



Education Report

Education Policy

Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2018

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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 achieving other targets.

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. Education in public institutions is free at all levels. 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. Recent policy measures strengthening links between education and training and the labor market (e.g., 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.

New Zealand

Score 9

According to the OECD's Education at a Glance 2016 Report, the performance across all levels of New Zealand's education sector compares well with those of other developed countries. PISA scores in New Zealand are higher than the OECD average, although the latest PISA report shows signs of some decline. There is growing evidence that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are struggling. Scores for Māori and Pasifika students, which have long been below average, are declining. The effects of socioeconomic disparities continue to be a major topic of public debate. In both primary and secondary education sectors, inequalities persist in school financing and students' educational achievement, while affordability is affecting parents' choice of school for their children. Free education is frequently described as being a "myth" and the education-funding system is criticized for being too reliant on parent donations, which produces further inequalities. On a more positive note, according to OECD data, teachers in New Zealand were ranked 4 out of 35 countries for professionalism.

In the field of primary and secondary education, investment and participation rates are high, with teacher-student ratios being among the lowest in the OECD. The main elements of the National government's approach to education include increasing participation of disadvantaged groups in early childhood education, encouraging students to stay in school longer by improving pathways to further learning and work, and raising teaching quality through increasing collaboration between schools. The new Education Act, passed by parliament in May 2017, lets children start school at the age of four years and 10 months and allows for online-only schools called "communities of online learning" (COOLs).

As for tertiary education, New Zealand's eight universities are ranked in the top 450 universities worldwide, according to the latest QS World University Ranking, and in the top 600 universities worldwide, according to the Times Higher Education Ranking. Despite the disadvantage of geographical distance, the proportions of international students undertaking short-term study, as well as enrolling in the bachelors, masters and doctoral programs, are higher than the OECD average. Nearly half of all international students come from China and India. While graduation rates at undergraduate level are generally higher than the OECD average, graduation rates for students below 30 years old are in line with the OECD average. For masters studies, the graduation rate of 4% is significantly lower than the OECD average.

Tuition costs have been a source of some concern for New Zealand's political parties. According to the OECD, tertiary students in New Zealand are paying the seventh-highest fees in OECD countries. The new Labour/NZ First party quickly introduced free tertiary education for first-year undergraduate students, beginning in the 2018 academic year. This policy had been repeatedly rejected by the National government, largely on the grounds that taxpayers were required to carry the burden

of a previous Labour government policy, continued under the 2008-17 National government, of providing interest-free student loans. That said, in September 2016, the Productivity Commission's "New Models of Tertiary Education" recommended reinstating interest on student loans, a suggestion that was categorically ruled out by the National-led government.

A recent development has been the launch of "FindMyPath," "a new website to help young people explore qualification pathways and figure out what they should study to achieve their career goals." The policy aims to strengthen the link between education and the labor market.

In December 2015, the Pathway Student Visa pilot program was introduced for a period of 18 months with selected primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Immigrants with a Pathway Student Visa can undertake three consecutive study programs with selected education providers and the visas are valid for up to five years.

In vocational education, apprentice numbers and completion rates have increased. Furthermore, New Zealand ranks high among OECD countries for adult education.

Citation:

Education at a Glance 2017. OECD Indicators. (<http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>).

New website helps students to 'FindMyPath.' 30 June 2016 <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-website-helps-students-%E2%80%98findmypath%E2%80%99> (accessed 13 September, 2016).

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Dougan, Patrice, 2016. NZ students' results decline, but still above OECD average – PISA report. New Zealand Herald. 6 December 2017 (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/education/news/article.cfm?c_id=35&objectid=11761505).

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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 (2016) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report gave the country scores well above the OECD average in Reading (third of 72 countries), Science (seventh), and Mathematics (tenth).

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.

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. The federal government has recently increased grant money for students from low- and middle-income families by 50%, making post-secondary education more accessible for these students.

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 indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Schools on reserves are funded federally through Indigenous and Northern Affairs 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 potential economic benefits of closing the educational gap between Indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians (Calver, 2015). The 2016 federal budget included CAD 2.6 billion for First Nations schooling, grades primary to twelve, in an effort to narrow the education gap. However, the largest portion of this spending will not be allocated until the 2020-2021 fiscal year, leaving the immediate benefits unclear.

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/e_v_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>

2016 Federal Budget "Growing the Middle Class," posted at <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2016/docs/plan/budget2016-en.pdf>

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2016) "Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study: The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics" http://cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/365/Book_PISA2015_EN_Dec5.pdf

Finland

Score 8

Built on the principle of lifelong learning, education policy in Finland promotes and maintains 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. By and large, Finland's education system has proved successful and in recent years ranked at the top of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment. However, while Finland remains among the top performers, the ranking of the country appears to be

slipping as gender and regional disparities in student performance significantly grow. The Education and Research Development Plan, revised every four years by the government, directs the implementation of education- and research-policy goals as stated in the government program. Since 2011, the plan has focused on the alleviation of poverty, inequality and exclusion. While Finland's expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP was above the OECD average some years ago, heavy cuts by the government in the education sector have now weakened the financial conditions for designing and pursuing education policy. In 2016, new curricula for compulsory basic education was introduced, designed to increase equality in compulsory education, enhance pupil participation in goal-setting and evaluation, and integrate more technology in teaching. While the curricula reflect more thoroughly the growing needs of a knowledge society, it has been criticized for the short period of transition involved with implementing it and the lack of resources and training for teachers. Additionally, partial 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.

Citation:

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

"Education Policy Outlook Finland", oecd.org/edu/highlightsFinland.htm;

"The new curricula in a nutshell", http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/basic_education/curricula_2014;

oecd.org/edu/highlightsfinland.htm.

South Korea

Score 8

Education policy is a key priority for the South Korean government. On the positive side, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results are good, and tertiary enrollment rates are high. South Korea's rankings in the 2015 PISA international student-assessment tests slipped slightly as compared to three years previously, though it still remains among the top eight OECD-member countries. In 2014, 6.3% of GDP was spent on education institutions, compared to an OECD average of 5.2%. Of this total expenditure, 1.7% of GDP represents private expenditure, which is more than twice the OECD average. This is largely because many Koreans spend a large share of their income on private tutoring academies (hagwons), a practice that puts low-income households at a disadvantage. To address this disparity, the Moon government promised to turn expensive "elite schools" into regular schools that offer free education. The Moon administration also announced that it will pass a law banning discrimination based on academic background.

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.

Citation:

OECD, Education at a Glance 2017

Korea Times. Moon's education pledges under scrutiny. May 10, 2017.
http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/05/181_229082.html

University World News. Is South Korea in a Higher Education Access Trap? July 14, 2017.
<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170711111525929>

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 increased by 73% between 2000 and 2017. The share of female students increased from 39% in 1990 to 51% in 2017. While, the number of students at universities increased by 50% and the number of students at universities of applied sciences tripled between 2000 and 2017.

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.

Since 1998, Switzerland has institutionalized a system of universities of applied sciences. Students with vocational training can acquire a diploma to enter these universities either during their training or in a special course lasting one year after they have finished their apprenticeship.

There is, however, a federal particularity in higher education. Cantons such as Geneva, Basel-City and Ticino have followed international trends favoring general qualification for university entrance, while others, especially in the German-speaking parts of the country, have focused on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the canton of Ticino, 50% of all 19 to 21 year olds acquire the matura secondary-school exit diploma, allowing them to go on to university or a university of applied sciences; in the cantons of Geneva and Neuchatel this figure is 45%, while in the canton of Obwalden only 23% gain direct access to a university or university of applied sciences (2016). However, the effect of this “federal” discrimination is somewhat reduced by permeability within the school and university systems.

The vocational-training system also offers considerable career prospects. In particular men with vocational training have similarly high employment rates over the course of their work life as men with tertiary education. However, there is a significant difference in earnings. At the age of 50, the median annual earnings of a male academic is about CHF 125,000, in contrast to about CHF 80,000 for a male worker with vocational training. Since 2014, when the public voted for the initiative opposing mass immigration with the intention of capping immigration from EU countries, the government has tried to strengthen vocational and higher vocational training programs. The aim was to increase the number of highly skilled workers. The underlying assumption was that with more highly skilled Swiss workers, the inflow of European labor could be reduced.

Resource allocation within the educational system appears 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.

Citation:
dievolkswirtschaft.ch/de/2016/11/korber-oesch-11-2016

Cyprus

Score 7

Cyprus's primary and secondary education is mainly public. Proposals for education reforms previously under discussion between the Ministry of Education and stakeholders have led to some changes. The teacher appointment system has been revised and semester exams have been introduced in secondary schools. Reforms have been undertaken since the 1990s, sometimes upsetting previous reforms. The focus of education is gradually shifting from knowledge-based learning to more research, experimentation and critical thought. High literacy rates (near 100% for youth), low drop-out rates and high 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.

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, funded largely by public authorities in addition to educational institutions and other organizations. Tertiary education is provided by public and private universities. 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.

Cyprus's expenditure on education as a share of GDP places it very high, but according to the EU education outcomes are relatively poor. Also, despite the high

rates of tertiary-education attainment (54.6% in 2015, Eurostat), few graduate with degrees in sectors linked to innovation.

Citation:

1. Tertiary-education attainment, Eurostat, 2016 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Educational_attainment_statistics#Level_of_educational_attainment_by_age_and_sex
2. Cyprus near Bottom Class yet another Educational Survey, Cyprus Mail, 7 December 2016, <http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/12/07/cyprus-near-bottom-class-yet-another-educational-survey/>
3. EU Commission, Semester Country Report, Cyprus, February 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-cyprus-en.pdf>

Denmark

Score 7

Education spending in Denmark is among highest in the OECD, but educational outcomes are vividly discussed. Traditionally, Danish pupils have not scored well on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) problem-solving tests. However, Denmark made some progress in the 2015 PISA results, scoring above the OECD average in science, mathematics and reading. This was an improvement over the past where Denmark's overall score was around the OECD average. Though there remains scope for improvement.

These improvements are partly attributable to recent reforms, including reforms to the primary and lower-secondary school systems. A major reform in 2013 granted more discretionary power to the school principal to allocate teacher resources and keep pupils in school for more hours. 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, especially girls.

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. In October 2017, the government

reached an agreement with labor market stakeholders to allocate DKK 2.5 billion to adult education and training. Universities have been under pressure to shorten the length of study and channel students into educational programs oriented toward business.

Citation:

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 2012 Results in Focus," <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf> (accessed 7 December 2017).

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

"Aftale til 2,5 milliarder til voksen- og efteruddannelse," <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/aftale-til-25-milliarder-til-voksen-og-efteruddannelse-paa-plads> (Accessed 7 November 2017).

France

Score 7

The French education system can in many aspects be characterized as rather successful, but, contrary to the past, it fails to integrate and promote the weakest segments of society. In the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, French results were not in progress but slightly above the OECD average. Overall spending on educational institutions amounted to 5.3% of GDP in 2013, slightly above the OECD average. Spending at the preschool level is exemplary, with nearly all children three years old and older attending preschool (écoles maternelles), and France is still above the OECD average at the primary schooling level. An alarming result of the PISA assessment is that, more than in any other OECD country, individual success depends on the socioeconomic background of students. 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.

The Macron government is approaching these issues in a different way, but the new policies are still under discussion or preparation. However, several measures adopted over the summer 2017 give some hints about the new approach. First, these measures placed greater an emphasis on training young people from less affluent backgrounds. In places with significant social problems, the government has decided to immediately half the number of students per elementary school class, bringing down the maximum number of students to 12 per class. Second, most of the disputed reforms put in place by the Hollande-Valls government are being dismantled (for instance the “bi-langues” classes have been reintroduced in secondary schools and more emphasis is put on the fundamentals). Third, international evaluations and rankings (such as the Pisa report) have been taken into account and will likely form the basis for further changes. Finally, a far-reaching renewal of the professional training system has been announced.

Citation:

OECD: Education at a glance 2016, Country Note France

Germany

Score 7

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an important indicator of the quality of a country’s educational system. 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 dependent on pupils’ social backgrounds. Educational opportunities are particularly constrained for children from low-income families and for immigrants. PISA results from 2012, however, had shown significant improvements (OECD 2016), reflecting possibly a catalytic effect of the “PISA shock” in the early 2000s. Germany ranked above the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science and the importance of students’ socioeconomic background had lessened. While in 2000, the level of social equity in German education was among the lowest of all OECD countries, Germany had risen to around the OECD average in 2012. The most recent PISA results from 2015 indicate a setback in science and mathematics, further stable performance in reading and confirm a looser link between socioeconomic background and performance compared to the 2000s (OECD 2016). Until 2017, the overall quality of the primary and higher education system improved slowly, but constantly. Germany ranked 19 out of 137 countries with an improvement score of 5.5 (Global Competitive Report 2017/2018: 115).

In contrast to other countries, the proportion of individuals with tertiary education has remained astonishingly low for several decades. The proportion of young people with tertiary education in 2016 (29.6% of the population between 23 and 34 years old) lags behind the OECD average and ranks sixth lowest among OECD countries. Overall, close to 60% of the population have completed upper secondary, with 13.2% possessing less than an upper secondary education. However, 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).

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 post-secondary vocational education and training is about 20%, much higher than the OECD average. All in all, the German education system excels in offering competencies relevant for labor market success, resulting in a very low level of youth unemployment (second lowest among OECD countries). 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.

Concerning the influx of refugees in 2015 and, to a lesser extent, in 2016 and 2017, their inclusion in the education system will be one of the most challenging tasks for their successful integration into German labor market and society.

Citation:

Global Competitive Report 2017/2018

<https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/adult-education-level.htm#indicator-chart>.

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

OECD (2014): Education at a glance. Country Note: Germany.

OECD (2016): Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Results from PISA 2015, Country Note: Germany.

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 people 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 (53.3% in 2014). Its rate of early school leaving is also below the EU average, at just 5.9% in 2014. However, enrollment rates in vocational-education and training programs are low.

The reputation of vocational education and training in Lithuania could still be

improved. According to an OECD survey of education released in September 2016, only 15% of all students are expected to graduate from vocational training programs compared to an OECD average of 46% and EU average of 50%. 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. A 2017 OECD report on education in Lithuania stated that Lithuania's schools and higher education institutions would benefit from clarifying and raising performance expectations, aligning resources in support of raised performance expectations, strengthening performance monitoring and quality assurance procedures, and building institutional capacity. Furthermore, the country must address mismatches between graduates' skills and labor-market needs, as the country's youth-unemployment rate of about 19.3% in 2014 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 improve its labor-market relevance.

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). Overall, government spending on education 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. However, spending on education in Lithuania has been above EU average (6.1% of GDP and 5.6% of GDP in 2011 and 2014 respectively compared to an EU average of 5.1% in 2011 and 5.0% in 2014). Though it has reached €1.1 billion in 2016, it was dispersed through a large number of institutions. The average salary of a researcher in Lithuania is four times lower the EU average (adjusted for purchasing power). While enrollment rates in Lithuania are relatively high (Lithuania ranked 30 out of 137 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017 for tertiary-education enrollment), the quality of education is comparatively low (Lithuania ranked only 73 out of 137 countries in the same report). The most significant deterioration in the country's performance in the Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017 was in the area of education policy.

The total number of school graduates continued decline in 2015 and 2016 due to demographic changes. In 2016, the number of graduates decreased by almost 10% compared to 2015 and by around 25% over the four years from 2012. It is projected that the number of graduates will decline by a further 40% by 2021. At the same time, the numbers of foreign students studying in Lithuania remain comparatively low at only 3% compared to an OECD average of 6%. Decreasing student numbers have intensified pressure on less popular higher education institutions, while there is

a relatively high number of higher education institutions (47) for a population of 3 million. For example, in 2016, there were an estimated 2.9 higher education institutions per 10,000 students in Lithuania, while there 1.2 in Finland and 1.1 in Ireland per 10,000 students. Consequently, discussions on reducing the overall number of higher education institutions to concentrate resources in the country's top-performing institutions have intensified. This has led to proposals to consolidate the network of Lithuanian state universities, and vocational education and training institutions. However, it is not clear if and how these proposals will be implemented. The strongest driver to merge or close down study programs is likely to come from declining graduate numbers, higher university entry thresholds and performance-linked funding.

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 2017: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-lithuania-en.pdf>
 The 2017 – 2018 Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum: <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2017-2018/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2017%E2%80%932018.pdf>
 OECD, Education at a Glance 2016, OECD indicators: http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016_eag-2016-en#.WFafA0a7qM9
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Norway

Score 7

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 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 greater emphasis on providing students with incentives to achieve, improving teaching quality and instilling a culture of excellence.

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, as well as a heavily underfunded tertiary-education system with high dropout rates and massive fictitious enrollment figures. Compared to previous governments, the Cerar government has devoted more attention to education policy. In September 2016, it announced increases in spending on education in 2017 and 2018, and in November 2016 parliament amended the Higher Education Act to make the higher education system more flexible, close the gender gap and ease bureaucratic burdens connected with internationalization processes. However, the implementation of the legislation through Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education is proceeding rather slowly.

Citation:

European Commission (2018): Country Report Slovenia 2018 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances. SWD(2018) 222 final, Brussels, 35-36 (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-country-report-slovenia-en.pdf>).

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Sweden

Score 7

Education policy remains a subject of heated debate in Sweden. Critics point to how Sweden has slipped in recent years in most international comparisons in terms of student knowledge and analytical skills. Sweden now ranks 19th on PISA (up from 32nd in the previous PISA report), which indicates that the decline appears to have been arrested. Even so, this remains an alarmingly poor ranking for a country relying on knowledge-intensive sectors for its economic growth and competitiveness. Some studies attribute the decline to the decentralization of primary education in the early 1990s; others argue that the teaching profession is not held in high enough regard within society and thus fails to attract highly qualified professionals; while yet others suggest that poor performance could in part be attributed to the fact that many teachers lack the formal qualifications needed to teach the subjects they are teaching. Promisingly, all three potential sources of deterioration in primary education are now on the policy agenda. Overall, it remains clear that Swedish schools continue to deliver high-quality education.

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. Perhaps of greater concern is the combination of a relatively high ranking (11th) in tertiary attainment and poorer PISA ranking (19th), which suggests that institutions of tertiary education may be lowering the bar with respect to entry requirements.

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. Nevertheless, equitable access to education is realized to a great extent for adult education. Sweden is rather successfully targeting the ambitious goals of life-long-learning as a high percentage of adults are regularly in contact with further education organizations.

In sum, the data shows that resources are not the key problem, and public debate shows no shortage of ideas and inclination to reform. In the spring of 2017, a major Royal Commission on education presented its findings and recommendations; these are likely to shape education policy in 2018. Education remains at the very top of the political agenda.

Citation:

SOU 2017: 35: Samling för skolan. Nationell strategi för kunskap och likvärdighet (<http://www.regeringen.se/498092/contentassets/e94a1c61289142bfbcfdf54a44377507/samling-for-skolan—nationell-strategi-for-kunskap-och-likvardighet-sou-201735.pdf>).

United Kingdom

Score 7

The Cameron government continued the marketization strategy pursued by the previous coalition and Labour governments. It pursued a policy of liberalizing 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 and turn them into sponsored academies. The core of this policy was to improve performance by boosting inter-school competition, as measured by performance tables administered by the regulator, Ofsted.

Ongoing 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 United Kingdom’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. Prime Minister May announced plans for new grammar schools, state run secondary schools subject to selection on academic grounds, but considered by many in the United Kingdom to be contrary to social mobility. However, May’s announcement has not yet been put into action.

In the higher education sector, the substantial increase in tuition fees, from £3,300 to levels now in excess of £9,000 per year, has been contentious. However, so far, there has been no discernible effect on overall student enrollment rates or on access to

higher education for students from poorer backgrounds, although concerns about the level of student debt have prompted renewed debate over the funding of tertiary education. British universities are concerned that the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union will be damaging, especially if accompanied by a clampdown on EU migrants. Fears that students from other EU countries will be deterred from applying to what is a highly successful sector, that EU nationals will be put off from working in British universities and that participation in EU research programs will become harder have led to demands from university leaders for a “soft” Brexit. There have been reports of EU consortia being reluctant to include British researchers in new research proposals.

Citation:

WEF ranks quality of UK education system as 15th in Global Competitiveness Report 2017/18 (Singapore 1st, USA 20th, GER 25th, F 28th).

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jul/12/uk-scientists-dropped-from-eu-projects-because-of-post-brex-it-funding-fears>

Australia

Score 6

The quality of Australia’s education system tends to be higher in non-government schools and in major metropolitan regions. Overall the high school completion rate is currently around 80%. 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.

In combination with the poor availability of affordable housing, young families are facing a stark choice. They can either buy a house and send their children to a below average public school. Or they invest in their children’s education, which makes buying a family home nearly impossible.

Regarding equity, the continued high level of government subsidies to non-government schools means inequity in schooling outcomes is 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. Moreover, inequity has increased, as government funding per student in non-government schools has increased at a faster rate than government funding per student in government schools. The 2017 budget did, however, take steps toward reducing inequity, boosting funding to government schools and reducing funding to some non-government schools in the period of 2017 to 2027.

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. Several measures in recent years have sought to reduce the cost to government of the higher education system. The 2015 budget contained measures requiring Australians living overseas to repay HELP debts on the same terms as those faced by Australian residents. This took effect on 1 January 2016. The 2017 budget additionally increased government direct funding of universities, increased student fees and reduced the income threshold at which students begin repaying their HELP debt.

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 limited. State and territory governments are highly revenue-constrained, and as a consequence the sector is relatively poorly funded. In recent years, a HELP scheme for vocational training, called VET Student Loans, has been established, but only applies to diploma-level courses. The higher-education sector is generally efficient and universities have had to be entrepreneurial 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>

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<http://studyassist.gov.au/sites/StudyAssist/VET%20Student%20Loans>

http://www.oecd.org/edu/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20AUSTRALIA_EN.pdf

Lisa Pryor, The End of the Australian Dream, The New York Times, 2. Mai 2017, S. 1 und 13.

Austria

Score 6

The Austrian educational system still 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. Despite the fact that there has been some improvement and partly as a result of the increasing role of the "Fachhochulen" (universities of applied science, polytechnics), the Austrian educational system still is highly socially selective. Parents' social (and educational) status is reflected in students' ability to access higher education, more so than in comparable countries. Last year, a citizens' initiative called on parliament to correct this negative process of selection. However, the initiative failed to drive

significant reform, at least in the short term. This state of affairs violates the concept of social justice and time fails to exploit the population's talents to the fullest.

A particular challenge is the significant number of children of first-generation immigrants who don't have German as their mother tongue. The Austrian educational system has not fully succeeded in guaranteeing that immigrant children after nine years of schooling are able to read and write German fluently. As for reading and writing, deficits are not only a problem in immigrant communities, it is obvious that the system's underperformance is not only the result of migration.

The hesitancy to engage in reform results in part from the considerable veto power held by specific groups, including the teachers' union, the Austrian conservative party (ÖVP) and its new potential coalition partner (the right-wing FPÖ). The teachers' union appears to be first and foremost interested in defending the special status of high schools and their teachers, and appears worried that this status will be lost if the two-tier organization of schools is changed. The parties on the political right tend to define any structural change that would open up higher education for the children of (culturally, socially, economically) less-privileged families as an agenda of the political left.

Recent reforms of teacher training aim at improving the first three (undergraduate) years of teachers' training. In the medium term, this will result in better-trained teachers for primary and secondary schools, the "Hauptschulen" in particular. The renaming of the Hauptschulen to "Neue Mittelschulen" (new middle schools), meant to encourage the integration of teachers from different systems, has not delivered on expectations. In 2016 – 2017, new reforms concerning full-time schooling and improved competencies for school directors are being introduced, which appears promising.

The sensitive issue of integrating children who arrived in Austria between 2015 and 2016 has forced the federal government to talk about introducing (widening) the obligation to send children to pre-school education ("Kindergarten") to prepare them for school.

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 is still highly unequal, with children of parents holding tertiary education degrees and/or having higher incomes enjoying better odds of graduating from university. The introduction of access restrictions for specific careers such as medicine in 2005 has increased the odds of children from high-education backgrounds gaining access to these careers.

Citation:

1) Friesinger et al., Zugangsbeschränkungen und Chancen(un)gleichheit im österreichischen Hochschulsystem, AK (131), Juli 2014

2) Zaussinger et al., Studierenden Sozialerhebung 2015, Band 1, IHS, Mai 2016

3) Unger et al., Evaluierung der Aufnahmeverfahren nach § 14h UG 2002, IHS, März 2015

also see: <http://gerechthebildung.jetzt>

Belgium

Score 6

The OECD deems Belgium's performance to be "top" level with regard to youth skills, but to be only "average" with regard to other indicators (including inclusiveness, youth integration into the labor market, and the promotion of skills in workplaces). Recent-era improvements in the Belgian education system were mainly achieved before 2010, and the country's education system has largely stagnated since that time. Given that education is almost exclusively publicly financed in Belgium, the economic-crisis-driven pressure to balance budgets has been an important factor in this lack of progress. In addition, the country's organization of education, in which a public network coexists with a "free," publicly funded (Catholic) network at all education levels from kindergarten to higher education, generates excessive structural costs. This undermines cost-effectiveness and overall efficiency (as well as reform potential) within the two independent education systems (Flemish- and French-speaking, since education policy is now fully devolved to the linguistic communities). 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, particularly within the French-speaking areas. OECD assessments of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results indeed highlight the dramatic drop in education performance in that part of the country. According to the WEF's Competitiveness report, employers have already begun experiencing a shortage of applicants with appropriate skills.

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." Within the French-speaking universities, the regional government is imposing increasing administrative control on education procedures, which diverts human resources away from teaching and research. Consequently, the situation is worsening. Chronic underfunding of higher education

and its negative impact on productivity has also been pointed out by Dumont and Kegels (2016, see section on Research and Innovation).

Citation:

<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

<https://www.ugent.be/current-students/en/administration/tuition/tuitionbalinkprepa20172018.htm>

Schwab, Klaus and Sala-i-Marti, Xavier (2017). The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018. World Economic Forum editor.

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

Czech Republic

Score 6 Public expenditure on education relative to GDP has increased since the economic crisis and is slightly above the EU average. Educational outcomes and the employability of school and higher education graduates are good. One problem, however, is the low tertiary education attainment rate. A particularly vulnerable group are Roma. Around 40% of Roma children are educated in “special schools” (populated almost exclusively by Roma), before being placed in practical schools with lower learning standards. The early school leaving rate remains among the lowest in the EU, but regional disparities are significant and the rate has been increasing steadily since 2010. It currently exceeds the 5.5% national target for 2020. The tertiary education attainment rate continues to rise; the 32% national target will be likely attained by 2020. Tertiary education significantly improves earning (adults with tertiary education earn 92% more than those with secondary education). Higher education reform was adopted in 2016, aimed at providing more autonomy to tertiary institutions and to raise the standards of accreditation and internal quality assurance. A further reform in 2017 focused on the development of a new career system for teachers and pedagogical staff to increase the attractiveness of the profession, but faced significant protests by teachers and a lack of support by two parties of the governing coalition (ANO and Christian Democrats) unwilling to face a divisive issue during the electoral campaign.

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 in proportion to GDP than in 2008 – 2009. Since then, the ratio has gone down and was almost 12% lower in 2016 than in 2008.

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools. After 2008, considerable cutbacks and rationalization measures were introduced, including a shortening of the school year. Upper secondary schools and public universities are the responsibility of the central government. The government cabinet during 2013-2016 managed 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. In the first years after the collapse, some steps toward rationalizing the university sector were considered, while some steps were taken to improve cooperation between institutions. Two attempts to merge universities outside the capital area were discontinued during the mandate period 2013-2016. The cabinet in office during 2017 did not take any measures toward mergers during its brief tenure.

The same dire situation prevails at music schools, once the pride of Iceland's education system due to their unique model of private and public funding. In 2016, they fought for their survival, a struggle that continued during 2017.

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:

www.hagstofa.is (Statistics Iceland)

OECD: Education at a Glance 2017, Paris.

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>

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. There is also a lack of investment in pre-primary education.

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 average education-attainment levels are high, and the value of education is well established in the community as a whole. The country has a heterogeneous education system. From primary to upper-secondary level, students are generally sorted into one of four primary school streams: three for the Hebrew-speaking community (secular, religious and ultra-orthodox), and one for the Arabic-speaking community (Arab, Druze and Bedouin minorities together).

Surveys indicate that 47% of adults (25- to 64-year-olds) have achieved a tertiary level of education, above the OECD average of 43%. Moreover, Israel ranks first within the OECD countries with regard to the share of secondary graduates under 20 years old. Israel spends a little more than 5.8% of its GDP (nearly 11% of the government budget) on education, again higher than the OECD average of 5.2% of GDP. However, expenditure on tertiary education is below the OECD average, at less than 1% of GDP. One Israeli university (the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology) ranks in the top 100 universities worldwide according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities list produced by the ShanghaiRanking Consultancy. Primary and secondary teachers’ salaries have increased significantly in recent years, and are now well above the national average salary.

However, while the average primary-school class size within the OECD as a whole is 21, the average primary-school class size in Israel is 28. This is a much-discussed aspect of the education system, leading to frequent expressions of frustration in the local media. PISA results are also deemed problematic. In the last PISA results published, Israel scored under the OECD average in all fields (science, mathematics and reading). However, it did score above the OECD average with regard to equity indicators in all fields (boys vs girls, social background, and immigrant students). Moreover, Israel has almost no gender gap in the completion rate of bachelors or equivalent programs.

Despite all the positive progress, Israel still shows gaps in educational performance among sub-groups of the student population. For example, average class sizes in the Hebrew-language school streams are lower than in the Arab stream, despite the 2007 policy reform designed to institute changes across all streams. There is another significant gap between the ultra-orthodox minority group and the secular majority. In May of 2017, the National Council of Higher Education signed a program aimed at extending access to tertiary education within the ultra-orthodox community, setting a goal of increasing the annual total of tertiary students drawn from within this group from about 11,500 to 19,000. Despite this program's positive goal, it sparked widespread opposition, especially regarding the decision to create gender-separated tertiary programs in order to make it more accessible to ultra-orthodox men.

These gaps result in part from unequal budgetary allocations. There is a bias favoring the Jewish majority in the education budget, although the media have recently reported that the Ministry of Education has designed a new allocation process seeking to correct the bias and increase budgets within the Arab and ultra-orthodox education streams. A separate reform in which "additional" school fees were raised has sparked opposition, with critics arguing that it violates the free-education policy.

In conclusion, Israel's education policy delivers high-quality education in some areas, and but only medium-level results in others. Policy has improved significantly in terms of equality and efficiency of funding. Nevertheless, inequality in the education sector still exists.

Citation:

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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. Under the LDP-led coalition, renewed emphasis has been placed on reaching the top international tier as well as improving the use of English. While the number of students going abroad for study has been declining for a number of years, this trend seems to have halted recently.

The government is actively promoting reforms. One current topic is strengthening adult education programs in order to support mid-career employment opportunities. Authorities are also actively working on curriculum reform, scheduled to be introduced in 2020.

A separate issue is the problem of growing income inequality at a time of economic stagnation. The government announced in 2017 that it is considering reducing the cost of higher education, or even making it free for students.

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 public's general willingness to spend money for educational purposes reduces the pressure to economize and seek efficiencies.

There is growing concern that reform measures have not achieved their intended goals. Despite major university reforms and the government's well-publicized intention to place 10 universities among the world's top 100, the rankings accorded to leading Japanese universities has proven disappointing in recent years. In the Times Higher Education World University Rankings of 2017, the University of Tokyo, Japan's top school, slipped to 46th place, its lowest position ever.

Luxembourg

Score 6 The country's education policy must deal with the challenges of a multilingual society and a high proportion of migrant students. The education system is particularly marked by its insistence on early selection: after six years of elementary school, students face a crucial junction and must choose one of two academic tracks, a general or a technical (secondaire technique) one. The number of students who must repeat a whole academic year is among the highest in the EU; more than 30% repeat one or more academic years. Although Luxembourg has the highest percentage of university graduates and smallest class sizes in Europe, about 25% of students do not achieve sufficient basic skills in math (range 33), science (range 33) and reading (range 36) to complete their education successfully, according to the PISA study. The assessment notes that only 40% of the students graduate in the

prescribed timespan. This places Luxembourg well below the OECD average, behind France, Belgian and Germany.

There is a marked division between Luxembourg nationals and migrant students, as migrants (especially the Portuguese minority) generally struggle with the country's three languages and often end up in the technical track (secondaire technique), which affects their progress toward a university education. Recent studies have shown that migrant students are four times less likely to transfer to the higher-level university-oriented early school track (enseignement secondaire) than Luxembourgish nationals. To counter this, more affluent migrants often send their children to international schools. This leads to yet another division between high-income and low-income migrants. A further reform with more permeable structures (including a more open guidance procedure with parent input) to avoid early tracking is being tested.

University students in Luxembourg are very mobile and often study abroad, acquiring new knowledge and language skills. Overall, 75% of tertiary-level students study abroad (2016), while 58% of all students in Luxembourg are foreign. According to the OECD, Luxembourg has the highest level of education expenditure per student (4,435 per student in 2016) and the smallest average class size (15 primary school students per class and 19 secondary school students per class).

A roughly 5% increase in elementary school students over the last five years will require more schools and more qualified teachers, especially teachers with expertise working with students with special needs. According to the United Nations, Luxembourg is taking measures to make the education system more inclusive. However, due to delays in this transformation process, 150 special needs teachers must be recruited over a four-year period.

Government reforms include the creation of the Luxembourg Center for Educational Testing, to link existing teacher training institutes, an increase in school autonomy combined with institutional development plans, the establishment of two institutes to support students with learning disabilities and behavior problems, the establishment of a center for political education, strengthening connections between kindergartens and elementary schools, improving inter- and post-school student transitions, increasing teacher and school flexibility, increasing annual training hours for teachers to 16 hours in 2017 and promoting native language instruction.

Citation:

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Netherlands

Score 6

In terms of quality, the average education attainment level for the population is high, somewhat exceeding the OECD average in 2015. 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 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. 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 deterrence effect of the new study-loan system will be more substantial among lower-income and ethnically non-Dutch families.

Equity in educational access for ethnic groups has not been achieved and is diminishing at the university level. There remain considerable gender gaps in education. The teaching work force is primarily female, excluding tertiary education. The number of women studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics, manufacturing and construction is low, and women are overrepresented in education, health care and welfare.

The Dutch school system stresses efficiency in terms of resource allocation. Expenditure for education is below the average for OECD countries. Among primary and secondary level school teachers, dissatisfaction with salary levels and increasing work pressure resulted in massive strikes in 2017. 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 shortage of skilled technical workers. Life-long learning is poorly supported by the government.

In January 2016, the national dialog on a reformed "curriculum for the future" for primary and secondary education received substantial input. The idea is to have a core curriculum (Dutch, English, arithmetic and math, digital literacy, and citizenship), specialization in one of three knowledge domains (individual and society, nature and technology, and language and culture), and multidisciplinary teaching in learning-how-to-learn, design, critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration. Over the next few years, these ideas will be systematically integrated into primary and secondary education policymaking. In higher professional training and university education, inadequate government funding will exacerbate existing challenges involving increasing student numbers, work pressure and quality issues.

Citation:

Decentraal onderwijsbeleid bij de tijd, Advies Onderwijsraad, 7 september 2017

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Portugal

Score 6 Much has been promised for the education system by the Programa do XXI Governo Constitucional 2015 – 2019.

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

In the 2015 UNDP Human Development Index, Portugal was ranked 43rd out of 49 countries in the Very High Human Development category. However, with only 8.2 “mean years of schooling” in 2014, Portugal was below all other 49 countries in this area except Kuwait; even Spain had 9.6 “mean years of schooling.”

Shortly after taking office in 2015, the Costa government implemented a review of the national system for student assessment, with these changes taking effect in the 2015 – 2016 school year. Positive signs since have included an improvement in Portugal’s PISA results and a decision to introduce free primary-school textbooks beginning with the 2017 – 2018 school year.

Generally, the most recent OECD Human Development Report shows progress for Portugal in the area of education.

In March 2017, the government launched a series of innovations aimed at improving the quality of education. These are summarized in the dispatch (despacho) cited below.

Citation:
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2015_statistical_annex.pdf

Alexandre Homem Cristo, “Ziguezagues nos exames (e o silêncio do ministro),” 11/1/2016, Observador. Available online at: <http://observador.pt/opiniaoziguezagues-nos-exames-silencio-do-ministro/>

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Despacho No. 1971/2017 – Diário Da República No. 48/2017.

Spain

Score 6 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 confirmed by the country’s unexceptional PISA test results. In fact, the country’s education system was only ranked the 24th most efficient out of 35 OECD countries. Some reasons for the overall poor results, although the causes strongly differ across regions, is a curriculum regarded as out of date, poor teaching quality and the large number of students who repeat years.

The level of government spending on education is also an important factor. In 2016, education spending was one point of GDP below the OECD average. However, among the Autonomous Communities, which are responsible for 80% of public spending on education, there are varied levels of spending. This diversity is the result of differing orientations on education policy, the financial resources available and number of private centers in each Autonomous Community.

The Spanish education system continues to suffer challenges 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. Equality of opportunities 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 have served to exclude poor students from the system.

The Spanish education system has been shaped not only by socioeconomic struggles over distribution, but conflicts over religious, linguistic-cultural and national identity issues, and political factors. The current legislative framework was approved by the PP government in 2013, which was ruling at the time with an absolute majority, but opposed by all other political parties as well as educators, some regional authorities and a large share of society. Partly due to this opposition, the PP minority government began new negotiations to improve the legal act in 2017. The difficulties of negotiating a national agreement on education illustrate the diverse views on the current state of the education system.

Citation:

Spain's PISA results (2015):

QS World University Rankings 2018

<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2018>

Spain's PISA results (2015):

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

European Commission: Education and Training Monitor 2017, Spain

https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017-es_en.pdf

United States

Score 6

The performance of primary and secondary education in the United States has long been disappointing. Historically low high school graduation rates significantly improved over the last two decades, reaching a record high of 82% in 2016 – still a low level for a wealthy country. The education system largely lacks vocational alternatives to high school education. High school students' performance in science, math and reading remains below most wealthy OECD countries. Yet the educational system is generously funded. Its shortcomings are the result of several factors,

including the impact of deficiencies in the home environments of many children in low-income/minority neighborhoods, severe inequalities in school quality between wealthy and low-income areas, a lack of accountability for outcomes in the fragmented system, and effective resistance to school reforms by powerful teachers' unions.

Federal engagement became more extensive and ambitious during the Obama administration. The federal Race to the Top program promoted test-based national performance expectations, reflecting new standards called the Common Core.

As college and university costs have increased, financial aid for low-income students has failed to keep up with tuition and living expenses. As a result, students from the top income quintile are now at least three times as likely to graduate as those from the lowest quintile. Trump's budget plans will cut some college loan programs.

The Trump administration's proposed budget would cut federal education programs by more than \$10 billion. The Department of Education's total operating budget would be slashed by \$9 billion and spending on secondary-education programs would be redirected to school-choice initiatives – the chief policy goal of Betsy DeVos, the education secretary. President Trump's budget would also eliminate the public-service loan-forgiveness program, subsidized Stafford Loans and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants.

Citation:

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/09/charter-schools-losing-the-narrative-but-winning-the-data.html>

Chile

Score 5

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. Former governments were not able to reduce the qualitative and social gap between the private and public systems; this failure has led to strong public protests that have endured since 2010, though these peaked in 2011 and 2012.

The general ideological disagreement 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 campaign platform included reforms that sought to abolish profit-seeking in the education sector. A series of legislative proposals on the issue have been submitted to Congress, but not all have been passed. The latest changes were introduced in March 2016 by the enactment of Law Nr. 20.845 (Ley de Inclusión

Escolar), which increases subsidies for the most vulnerable students in primary and secondary education. At the same time, public subsidies for providers of education are now granted only to private entities which legally count as non-profit organizations. Additionally, financial contributions (copagos) by those families whose children attend a public school should be lowered. Prior to this latest reform, Law Nr. 20.882 (Ley de Presupuestos del Sector Público), enacted in December 2015, introduced subsidies to the tuition fees for most vulnerable students who attend higher education (about 25% of the newly matriculated students in 2017).

In summary, the government's educational reform aimed 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. As one of the programmatic focuses of the government of President Bachelet, the past national budgets included an increase in educational spending. Thus, the 2017 budget intends to continue this trend with an increase of 6.2%.

Impacts of the latest reforms, especially regarding coverage of higher education and quality of the public education system as a whole, will be reliably measurable in the medium and long term.

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 (approximately \$60), and private-schooling fees averaging about CLP 300,000 (approximately \$450). Chile used to have a broad public-education system, but as a result of the poor quality of the public schools, the share of students attending public institutions has declined to approximately 40%. This rate might change in the near future as a result of the recent reforms, but numbers have still to be raised. There is still 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.

Therefore, the latest reforms can be interpreted as an important step toward more equitable access to (higher) education and an improvement regarding the quality standards of public education.

Citation:

Education budgeting

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Educational Reform

<http://leyinclusion.mineduc.cl/>

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

http://www.comunidadescolar.cl/documentacion/LeyInclusionEscolar/presentacion_sostenedores.pdf

<http://www.gratuidad.cl/lo-que-debes-saber/>

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

<http://www.latercera.com/noticia/tasas-cobertura-educacion-parvularia/>

Croatia

Score 5

As a percentage of GDP, public expenditure on education aligns with the EU average; as a percentage of total public spending, it even exceeds the EU average. However, spending is not particularly efficient. The share of 15-year-olds who underachieve in reading, mathematics and science is above the EU average; in the case of science, by almost eight percentage points. Conversely, the share of early leavers from education and training is far below the EU average, indicating that access to education is not a problem. The system's inefficiency is exacerbated by the high degree of selectivity in upper secondary education, which offers a university-preparatory track for the brightest students and a system of underfunded vocational schools for the rest. Over 70% of upper-secondary pupils attend such vocational schools in Croatia, compared to 49% 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. 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. Access to education is open and widespread, with almost 60% of

each cohort enrolled in tertiary education. 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 five percentage points below the EU average. The resources spent on education appear further wasted by the high level of unemployment of school and university graduates.

Education reform has suffered from a lack of continuity. In 2014, the Milanović government charged an expert team headed by Boris Jokić with providing a proposal for a new curriculum. The finalization and eventual implementation of this team's work, which built on the contributions of more than a hundred teachers and experts from individual educational fields, faced delays under the Orešković and the Plenković governments, but has regained momentum since fall 2017. As it stands, pilot projects for the implementation of the reform in 3%-5% of schools might begin in fall 2018. Blaženka Divjak, the new minister of science and education in the second Plenković government, has focused heavily on improving STEM disciplines and has made computer science, previously an elective subject, a compulsory subject for 5th and 6th grade students.

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). MIUR dominates education policy, including hiring and funding. Though regional and municipal school authorities have some power with respect to the 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 low. 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 and research funds, is above average. This is not because salaries are particularly high, but because capital and research funds are very limited. 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, overall quality could be improved.

During the period under review, there has been no major change in the allocation of resources. Some limited changes have been made with the 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 government funding to academic research and teaching results. This mechanism should have significant effects in stimulating a more competitive and quality-oriented university system.

Latvia

Score 5

Latvia has a relatively well-educated population and performs reasonably well in international comparisons, such as PISA. However, compared with the 2012 PISA results, Latvia has experienced a decline in learning outcomes, especially in science and mathematics. The 2015 PISA results show that performance in the most significant indicators is now at the OECD average or below. The share of top performers has shrunk, while the share of low performers has increased compared to 2012.

Key challenges to the education system include a shrinking population, a high rate of early retirement among teachers, an unsustainably low teacher-student ratio and a level of public funding significantly lower than the OECD average.

Education reform has been high on the government’s agenda. The total number of general education schools has dropped from 824 in 2014/2015 to 790 in 2016/2017, as has the number of vocational schools, from 63 to 51. Further school system consolidation is planned, aiming to both reduce expenditures and increase school size and quality at the secondary school level, particularly in Latvia’s rural regions where schools are often unsustainably small and with poor educational outcomes. However, these reforms are opposed by local governments which fear the loss of jobs that would accompany school closures. In 2016, the government reformed the teachers’ compensation system; this reform has met with resistance, including strike threats. A significant curriculum reform is also underway, to be implemented on a rolling schedule between 2018 and 2022.

Overall, public expenditure on tertiary education is low and 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 exceeded the EU 2020 education target of 40% of 30- to 34-year-olds holding university-level qualifications. In 2015, the ratio of 30- to 34-year-olds holding university-level qualifications was 41.3%, up from 39.9% in 2013. The IMF has warned that the current system is unsustainable due to a disproportionately high number of institutions, limited financing and falling student numbers. In 2017, the Bank of Latvia recommended a drastic reduction in the number of higher-education institutions, from 56 to 20, as well as a reduction in the number of study programs, from over 900 to less than 500. In 2016, the government reformed higher education financing, focusing on improving salary levels for teachers. These reforms have been met with substantial resistance but are still being implemented. The physical and communication infrastructures of 29 institutions were modernized between 2011 and 2013, supported by public funds in the amount of 65.3 million LVL. In 2014, the World Bank published a study that, among other things, analyzed financing models for higher education. However, frequent ministerial changes and a lack of political support means that it remains unclear when and to what extent these reforms will be introduced.

Citation:

1. OECD (2016). PISA 2015 key findings for Latvia. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-latvia.htm>. Last accessed 15.10.2017

2. OECD (2017) Education Policy Outlook: Country Profile – Latvia. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Latvia.pdf>. Last assessed 20.11.2017

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4. OECD (2016). Education in Latvia, Reviews of National Policies for Education. OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264250628-en>

Malta

Score 5

In Malta, because of a lack of natural resources, economic growth is intrinsically linked to human resources. Attracting investment and sustaining employment depend very much on the skill and education levels of the workforce. In this, the results are mixed.

Since 2013, the government has implemented a number of programs, some with fiscal support, to encourage more students to pursue further education. These include free support for students at risk of failing and/or who have failed admission to higher-education institutions and the extension of services and facilities at the Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST) to better address learning challenges at different educational levels. Extra summer classes for those wishing to

retake regular-level exams and a new alternative-learning program were introduced. In 2017, the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School was opened to cater to secondary level students with special talents in the arts. A pilot project to provide tablet computers for school children was concluded in October 2016. New schools are being built and others modernized. A staggered removal of exam fees was announced in the 2018 budget.

Nonetheless, the 2016 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) ranked Malta 20th for mathematics and 22nd for science from a total of 39 participating countries, while the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) ranked Malta 40th out of 50 participating countries. Furthermore, 27.8% of the Maltese population had attained a tertiary level of education compared to an EU-28 average of 38.7%. In 2016, Malta also had the highest school drop-out rate in the EU (at 19.6%), the position remained the same in 2017, though locally there was a marginal improvement of 0.1%. The PISA 2015 survey found that Maltese students improved their ranking in mathematics, reading, and science and noted improved performance by immigrant children and a narrowing of the academic achievement gender gap.

Malta provides a high level of equitable access to education at all levels. A total of 80% of all schools are free, while various measures exist to support students. Access to higher education remains open for all due to the absence of tuition fees and stipends for students. The provision of free preschool state facilities for children three years and over has been greatly expanded. Changes to the education system outlined in the last quarter of 2017 attempt to address remaining concerns. These include the setting up of the consultative National Board for Compulsory Education, enhanced services for children who require additional support, increased investment in applied learning and scholarships for post-graduate studies. A proposed new Malta University Act (still in the consultation phase) aims at making the university more solvent and its structures more efficient and transparent, though contemplated changes to its governing bodies are deemed to threaten the autonomy of the institution. A number of administrative challenges have also slowed down reforms. These include problems within the newly established Institute for Education, difficulties with teacher recruitment, high student-teacher ratios and delays in the building of new schools. Further reforms are also needed in the education sector as it has long failed to meet the needs of the economy in various sectors.

Citation:

<http://www.mcast.edu.mt/92>

Times of Malta 13/07/2016 SEC results similar to previous years,' Education Ministry says

Youth Guarantee Malta Implementation Plan p.22

The Malta Independent 15/10/2015 One tablet per child pilot project concluded; roll-out to start in October 2016

Times of Malta 10/03/2015 Educators will be able to apply for sabbaticals

Malta Today 02/06/2016 €15 million invested in construction of new schools

Budget Speech 2018 (English) p.71-76

TIMSS 2015 Malta Report (2016) p. vii

PIRLS 2016

European Semester Thematic Factsheets – Tertiary Education Attainment (Updated 2016) p.7

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Mexico

Score 5

Mexico's education system is relatively weak despite significant public investment in the sector. According to the 2017 OECD's Overview of the Education System, education spending in Mexico in 2014 (last year with available data) was 5.4% of the country's GDP. While this is slightly over the OECD's average of 5.2%, it is below other Latin American countries like Argentina, Chile and Colombia. Moreover, the per student expenditure of Mexico (,703) is the lowest of all OECD countries. This can explain to a great extent why student performance is lower than in most other OECD countries, including Chile (the other Latin American OECD member). Also, there are strong regional differences in education and some states (e.g., Guerrero) are continuously failing to cope with national minimum standards in education at the primary and secondary levels.

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 an excessive share of the budget is spent in an unaccounted for fashion. Aiming to mitigate the strong political influence of the teachers' union on the Education Ministry, the government's recent reforms aimed at facilitating a meritocracy in the teaching profession. However, the reform still lags behind expectations. It created a national organization that would implement periodic evaluations on teacher performances. This is definitely a step in the right direction as it renders teachers and the union accountable for the quality of their teaching. It has also has faced severe criticism in several areas. The most relevant is related to evaluation instruments that fail to account for the obstacles faced by teachers in the most rural and deprived areas of the country.

Some critics argue that the reform's goal is to undermine teachers' unions across the country and increase the centralized control of education. On the other hand, some criticism has been addressed to the remaining power of the teachers' union to control the allocation of positions among teachers. Until she was jailed on corruption charges, teachers' union leader Elba Esther Gordillo was considered politically untouchable as she controlled many votes. However, she was recently released to continue her sentence in home confinement. The same day she was released, the PRI formalized a coalition with Panal (New Alliance Party), which was close to Gordillo and the SNTE union.

There is evidence of the union collecting salaries for nonexistent 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.

While the overall scenario is not positive, there have been improvements worth mentioning in the past couple of years, including an increase in the percentage of students pursuing STEM degrees, an increase in the share of four-year-olds enrolled in preschool education and slight but steady increases in teachers' wages.

Citation:

<http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=MEX&treshold=10&topic=EO>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/21/release-of-mexican-union-boss-a-sign-of-the-times-for-pena-nieto>

Poland

Score 5

As one of its first measures, PiS had reversed the controversial obligatory lowering of the school age and made it possible for parents to send their children to school at the age of seven, as was the case until 2014. On 4 September 2017, with the start of the new school year, another new law on education entered into force, despite massive protests against it by the teachers' union ZNP (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego), which collected more than 900,000 signatures for a referendum against the reform. The new law closed the lower secondary or middle schools introduced in 1999, and marked a return to the previous two-tier school system (eight-year primary school followed by upper secondary school for another four years or vocational education). The reform has been badly prepared, and the costs of this lack of preparation will be borne by local administrations at the lowest (gmina) level, and teachers, parents and students. Most experts fear that the reduction in the duration of universal general education will increase inequality in educational outcomes. Criticism has also been leveled against government attempts to change the curricula with a view to rewriting Polish history, removing many liberal and cosmopolitan texts and values from the core of teaching programs. As for higher education, Minister of Science and Higher Education Gowin presented a first major reform bill in September 2017. Two of its central aims, the reduction of the number of university students and the promotion of the so-called STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), have been controversial.

Citation:

Chłoń-Domińczak, A. (2017): Changes in the education system in Poland. European Social Policy Network, Flash Report 2017/38, Brussels.

Bulgaria

Score 4

The Bulgarian education system is dominated by government-owned institutions and government-set standards at all levels. Public spending on education is 3.6% of GDP and is projected to increase to 3.8% by 2020.

The quality of education in Bulgaria falls short of the needs of a modern competitive economy. While the mean PISA score for mathematics, reading and science improved from 416 points in 2006 to 440 in 2015, it is still relatively poor. Available labor-market data indicate that there are serious skill mismatches, with secondary and tertiary schools producing a surplus in some activity areas and deficits in others, such as engineering and IT. In the QS World University Ranking, only one Bulgarian university, Sofia University, ranked among the world's top universities. However, the university's ranking has slightly worsened and it no longer ranks among the best 700 universities covered.

The level of equity in the Bulgarian education system is average to low. Many children in upper-income families are able to attend private schools, which seem to perform better than public schools. According to a 2016 ranking of Bulgarian middle schools, only 14 of the top-50 schools are regular public schools, the rest being either private schools, or math-focused middle schools. In addition, the school dropout rate among minorities, especially Roma, is significantly higher than the average, meaning that schools do not provide the same opportunities for all ethnic groups. Finally, 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.

In fall 2017, the Ministry of Education presented reforms to improve the measurement of the quality of education, optimize the school network, and strengthen the link between secondary education and the labor market by developing a dual education program (general education combined with vocational training). These proposals have been widely welcomed as modest steps in the right direction.

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Greece

Score 4

Greece performs better than other southern European countries as far as upper secondary education is concerned. With regard to the proportion of the population having completed tertiary education, the country scores much higher than Portugal and Italy, as well as most eastern and southeastern European countries. The latter achievement is probably due to the fact that in tertiary education in Greece there are no tuition fees for undergraduate studies at the 22 state universities and 14 state polytechnics (Technological Educational Institutes, TEI).

However, the age-old pattern of irrational and patronage-based allocation of education resources persists. The economic crisis has further exacerbated the mismatch between the allocation of resources and actual needs. Thus, during the period under review, divergence between employment and education trends worsened. The country clearly needs, among other specialties, more technicians, sales assistants, skilled and semi-skilled tourism workers, and computer scientists. Yet, the university system produces a very large number of graduates in the humanities, including hundreds of theologians, philologists and theater critics every year. There are also large numbers of physicians who cannot find employment in Greek hospitals nor can they find the financial resources to start their own medical practice. The total number of doctors in Greece (specialized and general practitioners) is approximately 69,000. Among OECD member countries, Greece has the highest ratio of doctors to population (Greece has 6.3 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants while the OECD average is 3.3 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants). As a result, hundreds of Greek physicians, who have been trained for free in respectable Greek state medical schools, emigrate to northern and western European countries, where they practice medicine. The same applies to architects and civil engineers, with engineering schools educating large numbers of students despite an overabundance of such professionals in Greece.

Access to university education is, however, not equitable as students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are more likely to successfully pass entrance examinations. Moreover, to the extent their parents can afford it, Greek high school students receive private tutoring to help with high school and the nationwide university entrance examinations. This reflects a cultural contradiction between on the one hand seeing education as an entirely public-sector activity (e.g., university students pay neither tuition fees nor textbook costs, as they obtain textbooks for free) and on the other hand success being dependent on private tutoring.

In fact, the education system is extremely top-heavy, meaning that public resources are channeled to sustaining a large number of state universities and polytechnics, while private resources are used to pay for “cramming schools” which prepare 11th and 12th grade pupils for the nationwide university entrance examinations. It is then no surprise that with regard to expenditure on pre-primary education Greece is

ranked among the lowest spenders in the group of OECD countries. The education system is unevenly structured and unevenly resourced, while there is a national fascination only with university entrance examinations. Consequently, all other levels of education are neglected. For example, Greece belongs to the group of lowest performing countries in PISA examinations, which are taken across the world by 15 year olds. In 2016, Greece ranked 43 out of 72 countries in key education categories, lower than in previous years.

The quality of education across Greek universities is very uneven. Some university departments have a long tradition of excellence, such as the Athens Law School and most of the engineering departments of the National Technical University of Athens. The distribution of infrastructure is generally very uneven across university departments, and most universities suffer from the fact that academic and administrative staff are underpaid. However, compared to previous periods, the period under review has seen a visible reduction in the number of strikes and sit-ins organized by student groups. This development is related to the ascent to power of the Syriza party, one of the major forces organizing student mobilizations under previous governments.

In the period under review, the Ministry of Education introduced a number of measures that further reduced the autonomy of higher education institutions. For instance, the ministry announced the merger of some polytechnics with universities and the establishment of a new university created out of the merger of two polytechnics in Western Attica. None of these measures were based on empirical evidence. They were measures flowing from political expediency. In a period of financial constraints, when salary, pension and welfare benefit increases cannot be affected by the incumbent government, a solution to the problem of the government's declining popularity is the distribution of non-monetary favors to the population. Examples are the symbolic renaming of polytechnics to universities, their "presidents" to "rectors" and the overnight transformation of professors of polytechnics into university professors.

Finally, in the period under review, the Syriza-ANEL coalition government again changed the law on university education. Major policy shifts included tighter supervision of state university and polytechnic financing by the government, stricter regulation of post-graduate programs that severely limit institutional autonomy and the enlargement of selection committees in university departments that are responsible for hiring or promoting faculty members.

As has happened in the past with legislation passed by previous governments, the new university education law regulates the structure and function of universities through numerous detailed regulations. There is no doubt, then, that Greece's education system is one of the most centralized among OECD countries and that education policy is extremely politicized.

Citation:

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

Romania

Score 4

Education policy continues to focus on short-term gains and lacks predictability. Each of the 20 ministers plus who occupied the position after 1989 has introduced reforms, often contradictory to their predecessors' policy agenda. The demographic and economic trends of a low birth-rate, urbanization, transnational competition for educators and rapid technological innovation continue to outpace government reform packages. The structural maladies afflicting Romania's education system include inadequate public spending, challenges in matching graduates with jobs, disparate access in rural and urban areas, and salary disputes between unions and the government. Incremental efforts to address the education problem in Romania have targeted salary increases, new curricula on civics and government, and public-private partnerships linking graduates to the growing high-tech sector. During the period of review, much effort and attention has been wasted on a misguided proposal of Minister Pop to oblige schools to adopt gym textbooks. President Iohannis articulated Romania's challenge at the conclusion of the 2016-2017 school year, citing the need for a comprehensive and long-term reform to the post-secondary education system; however, this kind of fundamental re-ordering remains a distant aspiration in the face of labor disputes and nearly 2,000 rural schools lacking indoor plumbing.

Slovakia

Score 4

The Slovak education system has suffered from a number of weaknesses. While public spending on education has risen, its level is still among the lowest in the European Union. Teachers' education is inadequate and the teaching profession is unattractive. 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. In consequence, the education system is insufficiently geared to increasing Slovakia's economic potential. In 2015, Slovakia introduced a dual vocational education training system, but interest among potential participants remains limited. Tertiary educational attainment has improved, but quality control in higher education does not meet international standards. The implementation of the anti-segregation legislation adopted mid-2015 in order to improve education for Roma children has been hindered by low teacher participation and a lack of teachers able to teach in multicultural settings.

Upon coming to office, the third Fico government, as one of its priorities, announced the drafting of a 10-year National Education and Training Development Program by

the end of 2016. However, the finalization and implementation of the reform program developed and presented in March 2013 by an independent expert commission was delayed by the resignation of Minister of Education Peter Plavčan and his replacement by Martina Lubyová in August 2017. The latter dissolved the Institute of Education Policy (IVP) which had been a major analytical pillar of the ministry and had been strongly involved in the drafting the new program. At the beginning of 2017, a new action plan (Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the Integration of the Roma until 2020) was approved for 2016 – 2018 which means that €170 million will go to education in order to reduce the difference between levels of education of the Roma compared to the national average.

Citation:

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Hungary

Score 3

Since the beginning of the decade, the education system has undergone major changes. Spending has been cut, competencies and control have been centralized, private and religious schools have been strengthened, and secondary education has been restructured with a view to strengthening vocational education. Most international comparisons suggest that the relative performance of Hungarian students has worsened as a result of these changes. The World Economic Forum's recent "Global Human Capital Report" identifies an "inadequately educated workforce" as the single most importance obstacle to doing business in Hungary and puts Hungary on place 87 (111) with regard to primary (higher) education.

In the period under review, public debates on education policy have largely focused on the new act on higher education passed by parliament in April 2017. The act has targeted the Soros-founded Central European University (CEU), the most prestigious institute of higher education in the country in an effort to force it out of the country. Massive protests both inside and outside Hungary, including threats of an infringement procedure on behalf of the EU, led the government to amend the act in October 2017, without really giving up on its goal of disturbing the work of the CEU.

Citation:

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Turkey

Score 3

Over the years, Turkey has made significant progress in increasing access to education. In the 2014 – 2015 school year, Turkey achieved almost universal primary school enrollment. Secondary-school enrollment was 79.4% 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 ranked 101 out of 144 countries for educational attainment in the 2017 Gender Gap Report. The report indicated that 92.6% of women and 98.6% of men are literate, the enrollment rate in primary education is 93.7% for women and 94.6% for men, the enrollment rate in secondary education is 85.5% for women and 87.2% for men, and the enrollment rate in tertiary education is 88.3% for women and 101% for men. Furthermore, pre-primary education (i.e., three to five year olds) and higher education enrollment rates are increasing rapidly

Regarding the quality of education, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 scored Turkey’s performance relatively low. Although Turkey’s scores have improved significantly over time and inequality in student performance has declined, the performance of an average 15 year old in Turkey for reading, mathematics and science is not satisfactory. According to PISA results, 31.2% of Turkish students underperformed in mathematics, sciences and reading. Turkey scored 420 points on the math test and ranked 49 out of 72 countries. Turkey ranked 52 in science and 50 in reading out of 72 countries. PISA 2015 results indicate that a large percentage of students in Turkey cannot understand what they are reading.

As the government seeks to improve the quality of education, education spending has become the largest item in the national budget. Expenditure on education now accounts for nearly a quarter of government revenue. The proportion of GDP allocated to education from the government budget has increased significantly, from 2.5% in 2000 to 4.9% in 2014. Also, in the aftermath of the failed 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent state of emergency period, thousands of teachers, especially in Turkey’s southeastern regions have been dismissed due to alleged links to terrorist organizations. Furthermore, schools, universities, student dormitories, foundations, centers and non-governmental organizations have been shut down and assets have been seized. The government plans to hire new staff to fill the gaps.

Despite announcements on the issue, the government continued to refrain from strengthening universities’ autonomy, and the universities’ ability to act autonomously further deteriorated after the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016. The aftermath of the failed coup attempt had severe impact on academic freedoms. During this period according to Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of

Europe a very large number of academics were dismissed through appended lists in emergency decrees, without any due process and with no judicial remedy.

Citation:

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