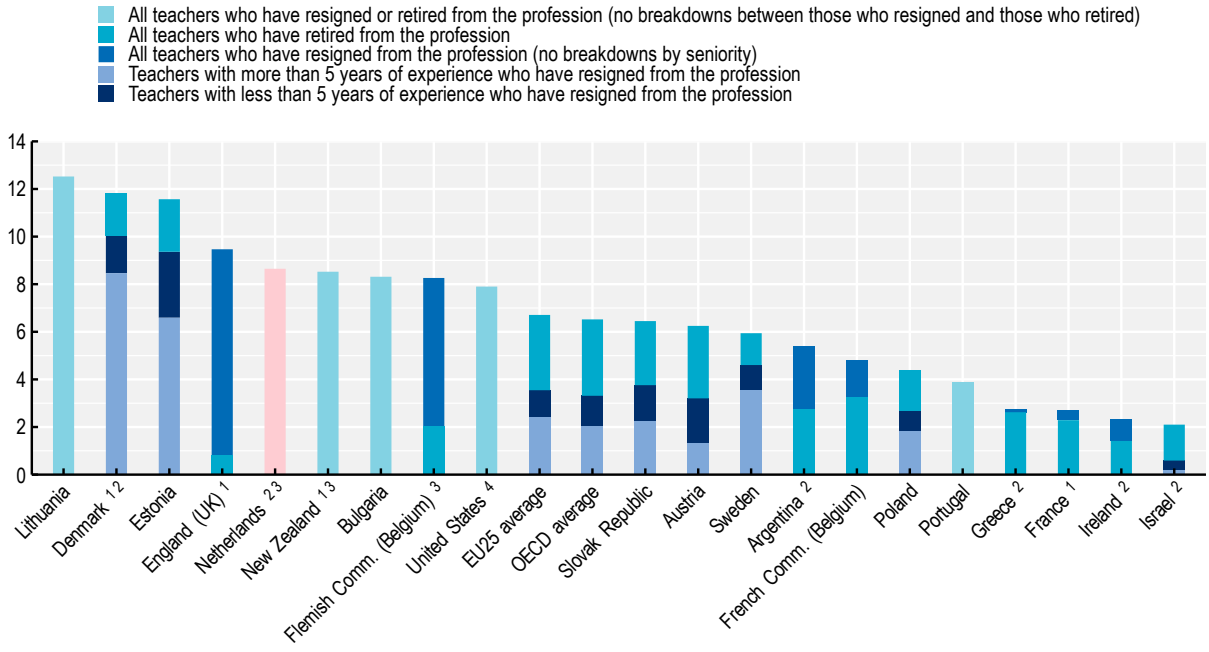
Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- Many countries are experiencing teacher shortages, reflected not just in the number of unfilled teaching positions, but also in other indicators such as the share of non-fully qualified teachers in the teaching workforce. In the 14 countries and economies with data available, 1.6% of teaching positions are unfilled on average, and 4.9% of teachers are not fully qualified. In the Netherlands, the share of unfilled teaching positions is 2.6%, and the share of non-fully qualified teachers is 2.7%. However, cross-country comparisons of these data should be made with even greater caution than in other areas, as teacher recruitment processes vary significantly, ranging from centralised systems with competitive national exams to fully decentralised hiring at the school level, making comparisons of vacancy levels difficult.
- High teacher turnover can place additional pressure on recruitment, while very low turnover may limit the renewal of the teaching workforce. In most countries with available data, between 1% and 3% of teachers retire each year. However, the share of teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement varies more widely, ranging from almost none in some countries to nearly 10% in others. the Netherlands is among the countries with high turnover, with no further breakdown between retirements and resignations available (Figure 6).

[2] Non-EU/EEA students.

Figure 6. Share of fully qualified teachers who left the profession by resigning or retiring in pre-primary, primary and secondary education (2022/23)

In per cent, full-time and part-time, public institutions



1. Academic year 2021/22 for Denmark, England (UK), France and New Zealand.
2. Only primary education in Argentina. Excluding pre-primary education in Greece and Ireland. Excluding upper secondary education in Denmark and Israel. Excluding upper secondary vocational education in the Netherlands.
3. Includes non-fully qualified teachers.
4. Includes teachers who left the profession because they were appointed to other positions in the education sector.
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table D8.4.

- Attracting second-career teachers can help alleviate teacher shortages while bringing individuals with a broader range of experience into the profession. To support this, 16 out of 28 countries with available data (including the Netherlands) offer dedicated alternative pathways into teaching for individuals changing careers.
- Since 2015, actual average salaries of primary teachers have increased in real terms by 14.6% on average across the OECD. In the Netherlands, they increased by 16.3% in 2024.
- The amount of compulsory instruction time affects teacher salary costs as it influences the number of teachers needed, combined with other factors such as class size and teaching time of teachers. In the Netherlands, students receive 940 hours of compulsory instruction per year in primary education and 1 000 hours in lower secondary education. This is above the OECD average of 804 hours in primary and 909 hours in lower secondary education.
- School holidays in primary education last 11 weeks per year in the Netherlands (all breaks combined), compared to 13.5 weeks across the OECD.
- At tertiary level, the average ratio of students to academic staff varies across different types of institutions. In many countries, institutions with a strong research focus, defined as those with more than three doctoral graduates per 100 graduates, tend to have lower student staff ratios than those with a smaller share of doctoral graduates. This is also the case in the Netherlands, where institutions with greater research focus have an average of 9 students per academic staff member,

compared to 13 students per academic staff member at institutions with a smaller share of doctoral graduates.

- Countries use a range of admission systems to tertiary public education institutions. These vary as to whether admission is open or selective, and whether applications are submitted directly to institutions or to a central body. In the Netherlands, admission is open for some programmes and selective for others. Applicants submit their applications to a central body.

More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2025 and to access the full set of indicators, see: https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en.

For more information on the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, see Education at a Glance 2025: Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes, https://doi.org/10.1787/fcfaf2d1-en.

For general information on the methodology, please refer to the OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics 2018, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en.

Updated data can be found on line at http://data-explorer.oecd.org/ and by following the StatLinks in the publication.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS: https://gpseducation.oecd.org/.

Questions can be directed to the Education at a Glance team at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills: EDU.EAG@oecd.org.

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