

**SGI** Sustainable  
Governance  
Indicators

# 2015 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 shown consistent improvements in its PISA rankings, and today is ranked in 2nd place in Europe and 4th place overall. Particular system strengths include the small number of low achievers and low school-level variance in student achievement. Enrollment rates at various education levels, including lifelong learning courses, are above the international average. Moreover, Estonia has already reached some of the EU's Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) headline targets, and is close to the target level in other areas.

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

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

on salary level is lower. The gender-based pay gap – the highest in Europe at 28% – is one aspect of this larger problem. Recent policy measures strengthening links between education and training and the labor market, such as involving companies and social partners in VET curricula development, including entrepreneurship skills in university curricula, and providing adults with low-level skills better access to lifelong learning, have sought to ensure that the provision of education keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy. However, providing students at various levels of the education system with work placements, traineeships and internship opportunities remains an urgent challenge.

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/>;

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Education and Training in Europe 2020: Responses from the EU Member States. Eurydice Report. Brussels:Eurydice. [http://www.eurydice.org.pl/sites/eurydice.org.pl/files/163EN.pdf](http://www.eurydice.org/pl/sites/eurydice.org.pl/files/163EN.pdf)

## 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 20 universities and 30 polytechnics, and close to 70% of high school graduates enter 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 ranked top in recent years. The Education and Research Development Plan, revised every four years by the government, is the key document of education and research policy in Finland. It 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.

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 Cooperation 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 in 2010). In its Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 – 2019, the National-led government has named as their first priority the improvement of skills for the industry. 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). That said, critics of the government's tertiary education policy are of the view that too much attention is given to vocationally oriented subjects relative to those, such as in the arts, that stress the intrinsic worth of a university education.

Citation:

Annual Report of the Ministry of Education 2013 (Wellington: Ministry of Education 2013).

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

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

## Canada

Score 8

Education quality in Canada is high. In 2009, Canada ranked fourth worldwide in terms of the quality of secondary education, as evidenced by its Program 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\\_else\\_1365173418229\\_eng.pdf](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DA_M-INTER-HQ-AEV/STAGING/texte-text/e_v_else_1365173418229_eng.pdf)

## South Korea

### Score 8

South Korea'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 compared to an OECD average of 6.3%. However, only 4.9% of GDP is public expenditure, less than the 5.4% OECD average. Thus, much of the success of Korean education can be attributed to parents' willingness to pay for education and not to public policies. Almost all parties involved in the field of higher education agree that a change in the South Korean system is both necessary and of high priority. There are many complaints about the curriculum content and the less creative teaching styles at South 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. Social and cultural templates based on school ties are also hampering educational reform in a fundamental way.

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 a Glance 2012*, DOI: 10.1787/eag\_highlights-2012-en

## 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. In 2014, the federal government began a process for funding education following after basic vocational training more robustly.

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

In this context, we have to mention a federal particularity in higher education. Some cantons such as Geneva and Tessin have followed international trends favoring general qualification for university entrance, while others, especially in the German-speaking portions of the country, have focused instead on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the canton of Geneva, 29% of all 19-year-olds acquire the matura secondary-school exit diploma, allowing them to go on to university, while in the canton of Uri, only 13% of 19-year-olds gain direct access to universities. However, the effect of this “federal” discrimination is somewhat reduced by the permeability within the school and university system. Likewise, the vocational-training system offers considerable career prospects. Finally, resource allocation within the educational system seems to be very efficient.

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

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



## Cyprus

### Score 7

Cyprus' educational system is mainly public. It has undergone various reforms since the 1990s, and new plans and policies are today under study, with a similar project launched by the previous government being abandoned. 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-based and overseas educational institutions; in 2013, it ranked 6th in the EU with respect to tertiary educational attainment (47.8%) for the 30-34 age group.

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

Despite recent reductions, Cyprus was among the top three EU members in terms of expenditure on education as a share of GDP in 2011 and 2012, a statistic partly attributable to the country's relatively high teachers' salaries. A modest student allowance offered to all tertiary-level students has since 2012 been based on income criteria. The financial and economic crisis has also driven a shift from (paid) private to public education.

Citation:

1. Tertiary education attainment, 2013,

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc480&plugin=1>

2. A Guide to Cyprus Education, in nine languages, <http://www.moec.gov.cy/odigos-ekpaideusis/index.html>

3. Public finances and grow-friendly expenditure in EU,

[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/01\\_public\\_finances\\_growth\\_friendly\\_expenditure.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/01_public_finances_growth_friendly_expenditure.pdf)

## Germany

### Score 7

Since the first PISA study in 2000, the OECD has often repeated its criticism that access to education in Germany is stratified and educational attainment is particularly dependent on pupils' social backgrounds. Educational opportunities are particularly constrained for immigrants and children from low-income families. In

comparison to other highly developed nations, German education structures also seem federalized and segmented. The most recent PISA results from 2012, however, show significant improvements (OECD 2013), reflecting possibly a catalytic effect of the “PISA shock” in the early 2000s. Germany now ranks above the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science, and has made considerable progress on education equity over the last decade. The importance of students’ socioeconomic background has lessened. While in 2000, the level of social equity in German education was among the lowest of all OECD countries, Germany was around the OECD average in 2012.

Other indicators confirm that Germany is still lagging behind the top education performers but slowly catching up. Germany ranked twentieth worldwide in the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report, trailing 1.1 points behind Switzerland, which achieved a score of 6.0 in the overall assessment of education system quality (Global Competitiveness Report 2012 – 2013: 442). Although the overall quality of the education system improved considerably (a score of 5.2, ranking the country 12th in 2014), Germany is still trailing 0.8 points behind frontrunner Switzerland (Global Competitiveness Report 2014 – 2015: 207).

However, the various periods within the lifelong learning process (cf. OECD 2011: 26), including pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, tertiary education and advanced vocational training, have vastly dissimilar performance profiles. For example, along with Australia and Iceland, Germany achieves a mediocre 5.1 score and is ranked twenty-second worldwide with respect to the quality of primary education (Global Competitiveness Report 2014 – 2015: 207); a moderate performance improvement over 2012 (when it scored 4.7 and ranked thirtieth). The primary education enrollment rate increased by 0.2% in comparison with 2010 (97.9% in 2014), resulting in a thirtieth place ranking (Global Competitiveness Report 2014 – 2015: 207). 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 third, only 0.5 points behind Switzerland, the leading nation with 6.5 points (Global Competitiveness Report 2014 – 2015: 207).

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 but the proportion of young people with tertiary education (53% in 2012) is gradually approaching the OECD average (58%). In contrast, Germany exceeds the OECD average in youth participation in vocationally-oriented tertiary programs by 4% (OECD 2014: 4). The success of Germany’s dual conception of vocational training has become a role model especially for southern European countries facing high youth unemployment, such as Spain (where a reorganization of vocational programs has been intended since 2012).

Regarding segmentation, the OECD’s criticism is not uncontested, since it overemphasizes academic degrees as a criterion of educational success. Vocational



education (ISCED levels three and four) “reduces the need for initial on-the-job training,” tends to increase the individual productivity that can be initially expected from a worker (OECD 2011: 122) and provides students with occupation specific skills. In general, Germany’s education system is strong in terms of vocational training, providing skilled workers with good job and income prospects. The rate of vocational education and training (i.e., the level of education that is either upper secondary or post-secondary but not tertiary education, ISCED levels three and four) is 22.1 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Within the 25 to 34 age cohort, 52.4% of the total population attained their formal qualification in this education category. In 2009, 81.2% of those with vocational education and training were employed (OECD 2011: 135). All in all, the German education system excels in offering competencies relevant for labor market success, resulting in a low level of youth unemployment (OECD 2014: 3).

Defining educational achievement primarily on the criterion of university degrees (as the OECD does) might not do justice to the merits of the segmented German dual education system. While 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 the OECD average). 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, there has been an increase of 9.2 percentage points in the employment rate of people with an educational attainment below secondary education, reflecting the country’s substantial progress in this area (OECD 2011: 41; cf. statlink on this page: 118 – 135). Nonetheless, particularly among younger cohorts, upward mobility is less common than downward mobility (OECD 2014: 7).

Recently, reforms to reduce the number of years necessary to finish upper-secondary education were revoked in a number of states (Schleswig-Holstein, Baden-Württemberg, Hesse). This brought about a pluralization of educational standards. In consequence, issues of comparability of A-level exams between states have not been resolved.

Citation:

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

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

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

## Lithuania

### Score 7

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

The reputation of vocational education and training in Lithuania must be improved, as only 28.4% of all secondary-education students are enrolled in this type of training. Preprimary education attendance is also low, with only 78.3% of Lithuanian children aged four to six attending preprimary education programs, compared to the EU-27 average of 92.3%. Adult participation rates in lifelong learning programs are also comparatively low. Moreover, Lithuania needs to increase the quality of its education programs. In the 2009 and 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports, which evaluate student performance in the areas of reading, mathematics and science, Lithuania was ranked below the OECD average. Furthermore, the country must address mismatches between graduates' skills and labor-market needs, as the country's youth-unemployment rate of about 22% in 2013 was partly associated with young people's insufficient skills and lack of practical experience.

In terms of equitable access to education, the country shows an urban-rural divide and some disparities in educational achievements between girls and boys. However, there are no significant gaps in access to education for vulnerable groups (with the exception of the Roma population and, to a certain extent, the migrant population). Lithuania spent €0.73 billion on education in 2011 (compared to €0.78 billion in the pre-crisis year of 2008). Overall government spending on education thus fell somewhat during the financial crisis, with higher education given a higher priority at the outset of the crisis thanks to an ongoing higher-education reform. While enrollment rates for Lithuania are relatively high (it was ranked 22nd among 144 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2013 – 2014 in terms of tertiary education enrollment), the quality of education has been assessed as comparatively low (ranked 55th 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>

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT on the assessment of the 2014 national reform program and

convergence program for Lithuania: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2014/swd2014\\_lithuania\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2014/swd2014_lithuania_en.pdf).  
See the 2014-2015 Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum:  
<http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-competitiveness-report-2014-2015>.

## Poland

### Score 7

The first Tusk government launched a number of education reforms that have gradually become effective, and have significantly increased the quality of education in the country. Although education expenditure in Poland is significantly lower than the average expenditure in the European Union more broadly, Polish students now achieve relatively good results at schools. The main aim of the Tusk government's reforms was to reduce the system's lack of synchronization with the labor markets. Reforms have led to a greater emphasis in the curriculum on mathematics, science and technology; a strengthening of vocational education; attempts to attract more students to economically relevant areas; measures to improve the quality of research and teaching at universities; and the adoption of a national strategy for lifelong learning. In June 2014, the Ministry of Education announced a new reform package focusing on improving teaching quality in secondary education. Prime Minister Kopacz has placed a strong emphasis on the continuation of education reform.

## 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. The most pressing problems remain the small (but slowly growing) share of pupils enlisted in vocational education and in fields such as engineering, as well as a heavily underfunded tertiary-education system with low completion rates. However, the country's oldest and largest public university, the University of Ljubljana, is regularly ranked among the world's 500 best universities. Preoccupied with crisis management, the Bratušek government has paid little attention to education policy.

#### Citation:

Eris, Mehmet, 2011: Improving Educational Outcomes in Slovenia. OECD, Economics Department, Working Paper No. 915, Paris. Available at:

<http://www.oecdilibrary.org/docserver/download/5kg0prg9b1g8.pdf?expires=1377810034&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A24D79C1BA7F2F01CFFF744616E3A5F1>.

Štremfel, Urška and Damjan Lajh. 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 strategy started by its New Labour predecessors in the education sector. It has liberalized school regulation so as to enable non-governmental organizations such as foundations, businesses and parent-teacher corporations to set up their own schools. This policy has been controversial 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. A concern about secondary-school exam standards led grading systems to be toughened in the last year.

Programs such as Pupil Premium are designed to encourage good schools to accept disadvantaged children, thus improving 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. A Children's Commission on Poverty inquiry showed that inter-school competition has led to increasing costs for pupils and their families, as many schools try to stand out by introducing fancier uniforms, new textbooks or extravagant field trips. This in turn serves to strengthen social segregation. Cuts and reallocations in the education budget have further added to the problems of the sector.

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

Traditionally, elementary and secondary education were run by local school boards, state boards, and state education departments, with minimal intervention by the federal government. Proposed reforms often encounter intense opposition from teachers' unions. More positively, teachers' unions also help secure higher pay for teachers, who are often underpaid in the United States. Some promising programs introduce more freedom and opportunity in the educational system, yet they do not reach most 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, serve only 2% of the overall student population.

During the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies, the federal government's role in education has expanded dramatically. The Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandated the creation of state-run testing programs, 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.

Citation:

Ehrenfreund, Max, "Teacher Tenure." *The Washington Post*. Sep 2014. ???

Goldstein Dana, "Back against Blackboard: education in America," *The Economist*. Oct 2014.

## Australia

### Score 6

The quality of Australia's education system is variable, tending to be higher in non-government schools and in major metropolitan regions. Overall the high school completion rate is currently around 80%, with all state and territory governments currently having a target of a 90% completion rate by 2015. However, 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. Five of the eight states and territories signed up to the new 'Better Schools' funding agreement, but the long-term benefits of the agreement seem unlikely to be realized, since the Abbott government has committed to honor only the first 4 years of the agreement, with no commitment to continue the agreements in any shape or form beyond that point.

With regard to equity, the continued high level of government subsidies to non-government schools means inequity in schooling outcomes continues to be high. The level of private funding in Australia is significantly higher than the OECD-average. Less affluent parents cannot afford to send their children to private schools, which creates inequality. In the higher education sector, the Higher Education 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. However, in 2014 the Abbott government passed legislation in the lower house to cut higher education funding by 20%, deregulate fees charged by higher education and increase the rate of interest charged on HECS debts. This may reduce higher education participation and equity of access, although, as of the end of the review period, the Senate has been refusing to pass this legislation. The OECD has warned that the success of the proposed changes depends on the development of tuition fee competition and on how the fees reflect the quality of the education offered.

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 Better Schools program. The higher education sector is generally efficient and universities have had to be quite entrepreneurial in order to prosper, aggressively marketing to international students and pursuing independent sources of research funds.

Citation:

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

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

OECD, Economic Survey Australia 2014, p. 42.

## 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 the French-speaking part of Belgium is substantially below that of Flanders.

Too few reforms have been implemented in the French-speaking part of Belgium to generate improvement. While the government continues to spend generously on education, the qualitative outcomes have to date shown no improvement (though in quantitative terms, school enrollment is high above the OECD average).

The 2013 OECD Education at a Glance publication notes in its summary of Belgium that “more students without qualifications (have been) left out” since the beginning of the crisis. Drop out rates have indeed increased in secondary schools. Tertiary education, in contrast, has absorbed a large increase in enrollment rates, but without



a matching increase in funding. The financial situation in universities and higher education institutions is thus deteriorating.

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

Citation:

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## Croatia

### Score 6

Access to education is open and widespread, with almost 60% of each given cohort enrolled in tertiary education. However, upper-secondary education is selective, offering an academic university-prep track for the brightest students, and a system of underfunded vocational schools for the rest. Over three-quarters of upper-secondary-pupils attend such vocational schools in Croatia, compared to just over one-half of pupils in the EU as a whole. As in other former Yugoslavian countries, vocational education is very weak, and there is a high degree of mismatch between what is taught and the demands of employers. Thus, vocational education is not an assured route to a job. Overall access to education in Croatia lags behind the EU average. The expected length of education in Croatia is just 16.4 years compared to 17.6 in the EU; similarly, only 70% of 18-year olds are still in education, compared to 80% in the EU as a whole. The quality of tertiary education varies significantly across institutions and even between departments within universities. Universities do not function as unified institutions with common policies, resources and objectives, and the academic culture is poorly developed. The share of the population aged 30-34 years who have successfully completed university education in Croatia is only 25% compared to 37% for the EU as a whole. Croatia spends only 4.2% of GDP on publicly provided education compared to 5.3% in the EU as a whole.

The Milanović government has been involved in the development of a relatively comprehensive Strategy of Education, Science and Technology. Drafted by more than 100 people, from education-ministry officials to student activists and teachers, the 180-page document was unveiled in September 2013. However, the government has been slow to endorse the strategy and to commence implementation.

## Czech Republic

### Score 6

The main quality issue shown up in international comparisons is the relatively low proportion of the population with tertiary education. Another area of weakness has

been the 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. A long-standing and unresolved equity issue has been the process of inclusion of children into special schools, mostly attended by children of Roma descent or from the lower classes, individuals whose chances of returning to a more mainstream educational path is limited. Several NGOs in 2014 have proposed regulations to offer more possibilities of assistance prior to special school enrollment. The government addressed the preschool issue by facilitating less strictly regulated babysitting and child care in so-called children's groups.

## Denmark

### Score 6

Denmark claims top levels in education spending, but not in achievement. Danish pupils have not scored well on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) problem-solving tests. In the PISA findings from 2009, Denmark was number 16 overall, 13 in mathematics, 19 in reading and 20 in science, results many Danes viewed as not good enough. To address this situation a number of initiatives have recently been taken and there is an ongoing discussion on the need for additional measures.

In the PISA results from 2012 Denmark scored 500 in mathematics (OECD average 494), 496 in reading (the OECD average) and 498 in science (OECD average 501), yielding an overall score just around the OECD average.

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. As a consequence, Danish schools went through a month-long strike/lockout conflict in the spring of 2013. Eventually the government intervened and Parliament passed a law that ended the conflict. It strengthened the powers of school principals. Since 2014, school days have become longer, there is more assisted learning, there are more lessons in Danish and math, and the teaching of foreign languages has been strengthened (English made compulsory from level 1, German and French from level 5). To strengthen the continued development of teachers' competencies the

government has allocated one billion DKK from 2014 to 2020.

The government set the target that 95% of young Danes should complete a general or vocational upper secondary education program. 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. However, it should be noted that the goal is formulated in terms of education level achieved 25 years after having left primary school.

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

Vocational and university educations are currently being discussed and reform initiatives are being planned.

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

One major problem concerns professional training. The education to professional training transition has been deficient. Organized by state schools, the system has lacked alternate training in cooperation with businesses, and diplomas are often not accepted by companies. This is 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 (managerial autonomy and more financial resources for universities) but France is only at the beginnings of a profound modernization push of its tertiary education system. Unfortunately, the fears of student protests have impeded any overhaul of a system that is in great need of change and adaptation.

## Iceland

### Score 6

Public expenditure on education increased prior to 2008, but has since been cut. In 2012, public expenditure as a proportion of GDP on high schools, colleges and universities was significantly less than in 2008–2009. Public sector pay for teachers has for many years been lower than private sector pay. As such, vacant primary and secondary school teacher positions remained unfilled and a large number of under-qualified teachers found employment. However, the 2008 economic collapse has changed this. Salaries have decreased in the private sector and the reduction in available jobs has increased the proportion of qualified teachers.

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools. Since 2008, considerable cutbacks and rationalization measures have been introduced, including a shortening of the school year. High schools and public universities are the responsibility of central government. Despite cuts to public expenditure on education, the number of high schools has increased in recent years. Most new schools are located in rural areas, where education has been supported by regional development policies. The new government looks certain to shorten the duration of high school matriculation from four to three years.

Iceland's universities have been seriously underfunded for a long time. There are seven universities: two private universities supported by state grants and five public including two agricultural colleges. The previous government considered rationalizing the university sector either by reducing the number of universities or by encouraging more cooperation between universities. Discussions between the two private universities, concerning a possible merger, took place, but were later abandoned. However, the number of universities will be reduced to six, with one of the agricultural universities, Hvanneyri, being merged with the University of Iceland, despite heavy protests from citizens and politicians in the west of Iceland.

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

Citation:

OECD: Education at a Glance 2014, Paris.

## Ireland

### Score 6

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

Some employers claim that the output of suitably qualified and skilled graduates from the second and third levels of the education system is inadequate, especially in the high-tech areas 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.

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

Irish students at tertiary institutions are not charged fees for most undergraduate courses. However, students were assessed a contribution of about €2,500 in 2013/2014, and this will rise to €3,000 by 2015.

The unemployment rate is closely related to educational levels, with the highest rates among those with the least education.

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

## Israel

### Score 6

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

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 consecutive reforms aiming to improve the quality of education. 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 the Jewish-orthodox communities, Israeli students' marks have deteriorated compared to previous generations; Israel showed high levels of attainment in the past and the value of education is well established in the community as a whole. Surveys shows that "42% of 25- to 34-year-olds have either tertiary type A or B qualifications compared with an OECD average of 34%." However, a recent Taub Center research paper suggests that Israeli education system is ill prepared for the world's increasingly competitive and dynamic working environment.

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## Japan

### Score 6

Education has always been considered one of Japan's particular strengths. Nonetheless, the Japanese education system faces a number of challenges. One of these is to deliver adequate quality and, particularly under the new LDP-led coalition, renewed emphasis has been placed on reaching the top international tier as well as improving the use of English. In late 2013, the Ministry of Education (MEXT) announced an English Education Reform Plan for 2014 - 2020. English-language education shall be started from an earlier age and teacher training improved. It is too early to evaluate the results of this plan. In the area of tertiary education, the 2001 administrative reform transformed the national universities into independent agencies, but this change has not created a sufficient reform impetus to improve quality 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.

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 the tertiary level, the system of equal access through study grants has been abolished, and every student now pays for university education through low-interest loans. It is feared this will lead to a loss of 20,000 to 30,000 potential students and will saddle lower- and middle-income families with debts. All in all, equity in educational access for ethnic groups has not been achieved, and is diminishing at the 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. The Educational Council, the government's major advisory body for educational policies, urged the government in a 2014 report to focus attention on structural problems in the educational system such as student transitions between school types and levels in particular. It also urged the government to develop a "curriculum for the future" that would ensure the working population be able to develop skills appropriate to future labor market needs.

### Citation:

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## 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.

## Sweden

### Score 6

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

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

In its defense, the previous government argued that it was extremely active in reforming education at all levels. The former as well as the current red-green government have expressed strong financial commitments to education. To improve the "fit" between education and the labor market, the current government announced to open alternative education programs that provide an avenue of learning other than to prepare for university studies. There are also plans, as mentioned earlier, to develop apprenticeship programs, which have proven successful in other countries like Germany. Finally, the previous government was committed to strengthening the competence and professionalization of teachers by, for example, reforming the university programs and introducing certification for teachers. The newly elected government intends to raise teachers' salaries and also to increase the number of the staff present in the school environment. However, due to the stalemate in parliament in December 2014, it remains to be seen if the red-green government will be

confirmed in the extraordinary election in March 2015.

A key means of assessing Sweden's education policy involves looking at the extent to which the education system successfully provides a skilled labor force. High youth unemployment could be seen as an indicator of failure in this respect but could also be explained by the performance and the specific demand of the economy. Some education policy experts support a two-tier model where apprenticeships facilitate a smooth transition from work-related secondary education programs into employment in industry, and where students who seek to continue their education arrive at universities well-prepared. This model has not been entirely successful elsewhere, but that may be attributable to economic factors or labor market rigidities. Also, as mentioned earlier, the PISA results substantiate the problems in Sweden's primary education to deliver good quality.

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

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

## 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.

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

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

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

The higher education system is made up of state 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. Meanwhile, low wages in the higher education sector is encouraging younger and older teaching staff to look for employment opportunities abroad.

Following the 2011 parliamentary elections, a professor of the Stockholm School of Economics' Riga campus was appointed Minister of Education. This appointment was made with the aim to reform the higher education system. Proposed reforms included reducing the number of schools and ensuring that students are taught skills demanded by the labor market. However, no concrete policy proposal was ever developed. After resistance among established education institutions developed, following the proposal to privately finance higher education, the minister stepped down in 2013. Higher education reform has subsequently stalled. In 2014, the World

Bank published a study that, among other things, analyzed financing models for higher education. While the study's recommendations are expected to be implemented in large part, the exact form of these reforms will be defined by the incoming government in November 2014.

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 holding 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 between 2011 and 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 infrastructure of 29 institutions was modernized between 2011 and 2013, supported by public funds in the amount of 65.3 million Latvian lats.

With respect to equity, free formal education to the end of 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 between 2009 and 2010, Latvia changed the system by which public funding was provided to local governments for primary and secondary education. Funding allocations are now tied to pupil enrollment, which has resulted in a restructuring of the school system and reduction in the number of schools. State funding is matched by local government funding at an inconsistent rate, based on the local government's own funding situation. A persistent decline in pupil enrollment due to demographic change creates further financial pressure. The system promotes consolidation and efficiency. However, local governments' inability to pay also translates into unequal access and 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 two 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 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.

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## Malta

### Score 5

Malta's main resource is essentially its human resources and 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. The ratio of students attending higher education remains one of the lowest in Europe, but since 2013 the government has implemented a number of programs, some of them with fiscal support, designed to encourage more students to further their education. Among these are measures increasing support for students at risk of failing their exams or who have failed admission to higher-education institutions, by providing extra tuition services free of charge. The government has also sought to build on measures implemented before 2013 by extending the services and facilities of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, which is equivalent to a polytechnic university, and in some areas helps bridge the gap between secondary school and university. However, Maltese education in the sciences generally remains weak.

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. A total of 80% of all schools are free, and students are supported in various ways. 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 (three years and over) state facilities, where Malta ranks 30th out of 41 countries.

During the latest review period, a pilot scheme allowing for mixed-gender schools was introduced at the secondary level, a less rigid system of testing allowing for greater self-expression by students was introduced, extra summer classes were provided for those wishing to retake ordinary-level exams, and a new type of alternative-learning program was introduced aimed at students unable to complete the ordinary-level exams. A pilot project aimed at providing school children with tablet computers was also introduced.

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## 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, this does not fully explain the weak outcomes. Indeed, in absolute terms Mexican educational spending is comparable to that of South Korea but Mexican students are performing much worse as shown by an international cross-sectional comparison. The problem, therefore, appears to be related to resource allocation rather than funding per se. Too much is spent on salaries in contrast to capital spending, and too much of the budget is spent in an unaccountable fashion. Aiming to mitigate the strong influence of the teachers union on the Education Ministry, the government's recent reforms were aimed at facilitating a meritocracy in the teaching profession. This will be a hard job.

In 2013, the Mexican Congress passed a significant education-reform bill. Its main aim was to weaken the hitherto-powerful teachers union – whose leader was arrested in 2013 and charged with embezzlement – and to create a meritocracy within the teaching profession. Nobody doubts that the union has been profoundly corrupt, but it will take many years before it is evident whether the recent reform has succeeded in improving the situation or not. Until she was jailed on corruption charges, the

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

## Spain

### Score 5

Since the 1980s, Spanish investment in education (number of teachers, schools, universities, transfers and scholarships) has increased the enrollment rates and graduate output of upper secondary and tertiary education by a considerable margin. To be sure, there are still problems of quality (as is explained below) and equity (in particular, regarding access to preschool education or as a consequence of the socioeconomic class segmentation between students in public schools and those attending public-funded private, normally Catholic, schools). Efficiency could be improved upon as well. For example, early school leavers make up almost 25% of the young population, and are not easily brought into training programs. Even if there has been some recent improvement in these figures, this problem does not facilitate the goal of creating a skilled labor force. Anyhow, the goal of creating a relatively efficient education system that facilitates high-quality learning for everyone has been largely achieved.

Despite this success, it is broadly perceived among Spaniards that educational outcomes are mediocre. This perception is based in part on Spanish universities' poor international ranking and PISA test results. This concern about the state of the system has fostered social and political momentum for launching reforms in recent years. However, budgetary austerity has meant that only a few and inexpensive regulatory measures targeting quality and efficiency in resource allocation have been implemented, but at the expense of fairness in access.

Spain's legislature, the General Courts, passed a new law at the end of 2013 (L.O. 8/2013) to "improve the quality of education" (also known as the "Ley Wert," in honor of the conservative minister for education) by taking advantage of the absolute majority enjoyed by the Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP) since no other party supported the reform. The initiative is ambitious in introducing competition to the system, but it lacks a wide social consensus from parents or teachers and it is not well funded. As its title suggests, the law focuses more on quality than on equality of opportunities. The latter has declined since 2011 as a result of education spending

cuts (in 2015, education spending accounted for 5.6% of GDP, far below the OECD average of 6.3%) and the increase in fees and conditions for obtaining funding and scholarships, which serves to exclude poor students from the system.

## Turkey

### Score 5

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

Over the years Turkey has made significant progress in increasing access to schools. In the 2012 – 2013 school year, it achieved almost universal primary-school enrollment, with 99% enrollment in the first four years and 93% in the second four years. Secondary-school enrollment was 70% during the same year. The gender-based enrollment gap has nearly disappeared for primary education, and has narrowed significantly for secondary education. However, Turkey is ranked 103rd out of 136 countries in terms of educational attainment in the Gender Gap 2013 Report. Pre-primary-education participation rates among three- to five-year-olds are increasing rapidly, as are higher-education enrollment rates, but both remain well below the OECD average.

Regarding the quality of education, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores Turkey's performance still relatively low. Although Turkey's scores have improved significantly over time, and inequality in student performance has declined, the performance of Turkey's average 15-year-old in reading, mathematics, and science is 46 points behind the OECD average. Furthermore, Turkey has a higher-than-average proportion of underperforming students, and academic achievement is particularly low among disadvantaged students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, around 22% of Turkish 15-year-olds do not read well enough to be able to analyze and understand what they read.

As the government seeks to improve the quality of education, education spending has become the largest item in the national budget. Expenditure in this area now accounts for nearly a quarter of tax revenues. The proportion of GDP allocated to education from the government budget has increased significantly, from 2.5% in 2000 to 4.2% during 2011. With these resources, Turkey has hired new teachers (35,000 in 2014 alone) and increased the use of education technologies.

National examinations select and place students within secondary and tertiary institutions. Parents, particularly those who are educated and have relatively high incomes, often seek tutoring services to prepare their children for the national

examinations, thus improving their chances of entering top schools and universities. However, Turkey adopted legislation to close private preparatory schools for university entrance exams by 1 September 2015 – a step that was widely seen as related to internal quarrels in the government’s camp.

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

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## Bulgaria

### Score 4

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

The level of equity in the Bulgarian education system is average to low. There are two main reasons for this. Many children in upper-income families are able to attend private schools, which seem to have better average performance rates than do public

schools. In addition, the school drop-out rate among minorities, especially Roma, is significantly higher than the average, meaning that schools do not provide the same opportunities for all ethnic groups. Geographic variance in the quality of the education provided by secondary and tertiary schools is very large, with schools in smaller towns and villages and in less populated areas unable to attract high-quality teaching staff.

Citation:

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## Chile

Score 4

Chile's school and education attainment levels are very mixed, and are generally much lower than the OECD average. Pre-primary education coverage is still low, but rising. Primary and secondary education coverage is high, reaching nearly 100% of current age cohorts. Tertiary education coverage is moderate but increasing. 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 the free market, reforms have largely been lacking in this area due to conflicts between teachers' boards and the corporations or enterprises offering private-education services. The current government's electoral manifesto promised reforms abolishing profit-seeking in the educational sector. Accordingly, a series of legislative proposals have already been introduced in Congress, and as of December 2014, some were already under discussion, while others had already been enacted. As a body, these aim at eliminating profit, selection and copayments within the private-education sphere. The educational reform is based on four fundamental principles: 1) ensuring that institutions provide ample education and protect families' security; 2) creating a high-quality public-education system; 3) providing for a modern, well-paid, decent teaching profession; and 4) creating a free (no-fee) higher-education system of high quality. In line with these goals, the budget proposal submitted by President Michelle Bachelet to Congress on 1 October 2014 includes a 27.5% increase in public investment. Public education will receive a funding increase of 10.2%, which will largely be dedicated to nurseries, kindergartens, public-school infrastructure and training programs for teachers. The 2015 budget also contains an increase in scholarships for (about 70% of) university students in Chile. Traditionally, high-quality education in Chile has been accessible only to those able to afford it. There is a huge financial divergence between private and public education, with 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 students attending public institutions has declined to approximately 40%. There is a great gap in the quality of education for less gifted students, as the system

is strongly focused on preparing students for careers requiring higher education. There are comparatively few options for applied, vocationally oriented training courses for students who cannot afford the university, do not obtain the necessary grades to enter university, or are simply skilled in fields that require solid technical training instead of an academic degree. Furthermore, there is a wide variance in standards between universities and even technical training centers, as quality-control standards 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.

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## Greece

### Score 4

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

Access to education is, however, not equitable as students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are usually more successful in passing entrance examinations. However, students pay neither tuition fees nor textbook costs.

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

The quality of education at Greek universities is very uneven. Some university departments have a long tradition of excellence, such as Athens Law School and most of the engineering departments of the National Technical University of Athens.

The distribution of infrastructures is generally very uneven across university departments and most universities suffer from the fact that academic and administrative staff are underpaid. In addition, frequent strikes and sit-ins organized by student groups associated with specific political parties makes for a tumultuous campus life. In 2013-2014, administrative employees went on strike in response to government measures placing certain categories of public employees “on reserve,” which further disrupted already unpredictable scheduling. From September to December of 2013, Greece’s largest universities, namely the University of Athens, the University of Thessaloniki and the National Technical University of Athens, essentially did not function at all, as striking employees barred access to most university buildings.

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

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

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

## Italy

### Score 4

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



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

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

During the period under review, no significant changes have taken place in education policy. A reform passed by the Berlusconi government designed to strengthen university governance has been implemented. A national evaluation process for university research has also been completed. Its results are now available and will inform decisions regarding state contributions to individual universities. These developments should have significant effects in stimulating a more competitive and quality-oriented university system. The Renzi government also announced a large-scale reform for public schools and the education system during the review period.

## 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.

The share of early school or training-program leavers fell during the period under review, leaving Luxembourg in fifth place on this measure within the EU-28. This share fell from 8.6% in 2012 to 6.1% in 2013. Reforms introduced on this issue (Second Chance School and new social assistance programs) in recent years are having a strongly positive effect. From 2010 to 2012, the proportion of students going on to tertiary education has increased. In contrast, the share of people with

upper-secondary education has declined. In contrast to other EU countries, the rates for upper secondary and tertiary education in Luxembourg are similar. But only 25% of Luxembourg's students will graduate "for the first time from tertiary-type A programs during their lifetime" (OECD 2014:76) and less than 30% will enter tertiary education programs.

According to OECD data (Education at a Glance 2014), Luxembourg has the OECD's highest level of expenditure per student by educational institutions (more than \$23,000 at the primary level and more than \$16,000 at the secondary level), and the smallest average class size (16 students). In addition, between 2008 and 2012, average salaries for primary-education teachers increased dramatically, by 40.8%. This is mostly due to the fact that the 2009 law reforming basic education introduced an increase in teachers' salaries. Yet despite its high costs, the education system largely performs below the OECD average.

In the last PISA study, Luxembourg showed the largest gender differences of any country measured. Boys outperformed girls in mathematics (by 25 points) and in natural science (15 points), while girls obtained better results in reading (PISA 2012). In mathematics specifically, Luxembourg showed the most pronounced differences between boys and girls among the OECD countries. In Luxembourg it is common for students to repeat one or more years of school, leaving school with an average of two years delay. A total of 70% of students have to retake at least one school year. The excessive length of studies and the delayed onset of working life are certainly problems that must be urgently addressed. Furthermore, only 20% of young adults complete type A tertiary education degrees before their 30th birthday.

In 2009, the government introduced primary-school reforms including a new competence-based curriculum, performance monitoring and a tutorial system. Secondary-school teachers were required to teach 15% more hours in 2012 as compared to 2005. A government action plan (Plan d'encadrement périscolaire) released during the period under review set new educational goals, mainly through a close collaboration between school and after-school care facilities, including sharing of premises, staff and equipment.

Plans for secondary school reforms were launched after primary school reforms, 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. Ongoing negotiations with the unions have not produced satisfactory agreement.

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## Portugal

### Score 4

The government of Prime Minister Passos Coelho, which took office in June 2011 and continued to hold power through the assessment period, abolished the “New Opportunities” lifelong-learning program that had been a flagship of the predecessor government. The New Opportunities centers were replaced in March 2013. The government also supports technical and professional education more strongly, and has increased national-level examinations for students. However, there is little evidence that these measures have generated gains in terms of quality, access or efficiency. Indeed, some of the policy measures adopted have contributed to making the educational system less effective, at least in the short term, as evidenced by the considerable turbulence over teacher placements in the 2014/15 academic year. Several schools were unable to field a full teaching staff even a full month after the start of the school year.

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

Post-bailout, the pattern of austerity and cuts in education remains. In the 2015 budget, the Ministry of Education is the ministry with the biggest cut in its budget.

A decline of 11% was imposed on primary and secondary education, as compared to 2014.

All this means that Portugal's strong results in the most recent OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluation (PISA 2012, published in December 2013) are unlikely to be sustained in the near future.

## Romania

**Score 4** In the period under review, Romania made limited progress in addressing the shortcomings of the education system, including early-childhood education, pre-university schooling and vocational training. The most important change was the June 2014 Emergency Ordinance No. 49/2014, which reshaped the 2011 Law on National Education. This included provisions allowing students who have not passed the high-school graduation exam to enroll in universities, reintroducing part-time doctoral programs and granting a broader autonomy to private universities (including the right to expand to pre-tertiary educational services). This development has produced mixed reactions. Education-sector unions, which were given a greater role in the higher-education system, have praised the reform, while others (including two former education ministers) have condemned it.

## Slovakia

**Score 4** The quality of education and training in Slovakia has suffered both from low levels of spending and a lack of structural reforms. Spending levels on education are among the European Union's lowest, and have fallen as a percentage of GDP since 2009. Minor increases in wages have not increased the motivation or morale of the often dissatisfied and frustrated teachers, but have instead been widely disregarded as a mere attempt to pacify them in the run-up to the 2016 parliamentary elections. While the second Fico government has sought to strengthen secondary vocational and tertiary technical education, the transition from school to the labor market has remained difficult for many. The fact that the head of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport changed twice in 2014 did not help improve education policy.

## Hungary

**Score 3** The second Orbán government radically revamped Hungary's education system. Municipalities have been deprived of their functions in primary and secondary education. 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.

Remarkable changes have taken place in the contents of history books, with right-wing ideology replacing more liberal views. The centralization trend has continued since the 2014 elections. The government's installation of powerful chancellors has drastically reduced universities' autonomy. It has also established a new University of Public Service (Nemzeti Köszolgálati Egyetem, NKE) to educate loyal bureaucrats. More broadly, the Orbán government has strongly promoted vocational education to the detriment of the general secondary-education system ("gimnázium"). At the end of October 2014, it officially announced that the number of pupils in the academically oriented secondary-school track would be cut by half, since this would in the future be meant only for those intended to go to university. At the same time, the 2015 austerity budget included new cuts for the universities, which had already lost a quarter of their funding between 2010 and 2014.

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