

# Australia

## Ensuring equal opportunities for students across socio-economic backgrounds

- Socio-economic status may significantly impact students' participation in education, particularly at levels of education that rely, in many countries, most heavily on private expenditure, such as early childhood education and care and tertiary education. In Australia, private sources accounted for 31% of total expenditure in pre-primary institutions, higher than the OECD average of 17%. At tertiary level, 65% of expenditure comes from private sources in Australia, compared to 30% on average across OECD countries.
- Tuition fees in public institutions in Australia are among the highest for a bachelor's programme across countries with available data. National students were charged USD 5 024 per year for a bachelor's degree in 2018, 6% more than they were charged on average in 2008.
- Financial transfers from the public to the private sector and direct public financial support to students may alleviate the financial burden of education. In Australia, 83% of national tertiary students received financial support in the form of public scholarships, grants and student loans. In 2018, public-to-private transfers represented 19% of total expenditure on tertiary institutions, higher than the OECD average of 8%. Public-to-private transfers are generally less common at pre-primary level and represent 0.6% of total expenditure on average across the OECD. However in Australia, there are no public-to-private transfers at this level.
- Across most OECD countries, socio-economic status influences learning outcomes more than gender and immigrant status. In Australia, the proportion of children from the bottom quartile of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) achieving at least PISA level 2 in reading in 2018 was 24% lower than that of children from the top ESCS quartile, a smaller share than the OECD average of 29%.
- International student mobility at the tertiary level has risen steadily reaching about 509 200 students in Australia and representing 28% of tertiary students in 2019. The largest share of international tertiary students studying in Australia comes from China. Students from low and lower-middle income countries are generally less likely to study abroad. In 2019, they represented 29% of international students in OECD countries, compared to 41% in Australia.
- Large differences in educational attainment may lead to starker earnings inequality in many countries. In Australia, 20% of 25-64 year-old adults with below upper secondary attainment earned at or below half the median earnings in 2019, below the OECD average of 27%.

## Gender inequalities in education and outcomes

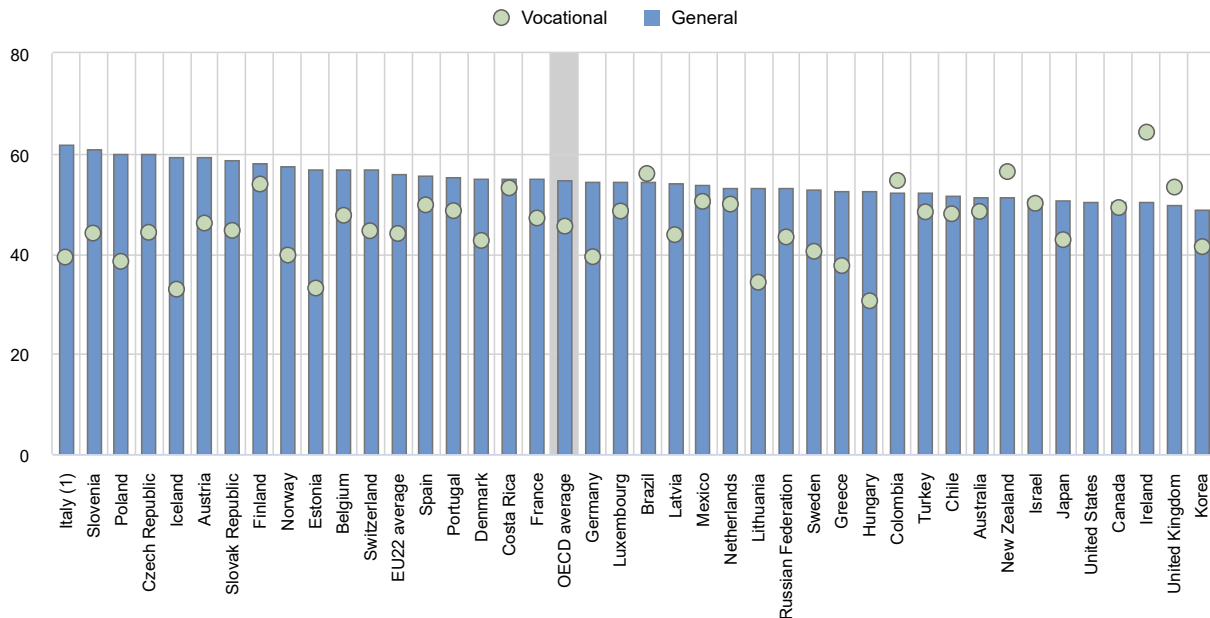
- Men are more likely than women to pursue a vocational track at upper secondary level in most OECD countries. This is also the case in Australia, where 52% of upper secondary vocational graduates in 2019 were men (compared to the OECD average of 55%). Women are generally more likely to graduate from upper secondary general programmes. This is also the case in Australia,

where women represent 51% of graduates from upper secondary general programmes, compared to 55% on average across OECD countries (Figure 1).

- Tertiary education has been expanding in the last decades, and, in 2020, 25-34 year-old women were more likely than men to achieve tertiary education in all OECD countries. In Australia, 62% of 25-34 year-old women had a tertiary qualification in 2020 compared to 47% of their male peers, while on average across OECD countries the shares were 52% among young women and 39% among young men.
- Gender differences in the distribution of tertiary entrants across fields of study are significant. Women tend to be under-represented in certain fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) across most OECD countries. On average, 26% of new entrants in engineering, manufacturing and construction and 20% in information and communication technologies were women in 2019. In Australia, women represented 25% of new entrants in engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes and in information and communication technologies. In contrast, they represented 79% of new entrants to the field of education, a sector traditionally dominated by women.
- Young women are less likely to be employed than young men, particularly those with lower levels of education. Only 43% of 25-34 year-old women with below upper secondary attainment were employed in 2020 compared to 67% of men in Australia. This gender difference is slightly smaller than the average across OECD countries, where 43% of women and 69% of men with below upper secondary attainment are employed.
- In nearly all OECD countries and at all levels of educational attainment, 25-64 year-old women earn less than their male peers: their earnings correspond to 76%-78% of men's earnings on average across OECD countries. This proportion varies more across educational attainment levels within countries than on average across OECD countries. Compared to other education levels, women with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education in Australia have the lowest earnings relative to men with a similar education level, earning 74% as much, while those with tertiary education earn 81% as much.
- On average across OECD countries with available data, 25-64 year-old women tend to participate slightly more in adult learning than men of the same age. In Australia, 39% of women participated in formal and/or non-formal education and training in 2016, compared to 36% of men. Family reasons were reported as barriers to participation in formal and/or non-formal education and training by 30% of women compared to 10% of men.

Figure 1. Share of women among upper secondary graduates, by programme orientation (2019)

In per cent



1. Includes post-secondary non-tertiary level.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of women in general programmes.

Source: OECD (2021). Table B3.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021\\_Annex3\\_ChapterB.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterB.pdf)).

## Education and migration background

- On average across the OECD, foreign-born adults (25-64 year-olds) account for 22% of all adults with below upper secondary attainment, 14% of those attaining upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, and 18% of tertiary-educated adults. But in Australia, the share of foreign-born adults among all adults with a given level of educational attainment is the highest among tertiary-educated adults (43% in 2019).
- Foreign-born adults have more difficulty finding a job than their native-born peers as they face various challenges, such as discrepancies in credential recognition, skills, and language. Thus, foreign-born workers are likely to have a lower reservation wage (the lowest wage rate at which a worker would be willing to accept a particular type of job). As a result, the employment rate for foreign-born adults with low educational attainment is higher than the rate for their native-born peers in many countries. On average across OECD countries, among adults without upper secondary attainment, 57% of native-born adults are employed compared to 61% of foreign-born adults. In Australia, however, the employment rate of foreign-born adults without upper secondary attainment was 57% in 2019, lower than that of their native-born peers (61%).
- The likelihood of being employed increases with the level of educational attainment, but foreign-born adults with tertiary attainment generally have lower employment prospects than their native-born peers. On average across OECD countries, 86% of native-born tertiary-educated adults are employed compared to 79% for foreign-born tertiary-educated adults. In Australia, among tertiary-educated adults, 87% of native-born adults and 83% of foreign-born adults are

employed. Foreign-born adults who arrived in the country at an early age have spent some years in their host country's education system and gained nationally recognised credentials. As a result, their labour-market outcomes are generally better than that of those who arrived at a later age with a foreign qualification. In Australia, among foreign-born adults with tertiary attainment, 86% of those who arrived by the age of 15 are employed, compared to 82% of those who arrived in the country at age 16 or later.

- Foreign-born young adults (15-29 year-olds) are also more likely to be neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) than native-born young adults. On average across OECD countries, 18.8% of foreign-born and 13.7% of native-born adults are NEET. However, in Australia, the proportion of foreign-born adults is lower than native-born adults who are NEET (8% compared to 12.4%).
- In many OECD countries, foreign-born adults earn less than native-born adults. This pay gap may narrow with higher levels of educational attainment. On average across OECD countries, foreign-born adults with below secondary attainment working full-time earn 89% as much as their native-born peers, while this gap disappears among tertiary-educated adults. In Australia, in 2019, among adults with below upper secondary attainment, the earnings of foreign-born full-time workers represented 95% that of their native-born peers, 93% among adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, and 90% among those with a tertiary-education.

### Cross-regional disparities in education

- Tertiary attainment may vary significantly within a country. In Australia, the share of 25-64 year-old adults with tertiary education varies from 34% in the region of Tasmania to 61% in the region of Australian Capital Territory, a similar regional variation as the average across OECD countries with available data.
- On average across OECD and partner countries with subnational data on labour-force status, there is more regional variation in employment rates among those with below upper secondary education (17 percentage points) than for those with tertiary education (8 percentage points). In Australia, there is a difference of 16 percentage points in the employment rate of adults with below upper secondary education between different regions of the country. However, this variation is only 6 percentage points for tertiary-education adults.
- The proportion of young people who are NEET shows significant subnational as well as national variation across OECD and partner countries. In Australia, the difference in the share of 18-24 year-old NEETs between regions with the highest and lowest value is 12 percentage points, compared to 11 percentage points on average across OECD countries.

### Investing in education

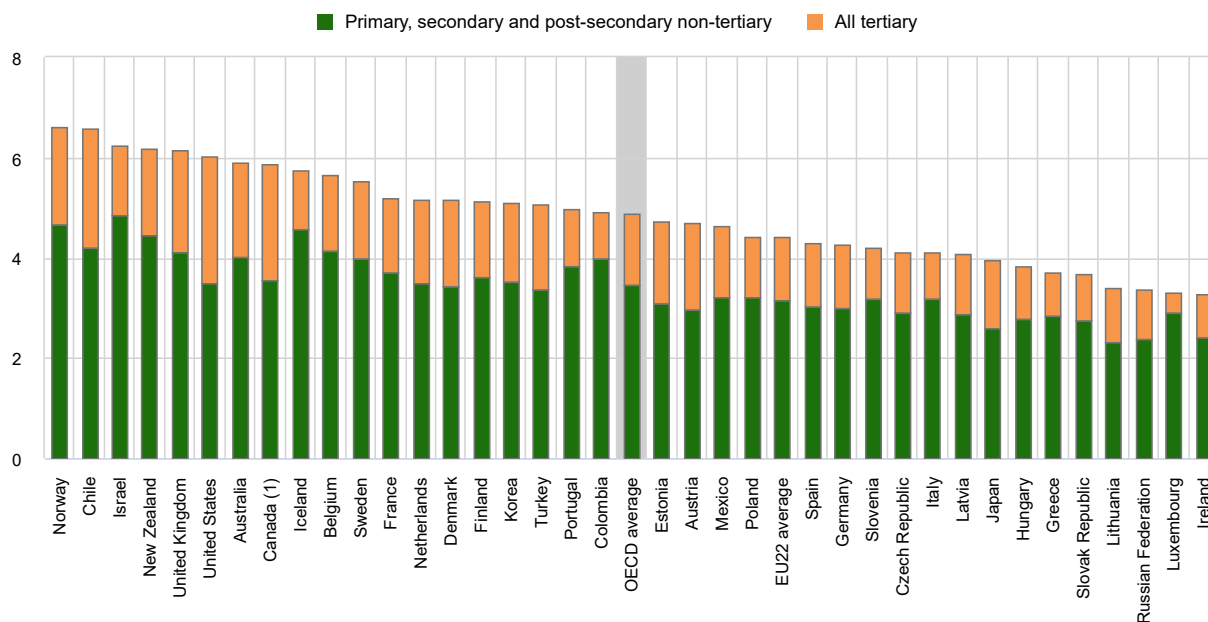
- Annual expenditure per student on educational institutions provides an indication of the investment countries make on each student. After accounting for public-to-private transfers, public expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions per full-time student in Australia was USD 9 406 in 2018 (in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP) compared to USD 10 000 on average across OECD countries.
- Expenditure on core educational services such as instruction and teaching make up the largest share of education expenditure. However, ancillary services (such as student welfare) and research and development (R&D) activities also influence the level of expenditure per student. In primary to tertiary education, 87% of institutions' expenditure per student is devoted to core educational services in Australia (compared to 89% on average across OECD countries). This

share is generally lower at the tertiary level due to expenditure on research and development, including in Australia where 62% of total expenditure is devoted to core educational services.

- The provision of education across public and private institutions influences the allocation of resources between levels of education and types of institution. In 2018, Australia spent USD 12 227 per student at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, USD 1 773 higher than the OECD average of USD 10 454. At tertiary level, Australia invested USD 20 647 per student, USD 3 582 more than the OECD average. Expenditure per student on public educational institutions is higher than on private institutions on average across OECD countries. This is also the case in Australia, where total expenditure on primary to tertiary public institutions amounts to USD 15 604 per student, compared to USD 11 093 on private institutions.
- Among OECD countries, Australia spent the seventh highest proportion of its GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions. In 2018, Australia spent on average 5.9% of GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions, which is 1 percentage point higher than the OECD average. Across levels of education, Australia devoted a higher share of GDP than the OECD average at both non-tertiary and tertiary levels (Figure 2).
- The share of capital costs on total expenditure on educational institutions is higher than the OECD average at primary to tertiary level in Australia. At primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary level, capital costs account for 11% of total spending on educational institutions, 3 percentage points above the OECD average (8%). At the tertiary level, capital costs represent 17%, higher than the average across OECD countries of 11%.
- Compensation of teachers and other staff employed in educational institutions represents the largest share of current expenditure from primary to tertiary education. In 2018, Australia allocated 71% of its current expenditure to staff compensation, compared to 74% on average across OECD countries. Staff compensation tends to make up a smaller share of current expenditure on tertiary institutions due to the higher costs of facilities and equipment at this level. In Australia, staff compensation represents 60% of current expenditure on tertiary institutions compared to 76% at non-tertiary levels. On average across OECD countries, the share is 68% at tertiary level and 77% at non-tertiary level.

Figure 2. Total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP (2018)

In per cent



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1. Primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education includes pre-primary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP.

Source: OECD (2021), Table C2.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021\\_Annex3\\_ChapterC.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterC.pdf)).

## Working conditions of school teachers

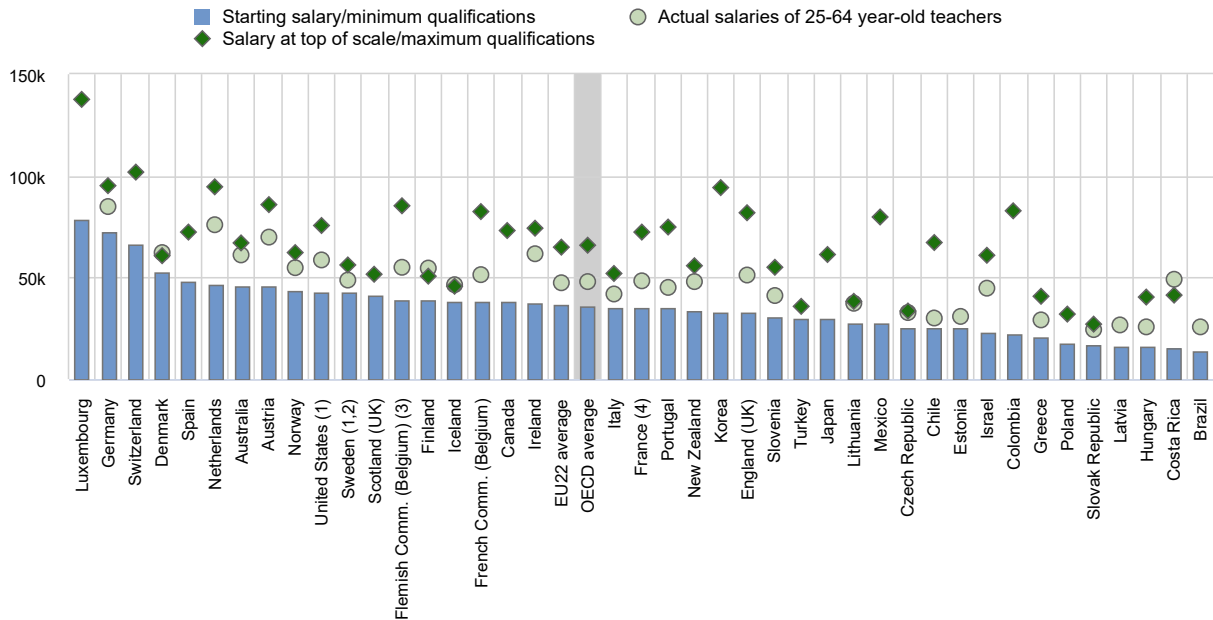
- The salaries of school staff, and in particular teachers and school heads, represent the largest single expenditure in formal education. Their salary levels also have an impact on the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In most OECD countries and economies, statutory salaries of teachers (and school heads) in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach, and also with experience. On average, statutory salaries of teachers with maximum qualifications at the top of their salary scales (maximum salaries) were between 86% and 91% higher than those of teachers with the minimum qualifications at the start of their career (minimum salaries) at pre-primary (ISCED 02), primary and general lower and upper secondary levels in 2020. In Australia, maximum salaries were 47% to 56% higher than minimum salaries at each level of education (Figure 3). However, most teachers were paid between these minimum and maximum salaries.
- Between 2005 and 2020, the statutory salaries of teachers with 15 years of experience and the most prevalent qualifications increased (at constant prices) by 2% to 3% at primary and general lower and upper secondary levels, on average across OECD countries with data for all reference years, despite a decrease of salaries following the 2008 financial crisis. In Australia, teachers' salaries at these levels increased by 12%-19%.
- Teachers' actual salaries reflect their statutory salaries and additional work-related payments. Average actual salaries also depend on the characteristics of the teaching population such as their

age, level of experience and qualification level. In Australia, teachers' average actual salaries (after conversion to USD using PPPs for private consumption) amount to USD 64 840 at the pre-primary level (ISCED 02), USD 60 082 at the primary level, USD 61 098 at the general lower secondary level and USD 59 834 at the general upper secondary level. On average across OECD countries, teachers' average actual salaries were USD 40 707, USD 45 687, USD 47 988 and USD 51 749 at the pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level respectively (Figure 3).

- Teachers' average actual salaries remained lower than those of tertiary-educated workers in almost all countries, and at almost all levels of education. Teachers' average actual salaries at pre-primary (ISCED 02), primary and general secondary levels of education were between 81% and 96% of the earnings of tertiary-educated workers on average across OECD countries and economies. In Australia, the proportion ranged from 88% to 95% at pre-primary, primary and general secondary levels of education.
- However, there are significant differences between men and women in relative salaries of teachers due to the gender gap in earnings across the labour market (statutory salaries are equal for male and female teachers in public educational institutions). When average actual salaries of teachers are compared to salaries of tertiary educated workers, these relative salaries are usually higher for women, and lower for men. In Australia, the proportion ranges from 98% to 101% for women (98% to 110% on average across OECD countries and economies), and from 80% to 82% for men (76% to 85% on average across OECD countries and economies) in primary and general secondary education.
- The average number of teaching hours per year required of a typical teacher in public educational institutions in OECD countries tends to decrease as the level of education increases: it ranged from 989 hours at pre-primary level (ISCED 02), to 791 hours at primary level, 723 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 685 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes) in 2020. In Australia, teachers teach 758 hours per year at pre-primary level, 878 hours per year at primary level, 828 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 821 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes).

**Figure 4. Lower secondary teachers' average actual salaries compared to the statutory starting and top of the scale salaries (2020)**

Annual statutory salaries of teachers in public institutions, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs



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**Note:** Actual salaries include bonuses and allowances.

1. Actual base salaries.
2. Salaries at the top of the scale and the minimum qualifications, instead of the maximum qualifications.
3. Salaries at the top of the scale and the most prevalent qualifications, instead of the maximum qualifications.
4. Includes the average of fixed bonuses for overtime hours.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of starting salaries for lower secondary teachers with the minimum qualifications.

**Source:** OECD (2021), Table D3.3 and 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/EAG2021\\_Annex3\\_ChapterD.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterD.pdf)).

## References

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## More information

**For more information on Education at a Glance 2021 and to access the full set of Indicators, see:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-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/EAG2021\\_Annex3.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3.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, 2021). 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.

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The data on educational responses during COVID-19 were collected and processed by the OECD based on the Survey on Joint 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.

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