

Education at a Glance 2023

Country note

Italy

This country note provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in Italy. It draws on data from *Education at a Glance 2023*. In line with the thematic focus of this year's *Education at a Glance*, it emphasises vocational education and training (VET), while also covering other parts of the education system. Data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers interested in the reference years for the data are referred to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2023*.

Highlights

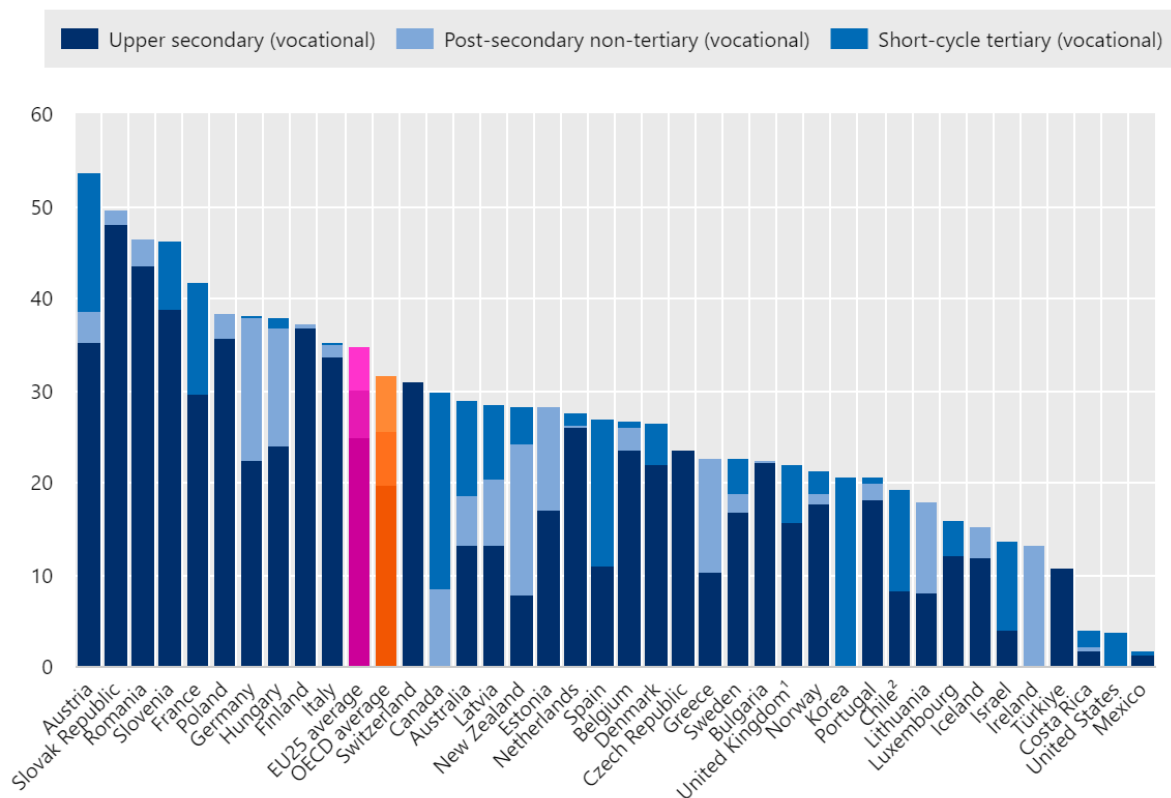
- In Italy, 40% of 15-19 year-olds are enrolled in vocational upper secondary education compared to 23% across the OECD. Despite the popularity of VET programmes, outcomes for VET students are below the OECD average. Employment rates of VET graduates one to two years after graduation are the lowest across the OECD with 55%. Similarly, NEET rates of 15-34 year-olds with a vocational attainment are 28.1%, well above the rate of 12.0% for their peers with general upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and also substantially above the OECD average of 15.2%. These numbers indicate that VET programmes in Italy face significant challenges in facilitating the transition of their students into the labour market.
- 25-34 year-olds with a vocational upper secondary or post-secondary degree in Italy earn just 4% more than their peers without upper secondary attainment. This is lower than in any other OECD country. However, the earnings advantage increases to 40% among 45-54 year-olds with vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary degrees, which is significantly above the OECD average of 23% for this age group. This may explain the continuing popularity of VET programmes among upper secondary students.
- In Italy, 79% of general upper secondary students, but only 55% of vocational upper secondary students complete their programme on time. Within an additional two years, these rates rise to 90% for general upper secondary students and to 70% for vocational upper secondary students. These rates are roughly similar to the average of OECD countries with available data.
- Italy invests 4.2% of its GDP into education from primary to tertiary level. This is below the OECD average of 5.1%. It corresponds to an expenditure per student of USD 11 400 compared an OECD average of USD 12 600.
- In all OECD countries, the gender ratios among ECE teaching staff are systematically unbalanced. In Italy, the share of male ECE teachers is very low with men making up just 1% of the pre-primary teaching staff.
- Teachers in Italy tend to be relatively old. 60% of upper secondary teachers are 50 years or older, whereas the OECD average is just 40%. Average actual teacher salaries are just 69% of the salaries of other tertiary educated workers in Italy, potentially limiting the attractiveness of the profession to new candidates.

The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- High-quality VET programmes integrate learners into labour markets and open pathways for further personal and professional development. However, the quality and importance of VET programmes differ greatly across countries. In some countries, half of all young adults (25-34 year-olds) have a vocational qualification as their highest level of educational attainment, while the share is in the low single digits in other countries. In Italy, 35% of 25-34 year-olds have a VET qualification as their highest level of attainment: 34% at upper secondary level and 1% at post-secondary non-tertiary level (Figure 1). From 2015 to 2022, the share of men with a vocational upper secondary attainment has decreased by one percentage point, and it has decreased by two percentage points for women.

Figure 1. Share of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of education has a vocational orientation, by level of educational attainment (2022)

In per cent



1. Data for upper secondary attainment include completion of a sufficient volume and standard of programmes that would be classified individually as completion of intermediate upper secondary programmes (9% of adults aged 25-34 are in this group).

2. Year of reference differs from 2022. Refer to the source table for more details.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of 25-34 year-olds who attained vocational upper secondary, vocational post-secondary non-tertiary or vocational short-cycle tertiary education.

Source: OECD (2023), Table A1.3. For more information see Source section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023_[11]).

- Across the OECD, unemployment rates for 25-34 year-olds with vocational upper secondary attainment are lower than for their peers with general upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. This is also the case in Italy, where 10.7% of young adults with vocational upper

secondary attainment are unemployed, compared to 13.1% of those with general upper secondary attainment.

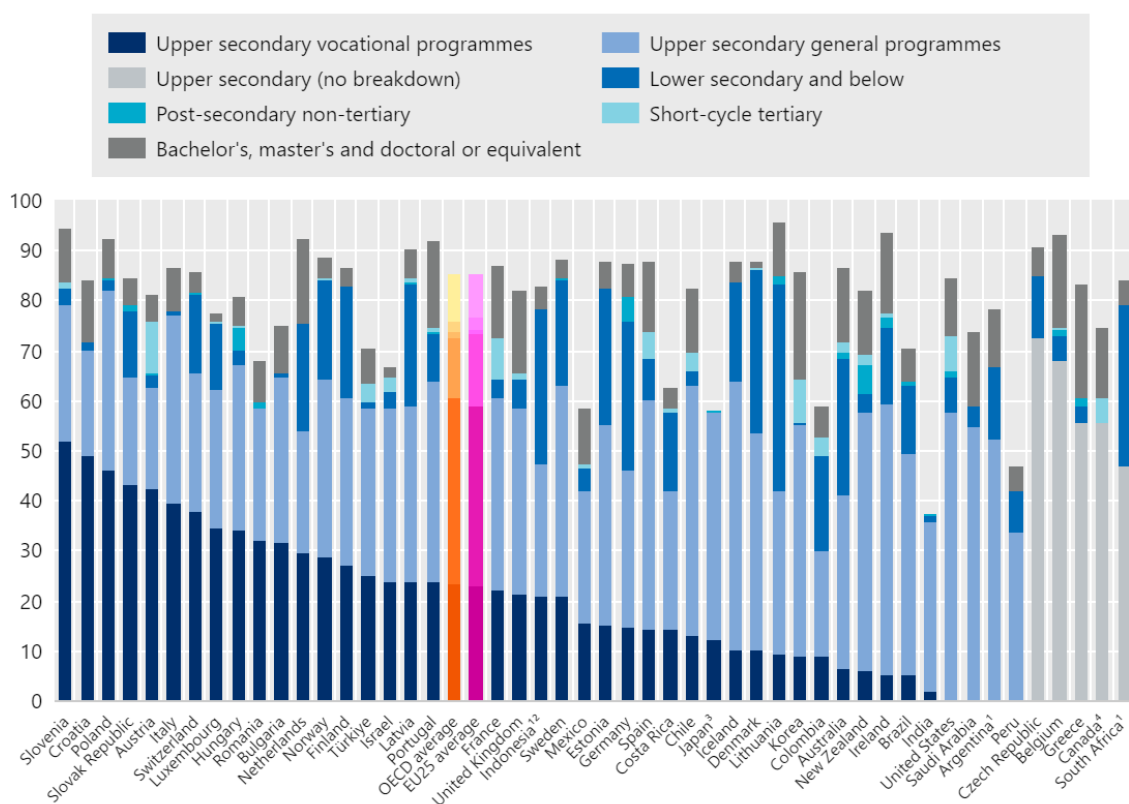
- In Italy, employment rates for 15-34 year olds are higher for those with higher educational attainment. The employment rate of people having completed upper secondary (vocational and general) programmes is 50% one to two years after graduation, 65% three to four years after graduation and 73% at least five years after the graduation date.
- Although an upper secondary qualification is often the minimum attainment needed for successful labour-market participation, some 25-34 year-olds still leave education without such a qualification. On average across the OECD, 14% of young adults have not attained an upper secondary qualification. In Italy, the share is higher than the OECD average (22%).
- Workers in Italy aged 25-34 with vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment earn 4% more than those without upper secondary attainment, whereas the earning advantage for workers with general upper secondary attainment is 8%. However, in almost all OECD countries, tertiary degrees provide a significantly larger earnings advantage. In Italy, 25-34 year-old workers with bachelor's attainment (or equivalent) earn 26% more than their peers without upper secondary attainment, while those with master's or doctoral attainment (or equivalent) earn 33% more.
- In 2020, women's earnings were 86% of men's for those with upper secondary vocational or post-secondary non-tertiary education, compared with 80% on average in the OECD among 25-34 year-olds. The earnings of those with tertiary education follow a similar pattern.
- Tertiary attainment continues to increase among the working age population. On average across the OECD, tertiary attainment is becoming as common as upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment among 25-64 year-olds. In Italy, 20% of 25-64 year-olds have tertiary attainment, a smaller share than those that have upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment (43%).
- In 2022 in Italy, almost half of the new entrants to short-cycle tertiary education chose STEM studies and almost 13% of these new entrants were female. 76% of 25-64 year-olds with short-cycle tertiary educational attainment were employed. This rate is lower than the OECD average, 82% of individuals with short-cycle tertiary attainment were employed.
- On average across OECD countries, 9.9% of young adults aged 25-29 with tertiary qualifications are not in education, employment or training (NEET), while in Italy the corresponding figure is 16.3%. Across the OECD, 17.1% of 25-29 year-olds with vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment are NEET while it is 26.2% in Italy. NEET rates for 15-34 year-old women with vocational upper secondary attainment are slightly higher than for men. Reducing NEET rates among young adults is a particularly important challenge in all countries because those who become NEET face worse labour-market outcomes later in life than their peers who remained in education or training at this age.
- As the demand for skills in the workplace changes ever more quickly, the importance of lifelong learning continues to grow. In Italy, the share of adults who participated in non-formal job-related education over a four-week reference period is 6% among 25-64 year-olds with vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, 5% among those with general upper secondary attainment and 13% among those with tertiary attainment. This compares to average shares of 7% (vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment), 7% (general upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment) and 14% (tertiary) across the OECD.

Access to education, participation and progress

- Participation in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) has a positive effect on children's well-being, learning and development in the first years of their lives. In Italy, 13% of 2-year-olds are enrolled in ECE. This increases to 87% of 3-year-olds, 92% of 4-year-olds and 87% of 5-year-olds.
- Compulsory education in Italy starts at the age of 6 and continues until the age of 16. Students typically graduate between the ages of 18 and 19 from general upper secondary programmes. The age range for completing vocational programmes is just as wide, with students typically graduating from vocational upper secondary programmes also between 18 and 19. This is different from most OECD countries, where graduates from vocational upper secondary programmes have a wider age range, reflecting the greater diversity of pathways into these programmes than for general ones.
- The large majority of 15-19 year-olds across the OECD are enrolled in education. In Italy, 37% of this age group are enrolled in general upper secondary education and 40% in vocational upper secondary education. A further 1% are enrolled in lower secondary programmes and 9% in tertiary programmes. This compares to an OECD average of 37% enrolled in general upper secondary programmes, 23% in vocational upper secondary programmes, 12% in lower secondary programmes and 12% in tertiary programmes (Figure 2).
- On average across countries and other participants with comparable data, 77% of entrants into general upper secondary education successfully complete their upper secondary studies (either in general or in vocational programmes) within the theoretical duration of the programme. The completion rate increases by an average 10 percentage points within two years after the end of the theoretical duration. In Italy, 79% of entrants into general upper secondary education complete their programme within the theoretical duration, but this share increases to 90% after allowing an additional two years.
- In most countries with available data, completion rates in vocational upper secondary programmes are lower than in general upper secondary programmes. In Italy, 55% of vocational students complete upper secondary education (either general or vocational programmes) within the expected duration and 70% complete their programme after an additional two years. On average across countries and other participants with available data, 62% of vocational entrants complete their studies on time and 73% within an additional two years.
- In some countries, most students enrol in another education programme shortly after completing their upper secondary education. In other countries, it is common for upper secondary graduates to enter the labour market or take a gap year and return to education later. Consequently, the share of general upper secondary graduates in education one year after their graduation ranges from less than 40% in Sweden to more than 90% in Slovenia. In all countries, general upper secondary graduates are more likely to be enrolled in formal education one year after their graduation than those who graduated from a VET programme. In Italy, 75% of general upper secondary graduates are in education one year after their graduation compared to 29% of vocational graduates.
- Bachelor's programmes are the most popular programmes for new entrants to tertiary education. On average across the OECD, they attract 76% of all new students compared to 88% in Italy. Short-cycle tertiary programmes are the second most common level of education for new entrants into tertiary education, but their importance differs widely across countries. In Italy, they are chosen by 2% of all new entrants.

Figure 2. Enrolment rates of 15-19 year-olds, by level of education (2021)

In per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2021: 2020 for Argentina and South Africa; 2018 for Indonesia.

2. Excludes students enrolled at tertiary levels.

3. Breakdown by age not available after 15 years old.

4. Excludes post-secondary non-tertiary education.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of students enrolled in upper secondary vocational education.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table B1.2. For more information see *Source* section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[1]).

- Perhaps surprisingly, the share of international students at tertiary level has not been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in many OECD countries. However, a few countries experienced double digit declines in the share of international students. Italy is not one of them, as the share of international students remained stable between 2019 and 2021 (3% of all tertiary students). International students make up 3% of bachelor's students and 10% of doctoral students. More than half of the students coming from abroad are female. The largest share of international students (35%) comes from Asia.

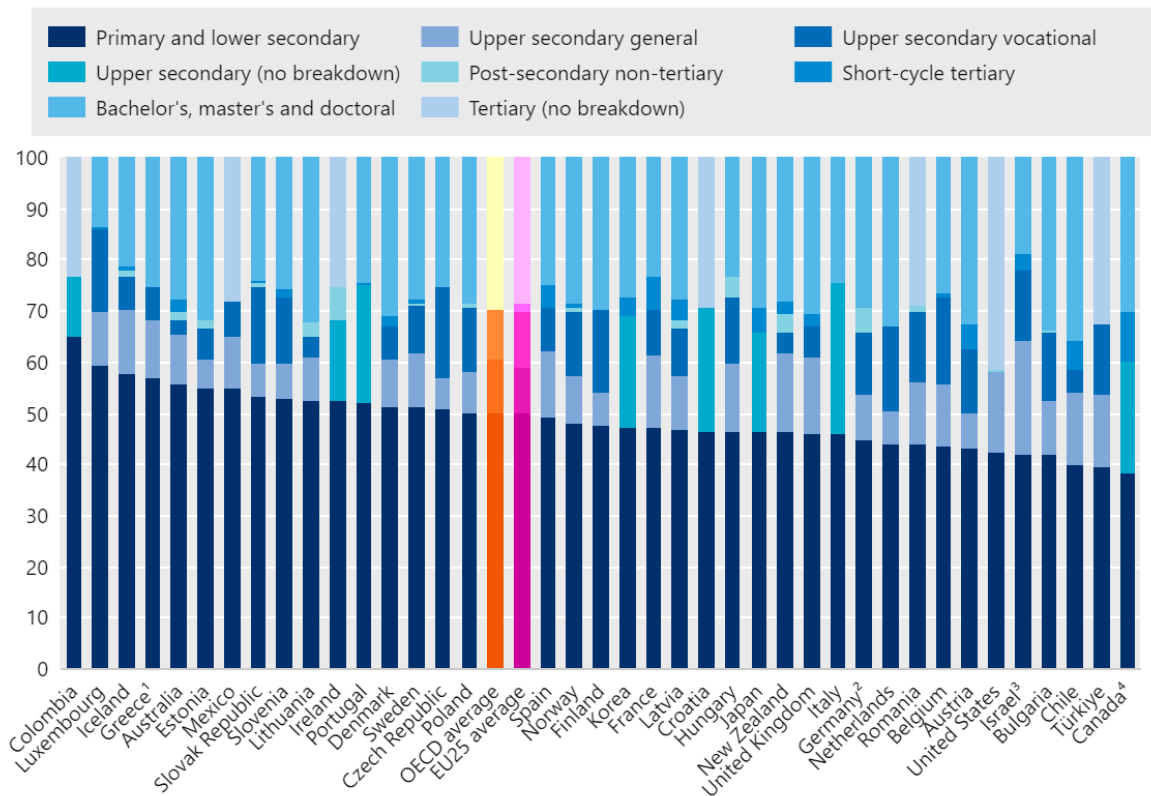
Financial resources invested in education

- All OECD and partner countries devote a substantial share of their domestic output to education. In 2020, OECD countries spent on average 5.1% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions. In Italy, the corresponding share was 4.2% of GDP, of which 30% was dedicated to primary education, 16% to lower secondary education, 30% to upper

secondary and post-secondary education combined and 24% to bachelor's, master's and doctoral or equivalent programmes (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Total expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions, by level of education (2020)

In per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2020. Refer to the source table for more details.

2. Upper secondary vocational programmes include lower secondary vocational programmes.

3. Upper secondary programmes include lower secondary programmes.

4. Primary education includes pre-primary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of total expenditure on primary and lower secondary institutions.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table C2.1. For more information see *Source* section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[1]).

- Funding for education in absolute terms is strongly influenced by countries' income levels. Countries with higher per capita GDP tend to spend more per student than those with lower per capita GDP. Across all levels from primary to tertiary education, Italy spends USD 11 439 annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power), compared to the OECD average of USD 12 647. Expenditure per student is equivalent to 27% of per capita GDP, which is the same as the OECD average of 27%.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for education systems across the world. On average across the OECD, expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions per full-time equivalent student (including expenditure on research and development) grew by 0.4% from 2019 to 2020 (the first year of the pandemic and the latest period with available data). In Italy, it decreased by 1.3%. This change in expenditure per student is the result of total expenditure on

educational institutions decreasing by 1% and the total number of full-time equivalent students increasing by 0.3%.

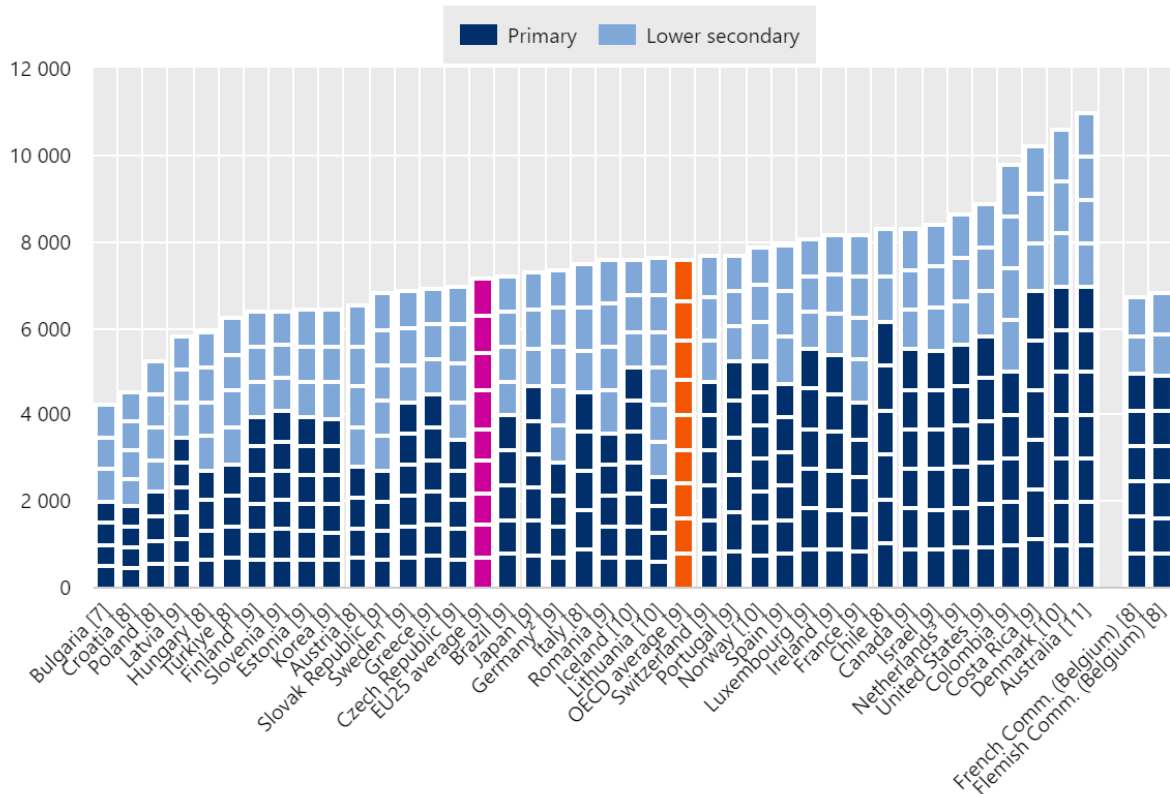
- Government sources dominate non-tertiary education funding in all OECD countries, while the private sector contributes 9% of the total expenditure on educational institutions on average. Private funding in Italy accounted for 5% of expenditure at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels.
- On average across OECD countries, more than half of government expenditure on primary to post-secondary non-tertiary education comes from subnational governments. In Italy, 87% of the funding comes from the central government, after transfers between government levels, 6% from the regional level and 7% from the local level.

Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- The total compulsory instruction time throughout primary and lower secondary education varies widely from country to country (Figure 4). Across the OECD, over the course of primary and lower secondary education, compulsory instruction time totals an average of 7 634 hours, distributed over nine grades. In Italy, the total compulsory instruction time is lower, at 7 491 hours, over eight grades.
- On average across OECD countries, 25% of the compulsory instruction time in primary education is devoted to reading, writing and literature and 16% to mathematics. In lower secondary education, the share is 15% for reading, writing and literature and 13% for mathematics. Italy is one of the few countries where there is no fixed share of instruction time spent on reading, writing and literature or mathematics at one or both of these levels especially at primary school level. At lower secondary level the timetable mainly dedicated to these subjects is shared with other subjects.
- Teachers' salaries are an important determinant of the attractiveness of the teaching profession, but they also represent the single largest expenditure category in formal education. In most OECD countries, the salaries of teachers in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach, and also with experience. On average, annual statutory salaries for upper secondary teachers (in general programmes) with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience are USD 53 456 across the OECD. In Italy, the corresponding salary adjusted for purchasing power is USD 44 235, which is equivalent to EUR 32 588. Upper secondary teachers in vocational programmes in Italy have the same statutory salaries.
- Besides average teacher salaries themselves, annual teaching time requirements, annual hours of compulsory instruction time for students, and class size also impact total spending on teacher salaries. When combined, these factors can be used to estimate an average cost of salaries per student and show the relative impact of each individual factor on total salary spending. Total teacher salary costs per primary student are USD 3 695 in Italy, slightly higher than the OECD average of USD 3 614. This difference can be broken down into these four factors: lower teacher salaries reduce costs (by USD 576), below-average teaching hours increase costs (by USD 89), above-average student instruction time increases costs (by USD 397), and smaller classes increase costs (by USD 171). Between 2015 and 2021, the salary cost of teachers per student increased by 12% in Italy (from USD 3 309 to USD 3 695).
- Between 2015 and 2022, statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes (with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience) declined in real terms in roughly half of all OECD countries with available data. In Italy, upper secondary teachers' salaries decreased by 4% between 2015 and 2022.

Figure 4. Compulsory instruction time in general education (2023)

In hours, in primary and lower secondary education, in public institutions



Note: Instruction hours for each grade refer to average hours per grade for the level of education. Numbers in square brackets refer to the total number of years for primary and lower secondary education.

1. Estimated number of hours by level of education based on the average number of hours per year, as for some subjects, the allocation of instruction time across multiple levels is flexible.

2. Year of reference 2022.

3. The number of grades in lower secondary education is three or four, depending on the track. The fourth year of pre-vocational secondary education was excluded from the calculation.

Countries and other participants are ranked in ascending order of the total number of compulsory instruction hours.

Source: OECD (2023), Table D1.1. For more information see *Source* section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[11]).

- On average across OECD countries, in full-time equivalent terms, there are 14 students for every teaching staff member in general upper secondary programmes and 15 students per staff member in vocational upper secondary programmes. In Italy, in full-time equivalent terms, there are 11 students per staff member in general upper secondary programmes, lower than the OECD average. In vocational upper secondary programmes, in full-time equivalent terms, there are 9 students for every teaching staff member (below the OECD average).
- The average age of teachers varies across OECD countries. In some countries, the teaching workforce is much younger than the labour force in general, whereas in others, teachers tend to be older. In Italy, 61% of teachers in general upper secondary programmes are aged 50 or older, compared to the OECD average of 39%. Teachers in vocational programmes are younger than their general programme peers their general programme peers, with 59% aged 50 or above (43% on average across the OECD). Teaching staff in Italy is predominantly female in pre-primary

education (just 1% of pre-primary teaching staff is male). In tertiary education more than 60% of the staff is male.

- National/central assessments (standardised tests with no consequence on students' progression through school or certification) are more common at primary and lower secondary levels than at upper secondary level, while most OECD countries conduct national/central examinations (standardised tests with formal consequence) in the final years of upper secondary education. These national/central assessments and examinations take place at different grades and can have different periodicities, their contents may vary over years and/or across students and are not necessarily compulsory for students. In Italy, there are at least two national/central assessments at primary level, and one at lower secondary level. At upper secondary level, there is one national/central examination that each student may be expected to take.

References

- OECD (2023), *Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>. [1]
- OECD (2023), Education at a Glance Database, <https://stats.oecd.org/>. [2]
- OECD (2023), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>. [3]

More information

For more information on *Education at a Glance 2023* and to access the full set of indicators, see: <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-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 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-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://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-data-en> and by following the *StatLinks* under the tables and charts in the publication.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS:

<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/>.

Questions can be directed to:

Directorate for Education and Skills

EDU.EAG@oecd.org

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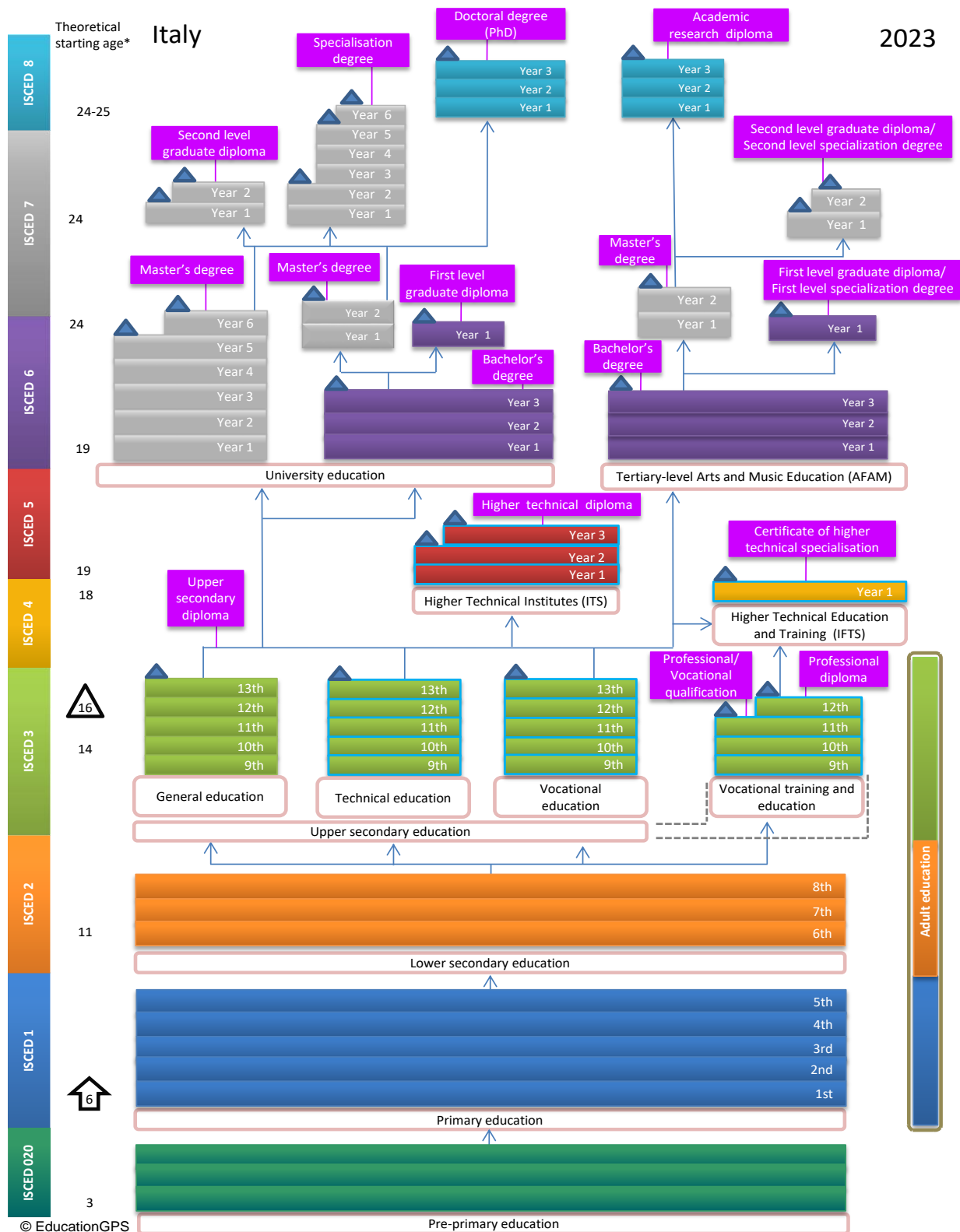
Key facts for Italy in Education at a Glance 2023

Indicator	Country		OECD average		Source	
Educational attainment of 25-34 year-olds by gender	2022		2022		Table A1.2	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	Below upper secondary	25%	19%	16%		12%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	52%	45%	44%		35%
	Tertiary	23%	35%	41%	54%	
NEET rates of 18-24 year-olds by gender	2022		2022		OECD (2023 ^[2])	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	24.6%	23.6%	14%	15.5%		
Employment rates of 25-64 year-olds by educational attainment and gender	2022		2022		OECD (2023 ^[2])	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	Below upper secondary	68%	36%	70%		48%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	83%	62%	84%		69%
	Tertiary	88%	80%	90%	83%	
Enrolment rate of children aged 3 in ECEC	2021		2021		Table B2.1	
	87%		73%			
Enrolment rate of 15-19 year-olds	2021		2021		Table B1.1	
	87%		84%			
Share of upper secondary students enrolled in VET programmes	2021		2021		Table B1.3	
	52%		44%			
Upper secondary completion rates by programme orientation	2021		2021		Table B3.1	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational		
	By the end of the programme duration	79%	55%	77%		62%
	Two years after the end of the programme duration	90%	70%	87%	73%	
Expenditure on educational institutions per full-time equivalent student by level of education (in USD PPP)	2020		2020		Table C1.1	
	Primary	USD 12 008	USD 10 658			
	Lower secondary	USD 9 760	USD 11 941			
	Upper secondary	USD 11 059	USD 12 312			
	Tertiary	USD 12 663	USD 18 105			
Total expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions as % of GDP	2020		2020		Table C2.1	
	4.2%		5.1%			
Share of total education expenditure on upper secondary educational institutions by programme orientation	2020		2020		Figure C2.2	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational		
	m	m	11%	10%		
Total compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education	2023		2023		Table D1.1	
	7 491 hours		7 634 hours			
Statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (in USD PPP)	2022		2022		Table D3.1.	
	USD 44 235		USD 53 456			
Change in statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (in real terms)	2015-2022		2015-2022		Table D3.7	
	-4%		4%			
Share of teachers in general upper secondary programmes aged 50 or older	2021		2021		Table D7.2.	
	61%		39%			

Note: The OECD average for completion rates reflects a different country coverage (see Indicator B3).

Source: OECD (2023^[2])

Diagram of the education system



Source: OECD (2023), "Italy: Diagram of education system", OECD Education GPS, http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/ITA/ITA_2011_EN.pdf
 Please refer to "Italy: Diagram of education system" for information on the keys.