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Gender imbalances in the teaching profession

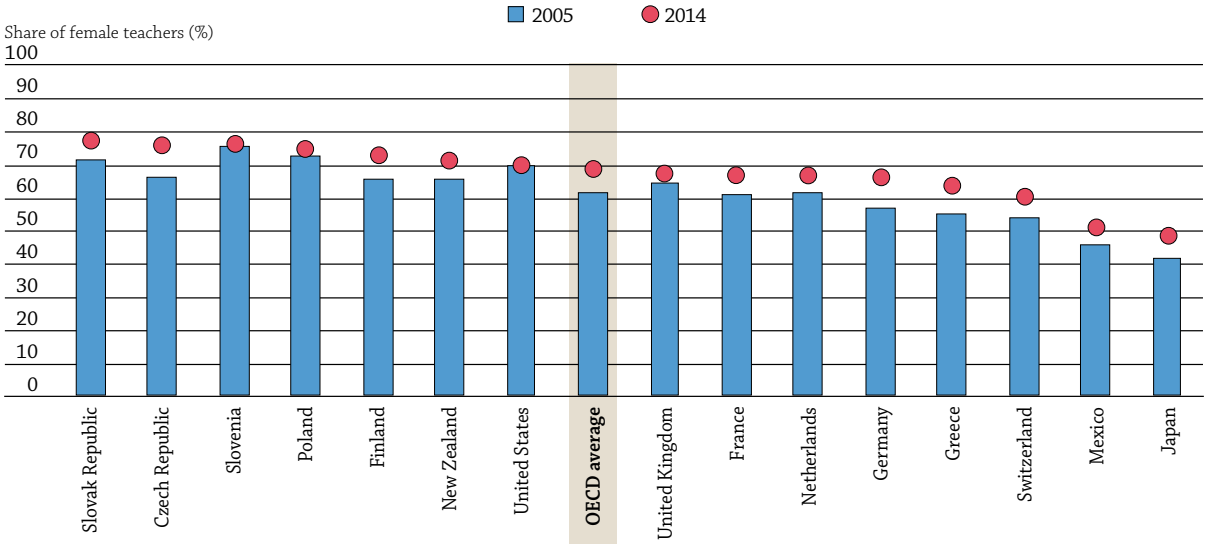
- **Historically across the OECD, the teaching profession has been largely dominated by women. The share of female teachers has been increasing over the past decade – reaching 68% in 2014 for all levels of education combined.**
- **The gender disparity decreases gradually with the level of education, from 97% of women in pre-primary education to 43% in tertiary education. Between 2005 and 2014, the gender gap increased at the primary and secondary levels, but decreased at the tertiary level.**
- **Male teachers earn 71% of the wages of other tertiary-educated workers in primary education, and this number increases to 81% in upper secondary education. In contrast, female teachers earn at least 90% of the wages of other tertiary-educated female workers at all education levels. This sharp difference in relative wages may contribute to making teaching more attractive to women.**
- **The largest share of women is found among the new generation of teachers (below the age of 30), raising concerns about the intensification of gender imbalances over time – in particular at the lower education levels, where women make up the great majority of teachers.**

The teaching profession is marked by a sharp – and growing – gender gap

Teaching is a highly gendered profession, with women making up over two-thirds of the teachers from pre-primary to tertiary education on average across OECD countries. The imbalance is particularly striking in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation, where approximately four out of five teachers are women. Among the 31 countries with available data, Japan is the only country with fewer female than male teachers (48% of the profession across all education levels). This surprising result may be partly related to the lower participation of Japanese women in the labour market compared to other countries (OECD, 2012).

There is evidence of a gradual "feminisation" of the teaching profession over the last decade. The average share of female teachers in the OECD increased from 61% in 2005 to 65% in 2010 and 68% in 2014. This upward trend is observed in every country with available data, regardless of the proportion of female teachers in 2005 (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the size of the increase varies widely between countries – increasing by less than 1% in Slovenia and the United States, and by more than 15% in Germany, Greece and Japan.

Figure 1. **Share of female teachers, all levels of education combined (2005, 2014)**



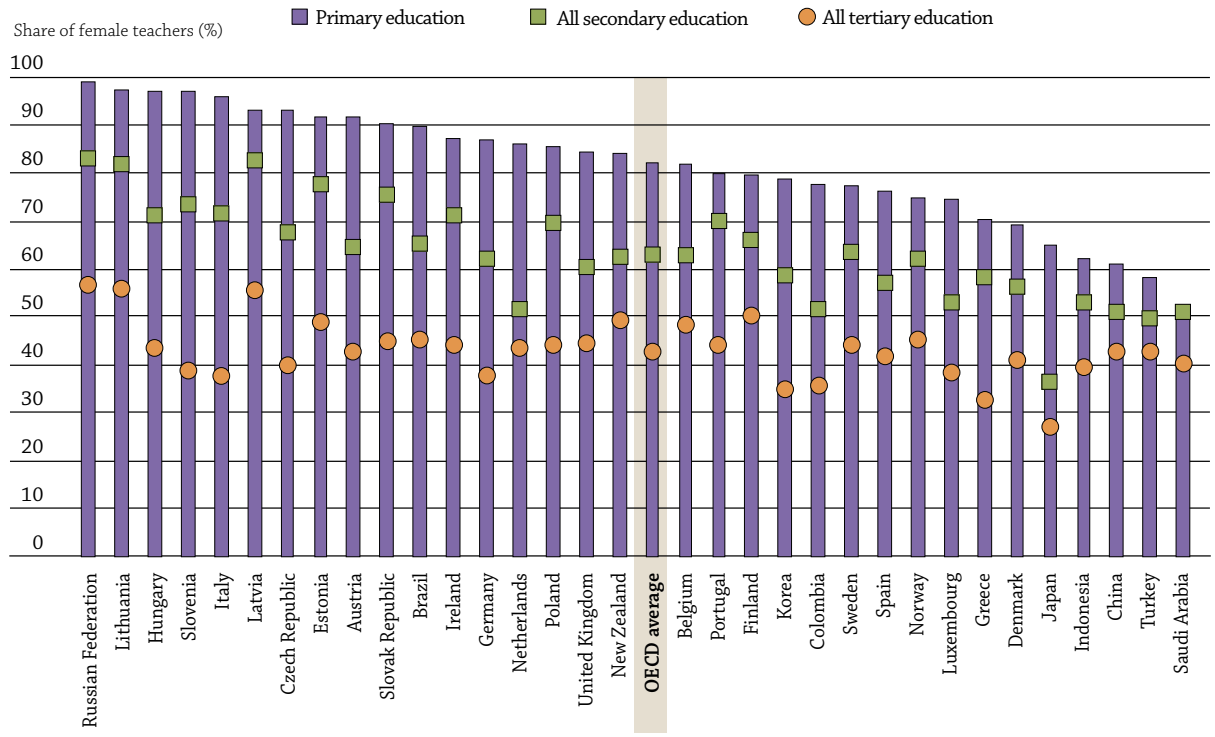
Note: Only countries with data for both years are included. For details please see Annex 3 (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm).
Countries are ranked in decreasing order of the share of female teachers in 2014.
Source: OECD (2016), Education at a Glance (database).

However, the gender gap varies significantly across levels of responsibility, fields and education levels

Although women make up a majority of the teaching profession, they are relatively under-represented in leadership positions. On average across OECD countries, 68% of lower secondary teachers are women, but only 45% of principals (OECD, 2016). This is particularly striking given that principals tend to be recruited from among the ranks of teachers – suggesting that female teachers are less likely to be promoted as principals than their male counterparts.

Even among teaching positions themselves, there are gender imbalances across the different fields of education. At the lower secondary level, women make up a lower share of teachers in science, mathematics and technology than in the overall teaching population (OECD, 2015a). The proportion of female teachers also decreases significantly with the level of education. Women make up as much as 97% of the teachers in pre-primary and 82% in primary education on average across the OECD. The share goes down to 63% at the secondary level and 43% at the tertiary level. This phenomenon applies to most countries with available data. In primary schools, the proportion of female teachers exceeds 60% in all countries except Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In contrast, at the tertiary level, there are only four countries with more female than male teachers: Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. **Share of female teachers by level of education (2014)**



Note: Only countries with all data are included. For details please see Annex 3 of *Education at a Glance 2016*, (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm).
Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of female teachers in primary education.
Source: OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en, Table D5.3.

What might explain the gender imbalance in the teaching profession?

Between 2005 and 2014, the employment rate among women in OECD countries increased from 56% to 59% on average. Even though this relationship may not apply to all countries, the increase in female labour market participation is likely to have contributed to the "feminisation" of teaching. For instance, in Japan and Germany – which, along with Greece, are among the three countries[1] with the steepest increase in the share of female teachers over the last decade – women's employment rates increased by over 11% compared to an 8% increase on average in countries with available data.

In addition, stereotypical notions of what women and men excel at and the careers they can pursue are likely to shape gender segregation into different areas of education. For example, the low share of female teachers in the field of science may result from the social perception of science as being a masculine domain – which may discourage women from pursuing tertiary studies in that field (OECD, 2015b).

Economic considerations are also likely to influence men and women's career orientation within the teaching profession, which raises the issue of potential gender wage imbalances across education levels. Interestingly, while the share of female teachers tends to

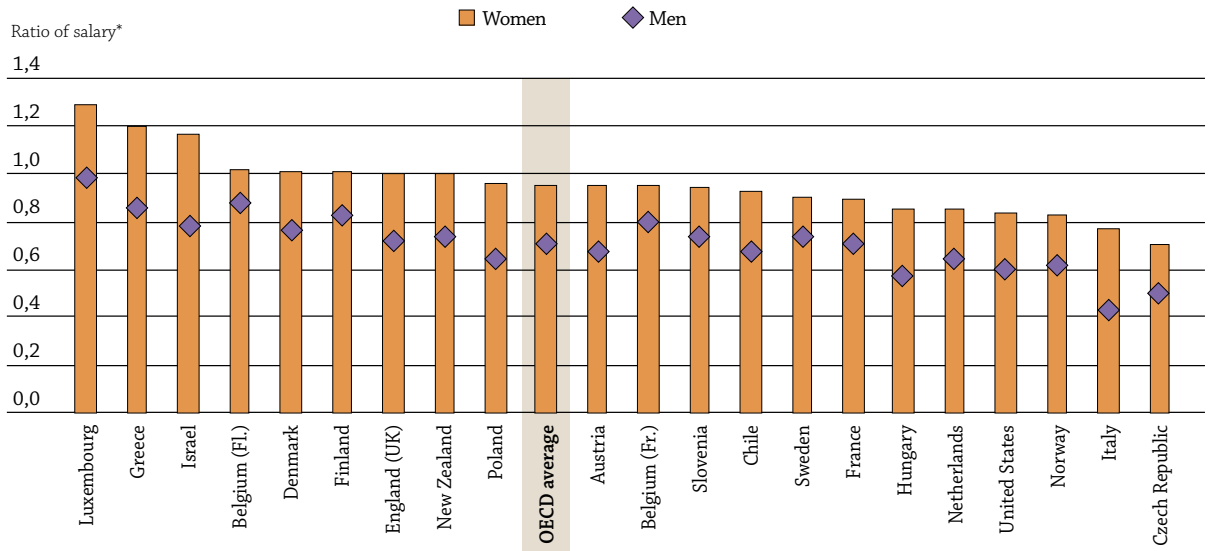
1. Out of the 15 countries with available data for both 2005 and 2014 (see Figure 1).

decrease with the level of education, salaries tend to increase. For example, the average actual salary of a teacher aged 25-64 in the OECD increases progressively across education levels, from USD 37 300 in pre-primary education to USD 46 600 in upper secondary education. On average women earn slightly less than men in primary and secondary education, although the wage gap does not exceed 3%.

Gender differences are more significant when it comes to teachers' salaries relative to other tertiary-educated workers. On average across OECD countries, male primary school teachers (aged 25-64) earn 71% of the wages of other tertiary-educated men. This number increases to 76% in lower secondary education and 81% in upper secondary education. Female teachers earn a significantly higher relative wage. Women in primary education earn over 90% of the salaries of other tertiary-educated female workers, and even slightly more than them at the lower and upper secondary levels (Figure 3). These sharp differences in relative salaries for men and women are likely to have made the teaching profession more appealing to women, especially at the lower levels of education.

Should we expect gender imbalances to intensify in the near future?

Figure 3. **Ratio of primary teachers' salaries relative to the wages of other tertiary-educated workers, by gender (2014)**



*Ratio of salary, using annual average salaries –including bonuses and allowances– of teachers (aged 25-64) in public institutions relative to the wages of full-time, full-year tertiary-educated workers of the same gender.
Note: Only countries with all data are included. For details please see Annex 3 of *Education at a Glance 2016* (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm).
Countries are ranked in descending order of the ratio of female teacher salaries relative to other tertiary-educated female workers.
Source: OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en, Table D3.2C.

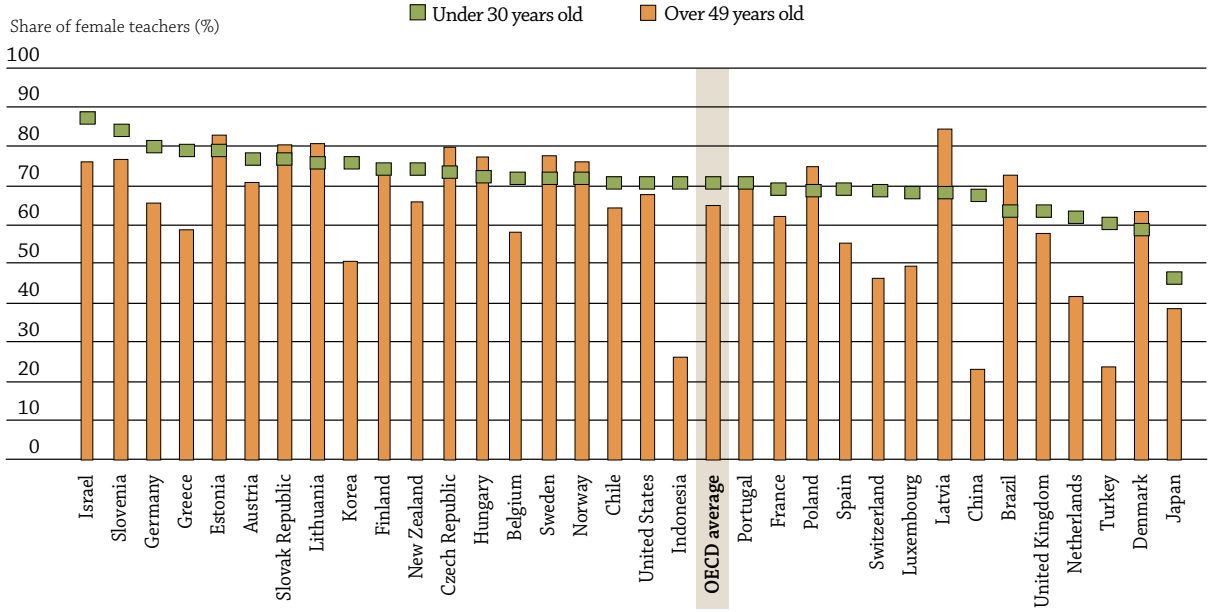
The current age distribution of male and female teachers may serve as an indicator of future gender imbalances in the teaching profession. In most countries, the highest share of women is found among the new generation of teachers at all levels of education. For instance, at the lower secondary level, women make up 70% of teachers under the age of 30, while they account for 65% of those aged 50 and over. This pattern is observed in 22 out of 35 countries with available data, and the difference between the older and the younger group exceeds 15 percentage points in 8 countries (Figure 4). The higher proportion of women among young teachers raises concerns about future gender imbalances at the lower levels of education, where women already dominate the profession. In addition, as the share of women graduating with a tertiary degree in education increased from 72% in 2005 to 78% in 2014 on average across OECD countries, there is reason to believe that gender imbalances may intensify in the near future.

However, at the tertiary level, where female teachers are on average a minority, the higher share of women among the younger generation of teachers suggests an improvement in gender parity. On average across OECD countries, the share of female teachers is closer to 50% (i.e. an equal gender distribution) among the younger group – with 53% of women among teachers under 30, compared to 38% among teachers aged 50 and above.[2]

These indicators are consistent with the gender distribution dynamics observed over the last decades, which point to a gradual increase in the gender gap at the lower education levels and to a decrease at the tertiary level. On average across the OECD, the rise in the share of female teachers between 2005 and 2014 widened the gender gap at the secondary level (from 59% of women to 63%) and narrowed it at the tertiary level (from 38% of women to 43%).

2. In China, Indonesia and Turkey, this pattern applies at the lower secondary level as well. Women are highly under-represented among older teachers, and the share of female teachers gets closer to 50% among the younger generation.

Figure 4. **Share of female teachers at the lower-secondary level, by age group (2014)**



Note: Only countries with all data are included. For details please see Annex 3 of *Education at a Glance 2016* (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm).
Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of female teachers under 30 years old.
Source: OECD (2016), Education at a Glance (database).

Persistent gender imbalances in the teaching profession have raised a number of concerns, and countries such as the United Kingdom have implemented policies encouraging the recruitment of male teachers in order to address the growing "feminisation" of the profession (OECD, 2015a). Given the magnitude of the phenomenon, and its gradual increase in lower education levels, it would be interesting to investigate the potential impact of the gender gap in teaching, for instance on education outcomes or career expectations.

The bottom line: The teaching profession is marked by striking gender imbalances. Not only do women make up the majority of teachers, but their distribution across levels and fields of education is highly uneven. These gender disparities have raised concerns, especially as the gender gap in the proportion of male and female teachers has increased over the last decade at the primary and secondary levels. The higher share of women among teachers below the age of 30 at these levels, together with the predominance of female tertiary graduates in the field of education, suggest that this phenomenon may intensify in the near future. However, the prospects are quite different at the tertiary level, where gender parity has improved over the last decade, particularly among younger teachers.

For more information

- OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en.
- OCDE (2015a), "Gender equality", *Trends Shaping Education 2015*, Spotlight 7, OECD Publishing, Paris, www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/Spotlight7-GenderEquality.pdf.
- OECD (2015b), *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264229945-en.
- OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en.

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