



Why is the gender ratio of teachers imbalanced?

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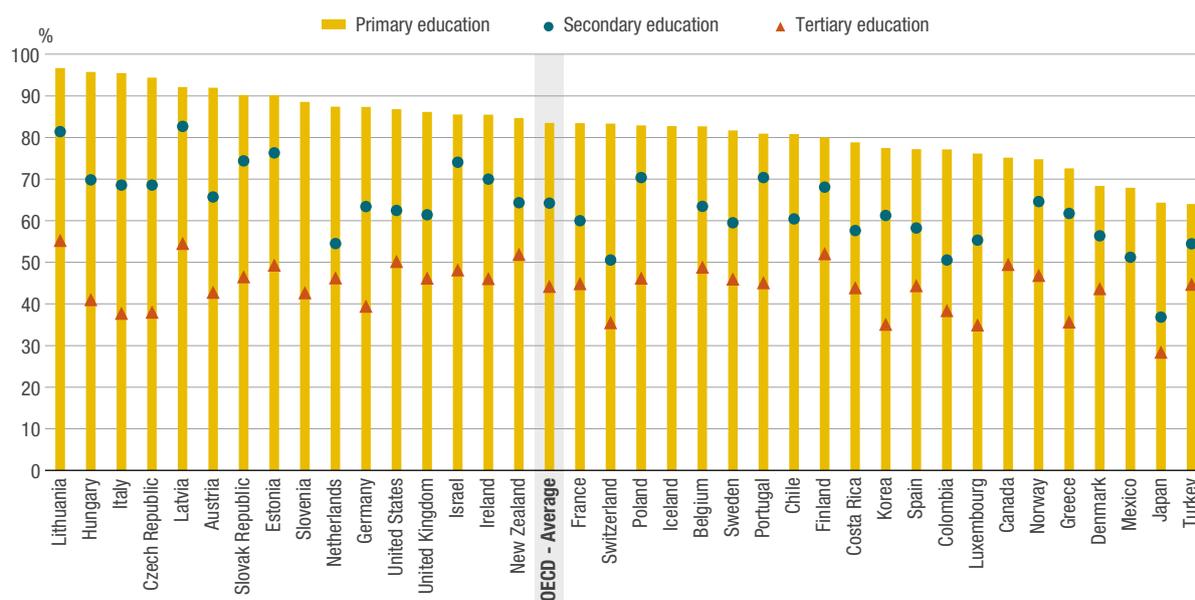


- Women are strongly over-represented among teachers. The share of female teachers is highest in primary schools and decreases with increasing level of education. Only among tertiary teachers is the share of women slightly lower than the share of men.
- There are several reasons behind the high share of female teachers. Lingering gender stereotypes contribute to the perception of teaching as a female profession. Flexible working arrangements for teachers are attractive for working mothers, while differences in relative wages between men and women make teaching financially less appealing to men than to women.
- Improving the recognition of the importance of teaching to society, including by compensating teachers adequately, could attract and retain good teachers regardless of gender.

Female teachers are strongly over-represented at non-tertiary levels of education and slightly under-represented at tertiary level

A balanced gender ratio among teachers exposes students to male and female role models and contributes to a diverse classroom environment. However, gender imbalances persist among those entering and staying in the teaching profession: on average in OECD countries, 70% of all teachers are women, with large differences across levels of education. Female teachers are especially over-represented at lower levels of education. In 2019, 84% of primary teachers in OECD countries were women on average, compared to 64% at secondary level and 44% at tertiary level. However, there are significant differences in the proportion of female teachers between countries at all educational levels. The share of female primary teachers ranges from 64% in Japan and Turkey to 97% in Lithuania. In contrast, women only make up more than half of tertiary teachers in 4 out of the 36 countries with available data (Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and New Zealand) and represent only 28% of teachers at tertiary level in Japan (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Share of female teachers, by level of education (2019)



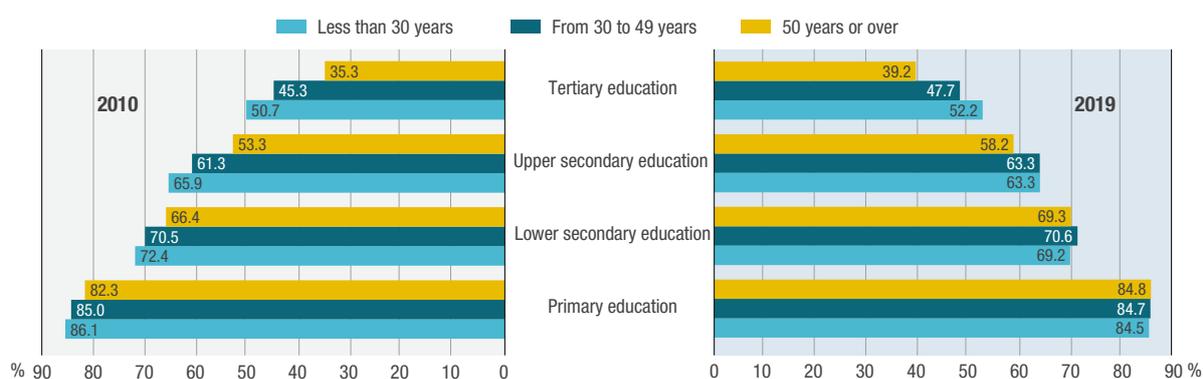
Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of female teachers at the primary level.

Source: OECD (2021_[1]), *Education at a Glance*, Table D5.1.

Between 2010 and 2019, the share of female teachers slightly increased at primary and secondary levels on average across OECD countries (from 83% in 2010 to 84% in 2019 at primary level and about 63% in 2010 to 64% in 2019 at secondary level). Thus, the trend of increasing gender imbalance discussed in OECD (2017^[2]) has continued, albeit at a slow pace. At the tertiary level, the share of female teachers has also continued to grow from 42% in 2010 to 44% in 2019 (OECD, 2021^[1]).

Analysing the gender distribution of teachers by age can provide insights into the future evolution of gender disparities. Between 2010 and 2019, the share of teachers under 30 (i.e. new entrants into the profession) who were female has declined at primary and secondary levels of education on average across OECD countries. At primary level, the share of female teachers among the youngest cohort fell by 2 percentage points between 2010 and 2019. At upper and lower secondary level, the share has declined by 3 percentage points (Figure 2). This suggests that the trend of increasing gender imbalance in primary and secondary education will turn around in coming years and gender ratios could slowly start to shift towards greater parity. At tertiary level, the share of women among new entrants has remained close to 50%, indicating that the gender ratio of tertiary teachers will continue to move towards greater parity.

Figure 2. Share of female teachers by level of education and age group (2010 and 2019)



Source: OECD (2021^[3]), Education at a Glance Database, <https://stats.oecd.org/>.

Imbalanced ratios are not just due to gender stereotypes

There are several reasons behind the imbalanced gender ratios among primary and secondary teachers. Historically, teaching has been one of the few skilled professions that has been accessible for women because it closely fitted the traditional stereotype of women as caregivers of children. While such gender stereotypes are less prevalent today than they were a few decades ago in many OECD countries, they might still be an important reason for the high share of female teachers, particularly at lower levels of education. However, other factors beyond gender stereotypes also contribute to skewed gender ratios.

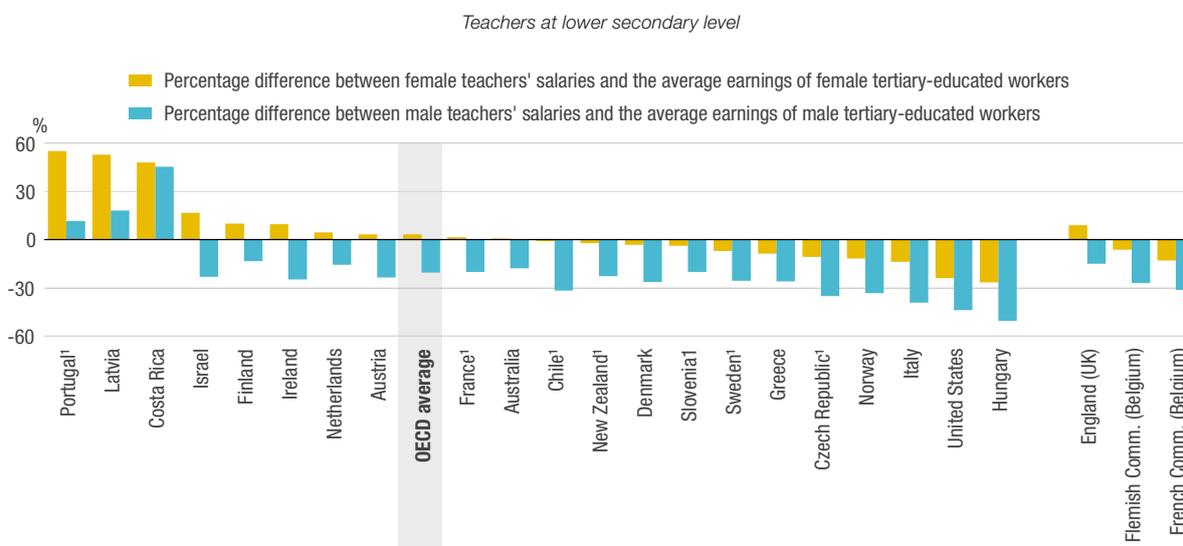
Teaching may be an attractive career option for working mothers because it provides the flexibility to combine work and family responsibilities. Teachers in many countries have considerable flexibility in organising their non-teaching working hours. For example, in 24 out of 31 OECD countries and economies with available data, teachers at the lower secondary level can spend part or all of their non-teaching working time outside of school premises (OECD, 2021^[1]). Ideally, this would make teaching similarly attractive to working fathers, but in many countries child rearing responsibilities still fall predominantly on women's shoulders (Craig and Mullan, 2011^[4]).

Teaching also lends itself to part-time work, which can be equally helpful for combining working and parenting duties. One in five lower secondary teachers in OECD countries are employed part time (OECD, 2020^[5]). On average, the share of women working part-time is 4 percentage points higher than the share of men across OECD countries (OECD, 2020^[5]), indicating that this option is popular among women.¹

Differences in relative wage levels between men and women are another factor contributing to imbalanced gender ratios among teachers. Teaching is one of the few professions where women do not face wage discrimination. On average across OECD countries, most of the primary (88%) and lower secondary (84%) teachers teach in public schools (OECD, 2021^[3]). Their salaries are determined by statutory salary scales or are agreed through collective bargaining in most OECD countries. Within each country, teachers' salaries differ according to a number of factors (e.g. the level of education taught, qualifications and teachers' experience or their career stage), but they are not affected by gender. Because of these standardised wage setting processes, the actual salaries of male and female teachers are nearly identical on average across OECD countries (OECD, 2021^[1]).

However, the welcome absence of wage discrimination in teaching implies that careers outside teaching will be financially more attractive for men than for women. Male teachers earn on average 20% less than other tertiary-educated men. In contrast, female teachers earn on average 3% more than other tertiary-educated women, who often face wage discrimination in other professions (Figure 3). Thus, gender wage discrimination in sectors outside of education also has negative implications for the gender balance within the teaching profession. As it is financially less attractive for men than for women to become teachers, men are discouraged from entering the profession (Allegretto and Mishel, 2016^[6]).

Figure 3. Teachers' actual salaries relative to tertiary-educated workers, by gender (2020)



Note: The figure shows the percentage difference between average salaries (including bonuses and allowances) of lower secondary teachers in public institutions and the earnings of full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education of the same gender.

1. Year of reference differs from 2020.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of percentage difference between female teachers' and female tertiary-educated workers' salaries.

Source: OECD (2021^[1]), *Education at a Glance*, recalculated from Table D3.5.

Recognising teachers' contribution to society could bring in more talent regardless of gender

Data from the 2018 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) reveal a widespread disillusionment among teachers about the perception of teaching in society. On average across the OECD, only one in four teachers (25.8%) considered their profession to be valued by society (OECD, 2020^[5]). This contributes to difficulties in hiring and retaining teachers. One in three teachers (33.8%) believed that it would have been better to have chosen a profession other than teaching (OECD, 2020^[5]). More than one in eight teachers aged 50 or under (14.1%) expressed an intention to leave teaching within the next five years (OECD, 2020^[5]). There are no major differences between male and female teachers. However, the attrition rate, which measures the proportion of teachers permanently leaving the teaching profession, is lower for female teachers (in pre-primary to upper secondary) than for their male colleagues in 11 out of 15 countries with available data (OECD, 2021^[1]).



Strengthening the recognition of teaching in society could bring more talent into the teaching profession regardless of gender. Compensating teachers adequately is an obvious way of acknowledging the importance of the teaching profession, but it is not the only one. Other important mechanisms include public appreciation for the long hours that teachers work beyond their teaching time and the often challenging work environment that they face. Giving teachers the means to do their job well, for example by providing well-equipped classrooms, is another important way of recognising the importance of the profession and motivating teachers.

All of these measures are important in their own right and should be implemented irrespective of gender considerations. However, they have the added benefit that by helping to attract the best-qualified candidates among both men and women to the teaching profession they could also contribute to improving the gender balance among teachers.

The bottom line

Women are strongly over-represented among primary and secondary teachers. This can be explained at least partly by gender stereotypes, but also by the attractiveness of the profession to working mothers and by differences in the relative wage levels in teaching for men and women. Recognising teachers' contribution to society could help to attract the best qualified candidates to the teaching profession, irrespective of gender.

NOTE :

1. These numbers are indicative, but they cannot conclusively show that women prefer to work part time, because it is unclear what fraction of male and female part-time teachers work part-time involuntarily.

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