

# Netherlands

This country note provides an overview of key characteristics of the education system in the Netherlands 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

- Strong labour markets and increasing participation in education have led to a decline in the share of 18-24 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 15.8% to 13.8% between 2016 and 2023. In the Netherlands, the share of NEETs decreased from 6.9% to 4.9%.
- Workers without an upper secondary qualification are at risk of earning much less than workers with at least an upper secondary qualification. In the Netherlands, 32% of 25-64 year-olds with below upper secondary educational attainment earn at or below half the median income, compared to 28% on average across the OECD.
- Parents' education has a strong impact on the educational attainment of their children. In the Netherlands, 30% of 25-64 year-olds with parents without an upper secondary qualification have obtained a tertiary qualification themselves compared to 19% on average.
- Participation in early childhood education and care is particularly important for children from disadvantaged families. However, in the Netherlands, 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 (54% compared to 88%). The difference of 34 percentage points in participation between children from families in the top and bottom tertile is larger than the OECD average of 19 percentage points.
- Many countries seek to attract internationally mobile tertiary students, as they often pay higher tuition fees and, if they decide to stay in the country after graduation, bring valuable skills to the labour market. Across the OECD, a total of 6% of all tertiary students are internationally mobile in 2022. In the Netherlands, the share is 17%, up from 10% in 2013.
- The average annual expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education (including R&D) in the Netherlands is USD 17 747 compared to an average of USD 14 209 in OECD countries. In most countries, expenditure increases by level of education. In the Netherlands, spending per student is USD 12 817 in primary education, USD 17 909 in secondary education and USD 23 864 in tertiary education (Figure 3).
- Countries make different choices about whether to operate many small schools or fewer large schools. In the Netherlands, the median primary school has 25 students per grade compared to

the OECD average of 27. The largest 5% of primary schools in the Netherlands have 58 or more students per grade, while the OECD average is 91 or more. At the other end of the scale, the smallest 5% of primary schools have 7 or fewer students per grade compared to an OECD average of 5 or fewer students per grade. Although small schools are important for ensuring primary education is accessible, especially in sparsely populated rural areas, they can be costly to run and may have to resort to multi-grade teaching.

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

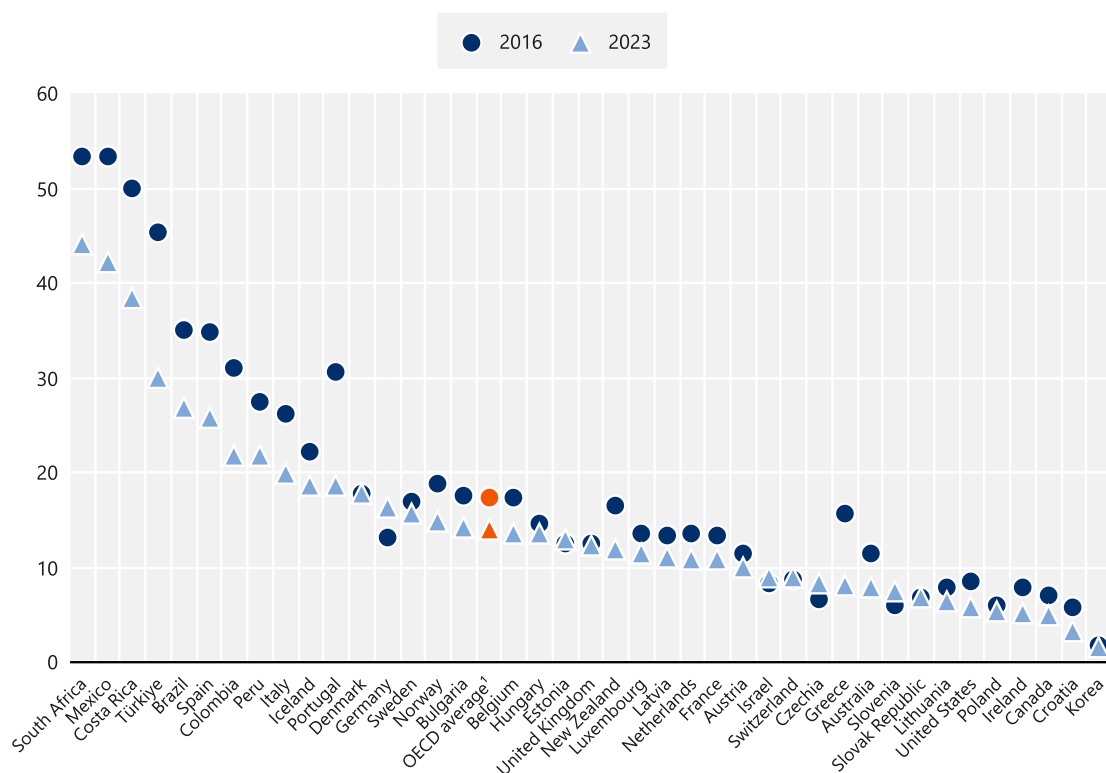
- Adults without upper secondary qualification are at considerable risk of poor social and labour-market outcomes throughout their lives. Reducing the share of young adults without an upper secondary qualification has been a priority in many countries and their share has decreased between 2016 and 2023 in 28 out of 35 OECD member countries. This is also the case in the Netherlands. Their share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary educational attainment decreased by 3 percentage points between 2016 and 2023. At 11%, it is 3 percentage points below 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 the Netherlands, 69% of 25-34 year-olds without an upper secondary qualification are employed, compared to 86% 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 much less than workers with at least an upper secondary qualification. In the Netherlands, 32% of 25-64 year-olds with below upper secondary educational attainment earn at or below half the median income compared to 23% of workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary educational attainment and 13% 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 18-24 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 15.8% to 13.8% between 2016 and 2023. In the Netherlands, the share of NEETs decreased from 6.9% to 4.9%.
- 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 59% for women and 50% for men, the gap in the Netherlands is much narrower than on average in the OECD.
- 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 the Netherlands, only 56% of young women with educational attainment below upper secondary educational level are employed, while the corresponding share for young men is 78% (the corresponding OECD averages are 47% and 72%). In contrast, 91% of young women with a tertiary qualification are employed, while the corresponding share for young men is 93% (the corresponding OECD averages are 84% and

90%). Tertiary attainment helps narrow the wage gap; however, due to other factors such as the 'child penalty,' the wage gap has not been overcome. Across the OECD, young women with a tertiary qualification earn on average 83% of the wage of their male peers, while the corresponding fraction is 90% in the Netherlands. Among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, young women earn on average 84% of the wage of their male peers across the OECD and 86% in the Netherlands.

- Parents' education has a strong impact on the educational attainment of their children. In the Netherlands, 69% of 25-64 year-olds who have at least one parent with tertiary attainment also attained a tertiary qualification. In contrast, only 30% of 25-64 year-olds with parents without an upper secondary qualification have obtained a tertiary qualification themselves. This compares to OECD averages of 72% and 19%, respectively.

**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>).

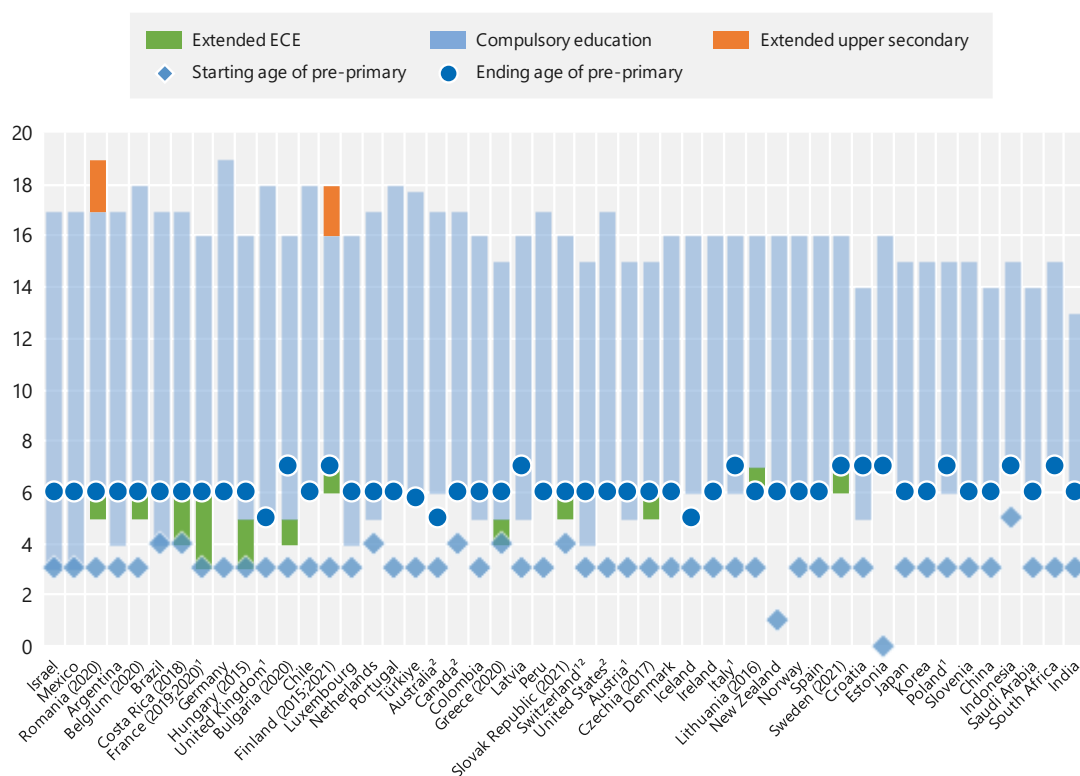


### Access to education, participation and progression

- 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, the Netherlands has an above average childcare gap between the end of paid parental leave and the start of free early childhood education. Free early childhood education is accessible for those in need in order to guarantee a good start at primary school.
- Participation in early childhood education and care is particularly important for children from disadvantaged families. However, in the Netherlands, 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 (54% compared to 88%). The difference of 33 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 the Netherlands, 99% of children in this age group are enrolled, compared with an OECD average of 96%. The previous government in the Netherlands has indicated the will to explore the possibility of lowering the starting age of compulsory education to age 4 to increase equity in education.
- 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. The Netherlands does not belong to this group. Compulsory education in the Netherlands lasts from the age of 5 to 17 for a total of 12 years, which is above the OECD average of 11 years (Figure 2).

**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>).

- The likelihood of tertiary students successfully completing their studies depends on their family background. In the Netherlands, 76% of students with at least one parent with tertiary attainment successfully completed their tertiary studies within three years of the theoretical end of the programme, while only 58% of students whose parents had less than upper secondary education did so.
- Women are significantly over-represented in tertiary education and the gap is widening in most countries. In the Netherlands, 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 the Netherlands, only 12% of women entering tertiary education were studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, while only 4% of men were entering education-related fields.

- Many countries seek to attract internationally mobile tertiary students, as they often pay higher tuition fees and, if they decide to stay in the country after graduation, bring valuable skills to the labour market. Across the OECD, a total of 6% of all tertiary students are internationally mobile in 2022. In the Netherlands, the share is 17%, up from 10% in 2013.

### Financial resources invested in education

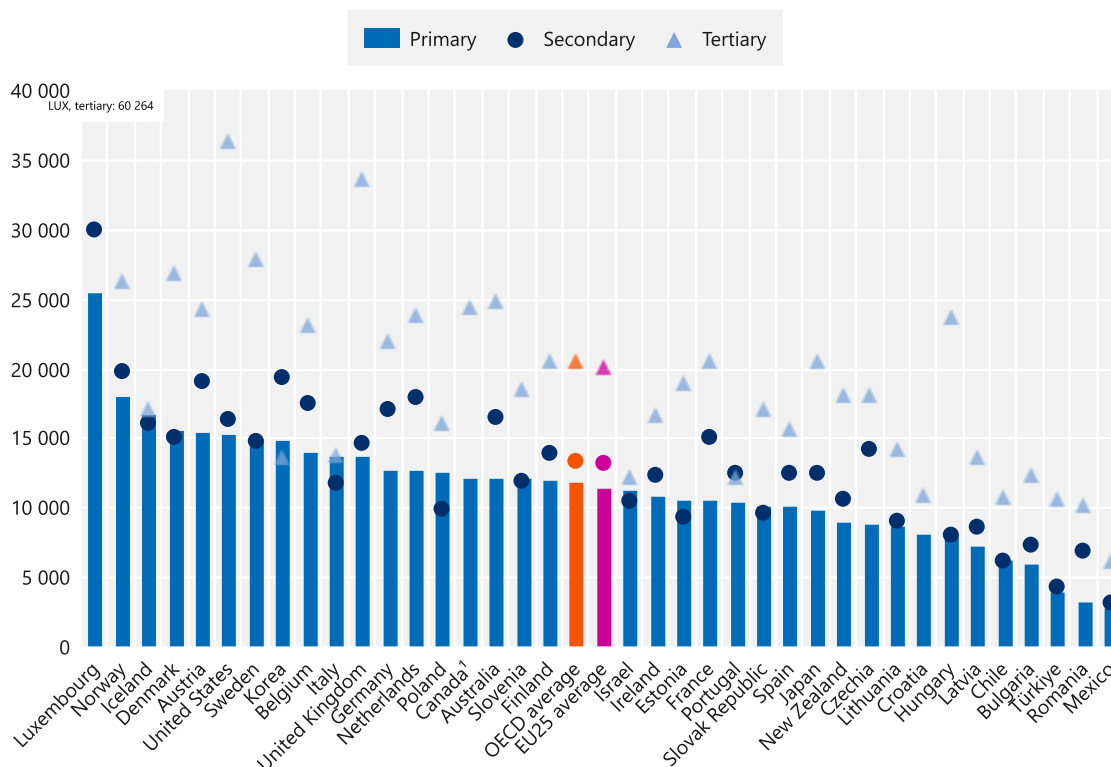
- The average annual expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education (including R&D) in the Netherlands is USD 17 747 compared to an average of USD 14 209 in OECD countries. In most countries, expenditure increases by level of education. In the Netherlands, spending per student is USD 12 817 in primary education, USD 17 909 in secondary education and USD 23 864 in tertiary education (Figure 3).<sup>1</sup>
- The Netherlands spends 5.3% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on educational institutions at primary to tertiary levels (including R&D). This is more 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 levels) has been broadly stable, with 4.9% in 2015 and 2021. However, trends vary considerably between countries. The Netherlands is among the countries where expenditure as a share of GDP remained roughly constant at 5.3%.
- Early childhood education has received much attention in recent years because of its importance, especially for children from disadvantaged families. In the Netherlands, public investment in early childhood education relative to GDP stayed constant between 2015 and 2021. Across the OECD, it has increased on average by 9% over this period.

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

**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 the Netherlands, 99% of total expenditure on primary institutions comes from public sources, which is above the OECD average of 93%. Private expenditure makes up a greater share in pre-primary and tertiary education in many countries. In the Netherlands, the share of public expenditure on pre-primary education is 86%, equal to the OECD average of 86%, while for tertiary education it is 72%, compared to an OECD average of 68%.
- Tuition fees are an important component of private expenditure on tertiary education, but they vary considerably across countries. In the Netherlands, with USD 3 041 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.
- The distribution of government expenditure on education by level of government differs between countries. In some countries, all final expenditure on education comes from central governments, whereas in other countries all final expenditure comes from local or regional governments. In the Netherlands, the central government is responsible for 84% of final expenditure on primary

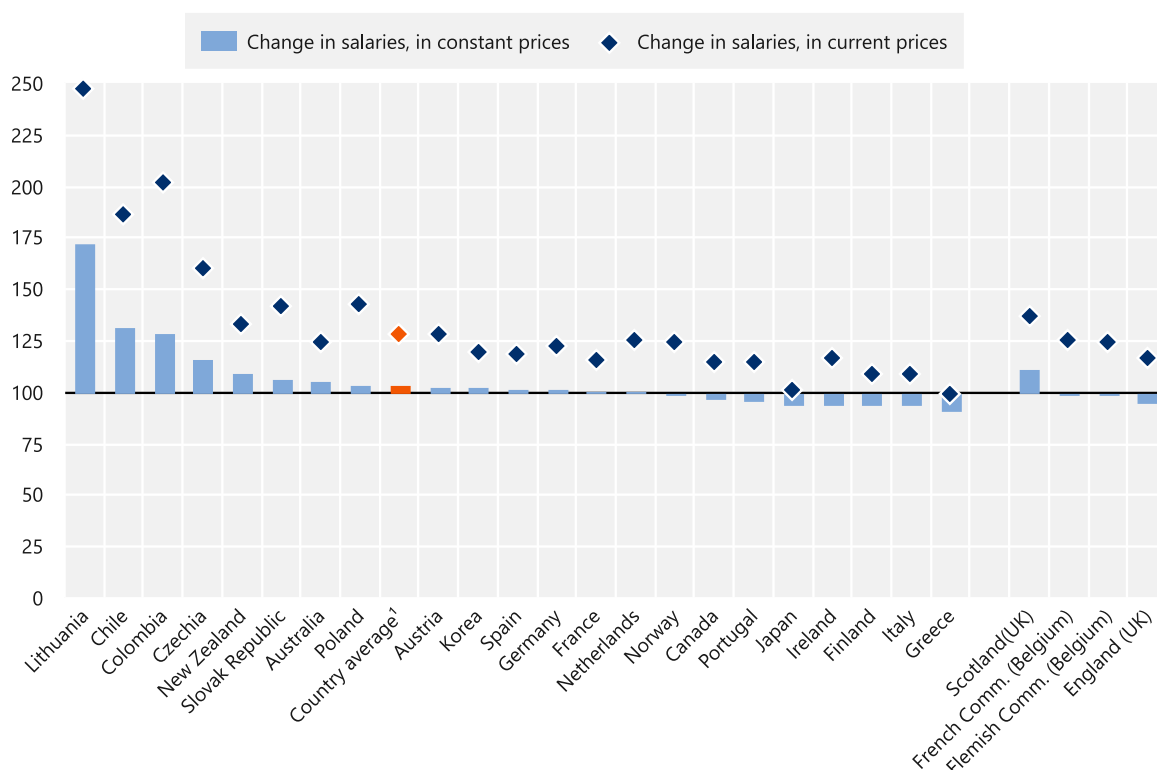
education and local governments are responsible for 16% (regional governments are not responsible for any final expenditure at primary level).

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

- Across the OECD, 18 out of 21 countries with available data on secondary education report that they face shortages of fully qualified teachers at the start of academic year 2022/2023. The Netherlands faces teacher shortages in most subjects, and the shortages differ greatly by region.
- Between 2015 and 2023, nominal statutory salaries increased by 25% in the Netherlands 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 remained stable 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 the Netherlands, teachers at lower secondary level have to teach 720 hours annually. This is similar the OECD average of 706 hours per year.
- Countries make different choices about whether to operate many small schools or fewer large schools. In the Netherlands, the median primary school has 25 students per grade compared to the OECD average of 27. The largest 5% of primary schools in the Netherlands have 58 or more students per grade, while the OECD average is 91 or more. At the other end of the scale, the smallest 5% of primary schools have 7 or fewer students per grade compared to an OECD average of 5 or fewer students per grade. Although small schools are important for ensuring primary education is accessible, especially in sparsely populated rural areas, they can be costly to run and may have to resort to multi-grade teaching.
- 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 the Netherlands, 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.
- Between 2013 and 2022, the average age of teachers has increased across the OECD. In lower secondary education, 36% of teachers are 50 years or older, compared to 35% in 2013. The Netherlands has similar share of teachers aged 50 or older, with 34% of teachers being in this age category, down from 42% in 2013.

### 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 online 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).

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