

Every Day Counts

International perspective

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School attendance problems



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Every Day Counts

Understanding, Preventing and Responding to School Attendance Problems



Every Day Counts: Understanding, Preventing and Responding to School Attendance Problems

- Includes data analyses, literature reviews and findings from OECD Policy Survey on School Attendance Problems
- Survey collects comparative information on education systems' policies and practices to address school attendance problems
- Focus on ISCED 1-3
- **45 submissions from 35 countries (including Ireland)**

Source: <https://doi.org/10.1787/7c6f6c3e-en>

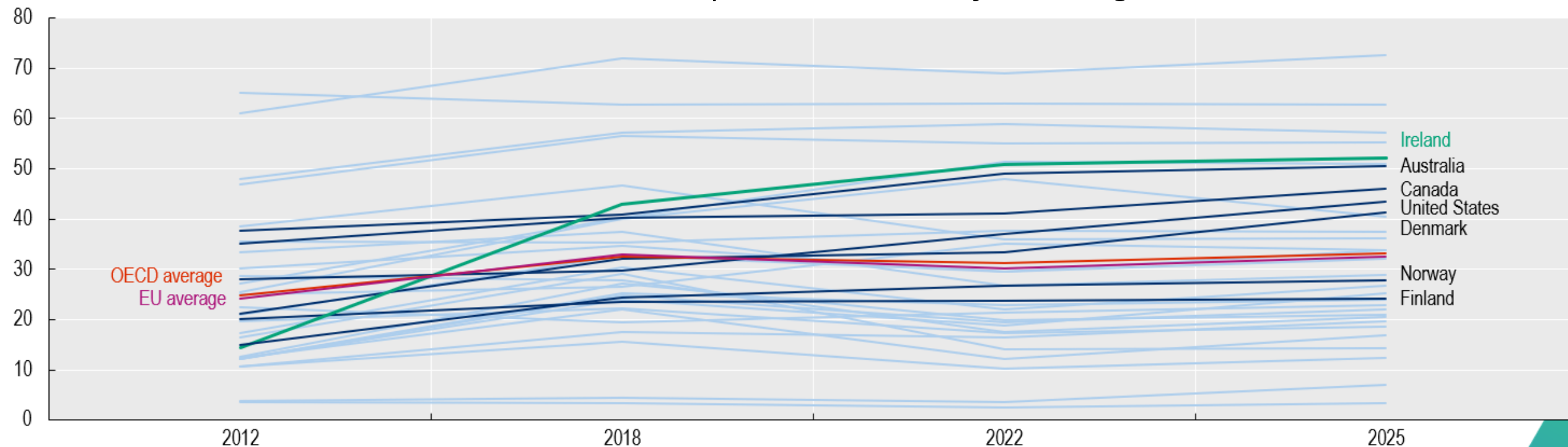
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International trends around absence



Self-reported student truancy has increased slightly over the last decade

Percentage of 15-year-old students reporting skipping a whole school day or some classes at least once in the past two weeks before taking the PISA test

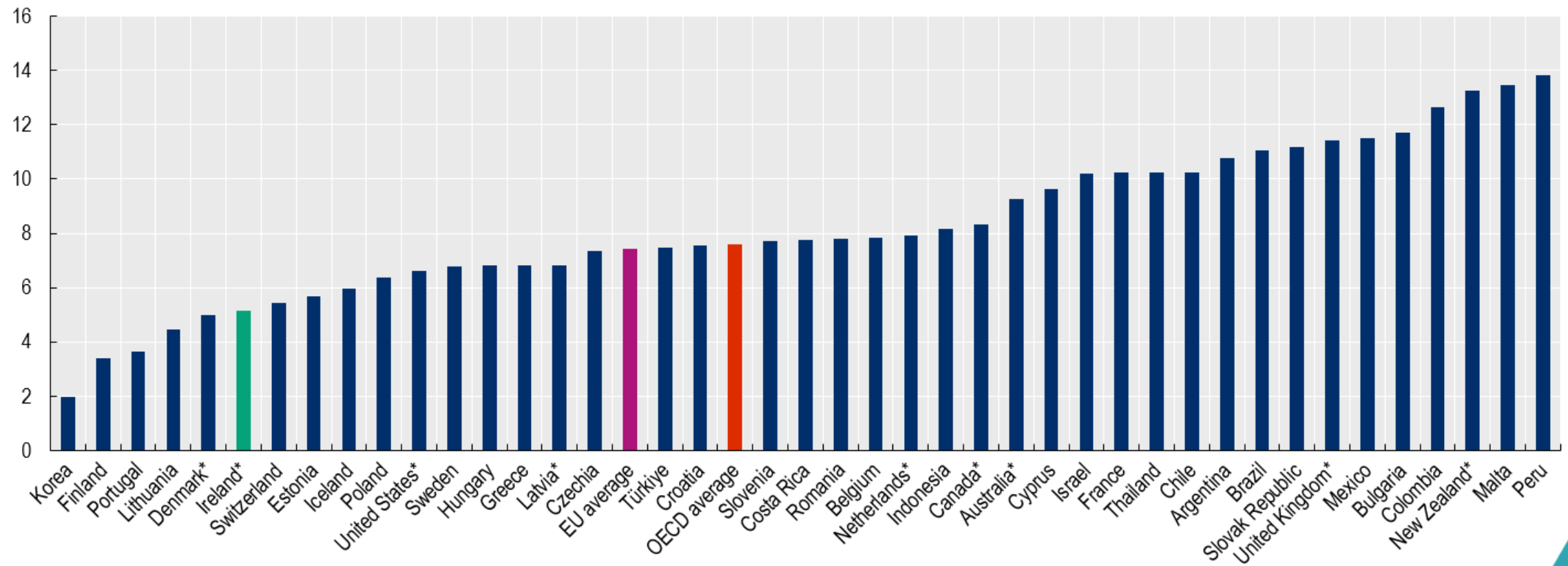


Source: OECD (2026), Every Day Counts: Understanding, Preventing and Responding to School Attendance Problems, Figure 1.2., <https://doi.org/10.1787/7c6f6c3e-en>; and OECD (2026), PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students, Table I.B1.4.158, <https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en>.



Long-term absence from primary to upper secondary education (2022)

Percentage of 15-year-old students who reported that they had missed school for more than three consecutive months at any time in their previous educational journey



Note: See Figure 1.16. in the report.

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption, Table II.B1.3.49, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>.

2

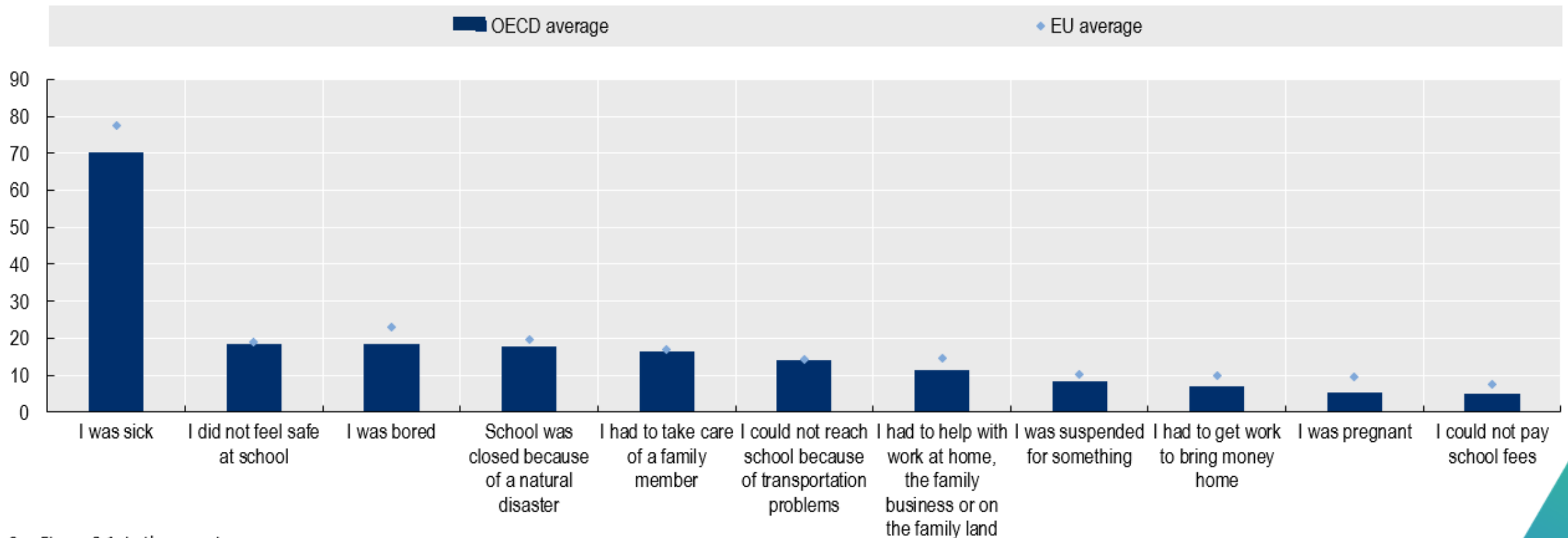
Drivers of school attendance problems



Sickness reported as the most common reason for long-term absence

Reasons for long-term absence (2022)

Percentage of students who reported the following reasons for having missed school for more than three consecutive months at any education level



Note: See Figure 2.1. in the report.

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption, Table II.B1.3.55, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>.

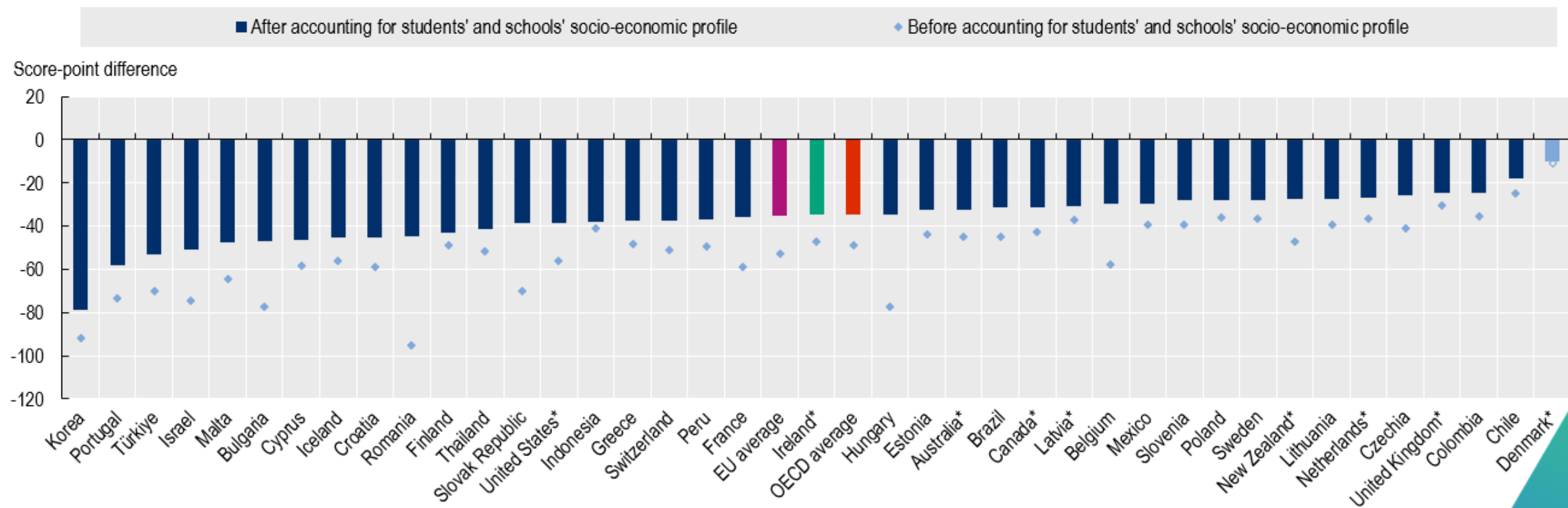
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Consequences of school attendance problems



The association between long-term absence and mathematics performance reflects underlying socio-economic differences between students

Change in mathematics performance when students reported that they had missed school for more than three consecutive months



Note: See Figure 3.5. in the report. Statistically significant differences are marked in darker colours and full diamonds.

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption, Table II.B1.3.52, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>.

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4

Monitoring and policy responses

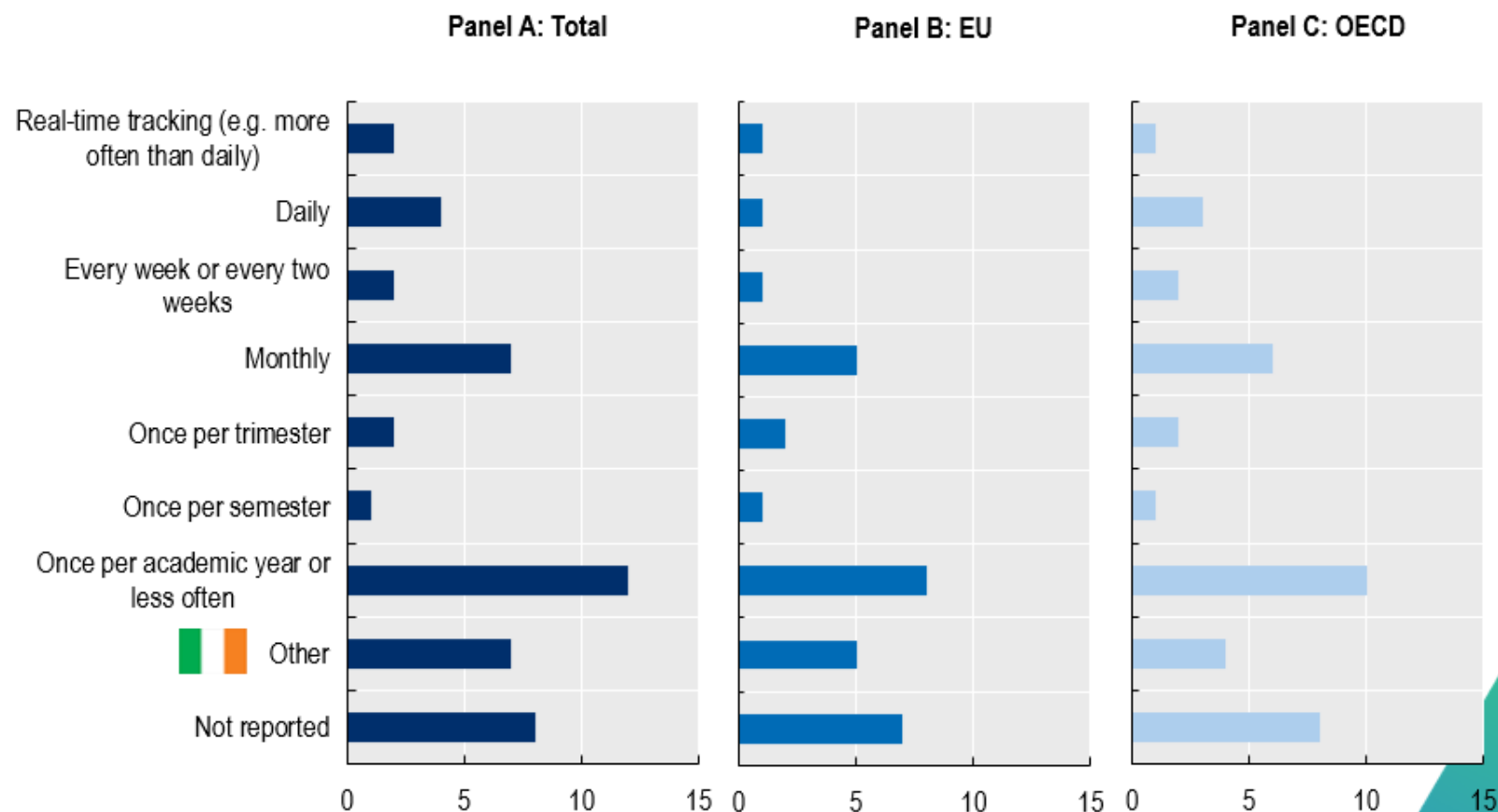


Most education systems record attendance data only once per academic year or less often

Examples:

- **Malta and Türkiye** track attendance in real time
- The **Flemish Community of Belgium, Indonesia, New Zealand and England (United Kingdom)** report data daily
- Schools in **Greece** report weekly and in **Scotland (United Kingdom)** every fortnight.
- **Latvia** reports data once per semester, while **Galicia (Spain)** and **Portugal** do so once per quarter.

Frequency at which attendance data is reported to the national (sub-national) level



Note: See Figure 4.13. in the report. 45 education systems responded to this item, including 31 from EU countries and 37 from OECD countries.

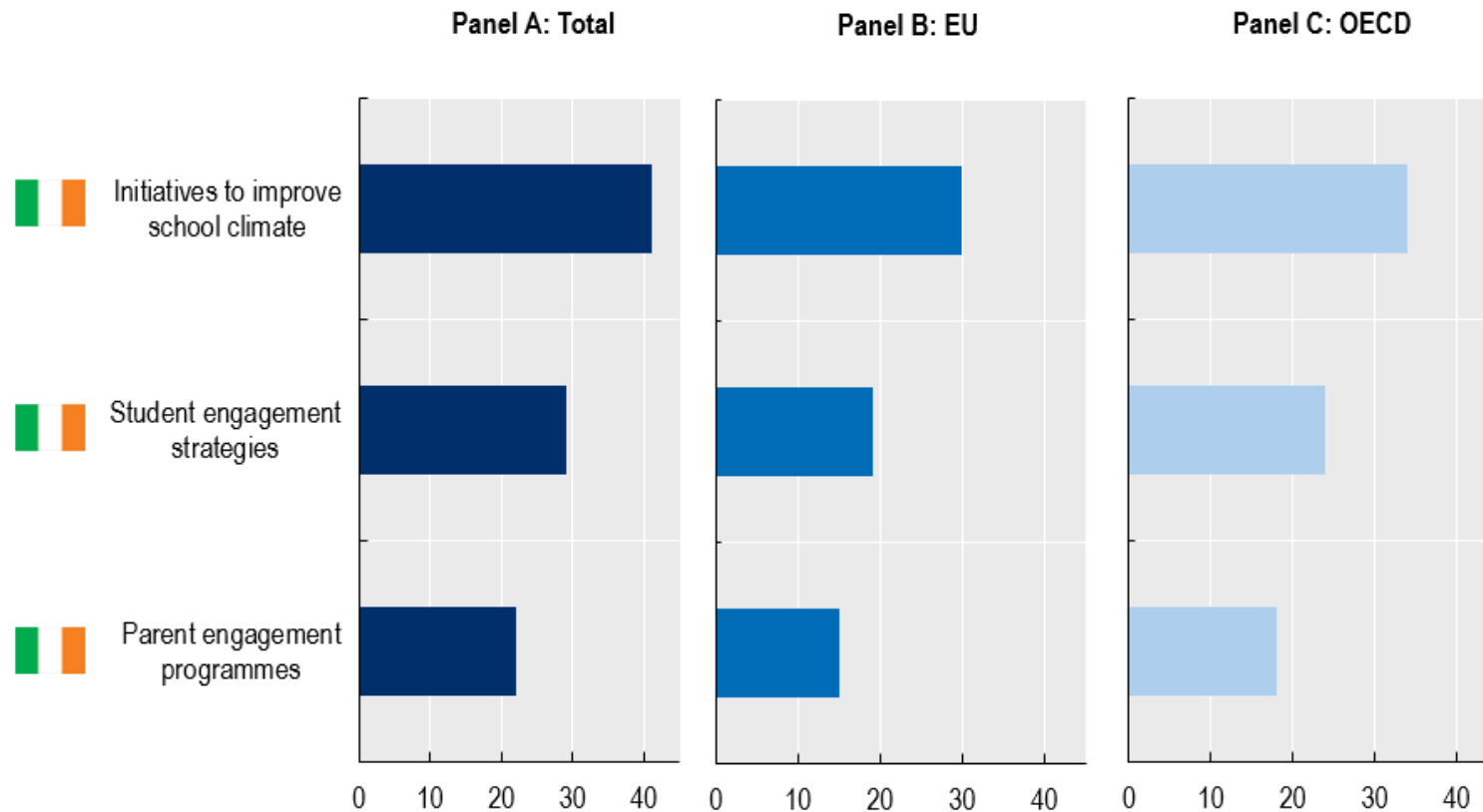
Source: OECD (2025), OECD Policy Survey on School Attendance Problems.

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The majority of education systems require or encourage schools to implement initiatives to improve school climate

System-level policies requiring or encouraging measures to promote engagement



Examples:

- **Spain:** Regional authorities have to implement anti-violence protocols, while schools develop coexistence plans supported by a designated Wellbeing and Protection Coordinator.
- **The Netherlands:** The School and Environment programme extends learning opportunities through sports, culture and academic support for students with fewer extracurricular opportunities.

Note: See Figure 4.9. in the report. 45 education systems responded to this item, including 31 from EU countries and 37 from OECD countries.

Source: OECD (2025), OECD Policy Survey on School Attendance Problems

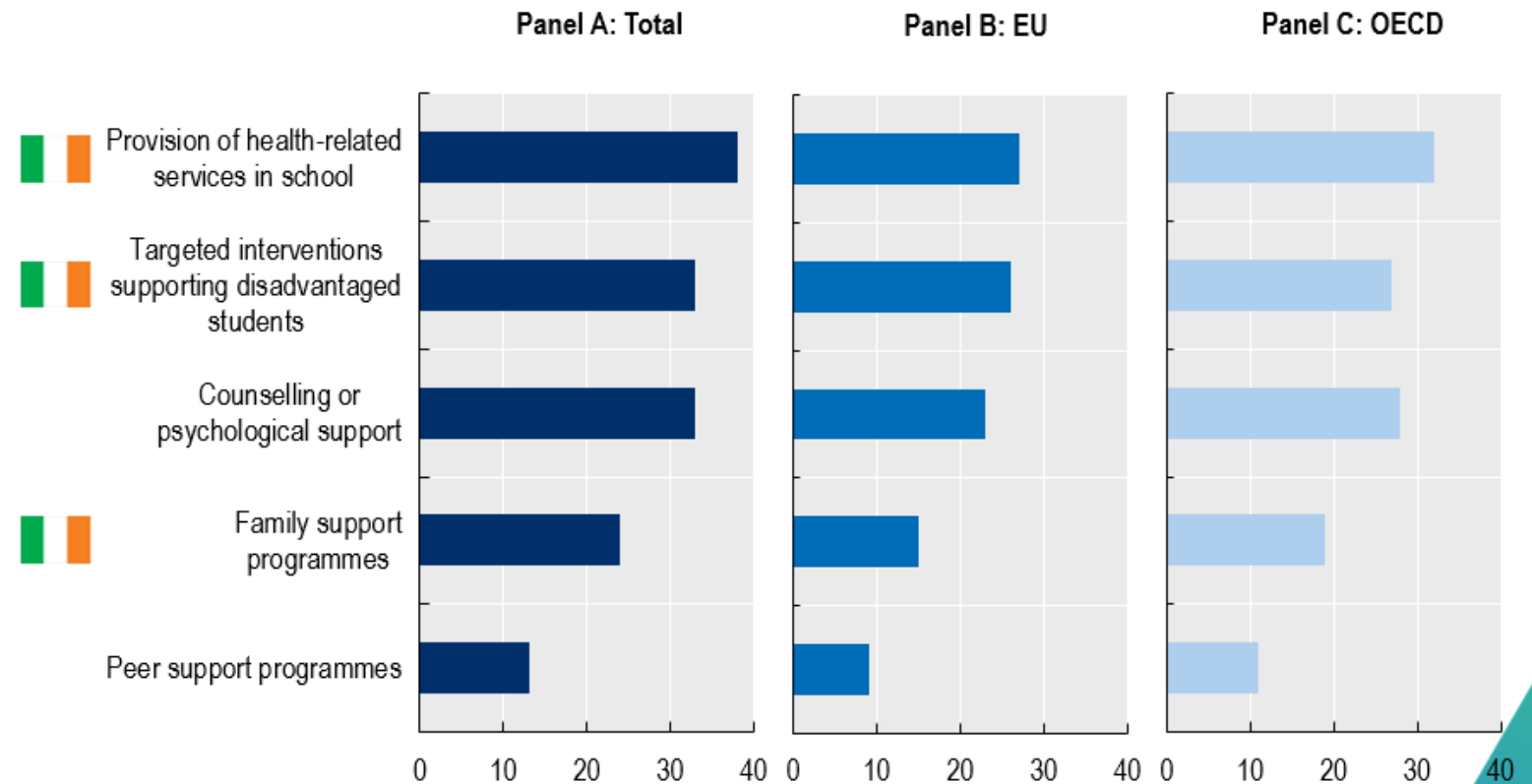


Most education systems encourage or require schools to provide health-related services

Examples:

- **Iceland:** Every primary and lower secondary education school must have a school healthcare service.
- **Lithuania:** Socio-economically disadvantaged students are entitled to free breakfast, lunch and school supplies.

System-level policies requiring or encouraging support measures



Note: See Figure 4.8. in the report. 45 education systems responded to this item, including 31 from EU countries and 37 from OECD countries.

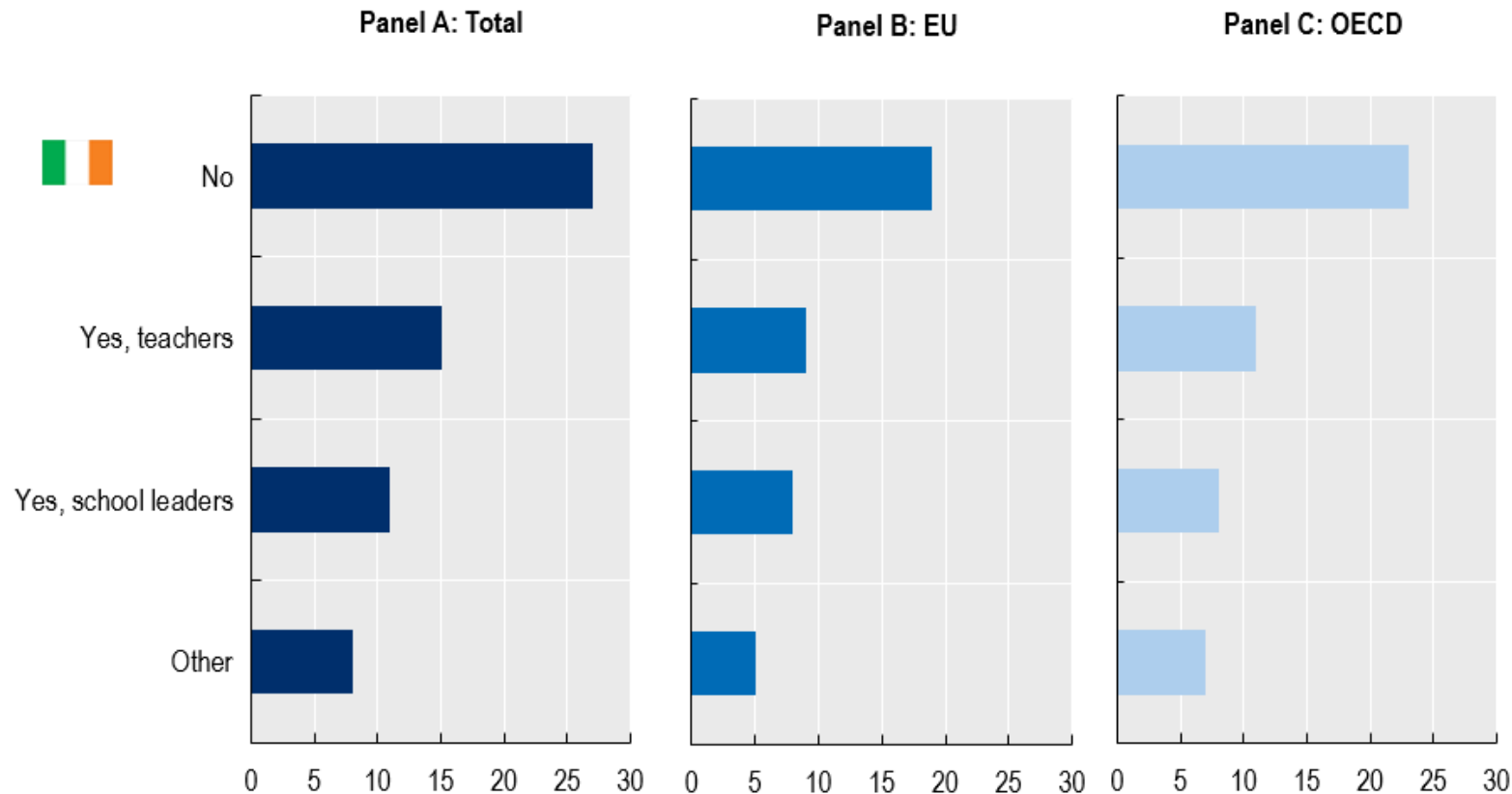
Source: OECD (2025), OECD Policy Survey on School Attendance Problems.

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Continuing professional learning on attendance is far from a universal practice across education systems

Required continuing professional learning (CPL) related to student absence



Examples:

- In the **French Community of Belgium**, there is no specific requirement for CPL, school staff can participate in training programmes focused on school retention and the prevention of dropout. These programmes cover topics such as identifying at-risk students, clarifying the roles of different stakeholders, developing partnerships with different professionals, and implementing preventive and follow-up measures.

Note: See Figure 4.12. in the report. 44 education systems responded to this item, including 30 from EU countries and 36 from OECD countries.

Source: OECD (2025), OECD Policy Survey on School Attendance Problems.

4

Key messages and policy pointers



Why attendance problems require early and holistic responses



Absence is shaped by multiple, interrelated and self-reinforcing drivers

- Respond to health barriers to improve attendance
- Address structural barriers through co-ordinated and school-based supports
- Provide a legal basis for co-ordinated support services
- Share data responsibly across institutions
- Create collective responsibility



Positive students' experiences in school are central to attendance

- Create a positive and safe school climate and a strong sense of belonging
- Build positive adult-student and student-student relationships
- Use academic approaches and targeted support to help students catch up after absence and to strengthen their connection to learning
- Shift attendance policies towards support and engagement, limiting exclusion to a last resort
- Develop relevant, inclusive and flexible learning environments
- Expand access to extracurricular activities



Parental beliefs and information gaps are changing and shaping absence

- Rebuild shared norms post-pandemic
- Include the voices of parents and students in the design and implementation of legislation, policies and practices
- Use personalised and actionable communication



What this means for policy design



Absence matters at every stage: early, cumulative and persistent effects

- Engage in continuous monitoring of attendance or absence
- Strengthen support at key transition points
- Enable timely and continuous intervention to address emerging absence patterns and underlying risks
- Use timely and granular data
- Reassess the role of thresholds and absence categories



Legislative frameworks shape attendance, but punitive approaches have limited impact

- Clearly define responsibilities for families, schools and authorities
- Reassess the role of punitive measures
- If sanctions are employed, embed them within graduated frameworks
- Limit grade repetition as an attendance response



Strong system capacity is essential to monitor and respond to absence

- Provide training on attendance to teachers and other school professionals
- Engage with non-teaching staff, protect staff time and clarify roles
- Develop capacity in the system through external and internal school evaluations



What this means for Ireland

- Strengthen the collaboration among departments, agencies, services and schools around school attendance
- Embed school attendance and student engagement in initial teacher education and continuing professional learning
- Include the voices of parents and students in school attendance policies and practices
- Implement whole-school and whole-community approaches to increase school attendance
- Strengthen central-level monitoring of school attendance and absence
- Support school leadership to embed a culture of attendance



CONTACT AND LINKS

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For more information:

OECD (2026), **Every Day Counts: Understanding, Preventing and Responding to School Attendance Problems**, <https://doi.org/10.1787/7c6f6c3e-en>

OECD (forthcoming 2026), **Tackling school attendance problems in Ireland**, *Education Policy Perspective*, OECD.

Education for Inclusive Societies project:

<https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/education-for-inclusive-societies.html>