



# Italy

This country note provides an overview of key characteristics of the education system in Italy based on Education at a Glance 2024. In line with the thematic focus of Education at a Glance 2024, it highlights issues of equity in education. Data in this note are provided for the latest available year as indicated in Education at a Glance 2024.

## Highlights

- The share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary educational attainment decreased by 6 percentage points since 2016 and reached 20% in 2023, but still remains above the OECD average of 14%.
- Parents' education has a strong impact on the educational attainment of their children. In Italy, 69% of 25-64 year-olds who have at least one parent with tertiary attainment also attained a tertiary qualification and 37% of adults whose parents do not have an upper secondary qualification also did not attain upper secondary education themselves.
- In Italy, the average share of 20-24 year-olds who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) decreased from 32% to 21% between 2016 and 2023. However, while gender differences are relatively small for 20-24 year-olds, the NEET rate is higher for 25-29 year-old women (31%, compared to 20% among men).
- In Italy, only 36% of young women without an upper secondary education are employed, while this share is 72% for young men. In contrast, 73% of tertiary-educated young women and 75% of their male peers are employed. However, tertiary attainment does not help to reduce the gender wage gap. In Italy, tertiary-educated young women earn on average 58% of the wage of their male peers, which is the largest gender earnings' gap across the OECD. Young women with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education earn 85% of their male peers.
- In Italy, 95% of the children are enrolled in early childhood education one year before the start of primary education. Overall, enrolment among younger children is less common. In Italy, as in most other OECD countries, children aged 0-2 from families in the bottom income tertile are less likely to participate in childcare than children from the top income tertile (20% compared to 49%, a difference larger than on average across OECD countries).
- Italy spends 4.0% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on educational institutions at primary to tertiary levels (including R&D). This is less than the OECD average of 4.9% of GDP.
- Italy's education system is characterised by below-average student-to-teacher ratios: there are 11 students per teacher in primary education, 11 in lower secondary education and 10 in upper secondary education, all numbers below the OECD average.
- Italy's teaching workforce is older than average across the OECD, with the share of teachers who are 50 years or older reaching 53% compared to 37% on average across the OECD and all levels



of education. However, between 2013 and 2022, this share in Italy stayed at 57% in primary education and it decreased from 63% to 48% in lower secondary education and from 73% to 54% in upper secondary education.

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

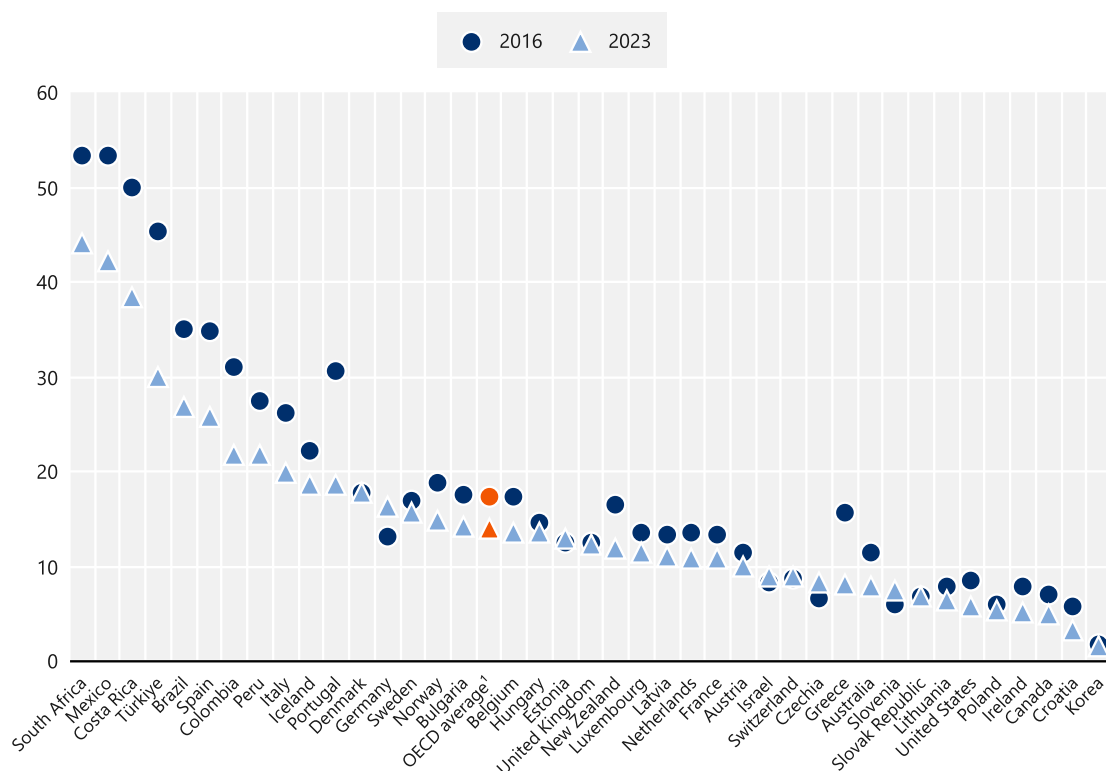
- Adults without upper secondary qualification are at considerable risk of poor social and labour-market outcomes throughout their lives. Reducing the share of young adults without an upper secondary qualification has been a priority in many countries and their share has decreased between 2016 and 2023 in 28 out of 35 OECD member countries. This is also the case in Italy. The share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary educational attainment decreased by 6 percentage points between 2016 and 2023. At 20%, it is 6 percentage points above the OECD average in 2023 (Figure 1).
- The difficult labour-market situation faced by workers without an upper secondary qualification is reflected in employment rates among 25-34 year-olds. In Italy, 57% of 25-34 year-olds without an upper secondary qualification are employed, compared to 69% of those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary qualification. The corresponding OECD averages are 61% and 79%, respectively. Moreover, workers without an upper secondary qualification are at risk of earning very low wages in most OECD countries. In Italy, 27% of 25-64 year-olds with below upper secondary educational attainment earn at or below half the median income compared to 21% of workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary educational attainment and 14% of workers with a tertiary qualification. Across the OECD, the respective shares are 28%, 17% and 10%.
- Strong labour markets and increasing participation in education have led to a decline in the share of 20-24 year-olds who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) in most OECD member countries. Across the OECD, the average NEET rate decreased from 17% to 15% between 2016 and 2023. In Italy, the share of NEETs decreased from 32% to 21% over the same period (20% for women and 21% for men). However, the NEET rate is higher for 25-29 year-old women (31%, compared to 20% among men).
- Further educational attainment protects from the risk of becoming NEET: the share of NEETs among 25-29 year-olds (men and women combined) are 48% among those without an upper secondary education, 23% among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and 15% among those with a tertiary qualification.
- By almost all available measures, girls and women have better educational outcomes than boys and men, and in many cases the gap is widening. This is reflected in gender gaps in educational attainment. In all OECD member countries, women aged 25-34 are as likely or more likely than their male peers to have a tertiary qualification (54% compared to 41% on average across OECD countries). With a tertiary educational attainment rate of 37% for women and 24% for men, the gap is similar to the OECD average in Italy.
- Although girls and women clearly outperform boys and men in education, the picture is reversed when they enter the labour market; the key measures of labour-market outcomes are generally worse for women than for men. Women aged 25-34 are less likely to be employed than men, with the gap typically widest for those with below upper secondary educational attainment and narrowest for those with tertiary attainment. In Italy, only 36% of young women with educational attainment below upper secondary educational level are employed, while the corresponding share

for young men is 72% (the corresponding OECD averages are 47% and 72%). In contrast, 73% of young women with a tertiary qualification are employed, while the corresponding share for young men is 75% (the corresponding OECD averages are 84% and 90%). However, tertiary attainment does not help to reduce the wage gap between men and women. In Italy, young women with a tertiary qualification earn on average 58% of the wage of their male peers, which is the largest gender earnings' gap across the OECD (OECD average: 83%). Young women's relative earnings reach 85% among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment (OECD average: 84%).

- Parents' education has a strong impact on the educational attainment of their children. In Italy, 69% of 25-64 year-olds who have at least one parent with tertiary attainment also attained a tertiary qualification (OECD average: 72%). In contrast, only 52% of those with at least one parent with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and 10% of those with parents without an upper secondary qualification have obtained a tertiary qualification themselves. This compares to the averages of 39% and 19%, respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, 37% of adults whose parents do not have an upper secondary qualification also did not attain upper secondary education themselves (OECD average: 16%).

**Figure 1. Trends in the share of 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary educational attainment (2016 and 2023)**

In per cent



1. The OECD average is derived from the unweighted mean of all countries with available and comparable data for both years. Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary attainment in 2023.

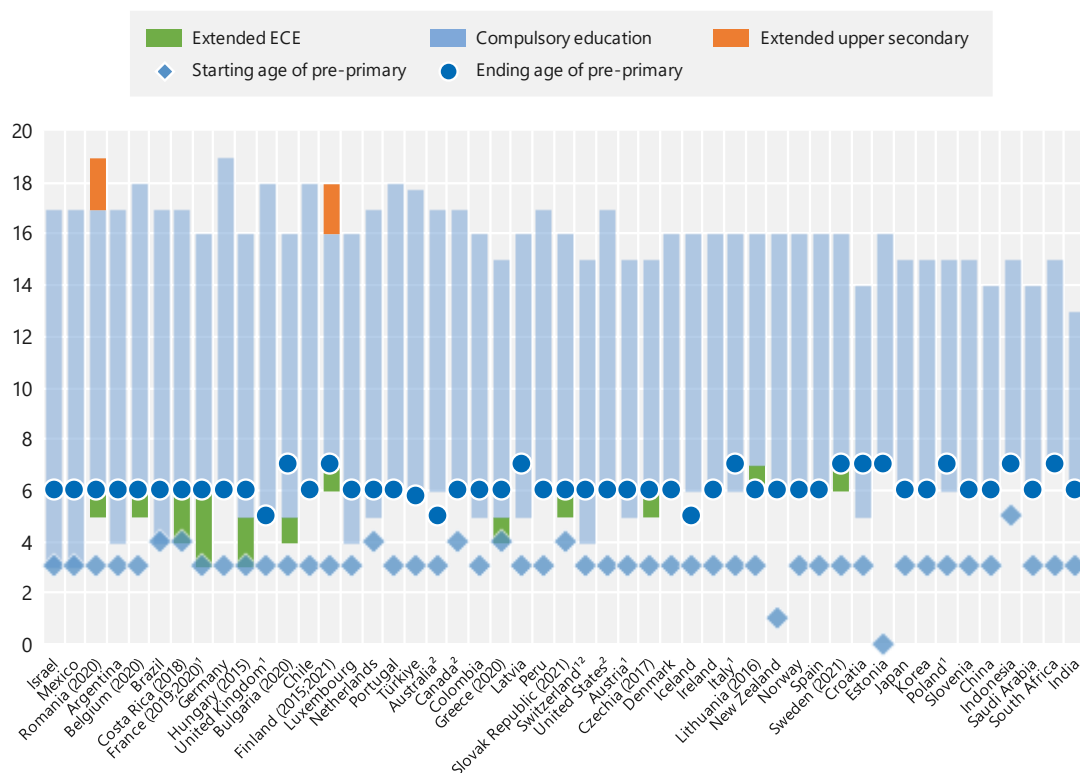
Source: OECD (2024), Table A1.2. For more information see *Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

## Access to education, participation and progression

- Childcare and parental leave policies vary considerably between countries. Of particular importance for low-income families is the so-called childcare gap, the period between the end of paid parental leave and the start of free early childhood education and care or compulsory education. In eight OECD countries, there is no childcare gap as free early childhood education or compulsory education starts immediately following the end of paid parental leave. In contrast, Italy has a childcare gap of 2 years between the end of paid parental leave and the start of free early childhood education.
- Participation in early childhood education and care is particularly important for children from disadvantaged families. However, in Italy, as in most other OECD countries, children aged 0-2 from families in the bottom income tertile are less likely to participate in childcare than children from the top income tertile (20% compared to 49%). The difference of 29 percentage points in participation between children from families in the top and bottom tertile is larger than the OECD average of 19 percentage points.
- Early childhood education can help to reduce the developmental gaps that put some children at a disadvantage when they enrol in primary school. In most OECD countries, the large majority of children are enrolled in early childhood education one year before the start of primary education. In Italy, 95% of children in this age group are enrolled, compared with an OECD average of 96%.
- Although most children and youths participate in education in the years before and after compulsory education, not all do so. In order to increase enrolment in the early years or among youths, twelve OECD member and accession countries have increased the duration of compulsory education over the past decade. Italy does not belong to this group. Compulsory education in Italy lasts from the age of 6 to 16 for a total of 10 years, which is below the OECD average of 11 years (Figure 2).
- Grade repetition is common in many countries to give students more time to master the content of a grade, although its effectiveness is debated. In Italy, 0.3% of primary, 1.8% of lower secondary and 3.3% of general upper secondary students repeat a grade in their current level of education, while the OECD average is 1.5% at primary, 2.2% at lower secondary and 3.2% at general upper secondary level.
- Women are significantly over-represented in tertiary education and the gap is widening in most countries. In Italy, 55% of new entrants to tertiary education are women, compared with an OECD average of 56%. As women are also more likely than men to complete tertiary education, the gap is even greater among graduates (see Education at a Glance 2022). However, there are large differences between fields of study in all OECD countries. In Italy, 21% of women entering tertiary education were studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, while only 1% of men were entering education-related fields.
- Across the OECD, 63% of students who graduated with a bachelor's degree did so from public institutions. However, private education is slowly becoming more common across all levels of tertiary education and the share of graduates from private institutions has grown by 3 percentage points between 2013 and 2022. In Italy, the share of bachelor's graduates from private institutions increased from 13% to 24%.

**Figure 2. Duration of compulsory education (2022)**

In years



**Note:** The year in parentheses indicates when policy changes were made to the duration of compulsory education. In addition, extended ECEC/extended upper secondary refers to the extension in the duration of the relevant level since 2013.

1. There are other compulsory activities to complete by the end of compulsory education (see Table B2.1).

2. Starting age, ending age, and duration of compulsory education may vary at sub-national level.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the duration of compulsory education.

**Source:** OECD (2024), Table B2.1. For more information see Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

## Financial resources invested in education

- The average annual expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education (including R&D) in Italy is USD 12 760 compared to an average of USD 14 209 in OECD countries. In most countries, expenditure increases by level of education. In Italy, spending per student is USD 13 799 in primary education, USD 11 739 in secondary education and USD 13 717 in tertiary education (Figure 3).<sup>1</sup>
- Italy spends 4.0% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on educational institutions at primary to tertiary levels (including R&D). This is less than the OECD average of 4.9% of GDP. On average across the OECD, the share of GDP dedicated to educational institutions (from primary to tertiary

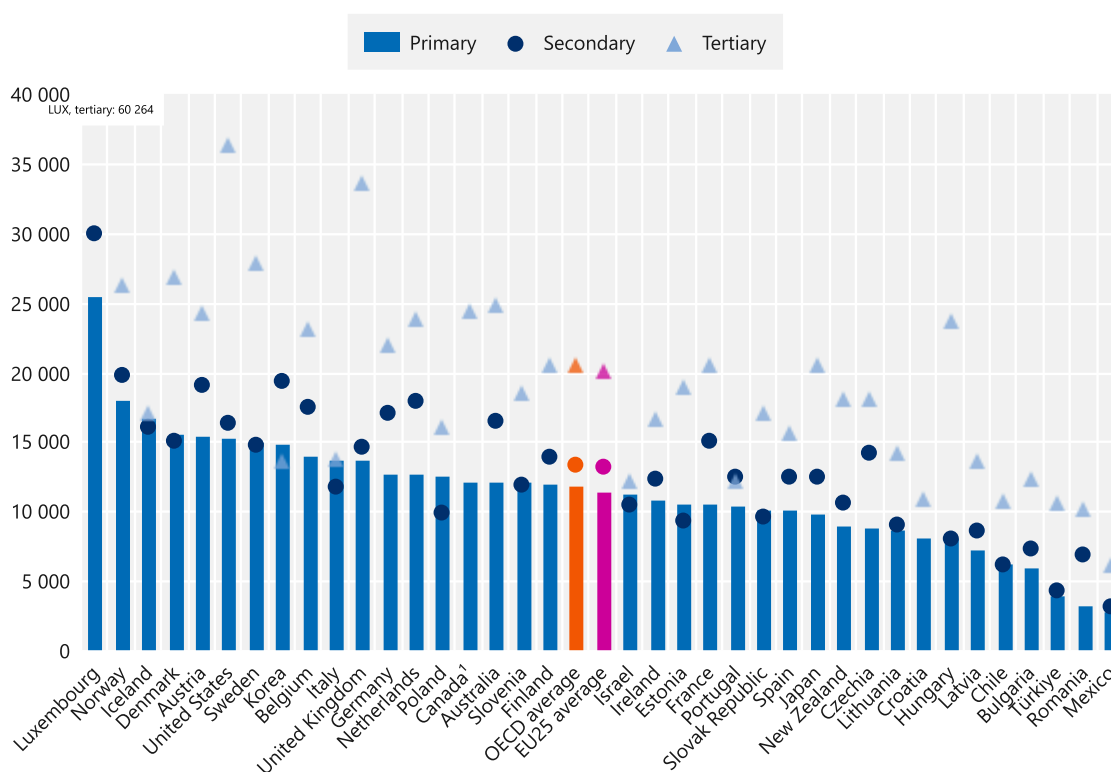
<sup>1</sup> All expenditure figures in this note are expressed in USD calculated based on purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates.

levels) has been broadly stable, with 4.9% in 2015 and 2021. However, trends vary considerably between countries. Italy is among the countries where expenditure as a share of GDP remained roughly constant at 4%.

- Early childhood education has received much attention in recent years because of its importance, especially for children from disadvantaged families. In Italy, public investment in early childhood education relative to GDP has decreased by 11% between 2015 and 2021. Across the OECD, it has increased on average by 9% over this period.

**Figure 3. Total expenditure per full-time equivalent student in primary, secondary and tertiary education (2021)**

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs, expenditure on educational institutions



1. Primary education includes pre-primary and lower secondary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the total expenditure per full-time equivalent student in primary education.

**Source:** OECD (2024), Table C1.1. For more information see *Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).

- Across the OECD, public authorities are responsible for the vast majority of spending on education, particularly at compulsory levels. In Italy, 92% of total expenditure on primary institutions comes from public sources, which is similar to the OECD average of 93%. Private expenditure makes up a greater share in pre-primary and tertiary education in many countries. In Italy, the share of public expenditure on pre-primary education is 84%, similar to the OECD average of 86%, while for tertiary education it is 60%, compared to an OECD average of 68%.
- How private institutions are funded varies considerably across countries, with some fully or largely government funded, while others receive little or no public funding. In Italy, government sources

spend USD 13 507 per full-time equivalent student in public primary institutions, while the figure is USD 1 488 per full-time equivalent student in private ones (the OECD averages are USD 11 914 for public primary institutions and USD 7 867 for private ones).

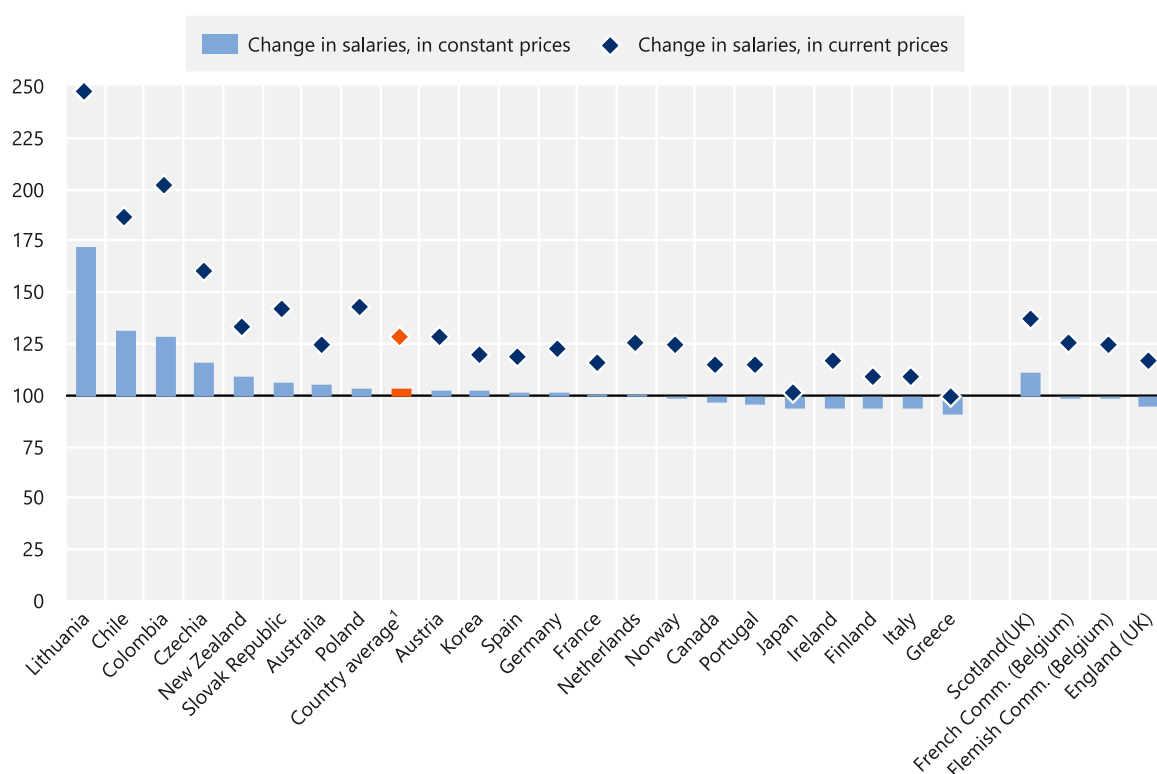
Tuition fees are an important component of private expenditure on tertiary education, but they vary considerably across countries. In Italy, with USD 2 570 per year for national students in bachelor's programmes, they are in the middle of the range among OECD countries for which data are available.

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

- Between 2015 and 2023, nominal statutory salaries increased by 8% in Italy for lower secondary teachers with 15 years of experience. Most of this increase compensated for the rising cost of living. In real terms (i.e. adjusted for inflation), teachers' salaries decreased by 6% over the eight-year period compared to an average increase of 4% across countries with available data (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Change in lower secondary teachers' statutory salaries between 2015 and 2023**

Index of change in annual salaries of teachers with most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (2015 = 100)



**Note:** The change in constant prices refers to the change in salaries assuming the same level of purchasing power between 2015 and 2023 (that is, in 2015 prices), whereas change in current prices refers to the nominal change in salary amount between 2015 and 2023.

1. Excludes Australia, Chile and Colombia as data for some years are missing between 2015 and 2023.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of the change in salaries in constant prices.

**Source:** OECD (2024), Table D3.6 and Table X2.5. For more information see *Education at a Glance 2024 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-en>).



- The work of teachers consists of a variety of tasks including teaching, but also preparing lessons, grading assignments and communicating with parents. The number of hours that teachers are contractually obliged to teach varies greatly across countries. In Italy, teachers at lower secondary level have to teach 626 hours annually. This is below the OECD average of 706 hours per year.
- Most education systems involve students and parents in the governance of public schools. In most countries, it is compulsory for parents' representatives to be included in the governing board of public schools. Student participation is less widespread, but still common. In Italy, the participation of parents in governing body of public schools is required, and the requirement for the participation of students varies by level of education.
- Student-teacher ratios vary between countries and between levels of education. On average across the OECD, there are 14 students per teacher in primary education, 13 students in lower secondary education and 13 students in upper secondary education. In Italy, the corresponding numbers are 11 in primary education, 11 in lower secondary education and 10 in upper secondary education. While lower student teacher ratios allow teachers to focus more on the needs of the individual, they require higher overall spending on teacher salaries and have to be weighed against alternative spending priorities.
- Italy's teaching workforce is older than average across the OECD, with the share of teachers who are 50 years or older reaching 53% compared to 37% on average across the OECD and all levels of education. Between 2013 and 2022, the average age of teachers has increased across the OECD, with the share of teachers who are 50 years or older going from 32% to 34% in primary education, from 35% to 36% in lower secondary education and from 38% to 41% in upper secondary education. In Italy over the same period, this share stayed at 57% in primary education and it decreased from 63% to 48% in lower secondary education and from 73% to 54% in upper secondary education.



### More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2024 and to access the full set of indicators, see: <https://doi.org/10.1787/c00cad36-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 2024: Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/e7d20315-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/s/5q> 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](mailto:EDU.EAG@oecd.org).

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 the Member countries of the OECD.

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.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.



Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. By using this work, you accept to be bound by the terms of this licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Attribution** – you must cite the work.

**Translations** – you must cite the original work, identify changes to the original and add the following text: *In the event of any discrepancy between the original work and the translation, only the text of original work should be considered valid.*

**Adaptations** – you must cite the original work and add the following text: *This is an adaptation of an original work by the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this adaptation should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its Member countries.*

**Third-party material** – the licence does not apply to third-party material in the work. If using such material, you are responsible for obtaining permission from the third party and for any claims of infringement.

You must not use the OECD logo, visual identity or cover image without express permission or suggest the OECD endorses your use of the work.

Any dispute arising under this licence shall be settled by arbitration in accordance with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Arbitration Rules 2012. The seat of arbitration shall be Paris (France). The number of arbitrators shall be one.