

# **Education at a Glance 2022**

OECD Indicators



# Ireland

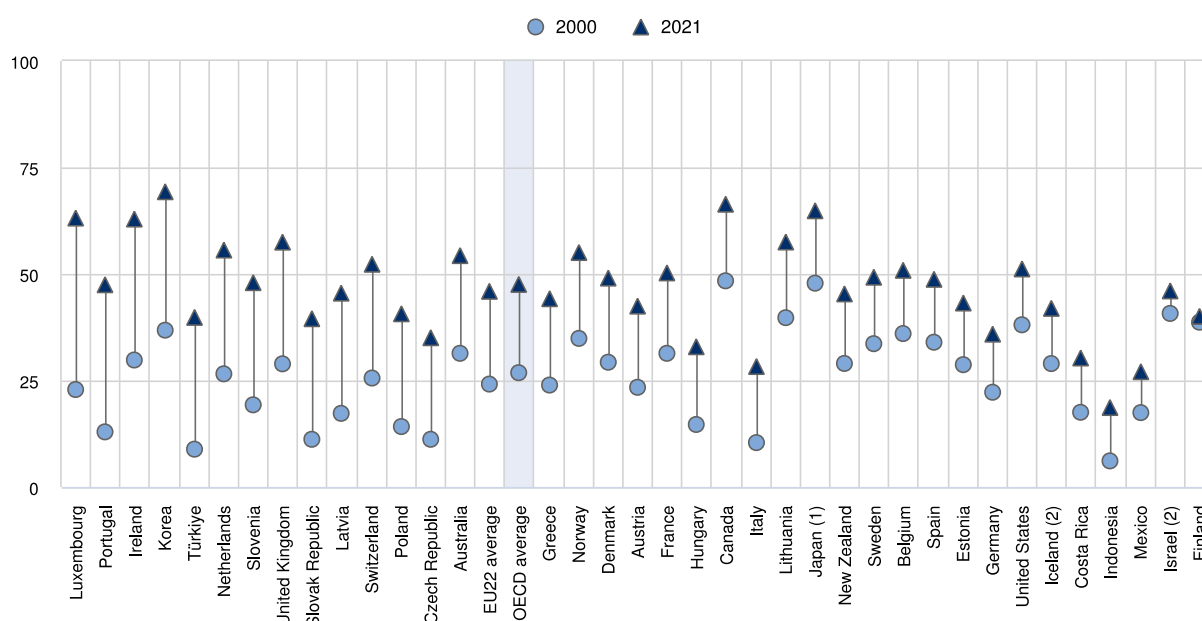
## The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- Educational attainment has been increasing throughout the OECD, in particular at tertiary level. Between 2000 and 2021, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment increased on average by 21 percentage points. In Ireland, the share increased at an even faster pace, by 33 percentage points (from 30% in 2000 to 63% in 2021) (Figure 1). Ireland is one of the 14 OECD countries where at least half of 25-34 year-olds have a tertiary education.
- Upper secondary attainment is often seen as a minimum qualification for successful labour market participation. Although the general increase in educational attainment has seen a parallel decline in the share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary attainment, 14% of young adults across the OECD still left school without an upper secondary qualification. In Ireland, the share is 5%, which is lower than the OECD average.
- Higher educational attainment is often associated with better employment prospects and Ireland is no exception. In 2021 the employment rate among 25-34 year-olds with tertiary education in Ireland was 44 percentage points higher than among those with below upper secondary attainment and 16 percentage points higher than among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. On average across OECD countries, the employment rate among 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary qualification was 26 percentage points higher than among those with below upper secondary attainment and 8 percentage points higher than among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. While the positive link between educational attainment and employment rates holds for both men and for women across the OECD, it is particularly strong for women. In Ireland, 29% of women with below upper secondary attainment were employed in 2021, compared to 87% of those with tertiary attainment. In contrast, the figures were 56% and 90% for men.
- Across the OECD, the labour market benefits of tertiary attainment have proved especially strong during economic crises. This was also the case during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland. Between 2019 and 2020, unemployment for 25-34 year-old workers with below upper secondary attainment increased by 1.9 percentage points, by 1.9 percentage points for workers with upper secondary attainment and by 1.2 percentage points for workers with tertiary attainment. In 2021, unemployment for workers with below upper secondary attainment increased by 0.8 percentage points, compared to 2020, by 0.4 percentage points for workers with upper secondary attainment and decreased by 0.6 percentage points for workers with tertiary attainment.
- Educational attainment affects not just employment prospects, but also wage levels. On average across the OECD, 25-64 year-old workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment earn 29% more than workers with below upper secondary attainment, while those with tertiary attainment earn about twice as much. In Ireland, the earnings advantage of tertiary-educated workers was even greater than the OECD average. In 2019, workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment earned 21% more than those with below upper secondary attainment and those with tertiary attainment earned more than twice as much.

- National averages provide only an incomplete picture of the situation in any given country. In most OECD countries, there are large differences in educational attainment across subnational regions. However, this is not the case in Ireland. Educational attainment is similar across most regions. In 2021, the difference between the region with the highest share of 25-64 year-olds with tertiary attainment (Eastern and Midland, at 56%) and that with the lowest share (Northern and Western, at 49%) was 8 percentage points. These subnational variations do not only reflect differences in education opportunities. To a large degree, they are due to economic conditions and internal migration patterns.

**Figure 1. Trends in the share of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds (2000 and 2021)**

In per cent



1. Data for tertiary education include upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (less than 5% of adults are in this group).

2. Year of reference differs from 2000: 2002 for Israel and 2003 for Iceland.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the difference in the share of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds between 2000 and 2021.

**Source:** OECD (2022), Education at a Glance Database, <http://stats.oecd.org/>. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-A.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-A.pdf)).

## Access to education, participation and progress

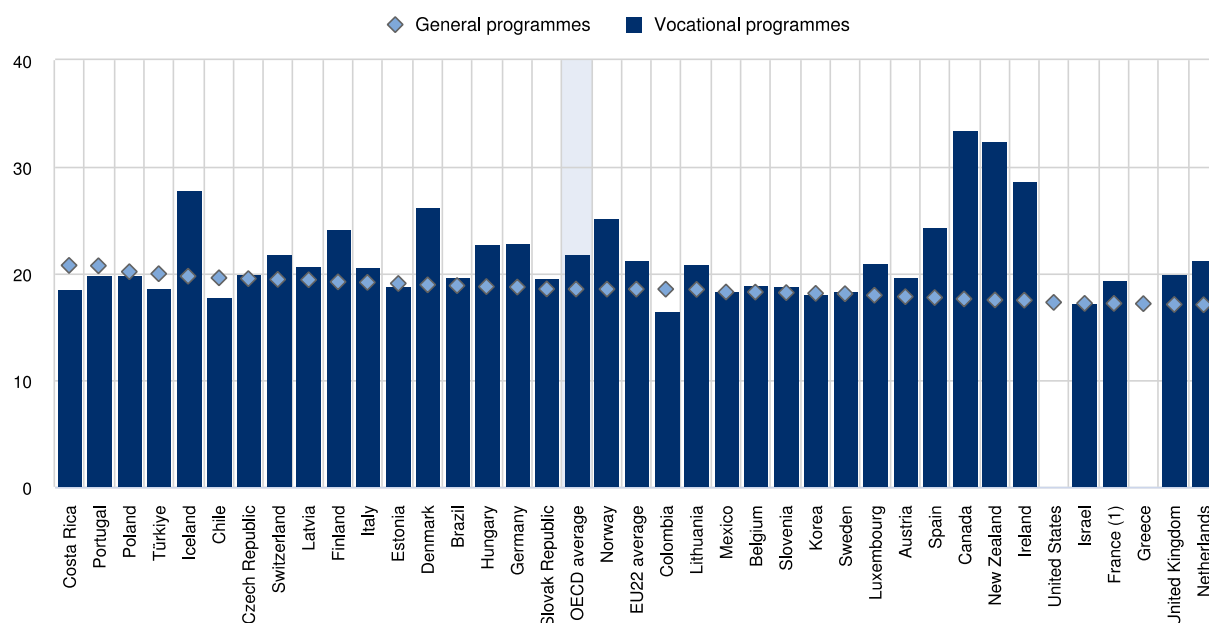
- Compulsory education begins at the age of 6 and ends at the age of 16 in Ireland. The range of ages for which at least 90% of the population are enrolled is longer than the period of compulsory education and goes from the age of 3 to the age of 17. This is similar to most other OECD countries, where more than 90% of the population are also enrolled for longer than the period of compulsory education.
- The age at which children enter early childhood education differs widely across countries. In Ireland, early childhood education starts offering intentional education objectives at age 3 and 18% of children under 3 are enrolled in early childhood education. Across OECD countries, the average enrolment rate among children below the age of 3 is 27%, but the rates range from less than 1%

to 63%. The enrolment rate among 3-5 year-olds increases substantially in all OECD countries. In Ireland, 61% of all children of this age are enrolled in early childhood education, which is below the OECD average. In Ireland, while compulsory school starts at age 6, many 4-5 years-olds are enrolled at primary level, rather than in early childhood settings.

- The average age of graduation from general upper secondary programmes varies from 17 to 21 years across OECD countries and is 17 years in Ireland. Differences in the average age of graduation from vocational upper secondary education are much larger and vary from 16 to 34 years across the OECD. These differences largely depend on whether vocational upper secondary students usually enrol in these programmes towards the end of their compulsory education or in mid-career. In Ireland, the average age of graduation from vocational upper secondary education is 29 years, which is above the OECD average at 22 years (Figure 2).
- In almost all OECD countries, women make up the majority of those graduating from general upper secondary education. In Ireland, the share is 51% (OECD average 55%). In contrast, men are overrepresented among graduates of vocational upper secondary programmes in most OECD countries, but not in Ireland where they make up 36% of all vocational upper secondary graduates, below the OECD average (55%).
- In Ireland, 63% of 18-24 year-olds are still in full- or part-time education or training at either upper secondary or tertiary level (significantly above the OECD average of 54%). A subset of these students (23% of 18-24 year-olds) combine their education or training with some form of employment in Ireland, compared to 17% on average across the OECD.
- One significant difference across countries' education systems is on whether or not vocational upper secondary programmes provide access to tertiary education. In 12 OECD countries and other participants, all vocational upper secondary graduates have direct access to tertiary education. In contrast, in Ireland vocational upper secondary graduates do not have direct access to tertiary education.
- As is the case in all OECD countries, a majority of students enrolled at tertiary level in Ireland are bachelor's students (71%). However, the next commonest enrolment level varies from country to country. In Ireland, master's students make up the second largest group of tertiary students at 16%. This is also the case in 25 other OECD countries, while in the remaining 14 countries with available data, short-cycle tertiary students form the second largest group.
- At 24%, business, administration and law was the most popular field of study among new entrants into tertiary education in Ireland, which is the case in most OECD countries. Despite the growing need for digital skills and the good employment prospects of students with degrees in information and communication technologies (ICT), only a small fraction of entrants into tertiary education choose this field. In Ireland, 89% of 25-64 year-olds with a tertiary ICT qualification are employed, but ICT students make up 7% of new entrants into tertiary education. However, this is above the OECD average of 6%.

**Figure 2. Average age of first-time upper secondary graduates, by programme orientation (2020)**

In years



1. Average age is based on all graduates instead of first-time graduates.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the average age of first-time upper secondary graduates in general programmes.

**Source:** OECD/Eurostat/UIS (2022), Tables B3.1 and B3.2. See *Source* section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-B.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-B.pdf)).

## Financial resources invested in education

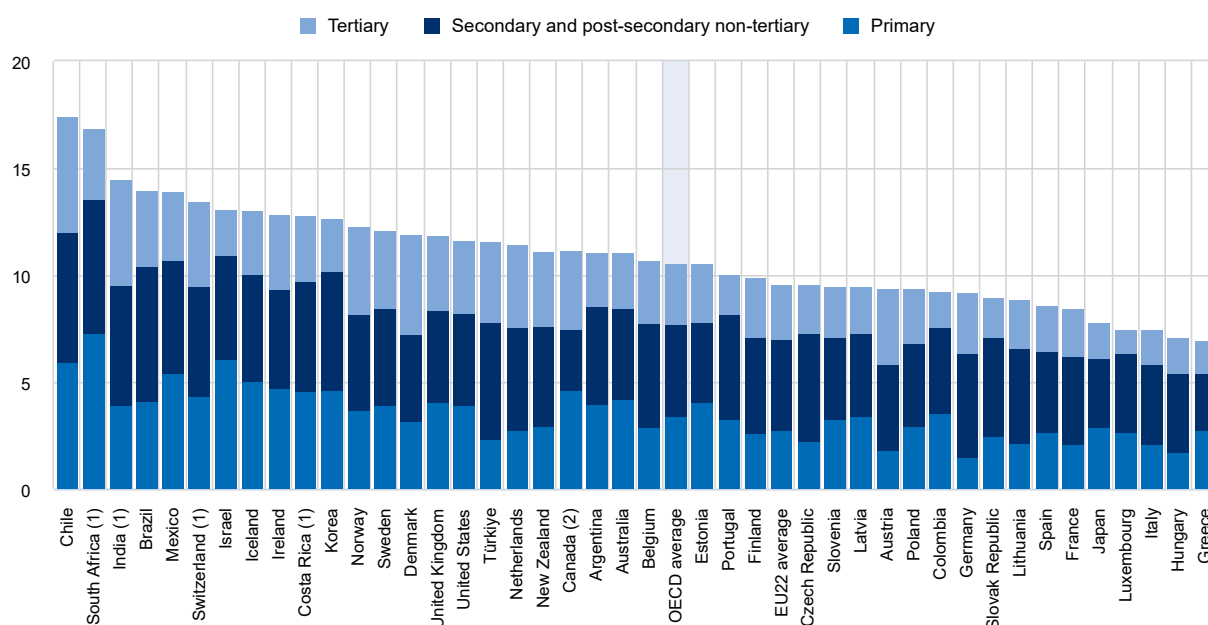
- All OECD countries devote a substantial share of national output to educational institutions. In 2019, OECD countries spent on average 4.9% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions. In Ireland, the corresponding share was 3.2%.
- Public spending on primary to tertiary education was 12.9% of total government expenditure in Ireland (Figure 3), higher than the OECD average (10.6%). In contrast, relative to GDP, public spending on primary to tertiary education (3.1%) is lower than the OECD average (4.4%).
- Across OECD countries, the provision of education at primary and secondary levels in terms of curricula, teaching styles and organisational management leads, on average, to similar patterns of expenditure per student from primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels. OECD countries as a whole spend on average around USD 9 923 per student at primary and USD 11 400 per student at secondary level. In Ireland, the values are USD 8 687 at primary and USD 10 383 per student at secondary level.
- In contrast to lower levels of education, spending on tertiary education varies widely across OECD countries. Expenditure per student at tertiary level in Ireland is higher than at other levels of education, as is the case in almost all other OECD countries. The average expenditure per student in Ireland is USD 16 997 per year, which is about USD 8 300 higher than that of the primary level and USD 6 600 higher than that of the secondary level. It is below the OECD average, but similar to many other countries. The average expenditure at tertiary level (USD 17 559) is driven up by

high values in a few countries. At 32%, the share of research and development (R&D) expenditure makes up a slightly larger fraction of expenditure on tertiary education in Ireland than on average across OECD countries (29%).

- Public funding dominates non-tertiary education (primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary) in all OECD countries, even after transfers to the private sector. On average across the OECD, private funding accounts for 10% of expenditure at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels, the same share observed in Ireland in 2019. In contrast, private expenditure at tertiary level was higher in all OECD countries. In Ireland, the share of private expenditure at tertiary level reached 27%, which was slightly below the OECD average of 31%, after public-to-private transfers. These latter accounted for 21% of expenditure on educational institutions at this level.

**Figure 3. Composition of total public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure (2019)**

Primary to tertiary education (including R&D), in per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2019. Refer to the source table for more details.

2. Primary education includes pre-primary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of total public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure.

**Source:** OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2022), Table C4.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-C.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-C.pdf)).

## Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

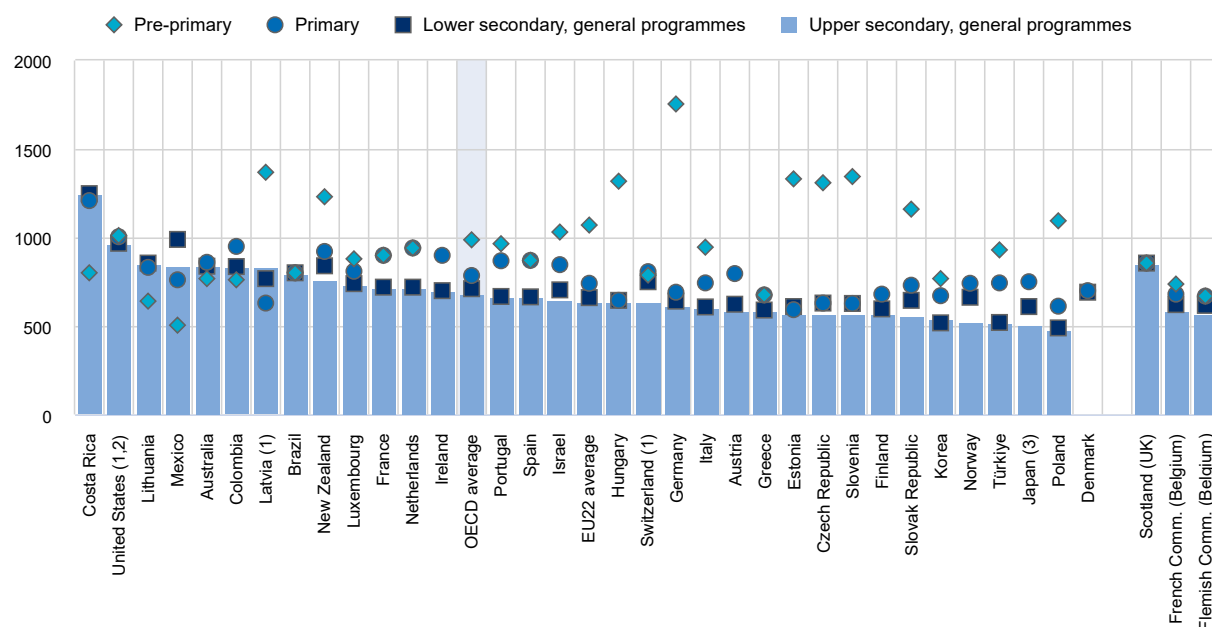
- The salaries of teachers and school heads are an important determinant of the attractiveness of the teaching profession, but they also represent the single largest expenditure item in formal education. In most OECD countries, the statutory salaries of teachers (and school heads) in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach, and also with experience. Actual salaries also increase with the level of education. On average across OECD countries,

actual salaries range from USD 47 538 at the primary level to USD 53 682 at the upper secondary level. In Ireland, actual salaries average USD 59 287 at primary level and USD 61 452 at upper secondary level.

- Between 2015 and 2021, on average across OECD countries, the statutory salaries of teachers at lower secondary level (general programmes) with 15 years of experience and the most prevalent qualifications increased by 6% in real terms. In Ireland, salaries increased less than the OECD average, by 2%.
- Teachers' average actual salaries remain lower than earnings of tertiary-educated workers in almost all OECD countries, and at almost all levels of education. However, Ireland is one of the few exceptions to this rule. Lower secondary (general programme) teachers in Ireland earn 3.1% more than other tertiary-educated workers. In contrast school head actual salaries in Ireland are much higher than the earnings of other tertiary educated workers. This is similar to most OECD countries, where school heads tend to earn well above the average earnings of tertiary educated workers.
- The average number of teaching hours per year required from a typical teacher in public educational institutions in OECD countries tends to decrease as the level of education increases. This is also the case in Ireland.
- Based on official regulations or agreements, annual teaching hours in Ireland are 900 hours at primary level, 700 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 700 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes) (Figure 4).
- The duration of initial teacher education for primary and lower secondary teachers ranges from 2.5 years to 6.5 years across OECD countries. In Ireland, initial teacher education typically lasts 6 years for prospective lower secondary teachers (general programmes). It is shorter for prospective primary teachers, at 4 years. As is the case in almost all OECD countries, a tertiary degree is awarded to prospective teachers of all levels of education upon completion of their initial teacher training.

Figure 4. Teaching time of teachers, by level of education (2021)

Net statutory teaching time in hours per year, in public institutions



1. Actual teaching time (in Latvia except for pre-primary level).

2. Reference year differs from 2021. Refer to the source table for details.

3. Average planned teaching time in each school at the beginning of the school year.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of the number of teaching hours per year in general upper secondary education.

Source: OECD (2022), Table D4.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-D.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-D.pdf)).

## Focus on tertiary education

- Among 25-64 year-olds in Ireland, bachelor's degrees are the most common tertiary attainment at 29% of the population followed by master's degrees with 14% and short-cycle tertiary qualifications with 9%. This is similar to the OECD average, where bachelor's degrees are most common (19%), followed by master's degrees (14%) and short cycle tertiary qualifications (7%). As in all OECD countries and other participants, only a small fraction of the population holds a doctoral degree: the share is 1% in Ireland.
- On average, tertiary attainment generates a wide range of labour-market benefits, including high employment rates. Yet, there are significant differences depending on the field of study. In 2021, employment rates in Ireland were highest among tertiary-educated individuals who studied engineering, manufacturing and construction with 95% and lowest among those who studied arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information at 77%. However, these differences need to be put into perspective. Even among 25-64 year-olds with tertiary attainment in the field with the lowest employment rate, this was 7.3 percentage points higher than among those with upper secondary attainment (all fields combined).
- In most OECD countries including in Ireland, tertiary-educated adults have higher rates of participation in non-formal education and training than those with a lower level of educational attainment. In 2021, 13% of 25-64 year-olds with tertiary attainment in Ireland had participated in



non-formal education and training in the four weeks prior to being surveyed, compared to 3% of their peers with below upper secondary attainment.

- Entering tertiary education often means costs for students and their families, in terms of tuition fees, foregone earnings and living expenses. Public policies on tuition fees students differ greatly across countries. In Ireland, public institutions charge tuition fees of USD 8 363 for national students at bachelor's level and of USD 9 736 at master's level. However, the fees actually paid by national students are considerably lower due to government support, with Irish students paying just USD 3 770 for a typical bachelor's programme.
- Over the decades, independent private institutions have been established to meet increased demand for tertiary education. On average across the OECD, 17% of students are enrolled in independent private institutions, but this figure masks large differences between countries. In Ireland, 4% of tertiary students are enrolled in such institutions. Independent private institutions charge higher annual tuition fees on average than public institutions for master's programmes in all OECD countries and other participants with available data, except in Chile and Lithuania.
- Enabling students to enrol on a part-time basis is an important way to facilitate access to tertiary education. Many part-time students would not be able to study full time, for example because they have child-care responsibilities or have to work to fund their studies. The share of part-time students at the tertiary level in Ireland is 19%, below the OECD average (22%). Compared to 2013, it has increased by 3 percentage points.

## COVID-19: The second year of the pandemic

- The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on adult learning in most OECD countries. In 2020, the share of adults who participated in a formal or non-formal education and training activity in the four weeks prior to being surveyed decreased by 2 percentage points on average across OECD countries compared with 2019. However, in 2021, participation in non-formal education and training returned to pre-pandemic levels in most countries. In Ireland, a similar pattern emerged. From 2019 to 2020, the share of adults participating in a formal or non-formal education and training activity fell by 2 percentage points. From 2020 to 2021, it increased by 3 percentage points and has thus increased above pre-pandemic levels.
- Young adults who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) for prolonged periods are at risk of adverse economic and social outcomes in both the short and the long term. After increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the share of 18-24 year-olds who are NEET in Ireland declined in 2021. The share of NEET among young adults was 11% in 2021, below pre-COVID levels.

## References

OECD (2022), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.


OECD (2022), "Regional education", *OECD Regional Statistics (database)*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/213e806c-en>.

## More information

**For more information on Education at a Glance 2022 and to access the full set of Indicators, see:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-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 Annex 3 ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3.pdf)).

For general information on the 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.

Data on subnational regions for selected indicators are available in the *OECD Regional Statistics* (database) (OECD, 2022). When interpreting the results on subnational entities, readers should take into account that the population size of subnational entities can vary widely within countries. For example, regional variation in enrolment may be influenced by students attending school in a different region from their area of residence, particularly at higher levels of education. Also, regional disparities tend to be higher when more subnational entities are used in the analysis.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS:

<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/>

The data on educational responses during COVID-19 were collected and processed by the OECD based on the Joint Survey on National Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, a collaborative effort conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the World Bank; and the OECD.

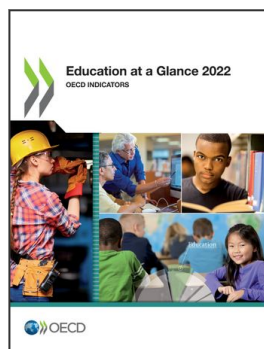
---

### Questions can be directed to:

Directorate for Education and Skills

[EDU.EAG@oecd.org](mailto:EDU.EAG@oecd.org)

---



From:

## Education at a Glance 2022

OECD Indicators

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>

### Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2022), “Ireland”, in *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/fa8dfbd4-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.