

SGI Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2009

Sustainability

Education report



Indicator **Education policy**

Question **Does education policy deliver high-quality, efficient and equitable education and training?**

30 OECD 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 = Policy effectively delivers efficient and equitable education.*
- 8-6 = Policy largely delivers high-quality, efficient and equitable education.*
- 5-3 = Policy partly delivers high-quality, efficient and equitable education.*
- 2-1 = Policy largely fails to deliver high-quality, efficient and equitable education.*

Finland

value 10

Education policy in Finland is a success story. Investments in education have been central to Finland's efforts to improve competitiveness, and the ambition of education policy is to ensure that the entire population has access to education and training. Generally speaking, Finnish people have a high standard of education, and the principle of lifelong learning is important. Basic education is free of charge, and municipalities are responsible for providing education to all local children. Basic education must be provided near home.

There are about 4000 comprehensive schools in Finland, and some 60,000 children start the first grade every year. By and large, the education system has met with undeniable success. In the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, Finland has consistently been among the highest scorers worldwide. The fact that pupils are taught by highly qualified instructors all day, and are offered a free meal during the school day is of essential importance in this regard. Education is given high priority in Finnish society and is intertwined with further public services such as communal libraries. There are 20 universities and 30 polytechnics in the country, and although entrance examinations require a relatively high level of knowledge, some 60 percent to 70 percent of each age cohort enters higher education.

Canada

value 9

The institutional performance of Canada's educational system facilitates equality of opportunity because it effectively diminishes the impact of disadvantaging factors, such as ethnic origin and socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, there are persistent concerns about the level of educational attainment of aboriginal Canadians, who generally suffer from both lower quality of education and lower educational

attainment than other Canadians.

At the tertiary level, there is a certain degree of parity in the quality of education offered by universities. The relative absence of elite universities strengthens equity by providing an equally valued education across the country. The funding structure of tertiary education – according to which most provinces require universities to maintain low tuition fees and to provide financial support in the form of loans and grants – also reinforces equity.

Nevertheless, there are some legitimate concerns regarding the level of funding for universities and the lack of incentives for students to major in socially desirable subjects, such as the sciences and more technological subject areas. In fact, Canada ranks only 20th in the OECD for its proportion of degrees in the natural sciences or engineering. On the whole, however, the Canadian education system is of high quality and efficient. Moreover, with the exception of some small subgroups (e.g., aboriginal Canadians), it reinforces equity.

New Zealand

value 9

The New Zealand educational system has largely been able to decouple students' success from their social status. Access to secondary and tertiary education is fair, although participation indicators in secondary and tertiary education show only average to low values.

A high proportion of the country's high school graduates go on to tertiary education. Although tuition fees are substantial, enrollment was about 500,000 students. Since a large number of these are part-time students, this number translates to about 270,000 equivalent full time students (EFTS). This is a large number in a total population of approximately 4.2 million people. The government provides student loans covering tuition and other expenses, and the incumbent government has made these interest-free for those who stay in New Zealand (the country faces the problem of a high percentage of graduates leaving the country after graduation).

Results from the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests have been impressive, meaning that the quality of education and training courses is excellent. However, there is room to improve with regard to the number of students. The government has responded to this with a number of reforms. The 2002 – 2007 Tertiary Education Strategy has three major target areas for achieving better results: the improvement of the education system's inclusiveness with regard to Maori and Pacific Islanders, the development of a knowledge society, and a higher investment in research and development activities at universities. Recent trends in tertiary education participation show that the strategy seems to be working.

With regard to job-based continuing education, New Zealand has followed the tradition of Anglo-American liberal market economies, investing extensively in transferable assets that are independent of specific jobs, rather than in job-based training, the path followed by some continental European economies.

Iceland

value 8

Although Iceland's public expenditure on education has increased significantly in recent years, several problems remain. First, teacher pay remains inadequate, as is true of public-sector pay more generally. This means that every year school principals have difficulty filling open jobs at their schools, with many teaching positions eventually filled by temporary, underqualified personnel.

Second, 40 percent of individuals between the ages of 25 and 64 have no education beyond primary education. Put differently, the average Icelander aged 25 to 64 has 10.5 years of schooling, or two years less than the OECD average. This means that Iceland's labor force is, on average, less well educated than it should be.

Third, universities face severe issues of underfunding. There are four universities in Iceland to choose from, two of them state universities with minimal fees, and two additional specialized universities. The student loan system makes it possible for students to pay their fees and living costs while studying either in Iceland or abroad. However, funds are scarce, although academic remuneration has improved significantly in recent years. The lack of funds suggested, for example, by levels of revenue per student that are low by OECD standards, is especially burdensome for state universities. Unlike the new semi-private universities, the state institutions are not legally allowed to supplement their revenues by charging tuition fees.

Nevertheless, the school system does provide equitable access to education. One of the main controversies facing the country's current education policy focuses on whether greater variety in schooling, including a larger number of tuition-funded private schools competing with public ones, would increase the quality of education at the expense of equity and ultimately social cohesion.

Netherlands

value 8

The labor force in the Netherlands has a relatively low percentage of individuals with higher degrees. In 2005, 9 percent of the population aged 15-64 held a university degree, and another 16 percent had completed advanced vocational training. Nevertheless, over the past few years, the number of students advancing to institutions of higher learning has been increasing, particularly among students of non-Western descent.

Between 2001 and 2006, the labor force's average level of educational attainment increased. In 2001, 28 percent of all citizens aged 25-34 had graduated from some institution of higher learning as opposed to 34 percent in 2005. The share of people that had participated in advanced training programs also increased. The level stood at 15.9 percent in 2005, and an increase leading up to 20 percent is predicted by 2010.

Nevertheless, for these improvements to continue, increased attention must be paid to the quality of secondary education. Only 31 percent of the schools engaged in secondary education evaluate the quality of their educational programs and learning processes, and the graduates of these schools appear to be significantly

undereducated in terms of mathematics.

Standards for access to education for weaker or immigrant students are met in 79 percent of these schools, and these groups perform sufficiently well in 71 percent of these schools. Nevertheless, the fact that students are channeled in certain education directions at a rather early stage in their educational careers hinders access to higher education at a later stage. Moreover, too little attention is paid to the attainment levels of students from ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic strata. As a result, the educational system is characterized by inequalities based on social status.

A final, critical point is the fact that only a very low percentage of university students graduate with degrees in science and technology. A 2005 study by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market predicts continued shortages in the respective professional groups for the period up to 2010.

Austria

value 7

The Austrian educational system is plagued by one main problem: The selection of students as early as at the age of 10. Many believe that this results in a significant degree of social selection and a lack of horizontal and vertical mobility. Additionally, the Austrian school system does not provide a sufficient pool of the most-qualified employees, and the percentage of university graduates within one generation is significantly below the European average.

The merits of the educational system have been a controversial issue for many years, and talks of possibly reforming the system have often led to heated debate. A Future Commission, which was formed after Austria scored poorly in the PISA tests in 2001, further emphasized the need for reform in addition to suggesting possible solutions, but only some of its recommendations have been implemented. Many experts believe that the conservative ÖVP has played a role in blocking comprehensive education reform.

Belgium

value 7

Since the constitutional reform of 1988, Article 127 of the Belgian constitution states that linguistic communities are mainly responsible for regional education policy. In the Dutch and French linguistic communities, early child care and educational services are very good. All children between the ages of 2.5 and 6 have, by right, access to free pre-school (see also “Family policy”). Primary and secondary education in both communities is compulsory and free of cost until age 18. At 12, students must choose among general, technical, art or vocational secondary education.

Overall, access to basic and intermediate-level education is well ensured and of good or reasonable quality. Access to secondary and tertiary education is also secure. In terms of equity, however, it is commonly admitted that the education system, despite

being free, does not offer equality of educational opportunity among different socioeconomic levels of the population. In addition, there are strong differences between educational achievements in Flanders and in Wallonia, as has been reflected in Pisa study results, where Flanders is ranked considerably higher than Wallonia. These differences are probably due to differing levels of educational spending in the two regions.

Universities and higher education institutions are openly accessible. Though the funding of universities is rather limited, in terms of research and reputation universities maintain acceptable international standards. The number of students per teacher, however, is very high. Students from poorer families receive financial aid of up to €3,300 per year from the community government. Independent of talent, however, it is still not common for young people from lower social strata to pursue a university education.

In sum, Belgium's education system suffers from three main structural problems: 1) Vocationally oriented secondary schools have a much too high percentage of students who have failed in standard secondary education. This state of affairs suggests that students at these schools have lower than average levels of motivation, are performing poorly in education and thus face slim opportunities on the job market. 2) Enrollment in science courses is much lower than in the liberal arts, and 3) in Francophone regions, language proficiency lags, which results in a competitive disadvantage for people from Wallonia in the job market.

Annotation: Thu Dang Kim and Koen Pelleriaux, "Equity in Education Thematic Review: Country Analytical Report, Flanders," OECD 2006.

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/37/39028715.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2008).

Czech Republic

value 7

There is broad access to education in the Czech Republic. Primary, secondary and tertiary education are free, and about one-third of students in higher education receive some financial support from the state. Private schools and universities have yet to establish themselves as a serious alternative to the public sector, and only 8.5 percent of the students in higher education were enrolled in private universities in 2005/2006. Vocational training works relatively well and successfully attracts incoming multinational companies seeking a disciplined labor force capable of carrying out relatively routine tasks. Enrollment in tertiary education, on the other hand, has remained relatively low. In January 2005, a comprehensive education reform overhauling curricula and increasing the autonomy of schools went into effect. The center-left government pledged to increase spending on education, but it failed to deliver on this pledge. The 2006 change in government has intensified debates about the introduction of tuition fees at universities.

Denmark

value 7

Denmark numbers among the OECD countries spending the largest proportion of public funds (as a percentage of GDP) on education. This high level of spending reflects the importance historically attached to education and the egalitarian aim of ensuring that educational achievement is based on the ability and motivation of the individual (or, in other words, on mitigating negative social inheritance). Nevertheless, although Denmark formerly held an educational lead in international comparison, it is less clear whether this continues to be the case today. According to various measurements (e.g., the proportion of an age cohort receiving a higher education or performance in Pisa or similar tests), the results are not outstanding, and only about one-fifth of any age cohort in Denmark receives any education beyond basic schooling.

As a result, the debate on education policy in Denmark consists of both qualitative and quantitative issues. The qualitative dimension includes teaching methods and curricula and focuses on primary schools, where a number of initiatives have been launched, including more closely monitoring individual pupils, using more tests, and intensifying efforts to help students with learning disabilities. When it comes to quantitative issues, targets have been set for the proportion of an age cohort receiving an education relevant to the labor market (currently 80 percent; 2015 target is 95 percent) and the proportion receiving a higher education (50 percent by 2015).

Germany

value 7

In comparison with other OECD country's, the achievements of Germany's education policy are only average. The OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study in 2001, in which Germany scored below average, identified two main reasons for this mediocre performance. First, large differences existed between the rankings of individual federal states. Second, students' social backgrounds had a larger impact on achievement in Germany than was the OECD average, leading to unequal opportunities.

Education policy has now become a political priority. The PISA results led to lively debates over full-day schools, on the adoption of assessment criteria, and on the implementation of centralized written exams for secondary students. Several measures have already been taken, such as the reduction of years required to graduate from the gymnasium level (a secondary schooling level) in some federal states.

Reforms have also taken place at German universities. Germany has been a participant in the Bologna Process, which has led to the introduction of the two-cycle study system featuring bachelor's and master's degree courses. The country has also sought to improve research standards by promoting competition, with an "Excellence Initiative" providing top universities with special financial support. Furthermore, tuition fees have been introduced in several federal states.

Ireland

value 7

The performance of Irish students in the PISA problem-solving evaluations is around the OECD average, as are its rates of attendance at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. According to these metrics, Irish educational policy may be said to be reasonably successful. Furthermore, during the period under review, increased funding has been provided to the educational system. Nevertheless, the existing system has struggled to accommodate increased demand for places created in recent years by Ireland's high immigration rates.

Funding of third-level education has increased and brought higher education research and development funding (as a proportion of GDP) closer to the OECD average level. Nevertheless, core funding of institutions has declined in real terms, and with salaries being comparatively high, there is less money to spend on undergraduate education.

In terms of social cohesion, Irish educational policy does not provide tertiary education that is equally accessible to all segments of society (see also "Social cohesion"). Another educational policy issue is the coexistence of public and private, fee-charging secondary schools, with the latter typically producing better results in terms of leaving certificate results. As access to college courses is primarily regulated by a student's leaving certificate results, this means that students from private schools tend to have privileged access to the most sought-after courses.

Japan

value 7

OECD data indicates that Japan's educational system has made strong progress in recent decades. In the 1960s, Japan's proportion of people with university-level or vocational tertiary qualifications ranked 14th among OECD countries. Today it ranks 2nd, just after Canada (OECD 2007). Japan ranked 3rd in the OECD's 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test, which evaluates students' ability to apply science, mathematics and reading lessons to new situations. Japan's above-average student performance in these tests coincided with below-average impact of socioeconomic background on that performance, indicating relatively equitable access to education in Japan. However, this analysis is marred by the fact that a substantial percentage of women in tertiary education attend two-year women's colleges rather than universities.

Some problems also remain in terms of providing a skilled labor force. The share of science graduates in Japan remains below the OECD average. For every 100,000 employees aged 25 to 34, 1596 people hold a tertiary science degree, compared with an OECD average of 1675. This gap is attributable mainly to the low participation of women in the sciences. Just 573 women per 100,000 employed 25- to 34-year-olds hold tertiary science degrees, compared to 2302 men. This is the lowest rate of any

OECD country (OECD 2007).

Annotation: OECD, "Education at a Glance," OECD: Paris, 2007.

http://www.oecd.org/document/30/0,3343,en_2649_201185_39251550_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed June 20, 2008).

South Korea

value 7

Educational levels are high in international comparison. Korea was among the top-ranked countries in the OECD's recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study. More than 90 percent of each age cohort in recent years has graduated from high school. More than 3 percent of men, and more than 1 percent of women, go on to obtain a PhD. Because education is held in such high esteem, the public pays close attention to education policy.

Despite the good PISA results, the Korean education system's high cost to families is a major concern. Government spending on education is very low compared to other OECD countries. The very results stem from the willingness of parents to invest huge amounts of money in their children's education, in the form of private schools and tutoring lessons taken by the vast majority of students. This favors children from well-off families, so good schools tend to be concentrated in expensive neighborhoods. Teaching methods focusing on discipline and memorization are often criticized as outdated. Initiative and creativity as prerequisites for innovation and progress are not actively promoted, and are sometimes even discouraged.

In 2005, the Roh administration passed a new private school law aimed at curbing corruption and improving the quality of private education. It requires private schools to have elected board members who are teachers and parents. In addition, the government has worked to reduce regional differences in the quality of schools and to improve the educational opportunities of the less well-off through income subsidies and other means. A lack of public funds has undermined efforts to improve schools in poorer and rural areas, however.

The development of high-quality universities and world class research capabilities has been one of the government's top priorities. The quality of universities varies greatly, however. Public universities that educate about 10 percent of students, as well as a few prestigious private universities, provide excellent training, but the majority of private universities remain below international standards. Consequently, well-off students and those who can secure a scholarship usually go abroad for graduate school, mostly to the United States. The high cost of private university tuition is another concern. Government guarantees for student loans and long-term, low-interest loans for underprivileged students remain insufficient.

Sweden

value 7

In Sweden, children must attend nine years of compulsory schooling starting at age seven, and all education throughout the public school system is free. In addition to municipal schools, there are also independent schools, which are open to all and which must be approved by the Swedish National Agency for Education. During the period under observation, the number of independent schools has increased, but the main proportion of schools continue to be publicly run. Sweden scores very high on public spending on education, which is a consequence of the public funding system. It also scores high on indicators measuring vocational training.

The Swedish education system is probably best described as being flat and relatively stable but with very few peaks. Indeed, there are almost no elite schools, and the results from the PISA tests indicate that Sweden only scores in the middle range of OECD countries. Furthermore, Sweden's anti-authoritarian style of education has been criticized recently by the parties on the right, and nepotism in recruitment and inflexibility have hurt the competitiveness of its universities. As a result of these factors, a large part of the political debate in Sweden during the period under observation was focused on the quality of education.

Switzerland

value 7

Switzerland's education system is strongly influenced by the federal and decentralized structure of the country's political system, as education policy falls within the jurisdiction of the cantons and municipalities. The system itself generally provides a high-quality education; a particularly efficient feature is its two-track model of university and non-academic training schools. This system is focused on the secondary level, with an ensuing amount of vocational training, with which Switzerland has experienced excellent results. However, the higher education system has experienced some difficulties. Although access to tertiary education has been improved for women and students coming from peripheral areas, students from socially disadvantaged families lack equal opportunity of access. As a result of the Bologna Process, the Swiss education system is currently experiencing extensive changes.

Australia

value 6

The federal government has direct responsibility for higher education only. Primary and secondary school education, as well as vocational education, are the responsibility of state governments. However, state school and vocational training systems are broadly similar across the country. Education is generally of a high quality. Equity of access is also good. This is true even for higher education, where

course fees are significant, because of a universally available student loan scheme, in which loans carry a zero real rate of interest and repayments are required only when personal income exceeds a certain threshold. Inequities do arise in access to federally-subsidized non-state secondary schools, which offer a high quality of education, but often charge high fees.

High school completion rates increased dramatically in the 1980s and early 1990s, but are still relatively low at approximately 80 percent. Higher education enrollments also grew dramatically from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. Despite this, employer groups and other commentators have been bemoaning a lack of suitably skilled labor in Australia for several years, calling for greater government efforts to increase skill levels. Much of the focus has been on vocational education and training. Government responses to date have been muted, however. Total public spending on education has been declining, in contrast to trends elsewhere, with private sources making up the shortfall. Australia has also lagged behind other comparable countries in school retention rates, and vocational education and training has been underfunded, largely as a consequence of disputes over financial responsibility between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. The government has begun to address issues of underfunding in higher education and the overreliance on overseas students as a source of funds for universities.

Norway

value 6

Norway has a tradition of very high education attainment. The Norwegian labor force is one of the most educated in the world, as measured by the share of its working population with secondary and tertiary education. Like other Scandinavian countries, the Norwegian government spends a considerable amount of resources (7.6 percent of GDP) on public education. The emphasis of the primarily public school system is on free access and equalization of opportunities. Students with difficulties in learning or socialization receive a high level of attention. In contrast, there is little emphasis on excellence or on providing specific attention to the most gifted pupils.

In spite of the high levels of educational attainment, there are important problems. The share of degrees in scientific disciplines is very low by international standards, and this limits the impact of public investment in education with regard to the country's competitiveness and capacity for innovation.

On the one hand, this may be due to the fact that university access is entirely demand-driven, with students able to choose a preferred field of study without any constraint. On the other hand, the country's high wage compression weakens the incentive for students to self-select in the most socially productive areas.

Another source of major concern is the quality of education in certain areas. In the OECD's recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, Norwegian students' performance was below the OECD average in mathematical, problem-solving and scientific knowledge. Science performance has been especially poor – worse, for instance, than Italy, Spain and Germany, whose performances were

considered to be particularly unsatisfactory. Significant regress was seen with respect to previous instances of the same study. A higher emphasis on student incentives, teacher quality and a culture of excellence may be necessary to improve these performances.

United Kingdom

value 6

Although the United Kingdom was ranked 8th out of 33 countries in the 2000 PISA study and literacy rates of 15 year-olds are above the OECD average, a high percentage of its population have low educational attainment. The educational system produces a large group of non-achievers without basic literacy, and there is a lack of intermediate and vocational qualifications. Twenty-nine percent of those aged 25 to 34 are low skilled – a share considerably larger than that found in most OECD countries.

This state of affairs prompted the Labour government of the past decade to focus on education policy and implement a plethora of policy initiatives aimed at transforming the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors. To combat a long history of deep-seated skills problems, incentives were introduced to reduce the attrition rate of students above 16 years of age. Other programs were initiated to provide a better start for those under five, and opportunities for adults to renew their skills were expanded.

The school system produces some world-class high-flyers, but these individuals are primarily the result of private schools and the few remaining grammar schools, the latter being a form of selective secondary education that takes only the top 10 percent to 25 percent of pupils from a catchment area. On average, the British education system benefits above all the middle classes and is not open enough to help clever but poor children. It also has no strategy for dealing with the most troublesome students and school truancy. Independent schools remain sought after by middle-class parents.

There is a clear lack of opportunities for intermediate and vocational training in the United Kingdom. One in ten 16- to 18-year olds is neither in education, nor in employment or training. Britain has one of the lowest school enrollment rates of 17-year olds.

Things look less gloomy at the university level, where the supply of graduates compares well internationally. University enrollment rates expanded rapidly during the 1990s. Recently, higher education specialists have focused on reducing the social gap in university admissions through closer monitoring, while at the same time, the introduction of university fees have threatened to deter lower social groups from making use of new offers (NB: devolution has allowed Scotland to set other priorities here). The experiment with so-called city academies to improve education achievement in inner cities has been ambiguous. Although access to education has improved, it remains unequal. Graduate output of upper secondary and tertiary education is still lower than in most other European countries, and the UK system fails to produce sufficient numbers of scientists and engineers.

United States

value 6

U.S. education policy generally delivers high-quality, relatively efficient, but decidedly inequitable education and training. For the most part, elementary and secondary education is funded from local property taxes, which yields vastly more resources for high-income areas.

Even more important, however, is the fact that patterns of racial and economic residential segregation result in low-income and minority students being concentrated in schools that often have high truancy rates, serious problems of school discipline and even crime, and markedly poor academic performance. For this reason, students coming from such schools are at both a financial and academic disadvantage when it comes to competing for admission to a college or university, and especially the best of them. In contrast, schools in middle-class and wealthy areas are amply resourced, orderly and highly effective.

At the same time, however, when compared with other OECD nations, even U.S. schools in these areas produce only average results with respect to mathematics and science achievement. For these reasons, the U.S. educational system contributes little to educational equity and social cohesion, and it implies an abdication of economic opportunities. The latter also results from the comparatively poor quality of vocational education in the United States. The exception to this is the vocational training provided in the U.S. military, which is of considerable importance owing to the large size of the armed forces and the amount of time its members are required to serve.

There are fewer concerns about the higher education system, which is large and generally effective by world standards.

France

value 5

Despite France's comparatively high international ranking in educational matters, there are problems to be addressed by French education policy. The education system in France is highly centrally organized. Although there have been efforts aimed at reforming the school system, each year 60,000 students drop out of secondary schools without having earned a degree, thus facing slim opportunities on the employment market.

French universities have also been suffering for years; despite continued debate, no moves have been made toward reform. High attrition rates among university students constitute another significant problem (up to 50 percent drop out before completing a formal degree). There is also a large discrepancy between top universities, which can compete internationally, and the generally underfinanced and overcrowded universities attended by a majority of the population. The new government at the time of writing is trying to solve this problem by granting universities more

autonomy.

The distribution of available funds in the French education system is also unusual compared to other OECD countries. It is one of the few countries where spending per unit for secondary schools is higher than it is for university students. Given the obvious problems with the “underachieving” French university system, the French government seems to be promoting the implementation of the Bologna process in order to avoid national antagonism and is looking to Europe for help in the matter.

Hungary

value 5

Hungary has relatively high levels of education spending. Access to primary and secondary education is free, but the quality of education has declined in recent years. Since schools are financed by local governments, primary and secondary education has been characterized by marked local and social disparities. The erosion of vocational training, which has suffered from a lack of resources and insufficient political interest, has contributed to skill shortages. Tertiary enrollment has risen despite the growth in tuition fees, but the strong expansion of tertiary education has not been matched by corresponding changes in labor demand. The Gyurcsány government has so far done little to address these problems.

Italy

value 5

The Italian school system can be characterized as a centralized, public system that is financed by the government through taxation and provides the same quality of education to all citizens. Thus, a low-income Italian family should have access to the same level of education as does a higher-income family. However, despite this attempt at equal opportunity, Italy, in comparison to other European countries, has displayed lower intergenerational mobility not only in terms of occupation but also in terms of education level.

Moreover, notwithstanding the low level of tuition fees and absence of other barriers, Italy’s education system remains characterized by low educational achievement at the university level. In Italy, annual expenditure per primary and secondary student is well above the corresponding OECD averages, while Italy spends comparatively little on tertiary education relative to its OECD peers. With the allocation of only 0.9 percent of GDP, Italy is the only OECD country that spends less than 1 percent of its GDP on tertiary education.

Thus, the education system is severely underfunded, does not provide for the effective and selective recruitment of teachers and offers too-limited resources for supporting children from poorer families. The amount of school-age individuals who do not complete their studies is very high. While significant additional investments in education will be important, it is clear that more money alone will not be enough. Investment in education needs to become more efficient. Productivity in education

has declined because the quality of schooling has remained constant while the price of maintaining the system (primarily providing teachers' salaries) has increased, although more slowly than the OECD average.

Portugal

value 5

The population of Portugal has one of the lowest proportions of individuals with higher education attainment levels in the European Union. To a significant degree, this results from the country's economic structure, although this structure is changing. The economy used to concentrate on low technology sectors that only demanded workers with a secondary-level education, as was expressed by the relatively limited financial returns to education above the secondary level (as measured by salary differentials). However, competition from low-cost producers from within and outside the European Union has resulted in a reduction in the importance of those sectors. At the same time, this changing picture has exposed persisting deficiencies in the professional and tertiary educational systems (despite a very significant increase in the tertiary education attendance rates in the country).

Low qualifications and a lack of human capital continue to be cited as the main obstacles to economic and social development in Portugal. In the period under consideration, a large number of measures and actions were taken to improve this situation, including the introduction of English language instruction at the primary school level, the provision of meals at school and national plans for increasing literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, changes in the organization of public schools have included measures aimed at increasing the job stability of faculty members in each school as well as the amount of time students spend in classes and other curricular enrichment activities. The career advancement requirements and the statute of teachers have been reformulated, allowing for greater teacher accountability vis-à-vis school boards and the Ministry of Education. Likewise, important efforts have been made in terms of providing training to young people who have already entered the job market before completing secondary school. Lastly, the network of schools has been reformulated. Schools with a very small number of students have been closed down, and resources have been concentrated on the remaining schools. All in all, reform in education policy has been visible and courageous. Nevertheless, less progress has been made when it comes to modernizing school facilities, which in many cases suffer from visible decrepitude, and to restructuring the governance of schools. Furthermore, the fact that several of these reforms have taken place in an environment characterized by acute conflict with teachers and teachers' unions might hamper their full implementation.

Spain

value 5

From many points of view, Spain's education policies are deficient. Compared to other EU countries, Spain devotes less public resources to education while private

spending per family on education is comparatively high. As for student attainment, dropout levels in compulsory and secondary education are also greater than the EU average while Spain's continuous training system lags behind the OECD average as well. In terms of equity two crucial aspects should be noted: There is an increasing risk of social polarization from what has emerged as a dual training system, based on differences of infrastructure and quality between public and private (but publicly funded) systems. The situation is getting worse, as the immigrant population tends to be concentrated in public centers while the Spanish middle classes flee toward private services.

The share of people aged 25 to 64 who have completed an upper secondary education (49.4 percent) in 2006 was still far below the EU-27 average (70 percent). Despite the percentage of first-year university students (27.1 percent in 2005), a percentage that is higher than in most other European countries, the number of university graduates is still relatively low. The number of graduates per 1,000 students from 25- to 34-years-old was 0.9; the EU-25 in comparison sees 1.5 students per 1,000 graduate. Students frequently register for doctorate-level studies but few ever complete their studies. There are no Spanish universities among the top 100 universities in international rankings. The decentralization of the education system and poor intergovernmental coordination mechanisms make it difficult to preserve the basic unity and cohesion of the system as per constitutional guarantees.

Mexico

value 4

Mexico's education system is generally of poor quality, and is not linked to the needs of the labor market. The net enrollment rate at primary school level is almost 100 percent, much better than 50 years ago, when infant and child mortality rates started to fall decisively, resulting in an unexpectedly high demand for educational services. Nonetheless, graduation from secondary or higher levels of education is very low. Enrollment in secondary education now amounts to around 60 percent of a given age group. The trend is upward, but few other OECD countries have figures this low. Members of a privileged elite attend good and prestigious private schools, while the vast majority of children are poorly educated in badly equipped, inadequately staffed public institutions.

Progress in improving the quality of education is held back by a powerful teachers union that has consistently opposed measures to improve qualification requirements and teachers assessments. Teachers' pay absorbs an unusually high proportion of the education budget – though it must be noted that teachers are not particularly well paid by OECD standards. The general quality of Mexican universities is much better than a generation ago, and far more Mexicans attend university. Good Mexican graduates can study abroad and fit easily into postgraduate training programs at universities in the United States or elsewhere. Private schooling in Mexico reaches a high standard. However, the stratification of the system has probably intensified in recent years since public institutions have not for the most part kept up with developments in the private sector.

Poland

value 4

Poland spends in relative terms a lot on education. Access to education is relatively broad-based, with the strong expansion of the private sector helping to increase differentiation. Since 1989, tertiary enrollment has increased substantially. The main problem of the current education system is a lack of synchronization between the education system and the demands of the labor market. Vocational training is poorly developed. Continuing education is relatively limited and does not reach the elderly or less-skilled groups. The PiS government has done little to address these problems. Trying to foster "patriotism for tomorrow," the government has been preoccupied with issues such as changing school reading lists and introducing school uniforms.

Slovakia

value 4

Slovakia scored poorly in the first PISA study. The education system, which grants free access to primary and secondary education, has suffered from low spending and outdated curricula. It also fails to deliver high tertiary attainment numbers. As a result, the match between the education system and the labor market has been weak. The Dzurinda government initiated substantial reforms during its time in office. It introduced tuition fees for universities and increased teachers' salaries to attract better qualified staff. It strengthened the links between schools and firms in order to improve the quality of vocational education and training and it initiated a decentralization of primary and secondary education. However, these and other reforms were interrupted by the breakup of the government coalition in February 2006 and the premature elections. The Fico government has done little to impact the education system so far.

Luxembourg

value 3

Luxembourg's education system performs poorly, as revealed by the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study of 2003, in which the country ranked behind all other EU member states. According to the OECD, Luxembourg's system fails to fulfill two important objectives: the reduction of social inequalities, and the preparation of each citizen for participation in a labor market that increasingly asks for spatial as well as educational mobility.

Language barriers present the main obstacle to equality of opportunity, particularly for immigrant children who are not fluent in Luxembourgish. Additionally, neither German nor French are taught as foreign languages, since they are official state languages. The school system was not designed to support a pupil population of whom 40 percent have immigrant origins, and who are not familiar with all official

languages. The educational level of young people entering the job market also reflects on the inefficiencies of the education system. In 2006, about 20 percent of new workers had not finished school.

Following the June 2004 elections, the new socialist education minister launched a set of policies aimed at reducing the impact of social or cultural origins on educational attainment, reforming language teaching, and improving professional training to reduce the number of young people excluded from the labor market because of low skills. However, confronted by the powerful teachers' lobby, the Ministry of National Education avoided difficult measures, instead encouraging a variety of experiments which did not go to the heart of the system's problems.

Greece

value 2

Greece needs a wholesale reform in education, including the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education as well as vocational training and life-long learning. Recent governments have emphasized the expansion of education, in order to offer educational opportunities to middle and lower social strata. However, policies have not facilitated high-quality learning, or the improvement of education quality.

Greece spends too little on education, and what is spent in this sector is not used efficiently. Public spending on education, as a percent of GDP, is the second-lowest in the European Union. A number of failures are evident. The share of students finishing secondary education is the fifth-lowest in the European Union, and tertiary completion rates are the eighth-lowest. Even more strikingly, the participation rate in informal job-related education and training at all levels of education is also extremely low in Greece – about 4 percent of students, compared to an OECD average of 17 percent. Greek students rank 28th among the 30 countries participating in the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), with only Turkish and Mexican scores ranking lower.

Apart from the lack of funding, the Greek education system has also suffered qualitatively for decades. Intense demand for tertiary education, which is public and free, and the "numerous clausus" system applied to all candidates for admission, regardless of university department, have reduced secondary education to a preparatory school for the competitive university entrance examinations. Education generally does not provide a skilled labor force, with the exception of certain professionals such as lawyers, medical doctors and engineers. Although most schools and universities are state-run, households pay large sums of money to cover tuition costs for cramming schools, which are private, afternoon and evening courses preparing high school pupils for the competitive university entrance examinations.

The incumbent government passed two laws in 2005 which pertained to the implementation of the Bologna process guidelines in the Greek university system. To date, the laws have been implemented only partially as a result of a lack of political will, bureaucratic inertia and a lack of skilled personnel in the Ministry of Education – a situation that is symptomatic of Greece's education policy as a whole.

Turkey

value 2

Turkish education policy largely fails to deliver high-quality, efficient and equitable education and training. Regarding participation in primary, secondary and tertiary education, Turkey ranks 103rd among 177 countries of medium-level development. Literacy among those 15 years old and older is 87.14 percent; child labor (under 17 years old) ranks 5.9 percent; pre-primary school education participation falls at 19.9 percent; and the participation of girls in primary, secondary and tertiary education falls behind those of boys at 6 percent, 2 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Compared to the only modest results of the educational system, education expenditures are rather high. The public sector of Turkey spends 4.33 percent of GDP on education, while the private sector spends 2.46 percent of GDP.

Although in theory, education from first grade to postgraduate levels is free in public schools and universities, there are serious issues of overcrowding and educational quality. Sending children to school is still a serious financial burden on families with very limited resources. Schools are free (public universities charge a largely symbolic tuition) but feeding, clothing and transporting children are not. In recent years, textbooks for basic education have been distributed by the government free of charge, but other necessary items such as writing instruments and notebooks cost money.

There are a number of very high-quality schools (both public and private) as well as universities (again, both public and private) but the system as a whole fails on quality and cannot provide nearly the same education to children of low-income families. Private tutoring and private preparatory courses, which prepare students for high school and university entrance examinations as well as providing remedial support for normal schoolwork, can be considered a major source of inequality in the system, as a student who does not take private tutoring and/or enroll in preparatory courses has little hope of being successful on highly competitive and selective entrance exams.

This report is part of the Sustainable Governance Indicators 2009 project, which assesses and compares the reform capacities of the OECD member states.

More on the SGI 2009 at www.sgi-network.org

Contact

Andrea Kuhn, Dr. Leonard Novy, Daniel Schraad-Tischler

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256

33311 Gütersloh

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de