



Education and Training Monitor 2023

Comparative report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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COMPARATIVE REPORT
(Executive summary)

Executive summary

The teaching profession

Teacher shortages are an increasing cause of concern.

A lack of comparable data makes it hard to capture the complex interplay of supply and demand in the teaching profession. And yet, using country-specific evidence, teacher shortages are widely reported and, in some cases, expected to increase. Shortages vary depending on demographics, subject, and geographic area. Prominent examples are understaffed schools in disadvantaged regions, a lack of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers, too few language teachers, and a shortage of male teachers at lower education levels. There is also considerable ageing of the teaching workforce in countries such as Greece, Portugal, the Baltic countries, and Hungary. Policy responses tend to be aimed at addressing shortages in specific subjects rather than at addressing geographic imbalances. A few countries are also looking into innovative solutions, such as pooling teachers across schools or organising school timetables differently.

Making teaching more attractive requires a balanced policy approach to both teacher recruitment and retention.

Assessing the attractiveness of the teaching profession helps to understand inflow and retention rates. EU countries use many policy levers to make a teaching career more attractive. Examples are efforts to alleviate heavy workloads, and the early identification of support and development needs through appraisal exercises. Countries are also working on measures to attract more students into initial teacher training, for instance through scholarship schemes, while at the same time introducing alternative pathways into the profession. Compared to the average salaries of tertiary educated workers, teachers' salaries remain low, and EU countries are looking into solutions, be they across-the-board salary increases or targeted bonuses. Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Romania have been implementing major salary increases in recent years ranging from 20% to 70%. In short, only a comprehensive and balanced policy approach to both teacher recruitment and retention can do justice to the complex nature of shortages.

EU-level target areas

Progress on broadening participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is stagnating.

Six EU countries (France, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, and Spain) have reached the EU-level 2030 target of 96% participation of children aged 3 and above in ECEC. But the EU average is stagnating, with the 2021 rate (92.5%) identical to the 2016-17 one. Participation remains low in five EU countries (Greece, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria). In many EU countries, the ECEC gap (the amount of time between the end of adequately paid leave and a legal entitlement to ECEC) remains wide. Despite the challenges, EU countries increasingly focus on more than just access and affordability and try to also improve the quality of ECEC. Measures tend to focus on curricula or educational guidelines, minimum qualification levels for core practitioners, and teacher training. Almost all EU countries report severe staff shortages, often with large regional disparities.

The two-decade success in bringing down early school leaving rates continues.

The average proportion of early leavers from education and training keeps going down, from 10.2% in 2019 to 9.6% in 2022. Caution remains warranted however, as progress masks considerable variation between EU education systems. Still, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU remains on a clear trajectory to be able to reach its 2030 target of less than 9% of 18-24-year-olds leaving school without at least upper secondary educational attainment. In terms of the policy response, initial teacher training, continuing professional development and multidisciplinary support teams increasingly work towards diversity and inclusion. A new emphasis on well-being at school is evident in widespread bullying and violence prevention measures, as well as psychosocial support services, although it remains to be seen what evidence there is of the effectiveness of these policy responses.

Cross-curricular learning and active participation may help (re)engage people in school education, motivating and supporting the acquisition of basic and digital skills.

Cross-curricular learning and active participation in decision-making are both heavily promoted in EU countries. However, only 13 education systems have set specific quality criteria for cross-curricular learning in school evaluations and even fewer make sure that students provide input into various quality assurance mechanisms. Cross-curricular learning is also a common approach used in teaching digital skills in the EU, especially in primary education, although it is not the only one. Digital skills are taught using several approaches, often in parallel. Teacher shortages are a major obstacle to the teaching of digital skills, particularly for subjects such as informatics. However, only 13 education systems offer both alternative pathways and retraining schemes for (prospective) informatics teachers at one or more education levels.

A closer look at diversity and inclusion in school education acknowledges the many potential aspects of educational disadvantage.

Prevalent underachievement in basic skills remains a cause for concern across the EU. Having introduced a new EU-level indicator on equity in education in the previous Education and Training Monitor, this year's report takes a closer look at the various sub-components of socio-economic status, as well as the aspects of educational disadvantage that go beyond it. New findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 show a clear correlation between reading performance and the number of books at home. First-generation migrants who, like their parents, were born outside the EU are three times more likely to leave school early (23.9%) than young people who, like their parents, were born in the reporting country (8.0%). Furthermore, over 1.3 million displaced children from Ukraine are being hosted across EU countries, with a concerted effort to integrate them into each country's education system.

The 2025 EU-level target for work-based learning has been reached, but teacher shortages are particularly severe in vocational education and training (VET).

In 2022, 60.1% of recent initial VET graduates experienced work-based learning during their education and training, reaching the 2025 EU-level target of at least 60%. Across the EU on average, recent VET graduates who experienced work-based learning during VET were more likely to be employed (82.5% in 2022) than those who had not (71.6%). After a volatile period linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the employment rate of recent VET graduates (79.7% in 2022) is moving closer to the EU-level target of 82% by 2025. Learning mobility in VET is also recovering from the pandemic but remains considerably below target. Teaching professionals in VET are in high demand, with shortages reported in many countries.

The EU-level target for tertiary educational attainment will be reached much earlier than 2030, but equity challenges remain.

The rate of tertiary educational attainment among 25-34-year-olds continues to increase, from 39.4% in 2019 to 42.0% in 2022, putting the EU well on track to reaching the 2030 target of at least 45%. Considerable progress has been made at EU level, and yet in eight EU countries, fewer than two in five young people have reached the level of tertiary education. There are persistent gender gaps in all EU countries, both in terms of attainment rates and areas of education. Only 18 education systems in the EU currently have strategies aimed at gender equity in higher education, while strategies helping under-represented groups access higher education are slightly more common. Meanwhile, countries continue modernising higher education through, for instance, digitalisation, competence frameworks, and micro-credentials.

The proportion of graduates who spend time abroad during their studies remains below 10% in most EU countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a decline in the proportion of graduates who spend time in another country during their studies, known as credit mobility. In 2021, only six EU countries had over 10% of their bachelor's and master's graduates participate in credit mobility. However, the pandemic is only one of many barriers to mobility in the EU. Despite progress being made since 2011, new evidence shows there is room for improvement in all EU countries. In contrast to the decline in the number of stays abroad, the proportion of graduates completing a full degree in a country other than their country of origin, known as degree mobility, has continued to increase. The many graduates from outside the EU, amounting to 71.0% of all inbound degree mobility, are a testament to the EU's attractiveness as a study destination.

Priority groups for strengthened policy action in adult learning are reconfirmed by all the available evidence.

Data underpinning the targets for adult participation in lifelong learning are not yet available. Nonetheless, all the available evidence shows there are a few salient points that will require more attention from policymakers, particularly in the context of upskilling and reskilling promoted by the European Year of Skills. Action is needed to (re)engage all adults of working age, but particularly adults who are older, less educated, outside the labour force, and living in rural areas. Up-to-date adult learning data will provide new insights into how to steer future reforms.

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