

SGI Sustainable
Governance
Indicators

2014 Education Report

Education Policy



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 had top-scores in PISA 2006 and 2009, ranking as one of the highest in Europe for educational outcomes. A small number of low achievers and modest school-level variance in student achievement are important strengths of the Estonian education system. Also, the enrolment rates at various education levels, including lifelong learning, are above the international average. Moreover, Estonia has reached some of the ET 2020 headline targets already, and in others it is very close to the target level.

Municipalities provide pre-school education and it is largely accessible (the enrolment rate is about 95%). However, some fast growing urban areas have experienced a shortage of vacant places. General education and vocational education and training (VET) are free and at the tertiary level about 50% of students pay tuition. There are about 500 general education schools, 50 VET institutions and 30 higher education institutions (HEI) including six public universities.

Interestingly, while higher education is generally associated with better employability and a higher salary, that is less so the case in Estonia. Firstly, compared to other countries, Estonia has a higher vertical mismatch, meaning that many university graduates are employed in jobs that do not require university education. Secondly, compared to other countries, the

effect of education on salary level is lower. Gender pay gap – the highest in Europe (28%) – is one aspect of this larger problem.

Citation:

Estonian Human Development Report 2012/13, Chapter 1.3. Education <http://www.kogu.ee/olemus-ja-roll/e-esti-inimarengu-aruanne/eesti-inima-rengu-aruanne-2013/>

Finland

Score 9

Built on the principle of lifelong learning, education policy in Finland promotes and maintains a high standard of education. All people by law must have equal access to high-quality education and training; basic education is free, and municipalities are responsible for providing educational services to all local children. Finland has some 20 universities and 30 polytechnics, and close to 70% of graduates each school year enters higher education. Nevertheless, the proportion of graduates from higher education (those 25 to 34 years old) has been comparatively low, and the number of graduates overall has been rising more slowly than in many other OECD countries. By and large, Finland's education system is successful, and in the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa), Finland has consistently been among the highest scorers worldwide, and is also ranked at the top in 2012. Adopted by the government every four years, the Education and Research Development Plan is the key document of education and research policy in Finland and directs the implementation of education and research policy goals as stated in the Government Program. From 2011 to 2016, the plan will focus on the alleviation of poverty, inequality and exclusion. In 2012, a National Working Life Development Strategy was completed; an implementation phase is at the time of writing under preparation.

Citation:

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

New Zealand

Score 9

Education policy in New Zealand was in the past characterized by a paradox. On the one hand, as experienced in a number of other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, participation indicators in secondary and tertiary education were average to low. On the other hand, the country's Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) results have been impressive overall, although the socioeconomic background of students affects performance to a higher degree than in most other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Among the

major initiatives introduced in recent years have been substantial increases in expenditures on preschool education, and the introduction of national standards in literacy and numeracy for children one to eight years old. Data from the Ministry of Education released in 2013 show that small gains have been made, although Maori and Pasifika students continue to underachieve, as do boys relative to girls. While the government has attempted to introduce performance-based criteria for teachers, there has been strong resistance to the use of such measures from both primary and secondary schools. There has been a remarkable increase in student numbers in tertiary education. New Zealand now has among the highest standards of tertiary attainment in the OECD (ranked fifth out of 41 countries). With its Tertiary Education Strategy 2010 – 2015, the National Party-led government has especially focused on strengthening the inclusion of ethnic minorities in education. Attainment has increased at all levels. With regard to job-based continuing education, the New Zealand economy has followed the tradition of Anglo-American liberal market economies (LMEs) that invest more extensively in transferable skills, independent from current jobs, rather than in job-based training as do some continental European coordinated economies (CMEs).

Citation:

Annual Report of the Ministry of Education 2012 (Wellington: Ministry of Education 2012).

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

Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 (Wellington: Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education 2010).

Canada

Score 8

The quality of Canadian education is high. In 2009, Canada ranked fourth worldwide in terms of the quality of secondary education, as evidenced by its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores. Canada has a number of world-class universities and the average quality of its universities is high. Canadian teachers are well-paid by global standards. Equity in access to education in Canada is also impressive. Canada has the highest proportion of the population aged 20 – 64 with some post-secondary education, thanks to the extensive development of community colleges. There are many educational second chances for Canadian youth. The high-school completion rate is also high and rising. Socioeconomic background represents a much lower barrier to post-secondary education in Canada than in most other countries. Because of tight government budgets and the lower priority given to education than to health by the general public, spending on education has been kept under control in Canada in recent years. The level of financial resources allocated to education, largely by provincial governments (as education falls under the provinces' jurisdiction), is reasonable, and resources are in general used efficiently.

Despite the overall strengths of the Canadian education and training system, there are significant weaknesses and challenges. Probably the biggest deficiency in education policy has been the failure to reduce the gap in educational attainment between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations. Schools on reserves are funded federally through Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada. A recent evaluation carried out for the ministry found that education opportunities and results are not comparable to those off the reserves, that the comparatively lower quality of teacher instruction and curriculum is affecting student success, and that funding gaps relative to provincially funded regular (off-reserve) schools persist, especially in isolated, low-population communities. Other challenges include the low completion rate for apprenticeship programs, threats to the accessibility of higher education related to large hikes in tuition; the underutilization of recent immigrants' high average skills, low levels of functional literacy in many workplaces, the limited development of the early-childhood education system, a relatively low proportion of PhDs in the overall population, and inadequate levels of employer training. These challenges are well recognized and are being addressed, though with varying degrees of success.

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_elsecc_1365173418229_eng.pdf

Iceland

Score 8

Public expenditure on education increased in the years before the 2008 economic collapse, but has been cut somewhat during the crisis. State expenditure on high schools, colleges and universities in 2012 was significantly less as a share of GDP than in 2008 – 2009. Teacher pay was for many years low compared with private-sector salaries; it proved difficult to fill vacant jobs at primary and secondary schools, and the low pay resulted in a large number of underqualified teachers. The economic crisis has changed this, however. Salaries have decreased in the private sector, and the tight job market has attracted qualified teachers back to the schools.

The average Icelander aged 25 to 64 has up to two fewer years of schooling than the OECD average. This means that Iceland's labor force is on average less well educated than its economic peers. Specifically, a third of Iceland's labor force has completed secondary education compared with nearly a half of Norway's labor force.

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools in Iceland. The crisis forced them to engage in considerable cutbacks and rationalization measures, for example by shortening the school year. The state is

responsible for high schools and most universities. Though there have been general cutbacks in expenditures on high schools, their number has increased in recent years, particularly in rural areas supported by regional development policies.

Iceland's universities have long been seriously underfunded, even during the boom years. There are seven universities: two private ones supported by state grants, and five state institutions including two agricultural colleges. The government in power during the 2009 – 2013 period considered rationalizing the university sector either by reducing the number of universities or by inducing more cooperation between them. Some merger discussions between two of the private universities took place, but did not come to fruition. Significant cooperation between the state universities has taken place since 2011, for example through the joint employment of teachers, a joint student-registration system, and other such means. The government has cut grants provided to the public and private universities.

South Korea

Score 8

The country's tertiary education enrollment rate is very high. Education policies are hotly debated, and are an important priority for the government. About 8% of GDP is spent on education institutions – much more than the OECD average of 6.3%. However, only 4.9% of GDP is public expenditure, which is less than the OECD average of 5.4%. Thus, much of the success of Korean education can be attributed to parents' willingness to pay for education and not to public policies. Almost all parties involved in the field of higher education agree that a change in the Korean system is both necessary and of high priority. There are many complaints about the curriculum content and the less creative teaching styles at Korean schools and universities. Entrance exams are a particularly controversial issue, which critics see as a major cause of weak analytical and debating skills. Many advanced systems have been introduced for education reform, but cramming and rote-learning are still favored over analytic skills, discussion and creativity.

Citation:

OECD, *OECD in figures 2009*

OECD, *Government at a Glance 2009*

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

OECD, *Education at Glance 2012*, DOI: 10.1787/eag_highlights-2012-en

Sweden

Score 8

Education policy continues to be extensively debated in Sweden. Critics point to how Sweden is slipping in most international comparisons in terms of student knowledge and analytical skills. Sweden currently ranks 21st on PISA scores, an alarmingly low ranking for a country relying on knowledge-intensive sectors for its economic growth and competitiveness. Critics also point to the high level of youth unemployment, which suggests that the education system fails to provide the skills and knowledge demanded by the labor market. A final criticism is that the skills required to enter into a teachers' education program at universities today are so low that there is very little competition to enter those programs. As a result, new teachers have limited aptitude to teach.

In its defense, the government argues that it is extremely active in reforming education at all levels. The government's financial commitment to education is certainly strong. To improve the "fit" between education and the labor market, the government is opening alternative education programs that provide an avenue of learning other than preparation 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 government is committed to strengthening the competence and professionalization of teachers by, for example, reforming the university programs and introducing certification for teachers.

A key means of assessing Sweden's education policy involves looking at the extent to which 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.

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

A third and final way to assess Sweden's education policy concerns equitable access to education. Education policy has performed rather well in this respect. Coming back to a previous point, if anything, the system is "too

equitable” in that requirements to enter some programs in university are so low that basically all who apply are admitted, resulting in a “race to the bottom” in tertiary education standards.

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 tertiary education system continues to discriminate against students from families with low social status and – probably as a related effect – against foreigners born in the country.

The Bologna reforms are now well under way in Switzerland. However, some experts claim that this process is detrimental to the quality of the technical colleges (Fachhochschulen), and that with academization, vocational training is losing its strong reputation.

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, as well as regional inequality in access to educational opportunities, equity in access overall is questionable. For example, the inequality in access to educational opportunities between cantons is similar to inequalities on this issue between European nation-states. As another example, in the canton of Geneva, 29% of all 19-year-old inhabitants acquire the Matur, a high-school diploma entitling its grantee to attend universities, while in the canton of Uri only 13% of 19-year-olds inhabitants gain direct access to universities. However, the importance of these differences are somewhat reduced by the permeability within the school and university system. Likewise, the system of vocational training offers considerable career prospects. Finally, resource allocation within the educational system seems to be very efficient.

Australia

Score 7

The quality of Australia's education system is variable, tending to be higher in non-government schools and in major metropolitan regions. Overall the high school completion rate is currently around 80%, with all state and territory governments currently having a target of a 90% completion rate by 2015. However, Australia spends only one-fifth of the OECD-average on preschools and the country has been falling down the PISA rankings among countries in its region. Concerns about deterioration in educational standards and outcomes over time has provided an impetus for a strong policy focus since 2007 on early childhood, primary and secondary schooling. The most important development in the review period was a commitment to implement the recommendations of the "Review of Funding for Schooling" (a.k.a. "the Gonski Review," named after the chairman of the committee that wrote the report), the final report of which was released in December 2011. The Gonski Review made 41 recommendations on the funding of schools in Australia. Implementation of the recommendations would entail a major injection of new funding with a strong emphasis on directing resources to where they are needed most. To date, only a few of the states and territories have indicated they will sign up to the new funding agreement, but most jurisdictions are likely to ultimately come onboard. The Labor government initiatives are likely to bring about some improvements in quality, but it is too early to discern significant effects as of the end of the review period, even for those programs introduced in 2008.

With regard to equity, implementation of the Gonski Review recommendations is likely to bring about some improvements. However, the continued high level of government subsidies to non-government schools means inequity in schooling outcomes continues to be high. The level of private funding in Australia is significantly higher than the OECD-average. Less affluent parents cannot afford to send their children to private schools, which creates inequality. In the higher education sector, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS, 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. On election to office (2007), the current Labor government abolished all full-fee undergraduate courses at public universities for Australian students, and at the same time removed caps on HECS-funded places. This has helped facilitate a sizeable expansion of the higher education sector.

Finally, with regard to efficiency, there is much room for improvement. Australia's educational system is complex, with shared responsibilities

between the states and the Commonwealth, and with funding coming mainly from the Commonwealth, which contributes to inefficiencies. Federal funding for vocational education and training is very limited. State and territory governments are highly revenue-constrained, and as a consequence the sector is relatively poorly funded. There have been proposals to create a HECS scheme for vocational training, but to date no progress has been made. Questions have also been raised about the cost-effectiveness of the new funding resulting from the Gonski Review, although the lack of policy detail at this stage makes it difficult to assess. The higher education sector is generally efficient and universities have had to be quite entrepreneurial in order to prosper, aggressively marketing to international students and pursuing independent sources of research funds.

Citation:

David Gonski, 'Final Report of the Review of Funding for Schooling', December 2011: <http://www.betterschools.gov.au/review>
 Moshe Justman and Chris Ryan, 'What's Wrong with the Gonski Report: Funding Reform and Student Achievement?', Policy Brief No. 2/13, Melbourne Institute, The University of Melbourne, April 2013: http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/policy_briefs_series/pb2013n02.pdf

Cyprus

Score 7

Cyprus' educational system is mainly public. It has undergone various reforms since the 1990s, and new plans and policies are today under study. The content of education has been primarily knowledge-based, with comparatively less focus on research, experimentation and critical thought. However, the latter subjects have gained ground since 2000. The high level of literacy (near 100% for youth) and high rate of upper-secondary attainment are indicative of a culture that places a high value on education. Cyprus has a high rate of participation in tertiary education, shared almost equally between Cyprus and overseas educational institutions; it ranks sixth in the European Union with respect to the proportion of the population aged 30 – 34 with tertiary education (45.8%).

The few public kindergarten-level facilities are provided mainly by communal authorities. Schooling from the pre-primary level to the age of 15 is compulsory. Vocational schools, apprenticeship programs and other education and professional training schemes also exist, mostly funded by public authorities but also by educational institutions and other organizations. Tertiary education including postgraduate coursework is provided by public and private universities as well as several private colleges and other institutions. A modest student allowance was offered to all tertiary-level students until 2011, after which income criteria were introduced.

Public expenditure on education was quite high in 2010; however, this was partly attributable to expenditure on a massive school buildings improvement program as well as to the high teacher salaries.

Prior to the establishment of a national university in 1992, all Cypriot students performed their graduate and postgraduate studies in overseas universities. The fact that only about half of them do today is one indicator of an efficient national system.

Citation:

1. Council of Europe, Report on fourth Assessment Visit, Anti- Money Laundering and Combating the financing of Terrorism Cyprus, 27 September 2011,

<http://www.cysec.gov.cy>

http://www.law.gov.cy/law/mokas/mokas.nsf/dttindex_en/dttindex_en?OpenDoc umen

Lithuania

Score 7

The educational system in Lithuania is comprised of the following stages: 1) early childhood education and care (preprimary and preprimary class-based education); 2) compulsory education for children aged seven through 16 (including primary education, lower-secondary general education, vocational lower-secondary education); 3) upper-secondary and post-secondary education (for persons aged 17 to 19); and 4) higher education provided by universities (undergraduate, graduate and PhD studies) and colleges (undergraduate studies). Lithuania has a high level of tertiary attainment, with 43.8% of citizens 30 to 34 years old having completed a tertiary degree in 2010. Its rate of early school leaving is below the EU average, at just 8.1% in 2010. However, enrollment rates in vocational-education and training programs are low.

The reputation of vocational education and training in Lithuania must be improved, as it is below the EU-27 average, according to the 2011 Eurobarometer survey. 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. Lithuania needs to increase the quality of its education programs. In the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, tracking student performance in the areas of reading, mathematics and science, Lithuania was ranked only 30th worldwide. Moreover, it must address mismatches between the skills of graduates and labor market needs, as the country's youth unemployment rate of above 30% at the end of 2011 was partly associated with young people's insufficient skills and lack of practical experience.

In terms of equitable access to education, the country shows an urban-rural divide and some disparities in educational achievements between girls and boys. However, there are no significant gaps in access to education for vulnerable groups (with the exception of the Roma population and, to a certain extent, the migrant population). Lithuania spent €0.73 billion on education in 2011 (compared to €0.78 billion in the precrisis year of 2008). Overall government spending on education thus fell somewhat during the financial crisis, with higher education given a higher priority at the outset of the crisis thanks to an ongoing higher-education reform. While enrollment rates for Lithuania are relatively high (it was ranked 16th among 144 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2012 – 2013 in terms of tertiary education enrollment), the quality of education has been assessed as comparatively low (ranked 54th of 144 countries in the same report).

Citation:

The Eurydice reports on Lithuania are available at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Overview>
The 2011 Eurobarometer report (Attitudes towards vocational education and training) is available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_369_en.pdf

Global Competitiveness Index 2012-2013 at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2012-2013/#=>

Slovenia

Score 7

Slovenia has moved relatively rapidly from the socialist curriculum tradition towards 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 (Eris 2011; Štremfel /Lajh 2012). The most pressing problems are a small share of pupils enlisted in vocational education and in fields such as engineering, and an underfunded tertiary education system with low completion rates. A White Paper on Education, prepared between 2009 and 2011, has provided some guidance for reform. The measures adopted have focused on changes in the curriculum and on public campaigns for vocational education.

Citation:

Eris, Mehmet, 2011: Improving Educational Outcomes in Slovenia. OECD, Economics Department, Working Paper No. 915, Paris (<http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5kg0prg9b1g8.pdf?expires=1377810034&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A24D79C1BA7F2F01CFFF744616E3A5F1>).

Štremfel, Urška/Lajh, Damjan, 2012: Development of Slovenian education policy in the European context and beyond. Bulgarian Journal of Science and Education Policy, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 130-154.

United Kingdom

Score 7

The coalition has continued to pursue the marketization started by its New Labour predecessors in education. It has liberalized the school sector to enable non-governmental organizations such as foundations, businesses, parent-and-teacher corporations etc., to found their own schools. This has been contentious within the coalition, however. The core approach of education policy is to improve performance by boosting inter-school competition, mainly through performance tables administered by the regulator Ofsted. Programs like the Pupil Premium are designed to encourage good schools to accept disadvantaged children and thus improve education while strengthening social cohesion. However, the socioeconomic composition of many of the country's schools still poses a significant challenge for disadvantaged students and those with an immigrant background. Cuts in the education budget (by 5.7% in 2012) and re-allocations have further added to the problems of the sector.

The United Kingdom – more accurately England, as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different systems – still has a pronounced divide between those who opt for private education (confusingly, known as public school) and those who go through the state system. There is a concern about pupils leaving school with no qualifications, and occasional alarms about certain segments of the youth population doing significantly worse than others. Exam results for late secondary pupils have been improving, but there has been an accusation that marking standards have slipped, leading the current education minister to push for tougher, more discriminating standards. Other debates concern the exercise of control by local authorities over the school system, with some attempt to weaken it, as mentioned above.

In the higher education sector, the drastic increase of tuition fees (from £3,300 to between £6,000 and £9,000 per annum) has been highly contentious. The effect on student enrolment cannot yet be assessed, although previous steps to push more of the costs of higher education from the general taxpayer to the student do not appear to have inhibited access for students from poorer backgrounds.

Citation:

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

United States

Score 7

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

Traditionally, elementary and secondary education were run by local school boards, state boards, and state education departments, with minimal intervention by the federal government. Proposed reforms often encounter intense opposition from teachers' unions, which are among the most powerful lobbies in the United States. Some promising programs introduce more freedom and opportunity in the educational system, yet they do not reach enough children. School vouchers, which are subsidies given to parents for tuition at any school, and which introduce parental choice and competition, play a marginal role. Likewise, charter schools, which entail greater parental involvement and are exempt from some state regulations, enroll only 2% of the student population.

During the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies, the federal role has expanded dramatically. The Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandated state-run programs of testing, with poor-performing schools to be penalized and ultimately closed. Federal involvement has become more extensive and ambitious during the Obama administration. Under Obama, the economic stimulus program— the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)— provided \$73 billion to stabilize state education budgets and support school construction and modernization. Moreover, Obama initiated an ambitious program of competitive grants – the Race to the Top— that has offered states financial inducements to propose and adopt reforms.

Belgium

Score 6

An OECD in-depth report on the Flemish school system concluded that over the past generation, “the general level of education in Belgium has gradually increased in comparison to other OECD countries, with the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds having attained upper secondary education or higher (83%) now slightly above the OECD average [...] Flemish students rank among the top three performers internationally in the mathematics assessment and among the top 10 in the science and reading assessments.” However, the educational system has not been able to reduce social gaps, as the report determined that socioeconomic factors strongly influence student performance. “Socioeconomic differences among students and schools account for nearly twice as much of the observed between-school performance differences in the Flemish Community, compared to on average in the OECD,” according to the report. While the report only reviewed Flemish community schooling, the conclusions can be extended to the French-speaking community, with the difference being that average performance in Wallonia is substantially below that of Flanders.

Primary and secondary schools are compulsory and free of cost. Most Catholic schools (referred to as “free” schools), are also largely state-funded and educate more than half the country’s school-age children, do ask for additional “voluntary contributions,” but these remain modest in amount. Private funding of education in Belgium is still an exception.

Although the country’s Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) scores are, statistically speaking, significantly above the OECD average, they are characterized by a large dispersion in the quality of output. This is because Flanders and Wallonia have different educational systems, as well as because both show unequal educational performance across social strata. Many experts have argued that part of the explanation lies in the early differentiation by educational track (classical secondary education as opposed to professional training schools), which de facto excludes many students as young as 12 years old from tertiary education.

A large share of the budget is used to pay for students repeating years. The wage premium for tertiary education is estimated to be among the lowest in Europe (Oliveira Martins, Boarini, Strauss and de la Maisonnette (2009), “Investment in Tertiary Education: the role of returns, individual financing and policies”, in *Quel Etat pour quelles performances économiques?*, Charleroi: Cifop), but this is partly mitigated by the relatively low cost of attending Belgian universities.

Croatia

Score 6

In Croatia, responsibilities for schools are divided between local governments and the Ministry of Education and its agencies, which sometimes causes conflicts over allocation of resources and management control. Access to education is open and widespread, with almost 60% of a cohort enrolled in tertiary education. In order to assure the quality of secondary education, there is a system of centralized exams overseen by central agencies. 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, so vocational education is not a route to a job. The quality of tertiary education varies significantly across institutions and even departments within universities. Universities do not function as unified institutions with common policy, resources and objectives, and the academic culture is poorly developed. The Milanović government has left the structure of the education system largely unchanged. As the center-left government and conservative forces have clashed over sexual education in primary and secondary schools and the privileged role of the Catholic Church, “value conflicts” have gained importance in education policy.

Czech Republic

Score 6

The main quality issue shown up in international comparisons is the relatively low proportion of the population with tertiary education. However, the numbers graduating annually from one of the public or private institutions of higher education suggests that over 30% of young people have been attaining this level of qualification in recent years. Another area of weakness has been underfinancing of preschool education, with almost 59,000 applications for children to be sent to preschool in May 2013 rejected on grounds of insufficient capacity. Overall, quality is threatened by an effective decrease in spending after 2009, both in terms of proportion of GDP and in real volume terms as a result of government austerity policies.

The most visible equity issue has been a proposed reform of higher education including the introduction of tuition fees. Throughout 2011, protests intensified among academics as well as the general public against the spending cuts envisaged by the reform. In June 2012, the Minister of Education withdrew the draft on the reform of higher education, stating that sections on financial support for socially disadvantaged students needed significant re-working. He further reached an agreement with universities about accepting fewer students for the upcoming academic year in order to account for the reduced funding.

One significant efficiency issue was the attempt to introduce a state baccalaureate to establish comparative final exams for students at all institutions of secondary education. However, about 20% of students failed in mathematics during the first trial in 2012. It turned out that the tests were too difficult and students were insufficiently prepared by their schools. Under pressure from the public, the Minister of Education Petr Fiala intervened and lowered the pass scores on the test. Numerous other issues emerged and the overall public evaluation of the program has been very negative.

Denmark

Score 6

Denmark claims top levels in education spending, but not in achievement. Danish pupils have not scored well on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) problem-solving tests. In the latest PISA findings from 2009, Denmark was number 16 overall, 13 in mathematics, 19 in reading and 20 in science, results many Danes view as still not good enough. For performance to get better, teacher training would have to improve and attitudes toward education reform would have to change.

The PISA results led to various efforts to improve Danish schools. As part of the government's 2006 globalization strategy, reforms of the primary and lower secondary school system were announced. According to the 2009 PISA results, "Academic standards need to be raised considerably in the core subjects of reading, mathematics, science and English. Evaluation and testing should give teachers, parents and pupils a clear idea of where particular focus is needed. Teachers should become subject specialists. The schools' management should be strong and visible, and the local authorities' responsibility for academic results should be crystal clear." Further reforms were approved in 2013 granting more discretionary power to the school principal to allocate teacher resources, and putting pupils in school for more hours.

The government set the target that 95% of young Danes should complete a general or vocational upper secondary education program. At least 50% of young people should complete a higher education program. The respective achievement figures in 2011 were 76.9% and 33.3%, implying there is still some way to go.

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.

Danish schools went through a month-long strike/lockout conflict in the spring of 2013. Eventually the government intervened and Parliament passed a law that ended the conflict. It strengthened the powers of the school principals.

Citation:

Ministry of Education, Uddannelse - udvalgte nøgletal, 2008, at <http://pub.uvm.dk/2008/uddannelsest al/>
 OECD, "PISA 2009 key findings," <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa2009keyfindings.htm> (accessed 18 April 2013).

France

Score 6

The French education system can in many aspects be characterized as successful. France is rated rather well in the Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) study, even though the country was downgraded, dropping from tenth of 27 in 2000 to seventeenth of 33 in 2009. Nonetheless, French results remained close to the OECD average throughout the period. Overall education spending totaled €132.1 billion in 2009, or 6.9% of GDP. Spending at the preschool level is exemplary, with nearly all children three years old and older attending preschool (*écoles maternelle*) and France is still above the OECD average at the primary schooling level. Secondary education is good but costly and, in recent years, has fallen behind other OECD countries. Higher education is dual, with a broad range of excellent elite institutions (the *grandes écoles*) and a large mass university system, which is poorly funded and poorly managed, and doesn't prepare its students well for a successful entry to the labor market. Spending on universities is below the OECD average.

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 one of the reasons for high youth unemployment in France. However, recently new joint training programs in cooperation with businesses have been established and have proven successful. As for universities, they are in principle accessible to all as fees are practically non-existent. However, the high rate of failure and the massification of teaching have contributed to the decline of the traditional university system. Nearly 40% of students choose, after high school, to register in alternative public or private institutions (*grandes écoles*, technical institutes, business schools). Social inequality in access to education and qualifications is another sensitive problem. There are persisting inequalities that effectively penalize students of working-class families at the university level, and flagrantly in accessing the elite schools (*grandes écoles*). Social, ethnic and territorial inequalities are often linked (as a result of a massive concentration of poor immigrant families in suburban zones).

University reform has been a permanent topic on the political agenda; some changes have been introduced (freedom and more financial resources for universities) but France is only at the beginnings of a profound modernization push of its tertiary education system.

Germany

Score 6

Education is consistently among the most controversial political issues in Germany. The OECD has often repeated its criticism that access to education in Germany is stratified, and that educational attainment is particularly dependent on pupils' social backgrounds. Germany was ranked 20th worldwide in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, trailing 1.1 points behind Switzerland, which achieved a score of 6.0 in the overall assessment of the educational system's quality (Global Competitiveness Report 2012 – 2013: 442). In comparison to other highly industrialized nations, German education structures seem segregated, stratified, federalized, segmented and socially highly selective. Educational opportunities are particularly constrained for immigrants and children from low-income families.

However, the various periods within the lifelong learning process (cf. OECD 2011: 26p), including pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, tertiary education and advanced vocational training, have very dissimilar performance profiles. For example, along with the United States, Germany achieves a mediocre 4.7 score and is ranked 30th worldwide with respect to the quality of primary education (Global Competitiveness Report 2012 – 2013: 436). The primary education enrollment rate was 97.7% in 2010, resulting in 33rd place in the ranking (Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013: 437). On the other hand, Germany was in the top group with respect to the local availability of specialized research-and-training services in the same survey. Here, Germany ranked fourth, only 0.3 points behind Switzerland, the leading nation (with 6.4 points) (Global Competitiveness Report 2012 – 2013: 446).

In contrast to other countries, the proportion of individuals with tertiary education (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level five) has remained constant for decades. In the OECD as a whole, the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with tertiary education is an average of 15.64 percentage points higher than within the 55 – 64 age cohort; however, this share is comparatively low in German, with the two age cohorts differing by just 0.38 percentage points (25.66% among the 25- to 34-year-olds as

compared to 25.28% among 55- to 64-year-olds) (OECD 2011: 30; cf. statlink on this page).

Regarding segmentation, the OECD criticism is not uncontested, since it overemphasizes academic degrees as a criterion of educational success. Vocational education (ISCED levels three and four) “reduces the need for initial on-the-job training,” tends to increase the individual productivity that can initially be expected from a worker (OECD 2011: 122) and provides students with occupation-specific skills. In general, Germany’s education system is strong in terms of vocational training, providing skilled workers with good job and income prospects. The rate of vocational education and training (i.e., the level of education that is either upper secondary or post-secondary but not tertiary education (ISCED levels three and four) is 22.1 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Within the 25 – 34 age cohort, 52.4% of the total population has attained their formal qualification in this education category. In 2009, 81.2% of those were also employed (OECD 2011: 135p.). In addition, the German education system excels in offering competencies relevant to labor-market success, resulting in a low level of youth unemployment (OECD 2011: 32; cf. statlink on this page).

Defining education 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. In the category below upper-secondary education, only 54.9% of the total population of 25- to 64-year-olds are employed – 1.1 percentage points below OECD average. On the other hand, within the other categories of upper-secondary and tertiary education, Germany is slightly above the OECD average (respectively 75.5%, or 1.3 percentage points above the OECD average, and 86.4%, 2.8 percentage points above the OECD average). Although these figures fall short of placing Germany in the OECD’s leading group, they have improved considerably. In comparison to 1997, an increase of 9.2 percentage points in the employment rate of people with an educational attainment below secondary education reflects the country’s substantial progress in this area (OECD 2011: 41; cf. statlink on this page: 118 – 135).

Ireland

Score 6

Quality:

Most evidence points to the conclusion that the Irish education system is average or slightly above average by Western European standards.

However, employers frequently claim that there is an inadequate output of suitably qualified and skilled graduates from the second and third levels of

the education system, especially in the high-tech areas which the industrial development agencies are anxious to grow in Ireland. 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.

Equity:

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 fairness of the two-tier structure of the secondary education system is currently being debated. A small minority of pupils attend fee-paying schools where state subvention 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. The level of subventions to these schools has been reduced.

At present, third level universities and colleges do not charge fees, but it is government policy to reintroduce them by 2014.

During the economic crisis the unemployment rate soared and marked differentials have emerged between those without much formal education and the better-educated groups.

Efficiency:

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

Israel

Score 6

Israel's education policy is deeply influenced by political divides, thus making it hard to estimate the degree to which it provides equitable treatment. As in other socioeconomic fields, funding allocation favors Jewish citizens. In addition, educational achievement in the partially state-funded Jewish-orthodox educational system are considerably lower – by standard measures – than in the regular system. These problems have been evident in recent

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results, where the variation in Israeli results was 40% higher than was the case for other OECD countries. An OECD working report concluded that this “broadly suggests that Israel’s poor overall performance in PISA is largely linked to issues in the education system itself and not due to other drivers of educational attainment.” However, Orthodox boys were not tested in the program, as they do not study relevant material. Arab-Israeli students that were tested fared worse than students in third-world countries such as Kazakhstan, as well as Tennessee. However, in the last few years, there has been an increasing level of matriculation to primary and secondary schools as well as to higher education institutes among Arab and Jewish orthodox communities.

Israeli education spending as a share of GDP is relatively high in comparison to other OECD countries. However, the education system has many allocation problems, and in the last decade has been going through various reforms aiming at improving quality. Although Israel is in line with OECD educational levels overall, it does not fare well in international surveys testing secondary-school students’ knowledge. Indeed, even after accounting for specific problems with the Arab and orthodox Jewish communities, Israeli students’ marks have deteriorated in recent PISA tests. Israel showed high levels of attainment in past generations, and the value of education is well established in the community as a whole. Surveys shows that “42% of 25- to 34-year-olds have either tertiary type A or B qualifications compared with an OECD average of 34%.” However, a recent Taub Center research paper suggests that Israeli education system is ill prepared for the world’s increasingly competitive and dynamic working environment.

Citation:

Ben-David, Dan, “The state of Israeli education and its repercussions,” 2011. (Hebrew)

Hemmings, P. “Israeli Education Policy: How to Move Ahead in Reform,” OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 781. 2010..

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http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/review-of-recent-developments-and-progress-in-labour-market-and-social-policy-in-israel_9789264200401-en

Japan

Score 6

Education has always been considered a particular strength within Japan. However, the Japanese education system faces a number of challenges. One of these is to deliver adequate quality. In 2002, so-called yutori (room to grow) education was introduced, reducing overall teaching hours and putting less emphasis on hard-core subjects such as mathematics. However, this policy shift has produced some discontent, and in 2011 a reorientation was introduced that to some extent reversed the yutori changes. In the area of tertiary education, the 2001 administrative reform transformed the national universities into independent agencies, but this change has not created

reform impetus sufficient to improve quality from within the system. The number of students going abroad for study has been shrinking for a number of years; Japan is almost singular in this respect among advanced nations. The new LDP-led government wants to use increased competency in and use of English as a centerpiece of economic reforms, but it is much too early to speculate as to the feasibility of this approach.

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

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

Netherlands

Score 6

Quality

The average level of education for the population is rising – in 2009 it was just above average for OECD countries. School drop-out is decreasing (15.5% in 2000, 12% in 2007); entry to the labor market with completed education (“basiskwalificatie,” or “basic qualification”) is rising (71.9% in 2000, 76.2% in 2007). The student/teacher ratio is somewhat lower than the OECD average for primary education, but considerably higher for secondary education. The total amount of instruction time in secondary education has become problematic for lots of schools. Dutch schools apparently rank alongside UK schools for high autonomy. However, the number of school mergers and upscaled school governance systems masks considerable loss of autonomy for individual schools. There is also standardizing pressure from nationwide performance testing by the School Inspectorate at all school levels. PISA internationally comparative school performance scores (corrected for economic, social and cultural background) rank the Netherlands just above OECD average. For a country that determines educational level at age 12 and allocates 60% of its children to the lower categorized school types accordingly, it is not surprising that differences in performance arise from differences between (not within) schools (which are far above OECD averages). School performance in the Netherlands has not declined, but there is also no internationally measured progress. The Ministry of Education follows a policy in which individual schools publish their pupils’ performance (as measured by the School Inspectorate) so that parents may

choose the best or most appropriate school for their children on the basis of comparative performance data. Quality improvement policy – CITO testing, performance monitoring, teacher professionalization programs, better transition trajectories between school types, quality management systems at school level – appears not to be very effective.

Equity/Access

Although over the years the school performance of pupils of non-Dutch origin improves (due to their parent's generally higher educational achievements), these children do far less well in science, reading and math than their fully Dutch peers. They lag behind considerably more than is average for 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 ability selection of pupils at age 12. At university level, the system of equal access through study grants has been abolished, and every student will pay for university education through low-interest loans. All in all, equity for ethnic groups is not achieved, and is diminishing at university level.

Efficiency

The Dutch school system is performing relatively efficiently. Expenditure for education is below average for OECD countries, but the rise since 1996 (in costs per pupil and in average salaries for teachers) is above the OECD average. Average education level and school performance are supposed to positively impact on a country's competitiveness. Strongly categorized or differentiated school systems (as in the Netherlands) lead to less competitiveness, at least in the sense that a country needs more time for adaptation to changing international economic perspectives. This may explain why the Netherlands is still strong in competitiveness, but suffers from a growing lack of a technically well-trained labor force.

Citation:

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

Ministerie van OCW (2013), Trends in beeld 2012. Zicht op Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (<http://www.trendsinbeeld.minocw.nl>)

Norway

Score 6

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

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

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

Poland

Score 6

The first Tusk government launched a number of education reforms which have gradually become effective. The main aim of reforms was to reduce the system's lack of synchronization with the labor markets. Reforms have included a greater emphasis in the curriculum on mathematics, science and technology, a strengthening of vocational education, attempts to attract more students to economically relevant areas, measures to achieve more quality in research and teaching at universities and the adoption of a national strategy for lifelong learning. While funding for higher education has been expanded, funding for general education has declined. Demographic changes have been associated with the rising teacher-student ratio, but also with a number of controversial school closures. In September 2011, pre-school education for five-year-olds became compulsory. However, the lowering of the compulsory school age from 7 to 6 years was postponed from 2011 to 2014.

Austria

Score 5

The Austrian educational system does not perform to its potential. Considering Austria's economic position, the country should have a significantly higher number of university graduates. The reason for this underperformance is seen by research institutions and experts such as the OECD to lie with the early division of children into multiple educational tracks, which takes place after the fourth grade. The result is that parents' social status is reflected in students' ability to access higher education, more so than in comparable countries. A citizens' initiative that called on parliament to correct this negative process of selection failed to produce significant reform, at least in the short term. This state of affairs violates the concept of social justice, and at the same time fails to exploit the national population's talents to the fullest.

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

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

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

Latvia

Score 5

Latvia has a well-educated population, with 96% of the relevant age group enrolled in secondary education, and 57% enrolled in tertiary education. Secondary education is provided by schools of very different quality, ranging from the elite to the average. Due to low salaries, the staff at these lower-quality secondary schools tends to be older and educated during the Soviet period. This often fails to produce education of sufficient quality to prepare students for university.

At the secondary level, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study (2009) places Latvia slightly below the OECD average.

The higher-education system in Latvia is made up of state-run schools and a comparatively large number of private institutions. The latter are more focused on attracting students than on quality. The quality of the education varies significantly between schools and faculties. In general, the higher-education sector suffers from low wages as well, resulting in emigration by the young and an aging staff.

A professor from the Stockholm School of Economics' Riga campus became minister of education after the elections in 2011, with the task of reforming the higher-education system. The primary goals were to reduce the number of schools and to monitor study programs' sustainability and relationship to labor-market demands. However, no concrete plan was ever developed. The idea of privately financed higher education resulted in resistance from education institutions, and the minister stepped down in 2013.

Vocational education programs are perceived as being of low quality. Survey evidence presented by the Latvian Competitiveness Report shows that employers believe vocational education institutions are failing to supply students with sufficient skills for their professions. Enrollment in vocational education institutions has been steadily declining, from a total of 15,000 students in 2005 to just 12,000 in 2011. The government launched a reform of the vocational education institutions in 2010, and in 2011 began providing additional funding to particular vocational education programs identified as future competence centers.

At the tertiary level, Latvia is striving to reach the EU 2020 educational target of 40% of 30- to 34-year-olds having university-level qualifications. In 2009, this ratio was 26% in Latvia. Latvian researchers are conspicuously absent from the Social Science Citation Index (with just 112 SSCI articles in the 1990 – 2008 period). Reform attempts undertaken in 2011 – 2013 saw proposals for change to the accreditation system, to education financing, and to the language of instruction. However, proposed reforms have been met with substantial resistance from educational institutions themselves, leaving doubt as to the government's ability to implement these changes. The physical and communication infrastructures of 29 institutions are being modernized during the 2011 – 2013 period, supported by public funds in the amount of LVL 65.3 million.

With respect to educational system equity, free formal education through the secondary level is accessible to everyone. PISA survey data from 2000 and 2009 demonstrate positive changes showing a decoupling of socioeconomic status and educational performance. Tertiary education is state funded for a limited cohort of students, who access publicly funded university spots

through a competitive process. Students who do not receive a publicly funded spot have the option of taking out a government-supported student loan to pay tuition costs.

At the primary and secondary education levels, there is an disproportionate division of resources between state and local governments. As a part of structural reforms accompanying the government's austerity program in 2009 – 2010, Latvia changed the system by which public funding is provided to local governments for primary and secondary education. Funding allocations are now tied to pupil enrollment, which has resulted in a restructuring of the school system and school closings. State funding is matched by local-government funding at an inconsistent rate, based on the local government's own funding situation. A persistent decline in pupil enrollment due to demographic change creates further financial pressure on the system. The system promotes consolidation and efficiency; however, local governments' inability to pay also translates into unequal access and unequal quality of education at the local level.

Public expenditure on tertiary education is low overall and is spread over a high number of institutions. With a population of just 2 million, Latvia has 58 accredited higher-education institutions. The IMF has observed that the combination of a disproportionately high number of institutions, limited financing and falling student numbers generates unsustainable strains on the higher-education system. The government has expressed its intent to reform the financing model for higher education. To date, however, the only major changes approved were in the accreditation system, in September 2012. The new regulations foresee pulling state funding from poor-quality programs. However, the implementation of these changes has been fraught with delays and subject to intense public criticism.

Citation:

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2. Latvian Competitiveness Report (2011), Available at: http://www.mk.gov.lv/files/latvian_competitiveness_report.pdf, Last assessed: 20.05.2013.
3. IMF (2013), Republic of Latvia: Selected Issues, Country Report, Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr1329.pdf>, Last assessed: 20.05.2013

Malta

Score 5

Malta's main resource is essentially its human resources, and because of issues of overpopulation, the pressures to attract business investment and sustain employment levels depends very much on the skill, quality and education levels of the workforce. The effects of Malta's education policy on the creation of a skilled workforce are mixed, however. While the number of students who attend higher education has grown over the last 20 years,

those levels have now reached a plateau and are in danger of declining, as the number of graduates from upper secondary levels has remained flat. The Angelou Economics Study commissioned by the Maltese government in 2010 states that despite improvements, Malta still lags in post-secondary education. Between 64% and 66% of Maltese students have no more than basic literacy skills; and performance in mathematics and sciences lags behind other countries. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study for 2011 concludes that 30% of fifth-year Maltese students did not meet international standards, compared to a median of 8%, ranking Malta 40th out of 50 countries surveyed.

Vocational education virtually disappeared prior to the reintroduction of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), a college for continuing education; however, there are no institutions to help bridge the gap between secondary school and MCAST, as vocational education schools have been closed. One criticism of MCAST has been that its courses and the standard of its graduates do not satisfy standard criteria, even though the institution awards degrees. Discussions during the review period included allowing MCAST graduates to add to degree work and qualifications at the University of Malta.

The graduate output of upper and tertiary education still remains low. EU statistics indicate that with the highest number of early school leavers in the European Union, Malta risked missing its 2020 thresholds.

The system's shortcomings conflict with the fact that Malta provides a high level of equitable access to education at all levels. State (50%) and church schools (30%) are free, with state support being provided for both sectors. The private school sector, which charges fees, is very small (18%). Yet there is a qualitative difference between private and state public schools, which results in a two-track inequitable system (Bartolo 2007). Post-secondary and tertiary students do not pay fees and also receive stipends to ensure that higher secondary and tertiary education remains open for all. There has also been an increase in the provision of free preschool (3 years and over) state facilities, where Malta ranks 30th out of 41 countries.

During the review period, the state educational system was in the process of being overhauled to address a number of issues including the segregation of the sexes and the rigid testing system. Early school leavers are at risk of remaining unemployed, and thus falling into a cycle of poverty.

Citation:

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[https://www.education.gov.mt/mediacentre.ashx?file=MediaCenter/Docs/1_PIRLS_2011-Malta_report.pdf](https://www.education.gov.mt/mediacentre/enter.ashx?file=MediaCenter/Docs/1_PIRLS_2011-Malta_report.pdf)

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

Mexico

Score 5

Mexico's education system is relatively weak despite significant public investment in the sector. Education spending in Mexico in 2012–2013 is not far short of 7% of GDP and has been on a sharp upward trend since the 1980s. Teachers' salaries have also been steadily rising. While Mexico's GDP is relatively low by OECD standards, that does not fully explain the weak outcomes. Indeed, in absolute terms Mexican educational spending is comparable to that of South Korea but Mexican students are performing much worse as shown by an international cross-sectional comparison. The problem, therefore, does not appear to be related to funding, but to organization. Aiming to mitigate the strong influence of the teachers union on the Education Ministry, the government's current reforms are aimed at facilitating a meritocracy in the teaching profession.

In 2013 the Mexican Congress passed a major education reform bill. The main aim is to weaken the hitherto-powerful teachers union – whose leader was arrested in February and charged with embezzlement – and to create a meritocracy within the teaching profession. Nobody doubts that the union has been profoundly corrupt.

However, until recently the teachers' union leader was considered political untouchable as she controlled many votes. It was quite common for the teachers union to collect salaries for non-existent teachers. One of the provisions of the reform is that the national statistics institute identifies how many teachers are actually employed by the Mexican state. Another provision is to create a national institute for education evaluation to take on the functions of an inspectorate – tasks for which that the union was previously responsible.

In terms of private education, it is of much higher quality. Privately educated students out-performed those enrolled in public schools at every level, though the sector lacks equity. It takes 1.4% of GDP in comparison to the state's 5.4%, much of it at secondary and/or university level.

Spain

Score 5

The mediocre results Spain gets in PISA reports or in universities' international rankings have facilitated a social and political momentum for launching reforms. After the failure of an attempt promoted by the former socialist minister Angel Gabilondo in 2011, the new Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP) government has decided to take advantage of its absolute majority to implement a controversial reform. A draft law for "improving the quality of education" (also known as the "Ley Wert," in honor of the conservative minister for education) was passed in 2013. The initiative is ambitious but it lacks a wide social consensus from parents or teachers and it is not well funded. As is shown from its very title, that law focuses more on quality than on equity.

Since the 1980s the goals of creating a Spanish education system that guarantees equality of opportunity for students and increases the graduate output of upper secondary and tertiary education have been largely achieved, despite problems of quality and others related to efficiency problems (such as early school leaving for almost 25% of the young population or a poor contribution from education policy toward providing a skilled labor force). Notwithstanding this, there is now an observable drop in school failure and more emphasis on professional training. On the other hand, there are fears of a decline regarding equity, because of the cuts in education spending since 2011 (now expenditure only reaches 5.6% GDP, far below the OECD average of 6.3%) and the increase in fees or conditions to get funding and scholarships, which could expel poorer students from the system. Thus the scores for this period are: quality 4 (increasing toward 5); equity in access 6 (declining toward 5) and efficiency in resource allocation 5 (stable).

Bulgaria

Score value_6

The Bulgarian education system is dominated by government-owned institutions at all levels. Public spending on education as a proportion of GDP is comparable to that of other Central and East-Central European countries. The quality of education in Bulgaria falls considerably short of the needs of a modern competitive economy, as can be seen by the bad PISA results. Available labor market data indicate that there are serious skill mismatches, with secondary and tertiary schools producing a surplus of people specialized in areas where labor demand is low, and severe deficits of people specialized in areas where demand is high.

The level of equity in the Bulgarian education system is average to low. There are two main reasons for this. Many children of upper income families are able to attend private schools, which seem to have better average performance rates than public schools. Also, the school drop-out rate among minorities, especially Roma, is significantly higher than the average, meaning that schools do not provide the same opportunities for all ethnic groups.

Hungary

Score 4

The government under Prime Minister Orbán has radically revamped Hungary's education system. Municipalities have been deprived of their functions in primary and secondary education, and the autonomy of universities has been reduced. A central government agency has become the employer of all teachers in Hungary, and the choice and provision of school books has been centralized as well. Justified as a means to increase efficiency and to reduce the hitherto strong regional disparities, centralization has created its own problems. For instance, the Klebelsberg Institute, the new central government agency office in the field of primary and secondary education, has struggled with the complex task of enrolling all pupils six years of age into schools nationwide. The centralization of education has been accompanied by increasing political-ideological pressure on teachers and students and by drastic cuts in funding. The budget for higher education is now around only 0.5% of GDP, less than half of the EU average. In December 2012, the government declared its intention to further cut spending on tertiary education. The planned reduction in the number of state-funded study grants from 30,000 to 10,000 has triggered a wave of student protests. The cuts in funding of higher education have partly been compensated by increased spending for vocational education. A further important change has been the increasing role of churches in education. As a result of these reforms, the quality of education, the access to education and the efficiency of the education sector have worsened.

Italy

Score 4

The Italian education system is a predominantly public system organized at state level with some participation by local authorities. The private sector is limited and mainly consists of religious schools. At university level there are a few private high prestige universities (Bocconi, LUISS, Cattolica). The education system is in principle open to everybody without discrimination. Students pay limited fees only at the university level. In practice, however, access is seriously limited at the upper secondary and tertiary level by the limited amount of resources devoted to scholarships or similar support

mechanisms for financially needy students. As might be expected, the share of individuals who do not complete their studies is above OECD averages.

Expenditure for all levels of education per student is close to the OECD mean, but due to the smaller percentage of students, the global expenditure as a share of GDP is significantly lower than the mean. 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 in OECD countries.

With regard to expenditure in tertiary education, Italy is lagging even more significantly behind. The share of education expenditure devoted to the salaries of teachers, professors and technical staff – the number of which is often unnecessarily high – compared to the share for capital expenditures, is larger than the mean. Selection of school and university personnel is still not sufficiently meritocratic. Although there are significant areas of high-quality education at both the secondary and tertiary levels, the system as a whole does not yet ensure satisfactory standards of quality.

During the current period no significant changes have taken place in the education policies. At tertiary level a reform passed by the Berlusconi government entailing a significant strengthening of university governance has been implemented. A national evaluation process for university research has also been put in place and its results will be delivered soon. This evaluation process should have significant effects in stimulating a more competitive and quality-oriented university system.

Luxembourg

Score 4

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 primary school, students face a crucial junction and must choose one of two academic tracks, general or technical. There is a marked division between Luxembourg nationals and migrant students, as generally migrants (especially the Portuguese minority) struggle with languages and are more often tracked to the technical level (*secondaire technique*), which affects their progress toward a university education. To avoid this, often more affluent migrants will send their children to a reputable international school. This leads to yet another division between higher-income and lower-income migrants. According to the last PISA study (2009), girls outperform boys in reading while boys get better results in mathematics and science. According to OECD data (*education at a glance*), Luxembourg spends the most per student at €18,858 per year, per student yet has one of the highest dropout

rates. The OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education also identified “a major performance disadvantage for students with an immigrant background.”

In 2009 the government introduced primary school reforms, including a new competence-based curriculum, performance monitoring and a tutorial system. A government action plan (Plan d’encadrement périscolaire) during the period has set out a goal of new educational opportunities, mainly through a close collaboration between school and after-school care, with the sharing of premises, staff and equipment.

Plans for secondary school reforms were launched after primary school reforms, and focused on a concept of improving a student’s skill base (socles de compétences) along with more balanced language expectations. Following a year of intensive negotiation and internal debate, the draft bill was introduced to parliament.

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Portugal

Score 4

The government of Passos Coelho that took office in June 2011 abolished the “New Opportunities” program of lifelong learning that had been a flagship of his predecessor’s executive. The New Opportunities centers were replaced in March 2013. The government has also sought to favor technical and professional education more strongly, and increase national-level examinations for students. However, there is little evidence that these have generated gains in terms quality, access or efficiency.

With regard to quality, the austerity measures and cuts have had an adverse impact on the already poor median quality of education in Portugal, with schools and universities seeing their budgets slashed. Schools have lost teachers, with those leaving being defined not on their quality but rather on

the nature of their contract. Universities have also seen some brain drain as a result of lower budgets and reductions in wages.

Similarly, access has been affected, both on the supply and demand sides. On the supply side, the cuts have sustained existing bottlenecks (e.g., in pre-schooling). The demand side has been constrained by the recession – with increasing unemployment and lower family incomes – and austerity, with higher tuition fees and more limited financial aid for poorer students.

While the number of university graduates has increased, Portugal remains far below the OECD average. Likewise, the high school dropout is very high. There is little efficiency in the education system.

Romania

Score 4

Article 32 of the Romanian Constitution guarantees access to free public education and school attendance is mandatory from the age of six until the completion of the tenth grade. However, the ease of access and the quality of primary and secondary education varies considerably: in particular, children in poor and remote rural communities often have to attend school in another village, and given that transportation to school is rarely provided this creates significant obstacles to school attendance and translates into poor attendance and educational achievement. Ethnic minorities have the right to education in their native language though in practice Roma children have had limited opportunities for such education.

The quality of public education has generally declined since 1990, primarily because salaries for teachers have been very low which has undermined the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and professors and has promoted widespread corruption. The quality control and corruption problems in Romanian universities were highlighted by a series of plagiarism scandals involving Prime Minister Victor Ponta as well as two recent education ministers (Ioan Mang and Ecaterina Andronescu). While state-funded universities are crippled by financial problems, a growing number of private universities are often “diploma factories” offering low quality of education. The low graduation rates at the Baccalaureate exams in the past three years have highlighted the quality problems in secondary education, which had been previously masked by high levels of cheating. Resource allocation within the public university system has been inequitable and inefficient: thus the recent round of salary cuts associated with the 2010 austerity measures were disproportionately distributed, with university professors and department chairs suffering minimal cuts (or even achieving raises) while the costs were considerably higher for those occupying the lowest positions within the employment hierarchy.

Slovakia

Score 4

In Slovakia, the reform of the education system has been a leftover from prior governments. The reforms prepared by the Radičová government fell victim to its collapse and did not pass the National Council. The Fico government initiated a complex reform in 2013 which has been partly accepted by opposition parties and think tanks. In line with the structure of the Slovak economy, it focuses on the improvement of secondary vocational and tertiary technical education. However, the government does not plan to improve the funding of the severely underfinanced education system, arguing that fiscal sustainability does not allow bigger spending in this sector.

Turkey

Score 4

Despite improvements during the review period, Turkey's education system still does not meet international quality standards and does not offer equal access to schooling opportunities. The proportion of GDP allocated to the education budget increased from 2.25% in 2001 to 3.56% in 2011. While resources have been increased, just how efficiently those resources are used and how much education policy helps foster social cohesion remain questionable. Key challenges are low enrollment rates, regional disparities regarding access to education, poor or insufficient infrastructure, outdated and in some parts politically contested curricula and the need for improvement in teachers' skills.

In April 2012, compulsory education was extended from 8 to 12 years (starting as of the academic year 2012 – 2013) and a new approach for schooling (four years of primary school plus four years of secondary school, then four years of high school) was introduced. The amended Education Law (Law 6287) allows families the flexibility to choose among different types of schooling, such as general and vocational schools as well as religious imam-hatip schools) as a secondary school.

An increase in national spending on education has positively influenced enrollment rates in schools and in higher education. The ratio of university graduates aged 15 or older increased from 9.2% in 2010 to 10.8% in 2011. Furthermore, government efforts helped reduce the percentage of illiterate people aged 15 or older from 7% in 2010 to 5.7% in 2011.

Six new universities were established in 2012, raising the total number of universities in Turkey to 168. Turkey is actively participating in European Union educational programs (Lifetime Learning, Youth in Action and Culture).

In April 2013, parliament passed a law to establish five more universities in Turkey.

While Turkey works to implement the Bologna Process recommendations, significant differences remain in terms of the quantity and quality of teaching staff and also in the quality and quantity of educational infrastructure. Turkey must work to establish a national qualifications framework that is based on the European Qualifications Framework.

Citation:

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Chile

Score 3

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. The government has not achieved its aim of closing the gap that exists between the private and public systems, which led to strong public protests, especially during 2011 and 2012. Apart from the general ideological gap between government and opposition regarding the role of education and a free market, reforms are also absent in this area because of the conflict between teachers' boards and the private education corporations or enterprises. Good, high quality education is only accessible to those who can afford it. There is a huge financial divergence between private and public education, with public spending per pupil per month of CLP 40,000 and private schooling fees of about CLP 300,000 (e.g., Deutsche Schule). Chile traditionally had a broad public education system, but as a result of the poor quality of the actual public schools, the number of scholars attending public institutions has declined to approximately 40%. There is a great gap in quality of education for less gifted scholars as there is a strong focus in the system on preparing students for careers that require higher education, but there are only few options for more applied, vocational training for students who do not obtain the grades necessary to enter university. Furthermore, standards between the respective universities or technical training centers vary greatly as the quality control standards applied are insufficient.

In general terms, Chile's education system – with the exception of a few top universities – fails in terms of educating and training people to acquire the knowledge and skills required for a quantum leap in development and

growth. This hampers labor productivity growth and efforts to diminish poverty rates. This weak performance results from failures in past and current education policies, and a strong teachers' lobby that has effectively opposed necessary reforms to school curriculum, school management and attempts to link teacher pay to teaching productivity.

Greece

Score 3

OECD data on secondary and tertiary education show that Greece is performing rather well. For instance, one fourth of the Greek adult population has a university-level degree. The rate of school drop-out after nine years of schooling is not as alarming as in other OECD countries. In short, Greeks on average have access to education and remain in education.

Access to education is not equitable as middle- and upper-class progeny are usually more successful in passing entrance examinations. However, Greece is one of the few countries in the OECD which offers free tuition at state universities. Students do not pay tuition fees or the cost of one textbook per course, which, again, is obtained for free.

The quality of education Greek pupils and students receive is, however, a totally different matter. PISA results show that Greek secondary school pupils perform worse than their counterparts in West European countries.

At university level, quality of education is very uneven. Some university departments have a long tradition of excellence, such as Athens Law School and most of the engineering departments of the National Technical University of Athens. However, the majority of university departments have uneven infrastructure, underpaid academic and administrative staff and tumultuous campus life owing to the penetration of university institutions and processes by political party-led student factions.

This has an unavoidable negative impact on efficiency. More concretely, education in Greece was diverging from the country's labor market trends even before the crisis. Greece, a relatively small country of approximately 11 million inhabitants, offers approximately 500 bachelor's degree programs and an equivalent number of master's degree programs. The large number and variety of university departments and the relatively large enrollment of pupils in secondary education and of students in tertiary education do not correspond to the types of jobs and job skills which the Greek economy needs in order to make optimum use of human capital. Even before the crisis, youth unemployment in Greece exceeded 20% in the 18 to 24 age group.

In the wake of the crisis this percentage increased dramatically. In 2013 youth unemployment was just above 60%, the highest in the European Union. This divergence between education and employment patterns was the largest problem with Greek education, which has not been resolved since the onset of the economic crisis. Reforms of the education system, particularly of tertiary education, were attempted in 2011. However, education reform was heavily resisted by opposition parties, politicized factions of student unions, university administration employees and a large share of professors who were politicized and interpreted education reform through the lens of the conflict between supporters and opponents of Greece's bailout.

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