Ireland

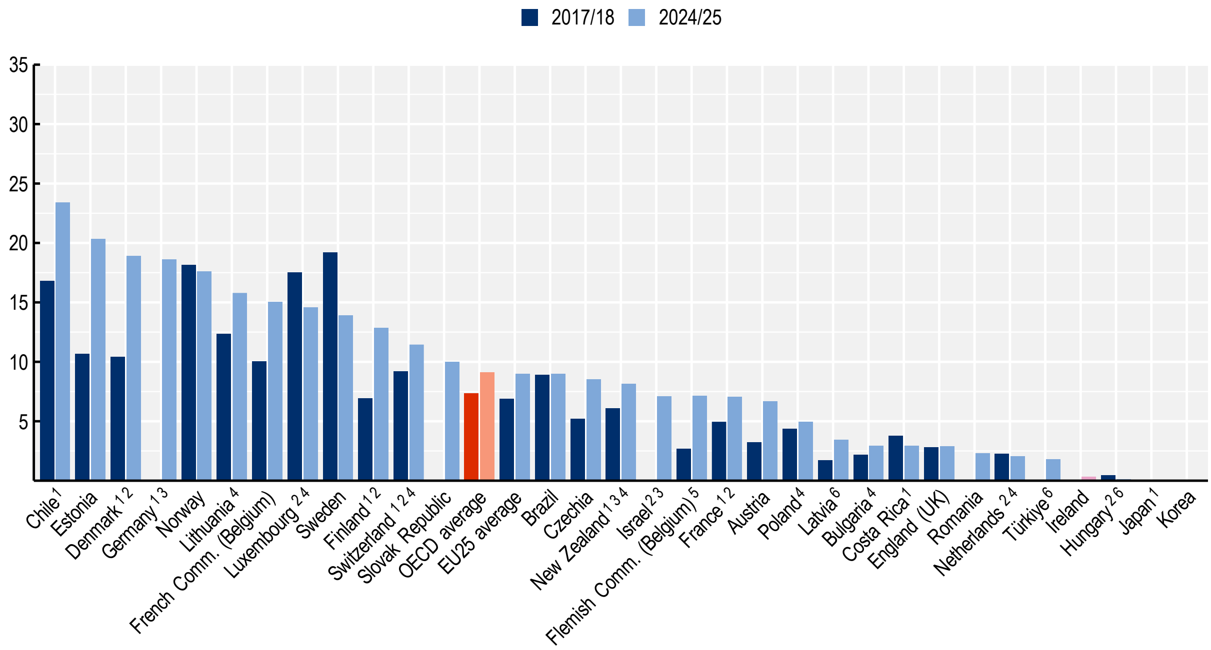
This country note for *Education at a Glance 2026* provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in Ireland. In line with this year's thematic focus, it emphasises teacher shortages while also covering other parts of the education system. The data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers are referred to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2026* for notes and reference years.

Teacher shortages

- Shortages of skilled workers have affected many sectors across the OECD in recent years, and the teaching profession is no exception. Teacher shortages manifest in different ways across education systems: in some countries, a lack of fully qualified teachers is reflected in a higher share of non-fully qualified staff, while in others a significant number of teaching positions remain unfilled.
- Non-fully qualified teachers refer to teachers who do not yet meet all the requirements to be recognised as fully qualified teachers under national regulations. In most countries, they either possess the required academic qualifications but lack mandatory certification or teacher training, have completed the required teacher training but do not hold the required academic qualifications, or lack both. In Ireland, 0.3% of all primary and secondary teachers in public institutions were not fully qualified in 2024/25, below the OECD average of 9.1% (Figure 1).
- Countries use two main approaches to measuring teacher shortages. The first approach estimates shortages before or at the start of the school year based on projected recruitment needs. The second approach measures shortages by counting the number of positions that remain vacant at the start of the school year or shortly after it begins. Ireland uses the second approach, and 1% of all teaching positions in public secondary education were unfilled at or shortly before the start of the 2024/25 school year (Table 2).

Figure 1. Trends in the share of non-fully qualified teachers in primary and secondary education (2017/18 and 2024/25)

In per cent, full-time equivalents, public institutions



1. Year of reference differs from 2024/25: academic year 2023/24 for Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and Switzerland; calendar year 2024 for Chile and Costa Rica; calendar year 2025 for New Zealand; academic year 2025/26 for Japan.
2. Pre-primary and primary education are combined in France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Upper secondary education is excluded in Denmark, Israel and Switzerland. Upper secondary vocational education is excluded in Finland, Hungary and the Netherlands.
3. Teacher data are based on headcounts instead of full-time equivalents.
4. Year of reference differs from 2017/18: academic year 2018/19 for Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland; 2019/20 for Luxembourg and Poland; calendar year 2020 for New Zealand.
5. Including government-dependent private institutions.
6. Teachers classified as non-fully qualified in these countries are in the process of acquiring full qualification.

For data, see OECD (2026) *Education at a Glance 2026: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b4968bbc-en, Figure 1 and Table 1.

- The attractiveness of the teaching profession depends on a variety of factors, including working conditions and salaries. According to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), full-time teachers in primary, secondary and vocational education report working 40.8 hours per week on average across the OECD in 2023, compared with 41.5 hours for other full-time workers holding a bachelor's or master's qualification. In Ireland, these teachers report working 35.5 hours per week on average, while other full-time workers with a bachelor's or master's qualification report working 40.7 hours per week (Table 6).
- Teachers tend to be older than other workers. On average across countries with available data, 25% of secondary teachers are aged 55 and over, compared to 19% of employed individuals holding at least a master's degree and 21% of the overall employed population. Ireland does not follow this pattern: 15% of secondary teachers are aged 55 and over, compared to 14% of employed individuals holding at least a master's degree and 19% of the overall employed population (Figure 10).
- High teacher turnover can indicate dissatisfaction with the profession, but the number of teachers in public institutions who leave the profession is also shaped by factors such as the age structure

of the workforce, labour-market conditions and the professional culture of a country. In Ireland, 2.1% of fully qualified teachers in primary and secondary education left the profession (through retirement or resignation) in 2024/25, compared with an OECD average of 6.4% (Table 3).

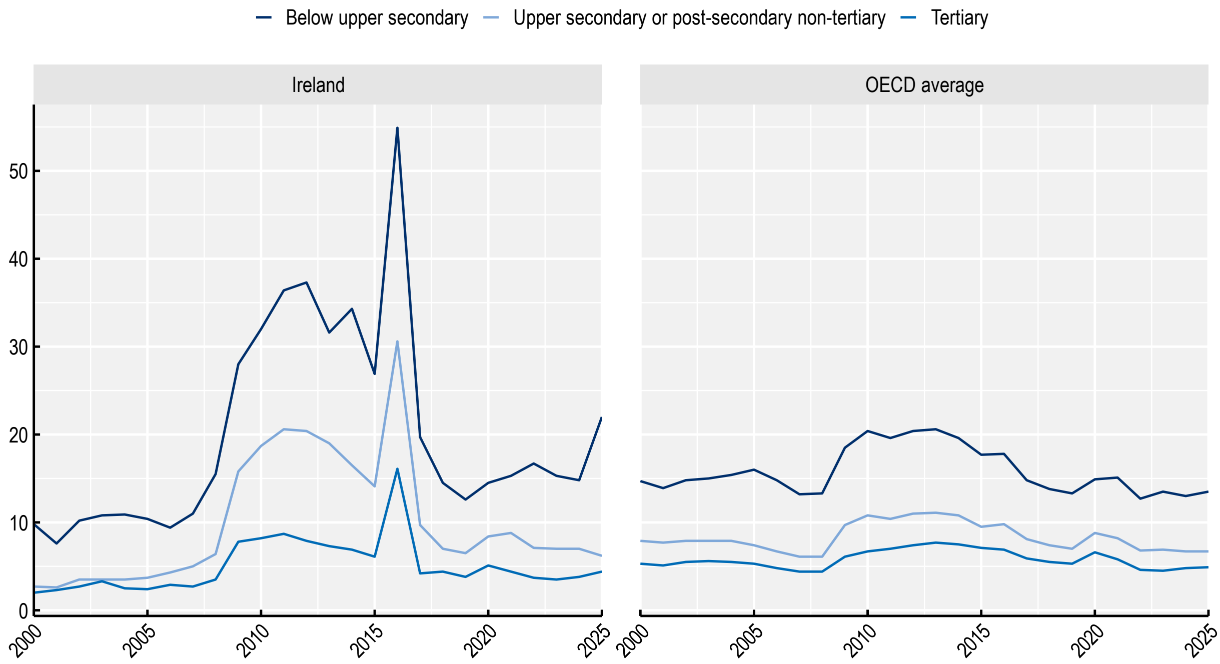
- The number of teachers a system needs is not determined by student numbers alone. On average across the OECD, measured in full-time equivalents, the number of teachers in public and private primary schools rose by 13% between 2015 and 2024, even though the number of primary students rose by only 2% over the same period, a divergence driven by policy choices around class sizes, teachers' working hours and instruction time. In Ireland, the number of primary teachers increased by 27% over this period, while the number of students decreased by 1% (Table 7).
- Looking ahead, the number of children aged 5-14 in Ireland is projected to decrease by 17% between 2024 and 2033, pointing to lower demand for teachers if other policies remain unchanged (Table 7). However, as argued above, demographic trends are only one factor shaping teacher workforce needs, and their effects can vary depending on how population change is distributed across regions. Teacher workforce needs also depend on policy decisions related to class sizes, teacher attrition and funding.

The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- Educational attainment remains at an all-time high in 2025 as more people obtain advanced qualifications. Across the OECD, 43% of working-age adults (25-64 year-olds) have a tertiary qualification, while the share of adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment is slightly lower at 39%. In Ireland, the share of adults with tertiary attainment is above the OECD average at 59%, while the share of adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment is below the OECD average at 32% (Table A1.1).
- The share of young adults without upper secondary attainment continues to decline across the OECD, standing at 12% in 2025. This trend is also apparent in Ireland, where the share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary attainment decreased from 9% to 4% between 2015 and 2025 (Table A1.2).
- Youth and young adults who are neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) are a key policy concern, as prolonged periods of inactivity at a young age can have lasting negative effects on socio-economic outcomes later in life. In Ireland, 9% of all 18-24 year-olds were NEET in 2025, down from 18% in 2015. For comparison, the average share of NEETs across OECD countries with available data for both years was 13% in 2025 and 16% in 2015 (Table A2.2).
- Employment outcomes for recent tertiary graduates vary across countries and are shaped by economic conditions, labour demand, and public policy. In Ireland, the unemployment rate among tertiary-educated young adults decreased from 6% in 2015 to 4% in 2025. The corresponding rates across OECD countries with available data for both years were 7% on average in 2015 and 5% in 2025 (Table A3.3. and Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trends in unemployment rates of young adults in Ireland and on average in the OECD, by educational attainment level (2000 to 2025)

In per cent of 25-34 year-olds in the labour force



Note: The OECD average on the right is based on a fixed sample of 34 countries.
For data, see OECD (2026) *Education at a Glance 2026: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b4968bbc-en, Figure A3.1 and *Unemployment rates of adults, by educational attainment, age group and gender* (indicator), https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/570 (accessed on 27 August 2026).

- The labour-market significance of advanced qualifications is also reflected in earnings. In almost every OECD country, workers without a tertiary qualification have earnings below the national average. In Ireland, full-time, full-year workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment earn 26% less than the national average and those with below upper secondary attainment earn 34% less (Figure A4.1).
- As the demand for skills in the labour market changes, participation in lifelong learning is essential for all adults. According to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), among employed adults, younger adults (aged 25-44) are more likely to participate in non-formal education or training than older adults (aged 45-64), but differences between the age groups are often small. In Ireland, 66% of 25-44 year-olds had participated in non-formal education or training over the last 12 months, compared to 58% of 45-64 year-olds. Across the OECD, average participation rates are 52% among 25-44 year-olds and 45% among 45-64 year-olds (Figure A5.2).
- Workers with higher educational attainment are much more likely to be in jobs where they can work from home in most countries. In Ireland, 52% of tertiary-educated workers sometimes or usually work from home compared to 23% of workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment (Figure A6.3).

Access to education, participation and progression

- Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is common among children from the age of 3 in all OECD countries. In Ireland, 95% of children between the age of 3 and the starting age of compulsory primary education (age 6 in Ireland) were enrolled in ECEC in 2024, higher than the OECD average of 90% (Figure B1.1). However, enrolment rates for younger children vary widely across OECD countries. Among 2 year old children in Ireland, 39% are enrolled in early childhood educational development programmes that meet the criteria of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) by combining education and care. This places Ireland in the middle of OECD countries with available data (Table B1.1).
- The number of primary and secondary schools – and thus their geographical proximity to students – varies across countries. Many countries have more primary than lower secondary schools, reflecting the desire to provide education close to primary students' homes while offering secondary students the greater choice of specialist subjects that can only be provided by larger schools. In Ireland, there are 4.27 primary schools for each lower secondary school, well above the OECD average of 1.97 (Figure B2.4).
- In upper secondary education, 93% of new entrants in Ireland complete a general or vocational programme within two years of the theoretical end of the programme. By this point, 0% of the cohort remain enrolled, while 7% have dropped out without qualifying (Table B3.3). In Ireland, women and men are as likely to complete their upper secondary programme unlike most countries, where men are the ones less likely to complete (Table B3.2).
- At tertiary level (ISCED 5-8), most OECD countries host a larger number of international students than they send abroad. On average across the OECD, outbound internationally mobile students account for 6% of all national students (whether enrolled domestically or abroad), while inbound students account for 12% of all students enrolled domestically in 2024. In Ireland the share of outbound international students is 7%, while inbound international students average 12%. The top three destination countries for outbound students in Ireland are the United Kingdom (53%), the Netherlands (11%) and the United States (7%), while the top three origin countries of inbound students are India (20%), China (12%) and the United States (9%) (Table B4.3. and Table B4.4).
- In many countries, inbound mobility has increased faster than outbound mobility among tertiary students. On average across the OECD, the share of inbound mobile students increased by 4 percentage points between 2015 and 2024, and the share of outbound mobile students increased by 1 percentage point. In Ireland, the share of inbound students increased by 4 percentage points, while the share of outbound students remained the same (Table B4.3).

Financial resources invested in education

- Government expenditure on primary to tertiary education as share of GDP (based on final funds, on educational institutions, including R&D) varies by a factor of approximately two across OECD countries (ranging from 2.4% to 5.2%), while government expenditure per student varies by a factor of ten (from USD 3 398 to USD 32 832 adjusted for purchasing power parity) as differences in income levels mean nominal expenditure tends to vary more than relative expenditure. On average across the OECD, expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education was USD 13 601 in 2023, while in Ireland it was USD 13 113 (Table C1.4. and Table C1.1).
- Government expenditure on education tends to rise with the level of education. In primary education, expenditure per student was USD 12 943 in 2023 in Ireland and USD 12 893 on average across the OECD. In lower secondary education, it was USD 12 699 in Ireland and

USD 14 291 on average across the OECD. Thus, Ireland is among the few OECD countries where expenditure is lower at lower secondary level than at primary level (Table C3.1).

- Expenditure can be divided into capital and current expenditure: the former finances investment in assets such as infrastructure, while the latter covers regular operating costs. Current expenditure can be further broken down into staff compensation and other current expenditure, such as purchases of goods and services and routine maintenance. In Ireland, 100% of current expenditure in primary educational institutions is dedicated to staff compensation compared to 79% on average across the OECD, while the remainder is dedicated to other current expenditure (Figure C3.3).
- On average across the OECD, government expenditure per student is the highest at bachelor’s and above levels despite being the levels where government expenditure accounts for the smallest share of total expenditure. Ireland is among the countries where government expenditure constitutes a smaller share of total expenditure compared to the OECD average. Government expenditure per student was USD 14 799 in 2023, corresponding to 58% of total expenditure at bachelor’s and above levels. In comparison, average government expenditure per student across the OECD was USD 16 405, amounting to 68% of total expenditure (Table C5.1).

Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- Most countries have increased their investment in pre-primary education in recent years. This is also reflected in the ratio of children to teachers. Across the OECD, the number of children enrolled at this level decreased slightly by 2% between 2015 and 2024 while the number of teachers increased by 14%, resulting in a 14% reduction in the child-to-teacher ratio. Similarly, in Ireland, the number of children enrolled in pre-primary education decreased by 18%, while the number of pre-primary teachers increased by 3%, resulting in a 20% decrease of the child-to-teacher ratio (Data for chart D2.1).
- In most countries, salaries of teachers in public institutions are lower than the salaries of other tertiary-educated workers, especially for teachers at lower levels of education. This is also the case in Ireland, where primary teachers earned on average 13% less than other tertiary-educated workers, while lower secondary teachers earned on average 9% less than other tertiary-educated workers (Table D3.2).
- Women form the majority of teachers at all levels of education except tertiary. Teachers in pre-primary education are almost entirely women with 96% of teachers being female on average across the OECD. The share of women among pre-primary teachers in Ireland is even higher at 97%. (Table D5.1).
- Across the OECD, women are more strongly represented among teachers than among school management staff. In primary education, women in Ireland accounted for 84% of teachers and 62% of school management staff in 2024, a gap of 22 percentage points. This gap was larger than the OECD average of 15 percentage points (Figure D5.3).

Contact

For more information on Education at a Glance 2026 and to access the full set of indicators, see: https://doi.org/10.1787/b4968bbc-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 2026: Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes, https://doi.org/10.1787/dcf64a14-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/ 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.

The full book is available in English: OECD (2026), *Education at a Glance 2026: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b4968bbc-en.