

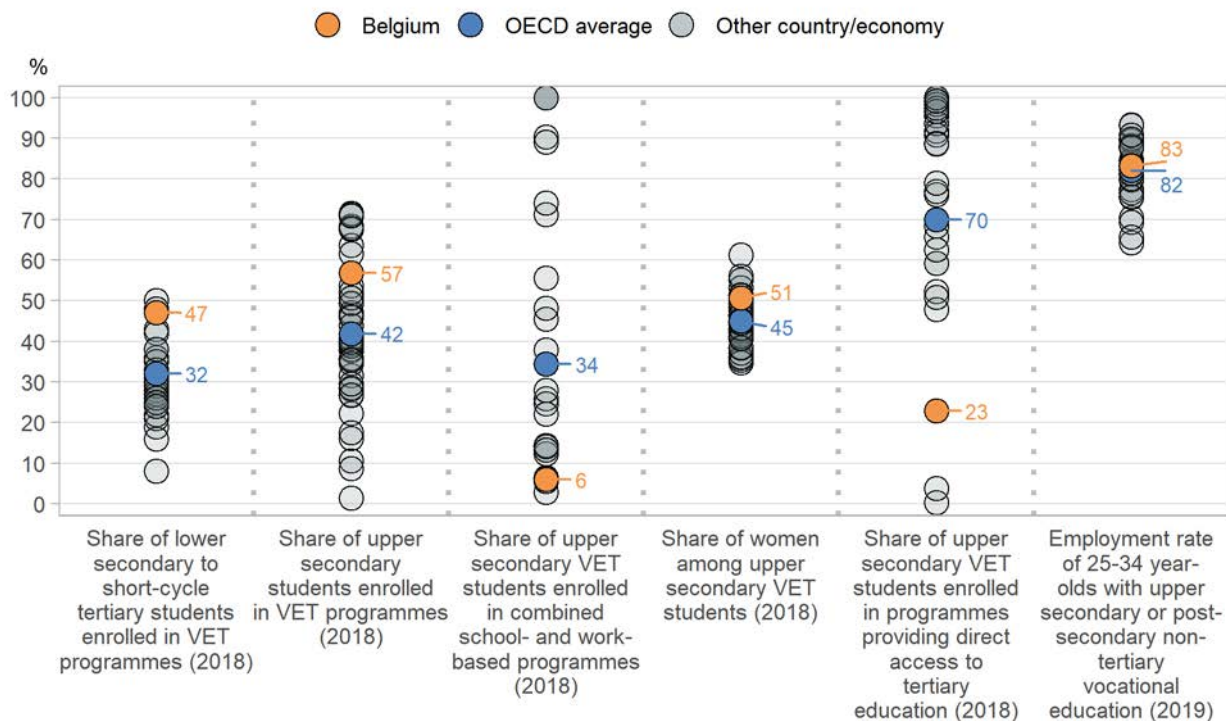
Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators is the authoritative source for information on the state of education around the world. It provides data on the structure, finances and performance of education systems in OECD and partner countries.

## Belgium

### Participation and outcomes of vocational education and training

- Vocational education and training (VET) programmes attract a diverse range of students, including those seeking qualifications and technical skills to enter the labour market, adults wishing to increase their employability by developing their skills further, and students who may seek entry into higher education later on.
- About one in three students from lower secondary to short-cycle tertiary level are enrolled in a VET programme on average across OECD countries. However, there are wide variations across countries, ranging from less than 20% of students enrolled in vocational education to more than 45% in a few countries. In Belgium, 47% of students are enrolled in vocational programmes, higher than the OECD average (32%), with the majority of lower secondary to short-cycle tertiary VET students (72%) found in upper secondary education (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Snapshot of vocational education



**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

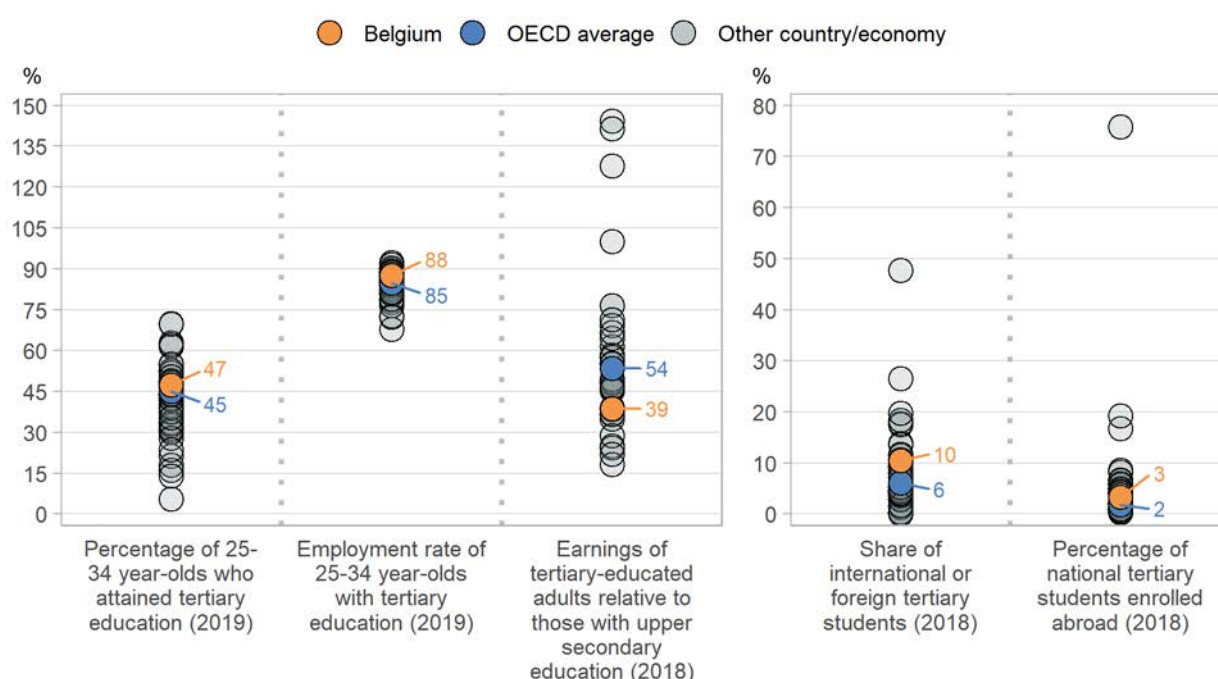
**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator A3 and B7. See Education at a Glance Database. <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

- VET is an important part of upper secondary education in most OECD countries. On average, 57% of all upper secondary students opt for VET programmes in Belgium, a higher proportion than the OECD average of 42%. VET programmes in Belgium include a high share of students in adults education programmes, which accounts for about one third of students at upper secondary education (Figure 1). Certain fields of study are more common than others at this level. In Belgium, the most common broad field is engineering, manufacturing and construction with 36% of upper secondary vocational graduates earning a qualification in this field, compared to 33% on average across OECD countries.
- The organisation and delivery of upper secondary VET programmes varies considerably from country to country. In combined school- and work-based programmes, between 25% and 90% of the curriculum is taught as work-based learning, while the remainder is organised within the school environment. In Belgium, 6% of upper secondary vocational students are enrolled in combined school- and work-based programmes, which is lower than the OECD average of 34% (Figure 1).
- To support upper secondary vocational students' transition to post-secondary education and improve their career prospects, many countries have created direct pathways from vocational programmes to higher levels of education. In Belgium, 23% of upper secondary vocational students are enrolled in programmes that offer the chance of direct access to tertiary education, lower than the OECD average of 70% (Figure 1).
- In 2019, 27% of 25-34 year-olds in Belgium held an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary vocational qualification as their highest educational level while 11% held a general one. The employment rate of younger adults with a vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education tend to be higher than the employment rate of those with general qualifications at this level (by 9 percentage points on average across OECD countries). Belgium follows this pattern, as 83% of 25-34 year-olds with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary vocational qualification are employed compared with 74% of those with a general qualification (Figure 1).
- On average across OECD countries, adults with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education have similar earnings to their peers with a general education at this level. While the difference in relative earnings between adults with general and vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment is less than 5 percentage points in about one quarter of OECD and partner countries, it is 6 percentage points in favour of general qualifications in Belgium.
- Poorer labour-market prospects of VET qualifications combined with higher tertiary attainment may have contributed to the decline in the share of adults with an upper secondary vocational qualification across generations in many countries. In Belgium, among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education as their highest attainment, 64% of 55-64 year-olds (older adults), compared with 71% of 25-34 year-olds (younger adults) held a vocational qualification. In comparison, the equivalent OECD averages are 72% for older adults and 59% for younger adults.
- On average across OECD countries, the ratio of students to teaching staff is similar in both upper secondary vocational and general programmes. However, Belgium is among the five countries where teachers' teaching time in vocational programmes is 10 to 30% higher than in general programmes.

## The rising demand for tertiary education

- The expansion of tertiary education is a worldwide trend. Between 2009 and 2019, the share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary degree increased in all OECD and partner countries. In Belgium, the share increased by 5 percentage points during this period, lower than the average increase across OECD countries (9 percentage points). In 2019, 47% of 25-34 year-olds had a tertiary degree in Belgium compared to 45% on average across OECD countries (Figure 2).
- From the gender perspective, younger women are more likely than younger men to achieve tertiary education in all OECD countries. In Belgium, 55% of 25-34 year-old women had a tertiary qualification compared to 40% of their male peers, while on average across OECD countries the shares are 51% of younger women and 39% of younger men.
- In Belgium, the average age of first-time entrants to tertiary education in 2018 was 19 years, lower than the OECD average of 22 years. Structural factors, such as admission procedures, the typical age at which students graduate from upper secondary education, or cultural perceptions of the value of professional or personal experiences outside of education may explain the differences in the average age of entry to tertiary education across countries.
- If current entry patterns continue, it is estimated that 49% of young adults will enter tertiary education for the first time in their life before the age of 25 on average across OECD countries (excluding international students). In Belgium, 62% of young adults will enter tertiary education by that age and most of them will enter at bachelor's or equivalent level.

Figure 2. Snapshot of tertiary education



**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator A1, A3, A4 and B6. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

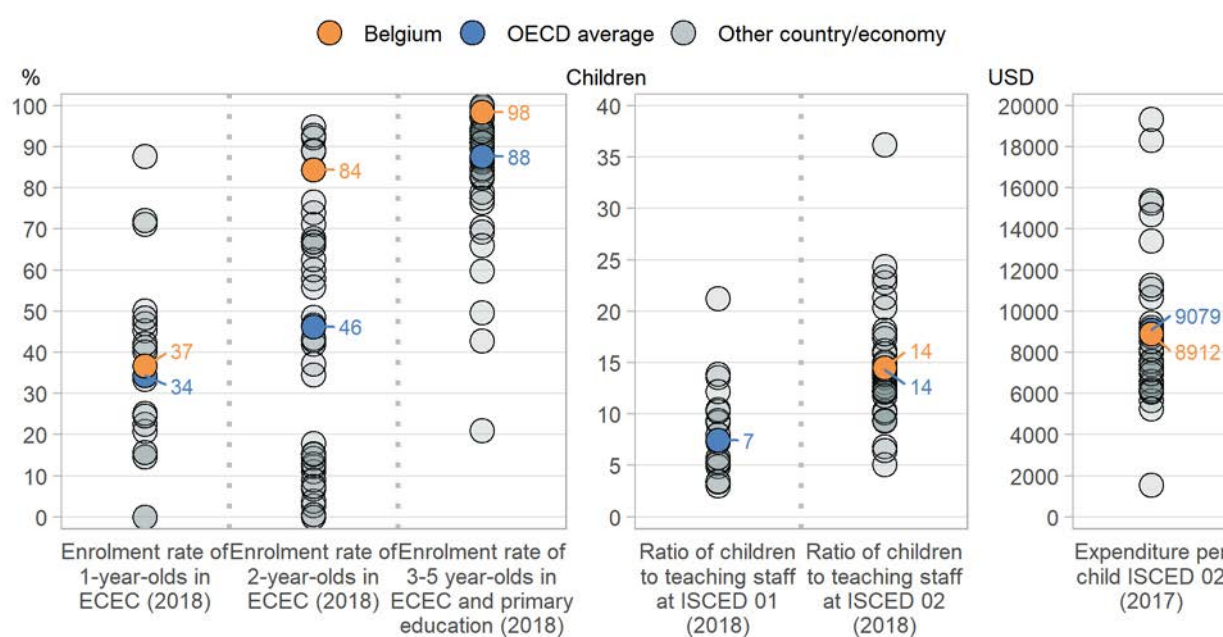
- Short-cycle tertiary programmes are generally designed to be vocationally oriented and represent the second most common route of entry into tertiary education on average across OECD countries, after bachelor's programmes. If current entry patterns continue, 1% of adults are expected to enter short-cycle tertiary education before the age of 25 in the Flemish Community of Belgium, compared to 10% on average across OECD countries. In Belgium, women make up 61% of students in such programmes, compared to 52% on average across OECD countries.
- Young people can face barriers to labour market entry as they transition from school to work, but higher educational attainment increases their likelihood of being employed and is associated with higher incomes. On average across OECD countries, the employment rate in 2019 was 61% for 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary education, 78% for those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education as their highest attainment and 85% for those with tertiary education. In Belgium, the shares are 52% for below upper secondary, 81% for upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary and 88% for tertiary attainment. Having a tertiary degree also carries a considerable earnings advantage in most OECD and partner countries. In Belgium, in 2017, 25-64 year-olds with a tertiary degree with income from full-time, full-year employment earned 39% more than full-time, full-year workers with upper secondary education compared to 54% on average across OECD countries (Figure 2).
- International student mobility has been expanding quite consistently in the past twenty years. In 2018, 5.6 million tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study, more than twice the number in 2005. In Belgium, the share of foreign or international students decreased from 11% in 2014 to 10% in 2018. Meanwhile 3% of Belgian tertiary students are enrolled abroad compared to 2% in total across OECD countries (Figure 2). English-speaking countries are the most attractive student destinations overall in the OECD area, with Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States receiving more than 40% of all internationally mobile students in OECD and partner countries. Among students leaving Belgium to study, the most popular destination country is Netherlands.
- Beyond the economic and employment outcomes, higher educational attainment is related to greater social benefits. For example, those with a tertiary education are more likely to feel they have a say in what their government does. In 2018, on average across OECD countries participating in the European Social Survey, 52% of tertiary-educated adults agreed with this sentiment compared to 26% of those with below upper secondary education. In Belgium, 48% of tertiary-educated adults feel this way compared with 28% of those with below upper secondary education.

## Starting strong

- In many OECD countries, ECEC begins for most children long before they turn 5 and there are universal legal entitlements to a place in ECEC services for at least one or two years before the start of compulsory schooling. While compulsory education begins at age 6 in Belgium, 98% of 3-5 year-olds in 2018 are enrolled in ECEC programmes and primary education in Belgium, compared to 88% on average across OECD countries (Figure 3).
- Public provision of early childhood education and care is an important factor in ensuring broad access to affordable ECEC. On average across OECD countries, more than one in two of the children in early childhood educational development services (ISCED 01) are enrolled in private institutions. Enrolment in private institutions is usually less common for 3-5 year-olds, who are usually enrolled in pre-primary education (ISCED 02), than for younger children. In Belgium, 53% of children attending pre-primary education are enrolled in private institutions, compared to one in three children on average across OECD countries.

- The workforce is at the heart of high-quality early-childhood education and care: stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy are fostered by better-qualified practitioners and high-quality interactions between children and staff facilitate better learning outcomes. In that context, lower child-staff ratios are found to be consistently supportive of staff-child relationships across different types of ECEC settings (NICHD, 2002). In Belgium, the ratio of children for every full-time equivalent (FTE) teacher working in pre-primary education (ISCED 02) is 14, equal to the OECD average (Figure 3).
- Sustained public financial support is critical for the growth and quality of ECEC programmes. In 2017, annual total expenditure in pre-primary settings (ISCED 02) averaged USD 8 912 per child in Belgium, slightly lower than the average across OECD countries (USD 9 079) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Snapshot of early childhood education and care**



**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Annual expenditure per child is shown in equivalent USD converted using PPPs. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator B2. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

## Investing in education

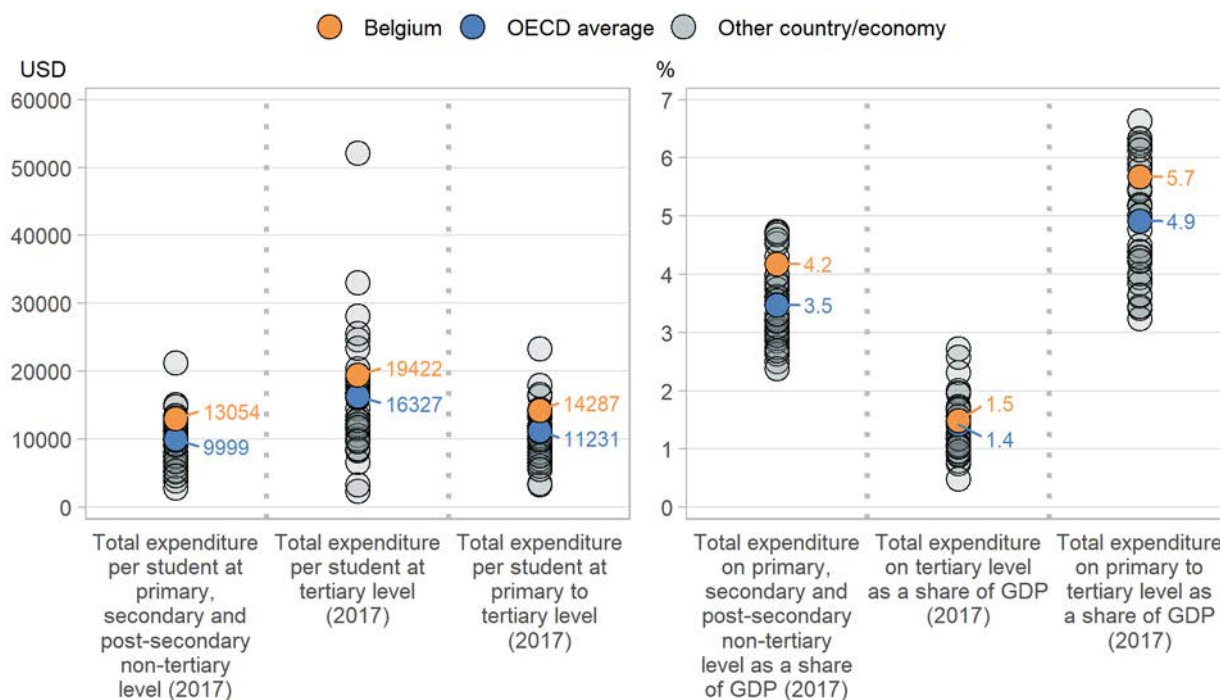
- Annual expenditure per student on educational institutions from primary to tertiary level provides an indication of the investment countries make in each student. In 2017, Belgium spent more on primary to tertiary educational institutions per full-time student than the OECD average, investing a total of USD 14 287 per student compared to USD 11 231 on average across OECD countries (Figure 4).
- The way education is provided influences how resources are allocated between levels of education and between public and private institutions. In 2017, Belgium spent USD 13 054 per student at non-tertiary level (primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education), USD 3 055 higher than the OECD average of USD 9 999. At tertiary level, Belgium invested USD 19 422 per



student, USD 3 095 more than the OECD average (Figure 4). Expenditure per student on private<sup>1</sup> educational institutions is higher than on public institutions on average across OECD countries. However, this is not the case in Belgium, where total expenditure on public institutions from primary to tertiary level amounts to USD 15 883 per student, compared to USD 13 172 on private ones.

- In most OECD countries, expenditure per upper secondary student varies according to programme orientation. Spending per student on upper secondary vocational programmes tends to be higher than for upper secondary general ones due to the higher cost of equipment, lower student-to-teacher ratios, and work-based requirements of such programmes. On average across OECD countries, expenditure per student in upper secondary vocational programmes was USD 1 470 higher than in general programmes in 2017. Belgium follows the same pattern: spending per student amounted to USD 14 896 in upper secondary vocational programmes, USD 686 higher than spending per student on general ones at the same level.
- Among OECD countries, Belgium spent the 10th highest proportion of its gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions. In 2017, Belgium spent on average 5.7% of GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions, which is 0.8 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Across levels of education, Belgium devoted an above average share of GDP at non-tertiary levels and an above average share at tertiary level (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Snapshot of the financial resources invested in educational institutions**



**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Expenditure in national currencies is converted into equivalent USD by dividing the national currency figure by the purchasing power parity (PPP) index for GDP. The years shown in parentheses are the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator C1 and C2. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

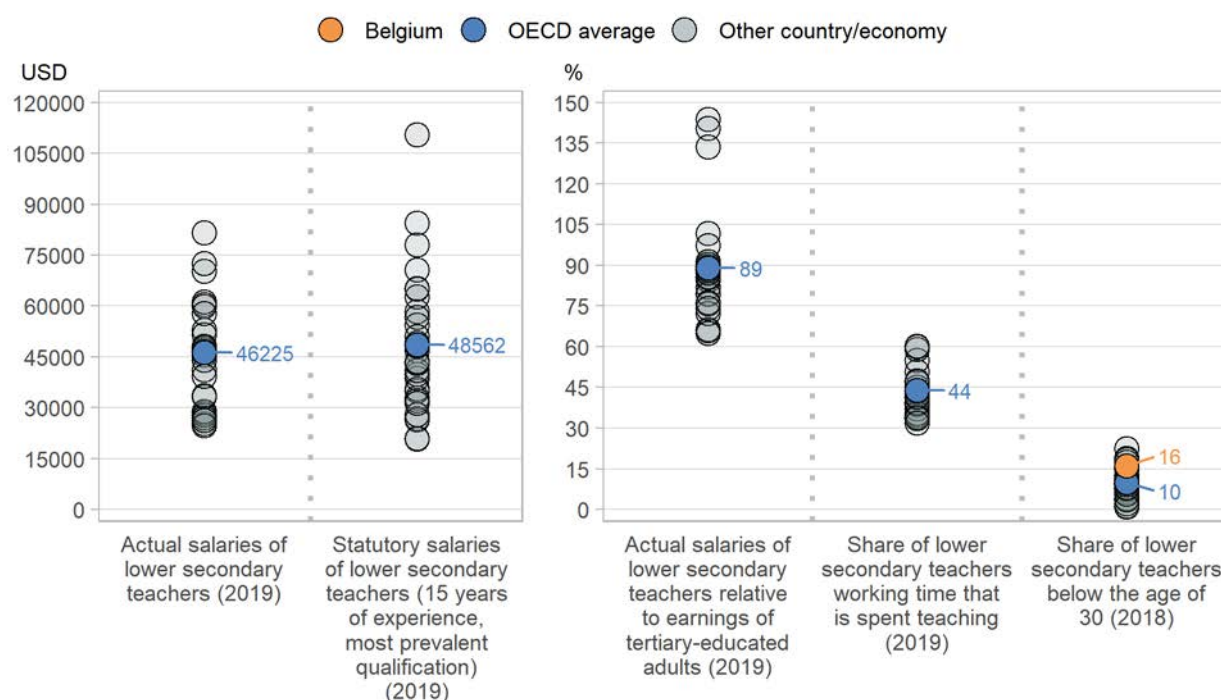
<sup>1</sup> Private institutions mainly refer to subsidized government dependent institutions.

- Between 2012 and 2017, expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education increased by an average annual growth rate of 1.3% across OECD countries. In Belgium, expenditure on educational institutions grew at an average rate of 1.2% a year, while the number of students grew on average by 0.6% per year. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 0.6% in expenditure per student over this period.
- Capital costs represent a lower than average share of expenditure on primary to tertiary institutions in Belgium. At primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary level, capital costs account for 4% of total spending on educational institutions, 4 percentage points below the OECD average. At the tertiary level, capital costs represent 5%, lower than the average across OECD countries of 10%.
- Compensation of teachers and other staff employed in educational institutions represents the largest share of current expenditure from primary to tertiary education. In 2017, Belgium allocated 86% of its current expenditure to staff compensation, compared to 74% on average across OECD countries. Staff compensation tends to make up a smaller share of current expenditure on tertiary institutions due to the higher costs of facilities and equipment at this level. In Belgium, staff compensation represents 75% of current expenditure on tertiary institutions compared to 89% at non-tertiary levels. On average across OECD countries, the share is 67% at tertiary level and 77% at non-tertiary level.

## Working conditions of school teachers

- Statutory salaries of teachers (and school heads) in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach. In most OECD countries and economies, they also increase with experience. On average, the statutory salaries of teachers with maximum qualifications at the top of their salary scales are 78% to 80% higher than those of teachers with the minimum qualifications at the start of their career at pre-primary, primary and general lower and upper secondary levels. In the Flemish and French community of Belgium, maximum salaries are 73% and 118% higher respectively than minimum salaries at pre-primary, primary and lower secondary level.
- While teachers' average actual salaries at pre-primary, primary and general secondary levels of education are 80-94% of the earnings of tertiary-educated workers on average across OECD countries and economies, the proportion ranges from 83-85% at primary level to 80-85% at lower and upper secondary level in the Flemish and French communities of Belgium. Teachers at upper secondary level earn about the same as tertiary-educated workers in both communities.
- Large proportions of teachers in many OECD countries will reach retirement age in the next decade, while the size of the school-age population is projected to increase in some countries, putting many governments under pressure to recruit and train new teachers. In Belgium, 21% of primary teachers are considered young teachers (under the age of 30), which is higher than the OECD average of 12%. On average across OECD countries, the proportion of young teachers decreases at other levels of education, to 10% in lower secondary education and 8% in upper secondary education. In Belgium, the proportion of young teachers decreases to 16% at lower secondary level and to 14% at upper secondary level (Figure 5). Between 2005 and 2018, the proportion of young teachers at upper secondary level decreased by 3 percentage points in Belgium, whereas it fell by 4 percentage points on average across OECD countries during this period.

Figure 5. Snapshot of teachers' working conditions



**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Teachers' salaries are shown in equivalent USD converted using PPPs. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator D3, D4 and D5. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

## The impact of COVID-19 on education

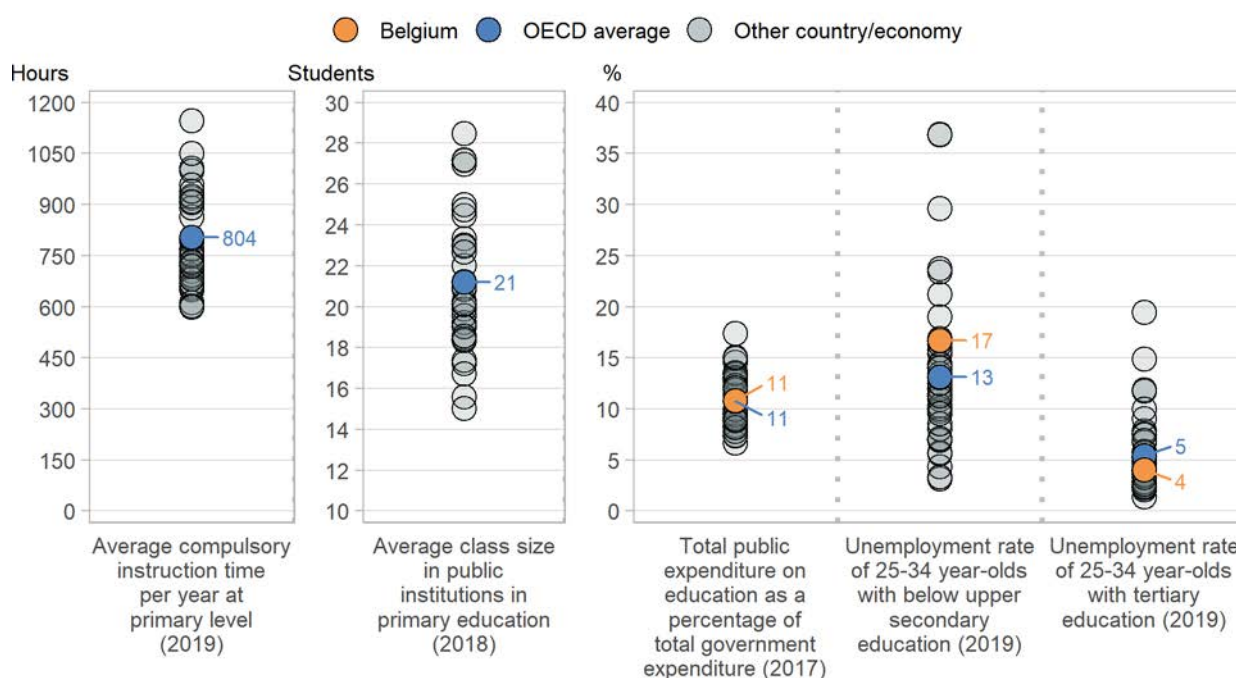
- The global 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves around the world. In a first effort to contain the virus, many countries have imposed a lockdown and schools and/or universities have closed for several months across all OECD and partner countries. In Belgium, the closures were nationwide from 13 March 2020 and schools started progressively reopening on 18 May 2020. By the end of June, Belgium had experienced 16 weeks of effective school closures in some form, compared to 14 weeks on average across OECD countries (UNESCO, 2020). However, the actual impact in some countries may have been less severe as some of these periods included scheduled school breaks.
- While there is uncertainty about the likely overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education expenditure, governments will face difficult decisions on the allocation of resources, as government funds are injected into the economy and the health sector. In 2017, public spending on primary to tertiary education as a share of government expenditure in Belgium was 11%, the same as the OECD average of 11% (Figure 6).
- As unemployment rises, private funding of education may also be at risk. The impact may be most severe in those countries and levels of education that rely most heavily on household expenditure, in particular early childhood education and care and tertiary education. This is less the case in Belgium. In pre-primary education (ISCED 02), private sources accounted for 3% of total expenditure in Belgium in 2017, lower than the OECD average of 17%. At tertiary level, 14% of



total expenditure comes from private sources, compared to 29% on average across OECD countries.

- The crisis may have a severe impact on the internationalisation of higher education as the delivery of online course material and travel restrictions may raise questions among international students' perception on the value of obtaining their degree from an institution abroad. Belgium, with a higher share of international students than in total across the OECD, may be more strongly affected than other countries.
- Unemployment may increase, as the economy struggles to cope with the reduced activity that resulted from the lockdown. Those with lower educational attainment are the most vulnerable, as they are the most unlikely to benefit from remote working. In 2019, before the pandemic hit, 17% of young adults with below upper secondary education in Belgium were unemployed compared to 4% of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds (Figure 6). In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the unemployment of young adults without an upper secondary education increased by 3.9 percentage points between 2008 and 2009 in Belgium compared to 0.7 percentage points among those with tertiary education.

**Figure 6. Snapshot of indicators relevant to the impact of COVID-19 on education**



**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator A3, D1, D2, and C4. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

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## More information

**For more information on Education at a Glance 2020 and to access the full set of Indicators, visit [www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm)**

For more information on to the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, visit Annex 3 of the publication (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

For general information on methodology, please refer to the OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics: Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications (<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en>).

Updated data can be found on line at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-data-en> and by following the StatLinks  under the tables and charts in the publication.

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The calculation on the number of weeks of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic is based on data from UNESCO (UNESCO, 2020). For general information on the methodology considered for the data, please refer to the [methodological note](#).

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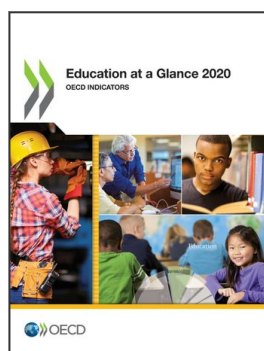
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On 15 May 2020, the OECD Council invited Costa Rica to become a Member. While Costa Rica is included in the OECD averages reported in this note, at the time of its preparation, Costa Rica was in the process of completing its domestic procedures for ratification and the deposit of the instrument of accession to the OECD Convention was pending.

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