



# Education Report

Education Policy

Sustainable Governance  
Indicators 2016

## Indicator

## Education Policy

## Question

To what extent does education policy deliver high-quality, equitable and efficient education and training?

41 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = Education policy fully achieves the criteria.
- 8-6 = Education policy largely achieves the criteria.
- 5-3 = Education policy partially achieves the criteria.
- 2-1 = Education policy does not achieve the criteria at all.

### Estonia

## Score 9

Estonians have traditionally placed a high value on education, which has been a driving force behind the country's excellent educational outcomes and its recent educational reforms. Estonia has shown consistent improvements in its PISA rankings, and today is ranked in 2nd place in Europe and 4th place overall. Particular system strengths include the small number of low achievers and low school-level variance in student achievement. Enrollment rates at various education levels, including lifelong learning courses, are above the international average. Moreover, Estonia has already reached some of the EU's Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) headline targets, and is close to the target level in other areas.

Municipalities provide preschool education, which is accessible to the great bulk of the population (the enrollment rate is about 95%). Earlier concerns regarding a shortage of places in urban areas have diminished, but problems associated with a shortage of financial resources, including low salary levels for teachers, have yet to be solved. General education and vocational education and training (VET) are free; since 2013, this has also been true of university instruction. University applicants have to score highly on entrance exams in order to be admitted. Furthermore, they have to study full time; otherwise, a reimbursement program will apply. There are about 500 schools providing general education, 50 VET institutions, and 24 higher-education institutions (HEI) including six public universities.

Interestingly, while higher education is generally associated with better employability and a higher salary, this appears less true in Estonia than elsewhere. Firstly, compared to other countries, Estonia has a higher vertical mismatch, meaning that many university graduates are employed in jobs that do not require university education. Secondly, compared to other countries, the effect of education on salary level is lower. The gender-based pay gap – the highest in Europe at 28% –

is one aspect of this larger problem. Recent policy measures strengthening links between education and training and the labor market, such as involving companies and social partners in VET curricula development, including entrepreneurship skills in university curricula, and providing adults with low-level skills better access to lifelong learning, have sought to ensure that the provision of education keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy.

Citation:

Estonian Human Development Report 2014/15, Chapter 2.1. Social cohesion [http://www.kogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/FINAL\\_EIA\\_2015\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.kogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/FINAL_EIA_2015_ENG.pdf) (accessed 30.10.2017).

## New Zealand

Score 9

Education policy in New Zealand was in the past characterized by a paradox. On the one hand, as experienced in a number of other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, participation indicators in secondary and tertiary education were average to low. On the other hand, the country's Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) results have been impressive overall, although the socioeconomic background of students affects performance to a higher degree than in most other OECD countries. Among the major initiatives introduced in recent years have been substantial increases in expenditures on preschool education, and the introduction of national standards in literacy and numeracy for children one to eight years old. Data from the Ministry of Education released in 2013 show that small gains have been made, although Maori and Pasifika students continue to underachieve, as do boys relative to girls. While the government has attempted to introduce performance-based criteria for teachers, there has been strong resistance to the use of such measures from both primary and secondary schools. There has been a remarkable increase in student numbers in tertiary education. New Zealand now has among the highest standards of tertiary attainment in the OECD (ranked fifth out of 41 countries in 2010). On the other hand, government funding of universities lags behind that provided in other western countries, including Australia, making it increasingly difficult for the leading research institutions to retain their rankings in international university-ranking systems. In its Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 – 2019, the National-led government has identified the improvement of skills for industry as its top priority. Achievement has increased at all levels. With regard to job-based continuing education, the New Zealand economy has followed the tradition of Anglo-American liberal market economies (LMEs) that invest more extensively in transferable skills, independent from current jobs, rather than in the job-based training more common among continental European coordinated market economies (CMEs). That said, critics of the government's tertiary education policy are of the view that too much attention is given to vocationally oriented subjects as opposed to arts or the humanities. A new professional body for the education profession, the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (EDUCANZ), has been established.

Citation:

Annual Report of the Ministry of Education 2015 (Wellington: Ministry of Education 2015).

Economic Policy Reforms – Going for Growth 2012 (Paris: OECD 2012).

Tertiary Education Strategy 2014-2019 (Wellington: Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education 2014).

Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand: <http://www.educationcouncil.org.nz/> (accessed November 14, 2015).

## Canada

### Score 8

Education quality in Canada is high. The country has a number of world-class universities and the average quality of its universities is high. Canadian teachers are well-paid by global standards. The most recent (2012) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report gave the country scores well above the OECD average in Reading and Science, and ranking among the top performers in Mathematics. Of the 65 countries and regional economies participating in the assessment, only nine outperformed Canada at a statistically significant level, with seven other countries performing at the same level as Canada. While the level of educational attainment is thus high, the trend has been less encouraging: for instance, while Canada ranked 7th in mathematics in the 2006 PISA report, it placed only 10th in 2009 and dropped further to 13th place in 2012.

Equity in access to education is impressive. Canada has the highest proportion of the population aged 20 to 64 with some post-secondary education, thanks to the extensive development of community colleges. There are many educational second chances for Canadian youth. The high school completion rate is also high and rising. Socioeconomic background represents a much lower barrier to post-secondary education in Canada than in most other countries.

Because of tight government budgets and the lower priority given by the general public to education than to health, spending on education has been kept under control in Canada in recent years. The level of financial resources allocated to education, largely by provincial governments (as education falls under the provinces' jurisdiction), is reasonable and resources are, in general, used efficiently.

Despite the overall strengths of the Canadian education and training system, there are challenges. Probably the biggest deficiency in education policy has been the failure to reduce the gap in educational attainment between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations. Schools on reserves are funded federally through Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada. A recent evaluation carried out for the ministry found that education opportunities and results are not comparable to those off the reserves, that the comparatively lower quality of teacher instruction and curriculum is affecting student success, and that funding gaps relative to provincially funded regular (off-reserve) schools persist, especially in isolated, low-population communities. A recent study has documented the large economic benefits that can be obtained by closing the Aboriginal education gap (Calver, 2015).

Other challenges include the low completion rate for apprenticeship programs, threats to the accessibility of higher education related to large hikes in tuition; the underutilization of recent immigrants' high average skills, low levels of functional literacy in many workplaces, the limited development of the early-childhood education system, a relatively low proportion of PhDs in the overall population, and inadequate levels of employer training.

Citation:

Summative Evaluation of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program on Reserve, report prepared for AANDC, June 2012. [http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DA\\_M-INTER-HQ-AEV/STAGING/texte-text/ev\\_else\\_1365173418229\\_eng.pdf](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DA_M-INTER-HQ-AEV/STAGING/texte-text/ev_else_1365173418229_eng.pdf)

Organization for Economic Development (OECD), "Education at a Glance 2014" OECD Indicators. September 2014.

Matthew Calver (2015) "Closing the Aboriginal Education Gap: Assessing Progress and Estimating the Economic Benefits," CSLS Research Report 2015-03, June. <http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2015-03.pdf>

## Finland

### Score 8

Built on the principle of lifelong learning, policy in Finland promotes and maintains a high educational standards. All people by law must have equal access to high-quality education and training, basic education is free, and municipalities are responsible for providing educational services to all local children. Finland has 20 universities and 30 polytechnics, and close to 70% of high-school graduates enter higher education. Nevertheless, the proportion of graduates from higher education (among 25- to 34-year-olds) has been comparatively low and the number of graduates overall has been rising more slowly than in many other OECD countries. By and large, Finland's education system is successful, and Finland has ranked at the top of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in recent years. The Education and Research Development Plan, revised every four years by the government, is the key document governing education and research policy in Finland, and directs the implementation of education- and research-policy goals as stated in the government program. From 2011 to 2016, the plan will focus on the alleviation of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Although the area of knowledge and education is a key focus for the Sipilä government, the state nevertheless enacted considerable cuts in education spending. These are likely to undermine the equality of educational opportunities, as well as the quality of basic education. Additionally, restrictions on the right to day care for children whose parents are not participating in the labor market undermine equal access to early education, especially in socially vulnerable families. This change in education policy is likely to decrease the quality and diminish the successes of the Finnish educational system.

Citation:

Education and Research 2011-2016. A development plan. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2012:3

## Germany

### Score 8

Since the first PISA study in 2000, the OECD has often repeated its criticism that access to education in Germany is stratified and educational attainment is particularly dependent on pupils' social backgrounds. Educational opportunities are particularly constrained for immigrants and children from low-income families. The most recent PISA results from 2012, however, show significant improvements (OECD 2013), reflecting possibly a catalytic effect of the "PISA shock" in the early 2000s. Germany now ranks above the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science, and has made considerable progress on education equity over the last decade. The importance of students' socioeconomic background has lessened. While in 2000, the level of social equity in German education was among the lowest of all OECD countries, Germany was around the OECD average in 2012.

Other indicators confirm that Germany is still lagging behind the top education performers, but is steadily catching up. In 2012, Germany ranked twentieth worldwide in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, trailing 1.1 points behind Switzerland, which achieved a score of 6.0 in the overall assessment of education system quality (Global Competitiveness Report 2012 – 2013: 442). In 2014, the overall quality of the education system improved considerably (a score of 5.2, ranking the country 12th in 2014), Germany is still trailing 0.8 points behind frontrunner Switzerland (Global Competitiveness Report 2014 – 2015: 207). In 2015, Germany ranked of 10 out of 144 countries with an improvement score of 5.4. (Global Competitiveness Report 2015 – 2016: 179)

In contrast to other countries, the proportion of individuals with tertiary education (International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED, level five) has remained constant for several decades. However, the proportion of young people with tertiary education (53% in 2012) is gradually approaching the OECD average (58%). Furthermore, Germany exceeds the OECD average in youth participation in vocational tertiary education programs by 4% (OECD 2014: 4). The success of Germany's dual vocational training approach has become a role model for southern European countries, which have high youth unemployment rates, such as Spain (where a reorganization of vocational programs has been underway since 2012).

Regarding segmentation, the OECD's criticism is not uncontested, since it overemphasizes academic degrees as a criterion of educational success. Vocational education (ISCED levels three and four) "reduces the need for initial on-the-job training," tends to increase the individual productivity that can be initially expected from a worker (OECD 2011: 122) and provides students with occupation specific skills. In general, Germany's education system is strong in terms of vocational training, providing skilled workers with good job and income prospects. The rate of vocational education and training (i.e., the level of education that is either upper

secondary or post-secondary but not tertiary education, ISCED levels three and four) is 22.1 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Within the 25 to 34 age cohort, 52.4% of the total population attained their formal qualification in this education category. In 2009, 81.2% of those with vocational education and training were employed (OECD 2011: 135). All in all, the German education system excels in offering competencies relevant for labor market success, resulting in a low level of youth unemployment (OECD 2014: 3). Thus, defining educational achievement primarily on the criterion of university degrees (as the OECD does) might not do justice to the merits of the segmented German dual education system.

Citation:

Schwab, Klaus (ed.) (2014): Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015. World Economic Forum: Geneva.

Schwab, Klaus (ed.) (2015): Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016. World Economic Forum: Geneva.

OECD (2013): Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Results from PISA 2012, Country Note Germany.

OECD (2014): Education at a glance. Country Note: Germany. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Germany-EAG2014-Country-Note.pdf> (last checked 11/12/2014).

## South Korea

### Score 8

South Korea's education system is very hotly debated, and education policies are an important priority for the government. On the positive side, PISA test results are good and tertiary enrolment rates are high. About 8% of GDP is spent on education institutions, compared to an OECD average of 6.3%. On the other hand, public expenditure totals only 4.9% of GDP, less than the 5.4% OECD average. Thus, much of the success of Korean education can be attributed to parents' willingness to pay for education rather than to public policies per se. Almost all parties involved in the higher-education sector agree that a change in the South Korean system is both necessary and a high priority. There are many complaints about the focus on "cramming," the curriculum content, and the teaching styles at South Korean schools and universities. University entrance exams are a particularly controversial issue. While they have played an important role in allowing relatively equitable access to top universities, they are seen as a major cause of a lack of creativity as well as weak analytical and discussion skills. Many attempts at education reform have been made, but cramming and rote learning are still favored over analytic skills, discussion and creativity. Social and cultural templates based on school ties are also hampering educational reform in a fundamental way. The high share (15% as of 2014) of Korean students among the foreign-student population in U.S. universities remains controversial in Korea. The Park administration's recent policy to introduce "a single government-written history book system" could undermine the liberal educational environment intended to cultivate creativity and democratic ideas.

Citation:

OECD, OECD in figures 2009

OECD, Government at a Glance 2009

Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (2009), South Korea, The Hague.

OECD, Education at Glance 2012, DOI: 10.1787/eag\_highlights-2012-en

IIE, Open Doors Report, 2014

## Switzerland

**Score 8** Switzerland's education system is strongly influenced by the country's federal and decentralized structure, as education policy falls under the jurisdiction of the cantons and municipalities. The system provides a high-quality education. The university system performs very well, as is the case in many other small and open European countries. Vocational training is very solid, and seems to be one of the most important factors in the low levels of unemployment, particularly among younger people. The permeability of vocational and tertiary education has improved as compared to other countries. The number of students enrolled at universities, universities of applied sciences and colleges of education nearly doubled from 2000 to 2015.

While women and – with some exceptions – persons from peripheral regions have equal access to higher education, the Swiss education system continues to discriminate at all levels against students from families with low social status. There is no empirical evidence that the education system discriminates against foreigners born in the country. Their lower success rates can be explained as a special case of discrimination against students from families with low social status.

In this context, we have to mention a federal particularity in higher education. Some cantons such as Geneva and Tessin have followed international trends favoring general qualification for university entrance, while others, especially in the German-speaking portions of the country, have focused instead on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the cantons of Ticino 53% of all 19-21 year-olds acquire the matura secondary-school exit diploma, allowing them to go on to university followed by the cantons of Geneva and Neuchatel with 46% while in the canton of Uri, only 30% of 19-year-olds gain direct access to universities (2014). However, the effect of this “federal” discrimination is somewhat reduced by the permeability within the school and university system. Likewise, the vocational-training system offers considerable career prospects. Finally, resource allocation within the educational system seems to be very efficient.

In general, the quality of the Swiss education system is outstanding. However, given the strong impact of parents' social status on access to higher education, there are questions about overall equity in terms of access.

## Cyprus

**Score 7** Cyprus' educational system is mainly public. After various reforms since the 1990s, new plans and policies are now under study, with similar projects launched by the previous government largely being abandoned. Education is primarily knowledge-based, with limited focus on research, experimentation and critical thought.



However, these latter areas have gained ground since 2000. High literacy rates (near 100% for youth) and upper-secondary attainment are indicative of a culture that places a high value on education. Students in tertiary education attend local and overseas educational institutions in almost equal numbers; in 2014, Cyprus ranked third in the EU with respect to tertiary educational attainment (52.5%) within the 30 – 34 age group.

The few public kindergarten-level facilities are provided mainly by communal authorities. Schooling from the pre-primary level to the age of 15 is compulsory. Vocational schools, apprenticeship programs and other education and professional training schemes also exist, mostly funded by public authorities but also by educational institutions and other organizations. Tertiary education including postgraduate coursework is provided by public and private universities as well as several private colleges and other institutions. However, a recent EU assessment claimed that tertiary students' literacy and mathematical skills are lower than those of upper-secondary graduates in the best-performing EU countries.

Despite recent reductions, Cyprus' expenditure on education as a share of GDP still places it among the top three in the EU; this is partly attributable to the relatively high teachers' salaries. A modest allowance offered to all tertiary-level students has been subject to income criteria since 2012. Measures that have shifted some education-related costs in areas such as transport to parents create unequal opportunities in education.

- :
1. Tertiary education attainment, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc480&plugin=1>
  2. A Guide to Cyprus Education, in nine languages, <http://www.moec.gov.cy/odigos-ekpaideusis/index.html>
  3. Public finances and grow-friendly expenditure in EU, [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/01\\_public\\_finances\\_growth\\_friendly\\_expenditure.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/01_public_finances_growth_friendly_expenditure.pdf)

## Lithuania

### Score 7

The educational system in Lithuania is comprised of the following stages: 1) early childhood education and care (preprimary and preprimary class-based education); 2) compulsory education for children aged seven through 16 (including primary education, lower-secondary general education, vocational lower-secondary education); 3) upper-secondary and post-secondary education (for persons aged 17 to 19); and 4) higher education provided by universities (undergraduate, graduate and PhD studies) and colleges (undergraduate studies). Lithuania's high level of tertiary attainment has been gradually increasing further in recent years (51.3% in 2013; above the EU average). Its rate of early school leaving is also below the EU average, at just 6.3% in 2013. However, enrollment rates in vocational-education and training programs are low.

The reputation of vocational education and training in Lithuania must be improved, as only 28.4% of all secondary-education students are enrolled in this type of

training. Preprimary education attendance is also low, with only 78.3% of Lithuanian children aged four to six attending preprimary education programs, compared to the EU-27 average of 92.3%. Adult participation rates in lifelong learning programs are also comparatively low. Moreover, Lithuania needs to increase the quality of its education programs. In the 2009 and 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports, which evaluate student performance in the areas of reading, mathematics and science, Lithuania was ranked below the OECD average. Furthermore, the country must address mismatches between graduates' skills and labor-market needs, as the country's youth-unemployment rate of about 22% in 2013 was partly associated with young people's insufficient skills and lack of practical experience. The European Commission has recommended shifting the focus of education to better meet labor-market demands, along with policies that would help young people attain basic skills.

In terms of equitable access to education, the country shows an urban-rural divide and some disparities in educational achievements between girls and boys. However, there are no significant gaps in access to education for vulnerable groups (with the exception of the Roma population and, to a certain extent, the migrant population). Lithuania spent €0.73 billion on education in 2011 (compared to €0.78 billion in the pre-crisis year of 2008). Overall government spending on education thus fell somewhat during the financial crisis, with higher education given a higher priority at the outset of the crisis thanks to an ongoing higher-education reform. While enrollment rates for Lithuania are relatively high (it was ranked 21st among 140 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2015 – 2016 in terms of tertiary-education enrollment), the quality of education has been assessed as comparatively low (ranked 53rd of 140 countries in the same report). The total number of school graduates showed a continued decline in 2015 due to demographic changes. This has intensified pressure on the country's less popular higher-education institutions, as well as on the university funding system. Consequently, discussions on reducing the overall number of higher-education institutions, thus enabling resources to be focused on the country's top-ranking universities, have intensified.

Citation:

The Eurydice reports on Lithuania are available at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Overview>  
COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, country report Lithuania 2015:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015\\_lithuania\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015_lithuania_en.pdf).  
See the 2015-2016 Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum:  
[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/gcr/2015-2016/Global\\_Competitiveness\\_Report\\_2015-2016.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/gcr/2015-2016/Global_Competitiveness_Report_2015-2016.pdf)

## Poland

Score 7

The first Tusk government launched a number of education reforms that have gradually become effective, and have significantly increased the quality of education in the country. Although education expenditure in Poland is significantly lower than the average expenditure in the European Union more broadly, Polish students now

achieve relatively good results at schools. The main aim of the Tusk government's reforms was to reduce the system's lack of synchronization with the labor markets. Reforms have led to a greater emphasis in the curriculum on mathematics, science and technology; a strengthening of vocational education; attempts to attract more students to economically relevant areas; measures to improve the quality of research and teaching at universities; and the adoption of a national strategy for lifelong learning. While Prime Minister Kopacz expressed her commitment to the continuation of education reform and announced the strengthening of vocational education, no major reforms were passed under her leadership.

## Slovenia

### Score 7

Slovenia has moved relatively rapidly from the socialist curriculum tradition toward a more flexible organization of education. With a high share of the population aged 25 to 64 having completed at least upper secondary education as well as high ranks in international educational achievement tests, the education system fares relatively well by international comparison. The most pressing problems remain the small (but slowly growing) share of pupils enlisted in vocational education and in fields such as engineering, as well as a heavily underfunded tertiary-education system with high dropout rates and massive fictitious enrollment figures. However, the country's oldest and largest public university, the University of Ljubljana, is regularly ranked among the world's 500 best universities. Compared to previous governments, the Cerar government has devoted more attention to education policy. However, the passage of an announced act addressing higher education has been delayed.

#### Citation:

OECD better policy series. Education and skills (Slovenia policy brief), May 2015, <http://www.oecd.org/policy-briefs/slovenia-enhancing-skills-to-support-productivity-growth>.

UNESCO Education for All National Review Slovenia. 2015. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002316/231638e.pdf>

## United Kingdom

### Score 7

In education, the Conservative government will continue the marketization strategy pursued by the previous coalition and Labour governments. It will continue to liberalize school regulation to enable non-governmental organizations – such as foundations, businesses and parent-teacher corporations – to set up their own schools, while also strengthening government powers to intervene in “failing” schools. This policy approach of turning “failing” schools into sponsored academies will remain controversial. Additional performance measures will be introduced. The core of the government's education policy is to improve performance by boosting inter-school competition, as measured by performance tables administered by the regulator, Ofsted.

Programs such as Pupil Premium are designed to simultaneously improve educational outcomes and strengthen social cohesion by encouraging well-performing schools to accept disadvantaged children. However, the socioeconomic composition of many of the UK's schools still poses a significant challenge for students from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds. A Children's Commission on Poverty inquiry indicated that inter-school competition has increased financial costs for pupils and their families, as many schools try to stand out by introducing fancier uniforms, new textbooks or extravagant field trips. Education has been among the areas largely protected from public spending cuts.

England – as distinct from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – still has a pronounced divide between those who opt for private education and those who go through the state system. Furthermore, there are public concerns about the number of students leaving school without any qualifications as well as students from particular socioeconomic backgrounds under-performing. Exam results for late secondary school students have been improving, but there were concerns that marking standards had slipped. As a result, the previous education minister (since moved to a different cabinet post) pushed for tougher, more discriminating standards. Other debates concern the degree of local government control over schools. Central government has attempted to weaken local authority control through, for example, the creation of independent academies.

In the higher education sector, the substantial increase in tuition fees, from £3,300 to between £6,000 and £9,000 per year, has been contentious. However, so far, there has been no discernible effect on overall student enrolment rates or on access to higher education for students from poorer backgrounds.

Citation:

WEF ranks quality of UK education system as 27th in Global Competitiveness Report 2012/13 (CH 1st, GER 20th, USA 28th, F 41st).

## United States

### Score 7

The performance of primary and secondary education in the United States has long been disappointing. High-school graduation rates, although showing some improvement between 1996 and 2006, remain low, at about 70%, in an education system that largely lacks vocational alternatives to high school. High-school students' performance in science, math and reading is below that seen in most wealthy OECD countries. Yet the educational system is generously funded. Its shortcomings are the result of several factors, including the impact of unionization and collective bargaining on assessment practices and teacher performance; deficiencies in the home environments of many children in low-income, minority neighborhoods; severe inequalities in school quality between wealthy and low-income areas; and a lack of accountability for outcomes in a fragmented system.

Traditionally, elementary and secondary education were run by local school boards, state boards, and state education departments, with minimal intervention by the federal government. Proposed reforms often encounter intense opposition from teachers' unions. Some promising programs, such as vouchers and charter school, introduce more freedom and opportunity in the educational system, yet they do not reach most children.

Federal involvement has become more extensive and ambitious during the Obama administration. Under Obama, the federal Race to the Top Program has strongly promoted test-based national-performance expectations reflecting new standards called the Common Core. This imposition of federal standards is currently a focus of political controversy, with Republican presidential candidates generally denouncing it.

As college and university costs have increased, financial aid for low-income students has failed to keep up with tuition and living expenses. The effects of family economic status on students' prospects for entering and graduating from a postsecondary educational program have become severe, with students from the top income quintile now at least three times as likely to graduate as those from the lowest quintile.

## Australia

### Score 6

The quality of Australia's education system is variable, tending to be higher in non-government schools and in major metropolitan regions. Overall the high school completion rate is currently around 80%, with all state and territory governments currently having a target of a 90% completion rate by 2015. However, the low level of preschool spending continues to be a weak point: Australia spends only one-quarter of the OECD average on preschools and the country has been falling down the PISA rankings among countries in its region. Concerns about deterioration in educational standards and outcomes over time has provided an impetus for a strong policy focus since 2007 on early childhood, primary and secondary schooling. The most important development was a commitment to implement the recommendations of the "Review of Funding for Schooling" (a.k.a. "the Gonski Review," named after the chairman of the committee that wrote the report), the final report of which was released in December 2011. The Gonski Review made 41 recommendations on school funding in Australia. Implementation of the recommendations would entail a major injection of new funding with a strong emphasis on directing resources to where they are most needed. Five of the eight states and territories signed up to the new "Better Schools" funding agreement, but the long-term outlook for the agreement is poor, as the coalition government has not committed to continuing the agreements beyond their initial 4-year expiration.

With regard to equity, the continued high level of government subsidies to non-government schools means inequity in schooling outcomes continues to be high. The level of private funding in Australia is significantly higher than the OECD-average. Less affluent parents cannot afford to send their children to private schools, which creates inequality. In the higher education sector, the Higher Education Loan Program, (HELP, introduced in 1989) continues to be an important mechanism for equitably and sustainably funding higher education. The scheme has increased the extent to which students bear the cost of their education without diminishing access to higher education for students from poor families. In 2014, the Abbott government passed legislation in the lower house to cut higher education funding by 20%, deregulate fees charged by higher education and increase the rate of interest charged on HELP debts. This would have reduced higher-education participation and equity of access, but the legislation was blocked in the Senate, and Malcolm Turnbull's government is no longer proposing fee deregulation. However, the 2015 budget did contain measures that would require Australians living overseas to repay HELP debts on the same terms as those faced by Australian residents. This took effect on 1 January 2016, and will help ensure the sector's financial integrity.

Finally, with regard to efficiency, there is much room for improvement. Australia's educational system is complex, with shared responsibilities between the states and the Commonwealth, and with funding coming mainly from the Commonwealth, which contributes to inefficiencies. Federal funding for vocational education and training is very limited. State and territory governments are highly revenue-constrained, and as a consequence the sector is relatively poorly funded. There have been proposals to create a HELP scheme for vocational training, but to date no progress has been made. Questions have also been raised about the cost-effectiveness of the Better Schools program. The higher-education sector is generally efficient and universities have had to be quite entrepreneurial in order to prosper, aggressively marketing to international students and pursuing independent sources of research funds.

Citation:

David Gonski, 'Final Report of the Review of Funding for Schooling', December 2011: <http://www.betterschools.gov.au/review>

Moshe Justman and Chris Ryan, 'What's Wrong with the Gonski Report: Funding Reform and Student Achievement?', Policy Brief No. 2/13, Melbourne Institute, The University of Melbourne, April 2013: [http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/policy\\_briefs\\_series/pb2013n02.pdf](http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/policy_briefs_series/pb2013n02.pdf)

## Austria

### Score 6

The Austrian educational system does not perform to its potential. Considering Austria's economic position, the country should have a significantly higher number of university graduates. The reason for this underperformance is seen by research institutions and experts such as the OECD to lie with the early division of children into multiple educational tracks, which takes place after the fourth grade. The result

is that parents' social status is reflected in students' ability to access higher education, more so than in comparable countries. A citizens' initiative that called on parliament to correct this negative process of selection failed to produce significant reform, at least in the short term. This state of affairs violates the concept of social justice, and at the same time fails to exploit the national population's talents to the fullest.

The hesitancy to engage in reform results in part from the considerable veto power held by specific groups, including the teachers' union and the Austrian conservative party. Both appear to be first and foremost interested in defending the special status of high-schools and their teachers, and appear worried that this status will be lost if the two-tier organization of schools is changed.

Recent reforms of teachers' educational tracks aim at improving the first three years (BA) of teachers' training to meet higher standards. In the medium term, this will result in better-trained teachers for primary and secondary schools, the "Hauptschulen" in particular.

The Austrian dual system of vocational training, involving simultaneous on-the-job training and classroom education, receives better marks. This system is primarily aimed at individuals who want to take up work at the age of 15, but is accessible up to the age of 18.

Access to the Austrian university system has become significantly unequal in recent years, with children of parents holding tertiary education degrees and/or having higher incomes enjoying massively better odds of successfully graduating from university.

Citation:

For the effect of parents' education on childrens' educational odds see: <http://www.gerechtebildung.jetzt>

## Belgium

### Score 6

The OECD classifies Belgium's performance as "top" with regard to youth skills, but only as "average" with regard to other indicators (including inclusiveness, youth integration into the labor market, and the promotion of skills in workplaces). Improvements in the Belgian education system were mainly achieved before 2010, and its education system has largely stagnated since that time. Given that education is almost exclusively publicly financed in Belgium, the pressure to balance budgets currently exerted by the economic crisis is certainly an important factor. In addition, the organization of education generates some excessive structural costs due to the coexistence of a public network and a "free" (Catholic) network that is also publicly funded; this undermines cost-effectiveness and overall efficiency (as well as reform potential) within the education system. The education system also has evident difficulty in producing social mobility; according to the OECD, "the likelihood of a

student participating in tertiary education varies greatly depending on the level of education attained by his or her parents.”

The general affordability of education helps render access to education largely equitable. University fees remain very low (€35 per year in French speaking universities, €90 in Flemish universities) as compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries. De facto discriminatory factors include the very minimal or nonexistent study grants for poorer students, and the increasingly overcrowded classrooms. Although the universities perform quite well today, their increasingly tight budget constraints risk reducing the quality of education in the medium-term.

As reported by Vanden Bosch (2014), the European Commission has also pointed to the “lack of coherence between education and employment policies, given the specific needs of the migrant population.”

Citation:

OECD Skills Outlook: <http://www.oecd.org/education/oecd-skills-outlook-2015-9789264234178-en.htm>

OECD (2014). “Education at a glance 2014, OECD Indicators”

Vanden Bosch (2014). “The European Semester in Belgium: A state of play”, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, European Policy Brief No 32

## Croatia

### Score 6

Access to education is open and widespread, with almost 60% of each given cohort enrolled in tertiary education. However, upper-secondary education is selective, offering an academic university-prep track for the brightest students, and a system of underfunded vocational schools for the rest. Over three-quarters of upper-secondary-pupils attend such vocational schools in Croatia, compared to just over one-half of pupils in the EU as a whole. As in other former Yugoslavian countries, vocational education is very weak, and there is a high degree of mismatch between what is taught and the demands of employers. Thus, vocational education is not an assured route to a job. Overall access to education in Croatia lags behind the EU average. The expected length of education in Croatia is lower than the average in the EU by more than one year; similarly, only 70% of 18-year olds are still in education, compared to 80% in the EU as a whole. The quality of tertiary education varies significantly across institutions and even between departments within universities. Universities do not function as unified institutions with common policies, resources and objectives, and the academic culture is poorly developed. The share of the population aged 30-34 years who have successfully completed university education in Croatia is about eight percentage points below the EU as a whole.

The Milanović government has been involved in the development of a relatively comprehensive Strategy of Education, Science and Technology. Drafted by more than 100 people, from education-ministry officials to student activists and teachers,



the 180-page document was unveiled in September 2013. However, the government has been slow to endorse the strategy and to commence implementation. Instead, it mandated a new expert team with providing a proposal for a new curriculum.

## Czech Republic

### Score 6

Public expenditures on education have not recovered from the economic crisis and stagnate below the EU average. The weak growth of public sector wages has made it difficult to maintain the necessary number of teachers, especially in “problem” schools. The lack of resources has also contributed to the lack of preschool facilities, which despite some reforms initiated in 2014, has remained a major public issue. The main deficit of the Czech education system on international comparison is the relatively low proportion of the population with tertiary education. While the growing availability of private tertiary education has helped to improve the situation, the strong differences in the quality of these private programs have raised concerns. In September 2015, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports withdrew the accreditation of the pedagogy program of the private Jan Amos Komensky University, which meant that more than 700 MA students were unable to finish their studies at this university. A long-standing and unresolved equity issue has been the process of inclusion of children into special schools, mostly attended by children of Roma descent or from the lower classes. In order to reduce the social handicap of children from disadvantaged families, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports initiated a debate about making attendance of nursery schools compulsory in the last preschool year.

## Denmark

### Score 6

Denmark claims top levels in education spending, but not in achievement. Danish pupils have not scored well on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) problem-solving tests. In the PISA results from 2012, Denmark scored 500 in mathematics (OECD average: 494), 496 in reading (the OECD average) and 498 in science (OECD average: 501), yielding an overall score just around the OECD average. To address this situation a number of initiatives have recently been taken and there is an ongoing discussion on the need for additional measures.

The PISA results led to various efforts to improve Danish schools. As part of the government’s 2006 globalization strategy, reforms of the primary and lower secondary school system were announced.

Further reforms were approved in 2013 granting more discretionary power to the school principal to allocate teacher resources and putting pupils in school for more hours. As a consequence, Danish schools went through a month-long strike/lockout conflict in the spring of 2013. Eventually the government intervened and Parliament

passed a law that ended the conflict. It strengthened the powers of school principals. Since 2014, school days have become longer, there is more assisted learning, there are more lessons in Danish and math, and the teaching of foreign languages has been strengthened (English made compulsory from level 1, German and French from level 5). To strengthen the continued development of teachers' competencies the government has allocated one billion DKK from 2014 to 2020.

The government set the target that 95% of young Danes should complete a general or vocational upper secondary education program. According to the most recent forecasts, this goal is close to being reached (the prediction is 93% for the current cohort). However, it should be noted that the goal is formulated in terms of education level achieved 25 years after having left primary school, in which sense the target is not very ambitious.

One problem is the fact that immigrant students score markedly lower than Danish students, a problem particularly pronounced among boys. However, second-generation students do relatively better than first-generation students.

Vocational and university educations have also been on the political agenda. In February 2014, a broad political agreement was reached focusing on better and more attractive vocational education and training. Universities have been under pressure to shorten the length of study and channel students into educational programs oriented toward business.

:

Ministry of Education, Uddannelse - udvalgte nøgletal, 2008, at <http://pub.uvm.dk/2008/uddannelsestal/>

Ministry of Education, Improving the Public School - overview of reform of standards in the Danish public school," <http://eng.uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/English/PDF/140708%20Improving%20the%20Public%20School.pdf> (accessed 17 October 2014)

Ministry of Education, Improving Vocational Education and Training - overview of reform of the Danish vocational system. <http://eng.uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/English/PDF/140708%20Improving%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training.pdf>

OECD, "PISA 2009 key findings," <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa2009keyfindings.htm> (accessed 18 April 2013).

OECD, "PISA 2012 Results in Focus," <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf> (accessed 17 October 2014).

Udvalg for Kvalitet og Relevans i de Videregående Uddannelser, 2014, Høje mål - fremragende undervisning i de videregående uddannelser, København.

## France

### Score 6

The French education system can in many aspects be characterized as successful, but it fails to integrate the weakest segments of society. France is rated rather well in the most recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, even though the country was downgraded, dropping from tenth among 27 countries in 2000 to seventeenth among 33 countries in 2012. Nonetheless, French results

remained close to the OECD average throughout the period. Overall education spending totaled €32.1 billion in 2009, or 6.9% of GDP. Spending at the pre-school level is exemplary, with nearly all children three years old and older attending pre-school (écoles maternelles) and France is still above the OECD average at the primary schooling level. Secondary education is rather good but uneven, excessively costly and, in recent years, has fallen behind other OECD countries. Higher education is dual, with a broad range of excellent elite institutions (prestigious lycées and grandes écoles) and a large mass university system, which is poorly funded and poorly managed, and does not prepare its students well for a successful entry to the labor market. Spending on universities lies below the OECD average. More importantly, drop-out rates are dramatic: only 40% of registered students obtain a university degree.

One major problem concerns professional training. The education to professional training transition has been deficient. Organized by state schools, the system has lacked alternate training in cooperation with businesses, and diplomas are often not accepted by companies. This is a major reason for high youth unemployment in France. However, recently new joint training programs in cooperation with businesses have been established and have proven successful. As for universities, they are in principle accessible to all as fees are practically non-existent. However, the high rate of failure and the massification of teaching have contributed to the decline of the traditional university system. Nearly 40% of students choose, after high school, to register in alternative public or private institutions (grandes écoles, technical institutes, business schools).

Social inequality in access to education and qualifications is another sensitive problem. The issue has risen in importance in the school system over the last 9 years. According to the PISA study, socioeconomic factors are more important for success in French schools than in most other countries. Furthermore, there are persisting inequalities that effectively penalize students of working-class families at the university level, and flagrantly in accessing the elite schools (grandes écoles). Social, ethnic and territorial inequalities are often linked (as a result of a massive concentration of poor immigrant families in suburban zones).

University reform has been a permanent topic on the political agenda but has failed to address the major issues which plague French higher education.

## Iceland

### Score 6

Public expenditure on education increased prior to 2008, but has since been cut. In 2012, public expenditure on high schools, colleges and universities was significantly less as a proportion of GDP than in 2008 – 2009. Public sector pay for teachers has for many years been lower than private sector pay. As such, vacant primary and secondary school teacher positions remained unfilled and a large number of under-

qualified teachers found employment. However, the 2008 economic collapse has changed this. Salaries have decreased in the private sector and a tighter labor market has increased the proportion of qualified teachers.

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools. Since 2008, considerable cutbacks and rationalization measures have been introduced, including a shortening of the school year. Upper secondary schools and public universities are the responsibility of central government. Despite cuts to public expenditure on education, the number of upper secondary schools has increased, particularly outside the capital region. The government intends to shorten the duration of upper secondary matriculation from four years to three.

Iceland's universities have been seriously underfunded for a long time. There are seven universities: two private universities supported by state grants and five public universities, including two agricultural colleges. The previous government considered rationalizing the university sector either by reducing the number of universities or by encouraging more cooperation between universities. Discussions between the two private universities, concerning a possible merger, took place, but were later abandoned. The planned merger of one of the agricultural universities, Hvanneyri, with the University of Iceland was dropped following heavy protests from citizens and politicians in the west of Iceland. In 2015, a serious attempt was made to merge three universities, namely two public universities, Hvanneyri and Hólar University College and the private university, Bifröst University. At the time of writing, this merger looks uncertain.

The OECD, among other institutions, has long highlighted the relatively low proportion of the labor force of Iceland that left school with secondary or tertiary qualifications, a key factor in explaining Iceland's low productivity, long working hours and high rates of labor force participation.

Citation:  
OECD: Education at a Glance 2014, Paris.

## Ireland

### Score 6

The evidence indicates that the Irish education system is average or slightly above average by western European standards. The most-frequently voiced concerns relate to levels of mathematics skills and lack of proficiency in foreign languages, as well as an overemphasis on the Irish language.

Some employers claim that the output of suitably qualified and skilled graduates from the second and third levels of the education system is inadequate, especially in the high-tech areas. Nonetheless, many firms that invest in Ireland list the quality of the education system and the skills of the labor force among the principal attractions for relocating here.

The fairness of the allocation of public resources for education is open to question. The resources allocated per pupil or student increase steadily the higher up the educational scale one goes, but access becomes more dependent on social class.

The two-tier structure of the secondary education system is controversial. A minority of pupils (about 10%) attend fee-paying schools where state support is augmented by the revenue from fees that can amount to €6,000 a year. These schools are socially exclusive and achieve higher academic results and higher progression rates to tertiary education than non-fee-paying schools. It is argued that the state should not subsidize institutions that perpetuate inequality in the education system. Most of these schools face excess demand for places, and have come under pressure to establish more transparent and equitable criteria for selection of pupils for entry.

Irish students at tertiary institutions are not charged fees for most undergraduate courses. However, the “student contribution” charged rose from €2,500 in 2014 to €3,000 in 2015.

Teachers’ and university lecturers’ salaries are relatively high in Ireland by international standards. However, class sizes tend to be large and the education system is somewhat biased toward lower-cost areas, such as liberal arts, law and business studies, and away from higher-cost areas, such as engineering and science.

## Israel

### Score 6

Israel’s education policy is adversely affected by political and cultural divides, making it hard to estimate the degree to which it provides equitable treatment. Funding allocation favors Jewish citizens. However, educational achievement in the partially state-funded Jewish-orthodox formal education (in mathematics, English, etc.) is considerably less advanced than in the general system. The 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results illustrate these systematic failures. Despite a constant overall rise in Israel’s ranking in recent years, the variation in its results was 40% higher than in other OECD countries. An OECD working report concluded that this “broadly suggests that Israel’s poor overall performance in PISA is largely linked to issues in the education system itself and not due to other drivers of educational attainment.” Orthodox boys were not tested in the program, as they do not study relevant material. Arab-Israeli students that were tested fared worse than Jewish Israelis.

Even after accounting for specific problems with the Arab and the Jewish orthodox communities, Israeli students’ marks have deteriorated compared to previous generations; Israel showed high levels of attainment in the past, and the value of education is well established in the community as a whole. Surveys shows that “42% of 25- to 34-year-olds have either tertiary type A or B qualifications compared with

an OECD average of 34%.” However, a Taub Center research paper suggests that Israeli education system is ill prepared for the world’s increasingly competitive and dynamic working environment.

Israeli education spending as a share of GDP is relatively high in comparison to other OECD countries. However, the education system has various allocation problems, and in the last decade has been going through consecutive reforms aiming to improve the quality of education and raise teachers’ salaries. While diverting some higher education funds to colleges and minority outreach programs helped to increase equity in the system, budget cuts in university programs have had a negative effect on the quality of education and on future opportunities for researchers and staff.

:  
Ben-David, Dan, “The state of Israeli education and its repercussions,” Taub Center, 2011: <http://taubcenter.org.il/he/%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%91-%D7%94%D7%97%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%9A-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C-%D7%95%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%95/> (Hebrew).

Hemmings, P. “Israeli education policy: How to move ahead in reform,” OECD Economics Department working papers No. 781., 2010, (English).

Levi, A., “Description and Analysis of the Budget for Higher Education in Recent Years”, Kneset research center, Jerusalem, 20.10. 2013:  
<https://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m03271.pdf> (Hebrew).

Ziri, Danielle, “PISA test results: Israeli pupils’ scores remain behind those of OECD countries”, Jerusalem Post, 12.03.2013: <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/PISA-test-results-Israeli-pupils-scores-remain-behind-those-of-OECD-countries-333863>(English).

Taub Center, “A picture of the nation: Israel society and economy in figures,” Taub Center publication, Jerusalem, 2015: [http://taubcenter.org.il/wp-content/files\\_mf/pictureofthenation2015hebrew.pdf](http://taubcenter.org.il/wp-content/files_mf/pictureofthenation2015hebrew.pdf) (Hebrew).

Taub Center, “Choosing to know: education,” Taub Center publication, Feb. 2015:  
[http://taubcenter.org.il/wp-content/files\\_mf/educationpolicybrieftaubcenter2015hebrew.pdf](http://taubcenter.org.il/wp-content/files_mf/educationpolicybrieftaubcenter2015hebrew.pdf) (Hebrew).

OECD “PISA results 2012 in focus,” OECD publication, 2012, (English).

RAMA, “Primary results from the international study - PISA 2012,” RAMA - the national authority of assessment of education, 3.12.2013, (Hebrew).

OECD, “Recent developments and progress in labor market and social policy in Israel,” OECD, 21.5.2013:  
[http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/review-of-recent-developments-and-progress-in-labour-market-and-social-policy-in-israel\\_9789264200401-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/review-of-recent-developments-and-progress-in-labour-market-and-social-policy-in-israel_9789264200401-en) (English).

Bank of Israel, “The connection between quality of education and growth: Israel compared to the world,” Bank of Israel, 3.6.2015:  
<http://www.boi.org.il/he/NewsAndPublications/PressReleases/Pages/03-06-2015-ResearchEducationQ.aspx> (Hebrew).

## Japan

### Score 6

Education has always been considered one of Japan’s particular strengths. Nonetheless, the Japanese education system faces a number of challenges. One of these is to deliver adequate quality and, particularly under the new LDP-led coalition, renewed emphasis has been placed on reaching the top international tier as

well as improving the use of English. In 2014 – 2015, this included the introduction of special subsidies for a number of so-called super global universities and high schools. Measures intended to streamline the structure of schooling and exams have been implemented, though it remains too early to evaluate results. While the number of students going abroad for study has been declining for a number of years, this trend seems to have halted recently.

In mid-2015, a Ministry of Education (Monbukagakusho) order caused a commotion within the education sector, as it seemed to ask national universities to scrap departments and courses addressing humanities and the social sciences. However, the terminology was ambiguous, and possibly intentionally so. There are concerns that the government's focus on "practical" education is too strong, and that its respect for academic independence is too weak.

Another issue is the problem of growing income inequality at a time of economic stagnation. Many citizens, considering the quality of the public school system to be lacking, send their children to expensive cram schools; given economic hardship, poor households may have to give up educational opportunities, future income and social status.

In terms of efficiency, the ubiquity of private cram schools is evidence that the ordinary education system is failing to deliver desired results given the funds used. The general willingness to spend money for educational purposes reduces the pressure to economize and seek efficiencies.

Citation:

Fumio Isoda, Major Makeover for the University Entrance System, Nippon.com Op-ed, 18 March 2015, <http://www.nippon.com/en/currents/d00166/>

## Netherlands

### Score 6

In terms of quality, the average education attainment level for the population is rising, exceeding in 2009 the OECD average. School dropout rates have been on the decline for years (15.5% in 2000, 12% in 2007), and the number of those entering the labor market with an education certification ("basiskwalificatie," or "basic qualification") has been on the rise (71.9% in 2000, 76.2% in 2007). The student/teacher ratio is somewhat lower than the OECD average for primary education, but considerably higher for secondary education. A growing number of understaffed secondary education institutions are struggling with overworked educators and dwindling financial resources. Similar to UK schools, Dutch schools are afforded a high degree of autonomy. However, a recent trend toward school mergers and reorganized school-governance systems has eroded the autonomy of individual schools. Nationwide performance testing across all school levels and instituted by the School Inspectorate has compelled many schools to introduce standardization methods. Most recently, proposals to introduce a basic math-skills test within secondary education, as well as in primary- and secondary-level teacher-

training programs, proved controversial. The international PISA test's comparative school-performance scores (corrected for economic, social and cultural background) rank the Netherlands just above the OECD average. For a country that determines future educational tracks at age 12 and allocates 60% of its children to the lower-categorized school types, it is not surprising that differences in performance arise from differences between (not within) schools (which are far above OECD averages). School performance in the Netherlands has not declined, but there is also no internationally measured progress. The Ministry of Education follows a policy in which individual schools publish their pupils' performance (as measured by the School Inspectorate), enabling parents to choose the best or most appropriate school for their children on the basis of comparative performance data. Quality-improvement policies – including CITO testing, performance monitoring, efforts to intensify and improve teacher professionalization programs, better transition trajectories between school types, and quality-management systems at school level – do not yet appear to be effective.

The Netherlands continues to struggle with achieving equity in educational access. Although the school performance of pupils of non-Dutch origin has improved over time (in part due to a rise in non-native adults' educational achievements), these children on average do far less well in science, reading and math than their Dutch-origin peers. Moreover, the gap in this regard is considerably larger than the average within OECD countries. For all pupils, socioeconomic/cultural background determines school performance to a degree above OECD averages; this is particularly true for secondary education, (i.e., after pupils have been tracked at age 12). At the tertiary level, the system of equal access through study grants has been abolished, and every student now pays for university education through low-interest loans. Calculations suggest this will result in an average lifetime income loss of -0.2% for tertiary-level students. The deterrent effect of the new study-loan system will be more substantial among lower-income and ethnically non-Dutch families. All in all, equity in educational access for ethnic groups has not been achieved, and is diminishing at the university level.

The Dutch school system is relatively efficient in terms of resource allocation. Expenditure for education is below average for OECD countries, but the rise since 1996 (in costs per pupil and in average salaries for teachers) is above the OECD average. Average education level and school performance are supposed to have a positive influence on a country's competitiveness. Relatively high levels of education attainment and school performance in the Netherlands should theoretically have a positive impact on the country's competitiveness. And although the Netherlands remains competitive in certain areas, the country's track-based school system makes it difficult for the education system to adapt quickly to changing labor market needs. As a result, the Netherlands faces a skilled technical labor shortage. The Educational Council, the government's major advisory body for educational policies, urged the government in a 2014 report to focus attention on structural problems in the educational system such as student transitions between school types



and levels. It also urged the government to develop a “curriculum for the future” that would ensure the working population was able to develop skills appropriate to future labor-market needs

Citation:

J. Scheerens et al., n.d., Visies op onderwijskwaliteit. Met illustratieve gegevens over de kwaliteit van het Nederlands primair en secundair onderwijs ([www.nwo.nl/binaries/contents/documents/nwo/algemeen/documentation](http://www.nwo.nl/binaries/contents/documents/nwo/algemeen/documentation))

OECD, Education at a Glance, 2011 ([www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/48631582.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/48631582.pdf))

Ministerie van OCW, Onderwijs in Cijfers, 2015 ([onderwijsincijfers.nl](http://onderwijsincijfers.nl))

Onderwijsraad, 2014. Onderwijspolitiek na de commissie-Dijsselbloem.

“Leren we het goede?”, in NRC-Handelsblad 19 September 2015

CPB Notitie, 11 November 2014. Aflossing en inkomenseffecten studievoorschot ([pcb.nl](http://pcb.nl))

## Norway

### Score 6

Norway has a tradition of very high education attainment. The Norwegian labor force is one of the most educated in the world, as measured by the share of its working population that has completed secondary or tertiary education. Like other Scandinavian countries, the Norwegian government spends a comparatively significant share of its budget on public education. The emphasis of the primarily public school system is on free access and ensuring equal opportunities. Students with difficulties in learning or socialization receive a high level of attention. In contrast, there is little emphasis on excellence or on providing specific attention to the most gifted pupils, although plans to remedy this are being made.

In spite of the high levels of educational attainment, there are shortcomings evident within the system. The share of degrees granted in scientific disciplines is low by international standards, which limits the impact of public investment in education on the country’s competitiveness and capacity for innovation. It is also worrying that a significant share of youth who start a course of education drop out before completing their degree programs.

Another source of major concern is the quality of education in certain subject areas. In the OECD’s PISA study, Norwegian students’ performance was below the OECD average in mathematical, problem-solving and scientific knowledge. In order to improve these performances, the country’s teaching establishment may need to put more emphasis on providing with students incentives to achieve, improving teaching quality, and instilling a culture of excellence.

## Sweden

**Score 6** Education policy continues to be extensively debated in Sweden. Critics point to how Sweden is slipping in most international comparisons in terms of student knowledge and analytical skills. Sweden now ranks 32nd on PISA scores (11th when students' socioeconomic background is considered), an alarmingly low ranking for a country relying on knowledge-intensive sectors for its economic growth and competitiveness. Even more disconcerting, the trajectory of Sweden's PISA rankings suggests a consistent and steep decline in performance. Some studies attribute the decline to the decentralization of primary education in the late 1980s; others argue that the teaching profession suffers from low social status which discourages many from studying to be teachers; yet others suggest that poor performance could in part be attributed to the fact that many teachers lack formal qualifications to teach the subjects they are teaching. It is clear that Swedish schools no longer fully achieve high performance and quality.

Critics also point to the high level of youth unemployment, which suggests that the education system fails to provide skills and knowledge demanded by the contemporary labor market. A final criticism is that the skills required to enter into a teachers' education program at universities today are relatively low, hence there is very little competition to enter those programs. As a result, new teachers may have only a limited aptitude to teach successfully.

In its defense, the previous non-socialist government argued that it was extremely active in reforming education at all levels. The former government as well as the current red-green government have shown strong financial commitments to education. To improve the "fit" between education and the labor market, the current government announced to open alternative education programs that provide an avenue of learning other than to prepare for university studies. There are also plans, as mentioned earlier, to develop apprenticeship programs, which have proven successful in other countries like Germany. Finally, the previous government was committed to strengthening the competence and professionalization of teachers by, for example, reforming the university programs and introducing certification for teachers. The newly elected government intends to raise teachers' salaries and also to increase the number of the staff present in schools. However, due to the current stalemate in parliament, it remains to be seen if the red-green government will be successful in reaching these ambitious goals.

A key means of assessing Sweden's education policy involves looking at the extent to which the education system successfully provides a skilled labor force. High youth unemployment could be seen as an indicator of failure in this respect but could also be explained by the performance and the specific demand of the economy. Some education policy experts support a two-tier model where apprenticeships facilitate a smooth transition from work-related secondary education programs into employment

in industry, and where students who seek to continue their education arrive at universities well-prepared. This model has not been entirely successful elsewhere, but that may be attributable to economic factors or labor market rigidities. Also, as mentioned earlier, the PISA results substantiate the problems in Sweden's primary education to deliver good quality.

Concerning graduate output of secondary and tertiary education, Sweden's performance in this respect could be seen as good but not great. Sweden is not as high in the rankings as its need for skilled and well-trained students to enter the research sector would require.

A third and final way to assess Sweden's education policy concerns equitable access to education. Education policy has performed rather well in this respect. Coming back to a previous point, if anything, the system is "too equitable" in that requirements to enter some programs in university are so low that basically anyone who applies is admitted, resulting in a "race to the bottom" in tertiary education standards.

## Italy

### Score 5

The Italian education system is a predominantly public system headed at the state level by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR). Although the MIUR has authority over programming, and hiring and funding, regional and municipal school authorities have some power with respect to curricula, physical infrastructure and resource management. Private education in Italy is limited and consists primarily of religious schools. Italy also has a handful of private universities with a prestigious reputation (e.g. Bocconi, LUISS, Cattolica). The education system is, in principle, open to everybody without discrimination. Tuition fees are excised only at the tertiary level and are limited. However, given the scarce amount of resources allocated for scholarships or similar support mechanisms for financially needy students, access is seriously limited at the upper secondary and tertiary levels. As might be expected, the share of individuals who do not complete their studies is above OECD averages.

Per student spending at all levels of education is close to the OECD average, but due to the smaller percentage of students, the global expenditure as a share of GDP is significantly lower than the OECD average. Moreover, the level of expenditure has been almost flat for the past 10 years. When education expenditure is measured as a percentage of total public expenditure, Italy shows one of the lowest rates among OECD countries.

In terms of tertiary education spending, Italy lags behind even more significantly. The share of education expenditure allocated to the salaries of teachers, professors and technical staff – the number of which is often unnecessarily high – compared to

the share for capital expenditures, is above average. Selection of school and university personnel is still not sufficiently meritocratic. Although there are significant areas of high-quality education at both the secondary and tertiary levels, the system as a whole does not yet ensure satisfactory standards of quality.

During the period under review, there has been no major change in the allocation of resources. Some limited changes have been made to the so-called Good School program (“La buona scuola”). These include reforms to teacher recruitment procedures, the authority and accountability of secondary school principals, and the transition of many teachers from fixed-term to unlimited employment contracts.

The allocation of public resources to universities has increasingly incorporated a quota, which links academic results to government funding. These developments should have significant effects in stimulating a more competitive and quality-oriented university system.

## Latvia

### Score 5

Latvia has a well-educated population. Currently, 96% of young people of the relevant age are enrolled in secondary education, while 57% are enrolled in tertiary education. However, the quality of secondary schools varies substantially. Due to low salaries, the average age of staff at lower-quality secondary schools tends to be older than in comparison to the average age of staff during Latvia’s Soviet period. As a result, secondary education fails to prepare students sufficiently for university. Furthermore, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study (2012) places Latvia slightly below the OECD average for secondary-level education results.

Public expenditure on tertiary-level education is low overall and is spread over a large number of institutions. With a population of just two million, Latvia has 58 accredited higher-education institutions, including both the public and private sectors. The country is striving to reach the EU 2020 educational target of 40% of 30- to 34-year-olds holding university-level qualifications. In 2013, this ratio was 39.9%, up from 26% in 2009. However, Latvian researchers are conspicuously absent from the Social Science Citation Index (with just 112 SSCI articles in the 1990 – 2008 period). The IMF has observed that the combination of a disproportionately high number of institutions, limited financing and falling student numbers has generated unsustainable strains on the system. The government has expressed its intent to reform the higher-education financing model. However, the only major changes approved to date have been in the accreditation system, in September 2012. Reform attempts undertaken between 2011 and 2013 saw proposals for change to the education-financing system and to the language of instruction. However, proposed reforms have been met with substantial resistance from educational institutions themselves, leaving doubt as to the government’s ability to implement these changes. The physical and communication infrastructures of 29

institutions were modernized between 2011 and 2013, supported by public funds in the amount of LVL 65.3 million. In 2014, the World Bank published a study that, among other things, analyzed financing models for higher education. However, the frequent change of ministers as well as a lack of political support for radical change means that it remains unclear when and to what extent these reforms will be introduced.

Vocational-education programs are perceived as being of low quality. Survey evidence presented by the 2012 Latvian Competitiveness Report shows that employers believe vocational-education institutions are failing to supply students with sufficient skills for their professions. The government launched a reform of vocational-education institutions in 2010, and in 2011 began providing additional funding and investment to particular vocational-education programs identified as future competence centers. While enrollment in vocational-education institutions had been steadily declining, it has now experienced an uptick. In 2014, 8,800 students completed secondary-level vocational education, an increase of 7.7% compared to 2013.

With respect to equity, free formal education through the end of the secondary level is accessible to everyone. While PISA survey data from 2000 and 2009 demonstrated positive changes indicating a decoupling of socioeconomic status and educational performance, 2012 data reconfirmed a negative link between these two variables. Tertiary education is state funded for a limited cohort of students, who access publicly funded university spots through a competitive process. Students who do not receive a publicly funded spot have the option of taking out a government-supported student loan to pay tuition costs.

At the primary- and secondary-education levels, there is a disproportionate division of resources between state and local governments. As a part of the structural reforms accompanying the government's austerity program between 2009 and 2010, Latvia changed the system by which public funding was provided to local governments for primary and secondary education. Funding allocations are now tied to pupil enrollment figures, which has resulted in a restructuring of the school system and a reduction in the number of schools. State funding is matched by local-government funding at an inconsistent rate, based on the local government's own funding situation. A persistent decline in pupil enrollments due to demographic change has created further financial pressure. The system promotes consolidation and efficiency. In 2014 the government embarked on a reform of the teachers' compensation system. This reform has met with stakeholder resistance, including strike threats, and remains stalled.

:

1. World Bank (2011), World Development Indicators: Education efficiency, Available at: <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.12>, Last assessed: 20.05.2013
2. Latvian Competitiveness Report (2011), Available at: [http://www.mk.gov.lv/files/latvian\\_competitiveness\\_report.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.lv/files/latvian_competitiveness_report.pdf), Last assessed: 20.05.2013.
3. IMF (2013), Republic of Latvia: Selected Issues, Country Report, Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr1329.pdf>, Last assessed: 20.05.2013

## Luxembourg

### Score 5

The country's education policy must deal with the challenges of a multilingual society and a high proportion of migrant students (about 50%). The education system is particularly marked by its insistence on early selection: after six years of primary school, students face a crucial junction and must choose one of two academic tracks, general or technical. There is a marked division between Luxembourg nationals and migrant students, as generally migrants (especially the Portuguese minority) struggle with languages and are more often tracked to the technical level (*secondaire technique*), which affects their progress toward a university education. Recent studies have shown that migrants are four times less likely to transfer to the higher-level, university-oriented school track (*enseignement secondaire*) than are Luxembourgish nationals. To avoid this, often more affluent migrants will send their children to a reputable international school. This leads to yet another division between higher-income and lower-income migrants.

According to OECD data (*Education at a Glance 2014*), Luxembourg has the OECD's highest level of expenditure per student by educational institutions (more than \$23,000 at the primary level and more than \$16,000 at the secondary level), and the smallest average class size (16 students). In addition, between 2008 and 2012, average salaries for primary-education teachers increased dramatically, by 40.8%. This is mostly due to the fact that the 2009 law reforming basic education introduced an increase in teachers' salaries. In 2009, the government introduced primary-school reforms, including a new competence-based curriculum, performance monitoring and a tutorial system. Secondary-school teachers were required to teach 15% more hours in 2012 as compared to 2005.

However, in the PISA 2012 study, Luxembourg showed the largest gender differences of any country measured. Boys outperformed girls in mathematics (by 25 points) and in natural science (15 points), while girls obtained better results in reading. In mathematics specifically, Luxembourg showed the most pronounced differences between boys and girls among the OECD countries. In Luxembourg some students repeat one or more years of school, leaving school with an average of two years delay. A total of 61% of EST students (*Enseignement Secondaire Technique*) had to retake at least one school year in 2013 – 2014. The excessive length of studies and the delayed onset of working life are certainly problems that must be urgently addressed. Furthermore, only 20% of young adults complete type A tertiary education degrees before their 30th birthday.

However, students on average are achieving better educational qualifications than in former periods. From 2010 to 2014, the proportion of students going on to tertiary education has increased. The share of people with upper-secondary education (2013: 38.6%) declined to 35.5% in 2014, while the share of those with tertiary education rose to 39.6%. Furthermore, the share of early school or training-program leavers fell during the period under review, leaving Luxembourg in seventh place on this

measure within the EU-28. This share fell 6.1% in 2014 (2012: 8.1%). Reforms introduced in recent years on this issue (Second Chance School and new social-assistance programs) are having a strongly positive effect, significantly reducing early school leaving and improving social cohesion.

The Ministry of Education's first educational report (2015) calls for better transitions between different school types, more education at the preschool and kindergarten levels, additional measures in the form of multidisciplinary teams and strategies for the "No Child Left Behind Act" aimed at realizing students' educational potentials and promoting inclusive schooling.

A government action plan (Plan d'Encadrement Périscolaire) released during the period under review set new educational goals, mainly through a close collaboration between school and after-school care facilities, including sharing of premises, staff and equipment.

Plans for secondary-school reforms were launched after primary-school reforms, focusing on improving student's skill bases (socles de compétences) along with more balanced language expectations. Following a year of intensive negotiation and internal debate, the draft bill was introduced to parliament in 2013. Ongoing negotiations with the unions have produced some satisfactory agreement.

The government is engaged on 85 reform projects as a whole. Key items here include a new Luxembourg Center for Educational Testing (LUCET) linked to teacher-training institutes, increases in school autonomy in association with individual institutional development plans, two new institutes for treating learning disabilities and behavior problems, a new center for political education, improvements in connections between kindergarten and primary school, efforts to ease inter-school and post-school transitions, policies making schools and teaching more flexible, an initiative promoting native-language instruction, and the creation of a (free) International School. Despite resistance and lengthy negotiations, there is a strong governmental will for change.

Citation:

[http://www.forum.lu/pdf/artikel/7380\\_316\\_UNEL.pdf](http://www.forum.lu/pdf/artikel/7380_316_UNEL.pdf)  
[http://www.cc.lu/uploads/tx\\_userccpublications/A\\_T\\_16\\_Oct\\_2014.pdf](http://www.cc.lu/uploads/tx_userccpublications/A_T_16_Oct_2014.pdf)  
<http://www.lessentiel.lu/fr/news/luxembourg/story/12031031>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/communiqués-conference-presse/2013/12/03-pisa/index.html>  
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00186&plugin=1>  
<http://www.gouvernement.lu/5069738/16-meisch-maintienscolaire?context=3422896>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/communiqués-conference-presse/2014/10/16-besser-zukunftschancen/index.html>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/systeme-educatif/statistiques-analyses/couts-et-financements/couts-12/couts-fin-12.pdf>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/systeme-educatif/dossiers-presse/2013-2014/131203-pisa.pdf>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/secondaire/etudes-internationales/pisa-2012/2012-de.pdf>  
<http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=LUX&treshold=10&topic=PI>  
[http://www.oecd.org/edu/EAG%202012\\_e-book\\_EN\\_200912.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/EAG%202012_e-book_EN_200912.pdf)  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/EAG-Interim-report.pdf>  
<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/luxembourg/>  
<http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/9810131ec011.pdf?expires=1422976094&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=5D5D1962E8CE11EE6EF9594E24240468>

<http://www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/publications/thematique/conditions-sociales/enseignement-en-chiffres/enseignement-en-chiffres.pdf>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/systeme-educatif/statistiques-analyses/bildungsbericht/2015/band-1.pdf>  
[http://www.legilux.public.lu/ldp/2013/20130081\\_I.pdf](http://www.legilux.public.lu/ldp/2013/20130081_I.pdf)  
<http://www.wort.lu/fr/luxembourg/detrochage-scolaire-au-luxembourg-chaque-mois-140-eleves-desertent-l-ecole-53749d49b9b398870802620c>  
<http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/systeme-educatif/statistiques-analyses/bildungsbericht/2015/band-2.pdf>  
<http://zukunft.men.lu/content/location/248>  
[www.zukunft.men.lu](http://www.zukunft.men.lu)  
<http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/themes-transversaux/statistiques-analyses/bildungsbericht/2015/band-1.pdf>

## Malta

### Score 5

The Maltese Islands are characterized by a lack of natural resources. Consequently, economic growth is intrinsically linked to human resources. Therefore, the ability to attract business investment and sustain employment levels depends very much on the skill, quality and education levels of the workforce. The effects of Malta's education policy on the creation of a skilled workforce are mixed, however.

Since 2013, the government has implemented a number of programs, some with fiscal support, to encourage more students to pursue further education. These programs include free support for students at risk of failing their exams or who have failed admission to higher-education institutions, and the extension of services and facilities for the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). MCAST has recently undergone a restructuring process, which has introduced three sub-colleges (the Foundation College, the Technical College and the University College) to better address the learning challenges at different educational levels.

A less rigid system of testing allowing for greater self-expression by students was introduced, extra summer classes were provided for those wishing to retake ordinary-level exams, and a new type of alternative-learning program was introduced for students unable to complete the ordinary-level exams. A pilot project aimed at providing school children with tablet computers was also introduced. Moreover, teachers now have the possibility of benefiting from a paid sabbatical to further their professional development. New schools are being built and others modernized.

Nonetheless, Malta has the third lowest tertiary education attainment level in the EU. In 2014, 26.6% of people in Malta had attained a tertiary level of education compared to an EU28 average of 37.9%. In 2014, the Trend in International Mathematics and Science Study ranked Malta 40 out of 50 countries, while the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study ranked Malta 35 out of 45 countries. Moreover, science education remains weak. At 20.4% in 2014, Malta has the second the highest rate of early school leavers in the EU.

The education system's limitations exist in spite of the system's high level of equitable access to education at all levels. A total of 80% of all schools are free,



while there are various measures available to support students. Secondary and tertiary students do not pay tuition fees and receive stipends to ensure that higher education remains open for all. There has also been an increase in the provision of free preschool state facilities for 3 year olds and over.

Citation:

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study for 2011, issued April 2013.

Claudia Vallejo and Melinda Dooly,(2008) Educational Policies that address Social Inequalities: Country Report Malta [www.epasi.eu/CountryReportMT.pdf](http://www.epasi.eu/CountryReportMT.pdf)

P IRLS Progress in International Reading Literacy Study Malta Report (2013) [https://www.education.gov.mt/mediacenter.ashx?file=MediaCenter/Docs/1\\_PIRLS\\_2011-Malta\\_report.pdf](https://www.education.gov.mt/mediacenter.ashx?file=MediaCenter/Docs/1_PIRLS_2011-Malta_report.pdf)

An Early School Leaving Strategy For Malta (2012) Office of the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education and Employment [https://www.education.gov.mt/mediacenter.ashx?file=MediaCenter/Docs/1\\_ESLS\\_for\\_Malta.pdf](https://www.education.gov.mt/mediacenter.ashx?file=MediaCenter/Docs/1_ESLS_for_Malta.pdf)

Ivan Martin, Times of Malta, Maltese students least likely to study science, 8/10/2014

Three Initiatives to help students announced as part of youth guarantee scheme. Times of Malta 23/04/14

Alternative learning programme a time bomb ready to explode. Independent 14/11/2014

MCAST launches new Logo and Corporate Identity that reflect developments in College for the benefit of its Students. Press Release 18/06/15

European Semester Thematic Fiche – Tertiary Education Attainment p.7

European Semester Thematic Fiche – Early Leavers from Education and Training p.7

Malta National Reform Programme 2015 p. 42

Times of Malta 21/02/14 Education system in crisis, minister admits

## Mexico

### Score 5

Mexico's education system is relatively weak despite significant public investment in the sector. Education spending in Mexico in 2012–2013 was not far short of 7% of GDP and has been on a sharp upward trend since the 1980s. Teachers' salaries have also been steadily rising. While Mexico's GDP is relatively low by OECD standards, this does not fully explain the weak outcomes. Indeed, in absolute terms Mexican educational spending is comparable to that of South Korea but Mexican students are performing much worse as shown by an international cross-sectional comparison. The problem, therefore, appears to be related to resource allocation rather than funding per se. Too much is spent on salaries in contrast to capital spending, and too much of the budget is spent in an unaccountable fashion. Aiming to mitigate the strong political influence of the teachers union on the Education Ministry, the government's recent reforms were aimed at facilitating a meritocracy in the teaching profession. However, in 2015, the government agreed to water down some of the most contentious reforms. It is significant that this announcement was made public a few days before the 2015 elections.

In 2013, Congress passed a significant education-reform bill. Its main aim was to weaken the powerful teachers' union – whose leader was arrested in 2013 and charged with embezzlement – and to create a meritocracy within the teaching profession. Nobody doubts that the union has been profoundly corrupt, but it will take many years before it is evident whether the recent reform has succeeded in improving the situation or not. Although the government has invested a lot of political capital in this reform, this will not in itself guarantee the reform's success, the teachers' union is one of the most powerful independent bodies in Mexico.

Until she was jailed on corruption charges, the teachers' union leader was considered politically untouchable, as she controlled many votes. It was quite common for the teachers union to collect salaries for non-existent teachers. One of the provisions of the new reform requires the national statistics institute to ascertain how many teachers are actually employed by the Mexican state. Another creates a national institute for education evaluation, which will take on the functions of an inspectorate – tasks for which the union was previously responsible. Private education is generally of much higher quality in Mexico. At every level, privately educated students typically outperform students enrolled in public schools. The private-education sector accounts for 1.4% of GDP in comparison to the state's 5.4%, much of this being spent at the secondary or university level.

## Spain

### Score 5

Despite the Spanish education system's outstanding improvement since the 1980s with regard to equity and efficiency, Spaniards largely regard educational outcomes within their country as mediocre. This perception is based in part on Spanish universities' poor international rankings (only 18 of the country's 70 made it into the 2015/2016 QS World University Rankings) as well as the country's unexceptional PISA test results. In fact, the country's education system was ranked the 26th most efficient out of 30 OECD countries. One of the reasons for the overall bad results, although effects differ strongly across regions, is that Spain has had to cope with a strongly increased influx of immigrants over the past 20 years. Other factors include a curriculum regarded as out of date, a rote system of learning, teaching quality requiring improvement, and the large number of students who repeat years. The level of government spending on education is also an important factor; in 2015, education spending totaled 5.6% of GDP, far below the OECD average of 6.3%.

This concern regarding the state of the education system has created the social and political momentum needed for reforms in recent years. However, budgetary austerity has meant that only a few relatively inexpensive regulatory measures targeting quality and efficiency in resources allocation have been implemented; moreover, these have come at the expense of fairness in access. Thus, during the 2011–2015 legislative term, the parliament passed a new law (L.O. 8/2013) to “improve the quality of education” (also known as the “Ley Wert,” in honor of the conservative education minister) by taking advantage of the absolute majority enjoyed by the Popular Party. No other party supported the reform. The initiative was ambitious in introducing competition within the system, but lacked a broad social consensus (from regions, parents and teachers). Moreover, it is not well funded, and focuses more on quality than on equality of opportunities. This latter category has been undermined since 2011 as a result of education spending cuts, an increase in fees, and a stiffening of conditions for obtaining funding and scholarships, all of which has served to exclude poor students from the system.

Therefore, the Spanish education system still suffers problems of quality and equity. Particular trouble points include access to preschool education and the socioeconomic class segmentation between students in public schools and those attending publicly funded private schools, normally affiliated with the Catholic Church. Efficiency could be improved upon as well. For example, early school leavers make up 22% of the youth population, and these individuals are not easily brought into training programs. Though these figures have shown some recent improvement, this set of problems makes it more difficult to create a skilled labor force.

Citation:

William Chislett. 2016. *A New Course for Spain: Beyond the Crisis*. Madrid: Elcano Institute  
Spain's Pisa results (2012) [www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA-2012-results-spain.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA-2012-results-spain.pdf)  
Caos en la implantación de la Ley Wert  
[www.elmundo.es/espana/2015/07/16/55a6b0b9268e3ea32a8b45b1.html](http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2015/07/16/55a6b0b9268e3ea32a8b45b1.html)

## Turkey

### Score 5

In 2012, compulsory education in Turkey was extended from eight to 12 years, starting from the 2012-2013 academic year. A new approach to schooling consisting of eight years of primary school (4+4) and four years of secondary school was introduced. A child can now expect to receive 14 years of overall schooling, including two years of pre-school.

Over the years Turkey has made significant progress in increasing access to schools. In the 2013 – 2014 school year, it achieved almost universal primary school enrollment. Secondary-school enrollment was 76.7% during the same year. The government is actively seeking to expand secondary school enrollment to comply with the new “4+4+4” law on education. The gender-based enrollment gap has nearly disappeared for primary education, and has narrowed significantly for secondary education. However, Turkey is ranked 105th out of 142 countries in terms of educational attainment in the Gender Gap 2014 Report. The report indicates that 92% of females and 98% of males are literate; the enrollment rate in primary education is 93% for females and 95% for males; the enrollment rate in secondary education is 80% for females and 84% for males; and the enrollment rate in tertiary education is 64% for females and 75% for males. On the other hand, pre-primary-education participation rates among three- to five-year olds are increasing rapidly, as are higher-education enrollment rates, but both remain well below the OECD average.

Regarding the quality of education, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores Turkey's performance still relatively low. Although Turkey's scores have improved significantly over time, and inequality in student performance has declined. The performance of Turkey's average 15-year-old in

reading, mathematics, and science is 35 points behind the OECD average. Furthermore, Turkey has a higher-than-average proportion of underperforming students, and academic achievement is particularly low among disadvantaged students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, around 22% of Turkish 15-year-olds do not read well enough to be able to analyze and understand what they read.

As the government seeks to improve the quality of education, education spending has become the largest item in the national budget. Expenditure in this area now accounts for nearly a quarter of tax revenues. The proportion of GDP allocated to education from the government budget has increased significantly, from 2.5% in 2000 to 4.2% during 2011.

National examinations select and place students within secondary and tertiary institutions. Parents, particularly those who are educated and have relatively high incomes, often seek tutoring services to prepare their children for the national examinations, thus improving their chances of entering top schools and universities. However, Turkey adopted legislation to close private preparatory schools for university entrance exams by 1 September 2015 – a step that was widely seen as related to internal quarrels within the government.

The government seeks to align its tertiary-education standards with those in the EU. Currently, Turkey has 176 universities, but significant quality differences persist. There is no independent and fully functional quality-assurance and accreditation agency. Participation in the Youth in Action program has continued to grow. In May 2014, Turkey became a full participant in the Erasmus+ program. In May 2014, the Higher Education Council (YÖK), Turkey's supreme decision making body for universities and higher education, published a road map for enhancing higher-education system quality. Despite announcements on the issue, the government has thus far refrained from strengthening universities' autonomy.

According to the OECD (2014), Turkey has one of the highest earnings premiums among OECD countries. In 2012, adults with a tertiary education earned 91% more on average than an adult with an upper secondary education, compared with the OECD average of 59%. An adult with an upper secondary education also earned 37% more than an adult with a below upper secondary education, compared with the OECD average difference of 22%. Furthermore, the 2014 OECD study notes that tertiary attainment levels continue to increase particularly among young adults; a high proportion of females graduate from computing, sciences, engineering and mathematics academic (tertiary-type A) programs; investment in education is below average of OECD countries; and teachers in Turkey earn low salaries by international standards but are relatively well paid within Turkey.

Citation:

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014) Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, Paris: OECD

World Bank (2014) Turkey's Transitions: Integration, Inclusion, Institutions, Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

World Bank (2015) World Bank Group - Turkey Partnership: Country Program Snapshot, Washington D.C.: The World Bank (April).

World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2013, <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gapreport-2013> (accessed 5 November 2014)

## Bulgaria

### Score 4

The Bulgarian education system is dominated by government-owned institutions at all levels. Public spending on education as a proportion of GDP is comparable to that of other East-Central European countries. The quality of education in Bulgaria falls considerably short of the needs of a modern competitive economy, as can be seen by the country's comparatively poor PISA results. Available labor-market data indicate that there are serious skill mismatches, with secondary and tertiary schools producing a surplus of people specialized in areas where labor demand is low, and severe deficits of people specialized in areas where demand is high. According to the QS World University Ranking, only one Bulgarian university, Sofia University, ranks among the world's top 300 universities.

The level of equity in the Bulgarian education system is average to low. There are two main reasons for this. Many children in upper-income families are able to attend private schools, which seem to perform better than public schools. According to a recent ranking of 1,000 Bulgarian middle schools, only 14 of the top-50 schools are regular public schools. In addition, the school drop-out rate among minorities, especially Roma, is significantly higher than the average, meaning that schools do not provide the same opportunities for all ethnic groups. Geographic variance in the quality of the education provided by secondary and tertiary schools is very large, with schools in smaller towns and villages and in less populated areas unable to attract high-quality teaching staff.

Citation:

Ilieva-Trichkova, P., & Boyadjieva, P. (2014). Dynamics of inequalities in access to higher education: Bulgaria in a comparative perspective. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 4(2), 97-117.

Middle-school ranking available here: <http://www.danybon.com/obrazovanie/klasacia-na-uchilistata-v-bg-nvo-7-class-2015/>

Trentini, C. (2014). Ethnic Patterns of Returns to Education in Bulgaria: Do Minorities Have An Incentive to Invest in Education? *Economics of Transition*, 22(1), 105-137.

## Chile

### Score 4

Chile's school and education attainment levels are very mixed, and are generally much lower than the OECD average. Pre-primary education coverage is still low, but rising. Primary and secondary education coverage is high, reaching nearly 100% of current age cohorts. Tertiary-education coverage is moderate but increasing, although the quality of universities and private-sector technical institutions varies

significantly. The government has not achieved its aim of closing the gap that exists between the private and public systems; this failure has led to strong public protests that have continued since 2010, peaking during 2011 and 2012.

The general ideological gap between the government and opposition regarding the role of education and the free market has made it more difficult to pass reforms. However, conflicts between teachers' boards and the corporations or enterprises offering private education services have also played a role. The current government's electoral manifesto promised reforms that would abolish profit-seeking in the educational sector. A series of legislative proposals on the issue have been submitted to Congress, but only minor changes have as yet been passed.

In sum, the government's educational reform aims at eliminating profit, selection and copayments within the private-education sphere, and is based on four fundamental principles:

- 1) Ensuring that institutions provide a strong education and protect families' financial security;
- 2) Creating a high-quality public-education system;
- 3) Providing for a modern, well-paid, highly skilled teaching profession; and
- 4) Creating a free (no-fee) higher-education system of high quality.

In line with these goals, the budget proposal submitted by President Michelle Bachelet to Congress on 1 October 2014 included a 27.5% increase in public investment. Public education received a funding increase of 10.2%, largely dedicated to nurseries, kindergartens, public-school infrastructure and training programs for teachers. The 2015 budget also contained an increase in scholarships for about 70% of Chile's university students. The 2016 budget foresees an increase in education spending of 7.5%.

Traditionally, high-quality education in Chile has been accessible only to those able to afford it. There is a huge financial divergence between private and public education, with per month spending per pupil in the public system averaging CLP 40,000, and private-schooling fees averaging about CLP 300,000. Chile traditionally had a broad public-education system, but as a result of the poor quality of the actual public schools, the number of students attending public institutions has today declined to approximately 40%. There is a great gap in the quality of education for less gifted students, as the system is strongly focused on preparing students for careers requiring higher education. There are consequently comparatively few options for applied, vocationally oriented training courses for students who cannot afford the university, do not obtain the necessary grades to enter university, or are simply skilled in fields that require solid technical training instead of an academic degree.

Furthermore, there is wide variance in standards between universities and even technical training centers, with insufficient quality-control standards. In general terms, Chile's education system – with the exception of a few top universities – fails

in the task of educating and training people to acquire the knowledge and skills required if the country is to make a quantum leap in development and growth. This hampers labor-productivity growth and undermines efforts to diminish poverty rates. This weak performance results from failures in past and current education policies, as well as the efforts of a strong teachers' lobby that has effectively opposed necessary reforms to school curriculums and school management structures, and has blocked attempts to link teacher pay to teaching productivity.

Citation:

<http://michellebachelet.cl/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Reforma-Educacional-14-21.pdf>

<http://www.dipres.gob.cl/595/w3-multipropertyvalues-14437-22369.html>

[http://www.dipres.gob.cl/595/articles-124267\\_doc\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.dipres.gob.cl/595/articles-124267_doc_pdf.pdf)

<http://reformaeducacional.gob.cl/documentos/>

## Greece

### Score 4

While the Greek state's expenditure on pre-primary education is one of the lowest among advanced economies, Greece performs better than Italy, Portugal and Spain as far as upper secondary education is concerned. With regards to tertiary education attainment, the country scores higher than Italy, Portugal and even Germany as well as most Eastern and Southeast European countries. One-fourth of the Greek adult population has a university-level degree. The rate of attrition after nine years of schooling is not as alarming as in other OECD countries. In short, Greeks on average have good access to education and remain in education.

Access to education is, however, not equitable as students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are usually more successful in passing entrance examinations. Moreover, Greeks spend more on education per capita than the EU average in order to receive private tutoring to help pass necessary pre-university exams and/or send their children to study at universities abroad. This reflects a cultural contradiction between seeing education as an entirely public sector activity (e.g., university students pay neither tuition fees nor textbook costs) and success being dependent on private tutoring.

In the 2012 PISA results, Greece receives middling to above-average rankings among the OECD. Greek secondary school pupils perform better than one would have expected, given the spending cuts in education.

The quality of education at Greek universities is very uneven. Some university departments have a long tradition of excellence, such as Athens Law School and most of the engineering departments of the National Technical University of Athens. The distribution of infrastructures is generally very uneven across university departments and most universities suffer from the fact that academic and

administrative staff are underpaid. In addition, frequent strikes and sit-ins organized by student groups associated with specific political parties makes for a tumultuous campus life. In 2013-2014, administrative employees went on strike in response to government measures placing certain categories of public employees “on reserve,” which further disrupted already unpredictable scheduling. From September to December of 2013, Greece’s largest universities, namely the University of Athens, the University of Thessaloniki and the National Technical University of Athens, essentially did not function at all, as striking employees barred access to most university buildings. The situation improved from mid-2014 onwards, when strikes and sit-ins were drastically reduced. This change probably resulted from the fact that left-wing political factions of students and administrative employees shifted their attention to the national political scene. The most vocal among them actively supported the radical left opposition political party Syriza, which in January 2015 replaced the center-right/center-left coalition government which had been governing since 2012.

Education in Greece was diverging from the country’s labor market trends even before the crisis. This tendency has been exacerbated throughout the crisis period, as the skills acquired by those in secondary and tertiary-level education learned do not match the types of jobs needed in the Greek economy. Notably, even before the crisis, youth unemployment in Greece exceeded 20% among those aged 18 to 24. In the wake of the crisis, this percentage increased dramatically. In 2013, youth unemployment was just above 60%, the highest in the European Union. This divergence between education, economic needs and employment patterns has been the largest problem faced by Greek education policy.

Meanwhile, left-wing student organizations and professors opposed all legislation passed to reform universities in 2012 and also in 2013 and 2014, when reforms were under implementation. Despite such resistance, most professors and students supported policy changes and by the end of 2014, most reforms were eventually implemented by most state universities, albeit often in a watered-down form.

Citation:

Information on the performance of Greece’s educational system is based on data provided on this SGI platform.

## Portugal

Score 4

The government of Prime Minister Passos Coelho, which took office in June 2011 and continued to hold power through the end assessment period (November 2015), abolished the “New Opportunities” lifelong-learning program that had been a flagship of the predecessor government. The New Opportunities centers were replaced in March 2013. The government also supported technical and professional education more strongly, expanding vocational courses across the educational sector in October 2015. Previously, it also expanded the use of national-level examinations for students. In addition, the government has sought to devolve education



responsibilities by increasing partnerships with private education providers, and in the summer of 2015, initiating a pilot project to decentralize education responsibilities to local governments in 15 municipalities.

However, there is little evidence that these measures have generated gains in terms of quality, access or efficiency. Indeed, some of the policy measures adopted have contributed to making the educational system less effective, at least in the short term, as evidenced by the considerable turbulence over teacher placements in the 2014/15 academic year. Several schools were unable to field a full teaching staff even a full month after the start of the school year. Moreover, one of the measures introduced – holding written exams for people seeking to enter the teaching profession – was deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in October 2015.

With regard to quality, the austerity measures and cuts have had an adverse impact on the already poor overall quality of education in Portugal, with schools and universities seeing their budgets slashed. Schools have lost teachers, with those leaving being selected not on the basis of merit, but rather on the basis of their contract terms. Universities have also seen a brain drain, with many professors going abroad, as a result of lower budgets and reductions in wages. Similarly, access has been affected both on the supply and demand sides. On the supply side, the cuts have sustained existing bottlenecks (e.g., for preschool places). The demand side has been constrained by the recession – a result of increasing unemployment and lower family incomes – as well as austerity, which has resulted in higher tuition fees and more limited financial aid for poorer students. While the number of university graduates has increased, Portugal remains far below the OECD average. Likewise, the high-school dropout rate is very high.

Post-bailout, the pattern of austerity and cuts in education has continued. In the 2015 budget, the Ministry of Education suffered the largest budget cuts of any ministry, with a spending decrease of 11% as compared to 2014 imposed on primary and secondary education.

In early 2015, the OECD called attention to the negative impact of successive budget cuts in the education sector, and advocated an increase in the education budget.

Citation:

Portaria n.º 341/2015 de 9 de outubro, available online at: <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/70497208>

Joana Capucho, “67 milhões de euros para 15 câmaras gerirem educação,” *Diário de Notícias*, 14/08/2015, available online at: <http://www.dn.pt/portugal/interior/67-milhoes-de-euros-para-15-camaras-gerirem-educacao-4729632.html>

## Romania

Score 4

Despite efforts in 2014 to reform the 2011 Law on National Education, pervasive problems persist in the education system. The quality and accessibility of education have become major political issues. Prime Minister Ponta and scores of other politicians have engaged in extensive plagiarism, university presidents have been

arrested for rigging entrance exams, and many politicians and former secret police (Securitate) agents are allowed to teach political science and security studies in universities outside of Bucharest. President Iohannis' insistence has forced the government to devise a three-year plan to modernize the system in the key areas of sanitation, resources and rural-urban disparities. A bill proposed by the Ministry of Education in June 2015 would mandate 12 years of compulsory education, create a legal statute to protect teachers and reorganize doctoral studies nation-wide. However, the adoption of these reforms has been hampered by the politicization of the education issue. Prime Minister Ponta slowed reforms by insisting on a thorough consultation with trade unions, parliament, teachers and students.

## Slovakia

### Score 4

The quality of education and training in Slovakia has suffered both from low levels of spending and a lack of structural reforms. Spending levels on education are among the European Union's lowest, and have fallen as a percentage of GDP since 2009. Because vocational education is underdeveloped and universities focus on non-technical education, Slovakia faces a shortage of skilled workers needed for its industry-oriented economy. A new act addressing vocational education and training went into effect in 2015 which is to foster the transition from a school-based supply-driven system of vocational education to a demand-driven system based on work-based learning, inter alia by introducing tax incentives for enterprises providing practical training in certified training facilities. Less progress has been made with the development of more career-oriented bachelor programs.

## Hungary

### Score 3

The third Orbán government has continued the strategy of full control of education parallel with the drastic budget cuts in this field. Municipalities have been deprived of their functions in primary and secondary education. In public education, the government has established the Klebelsberg Centre for the Maintenance of Institutions (Klebelsberg Intézményfenntartó Központ, KLIK) as a means of exercising political control of the school system. KLIK includes all schools throughout Hungary and is responsible for the entire scope of economic and professional management of all schools, including minor matters. As the employer of all teachers, KLIK has the authority to fire teachers deemed not sufficiently loyal to the regime. KLIK has also been charged with surveying and appointing all school directors. In late August 2015, 225 school directors were replaced, a move prompting parent-organized public demonstrations in protest of the lack of professional expertise among the new directors who are Fidesz-loyalists. Some schools must operate without gas and/or electricity at times because KLIK has failed to pay bills consistently.

The trend toward centralization has also continued in higher education. The second Orbán government's installation of powerful chancellors drastically reduced universities' autonomy. With the radical transformation of the university system, the government established a new University of Public Service (Nemzeti Közszerológati Egyetem, NKE) to educate loyal bureaucrats, military and police officers. In addition, the third Orbán government has introduced a series of legislative amendments that have weakened further universities' autonomy and strengthened the NKE's privileges. Whereas higher education overall has suffered massive cuts since 2010, huge sums of money has been transferred to NKE. As a rule, university courses are subject to monitoring by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (Magyar Akkreditációs Bizottság). However, NKE was removed from this stipulation in March 2015. The presence of NKE's main building in the former traditional military academy (Ludovika) is highly symbolic.

## Address | Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
Germany  
Phone +49 5241 81-0

**Dr. Daniel Schraad-Tischler**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81240  
daniel.schraad-tischler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

**Dr. Christian Kroll**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81471  
christian.kroll@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

**Dr. Christof Schiller**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81470  
christof.schiller@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

**Pia Paulini**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81468  
pia.paulini@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)  
[www.sgi-network.org](http://www.sgi-network.org)