



# Education Report

Education Policy

## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017

Indicator

## Education Policy

Question

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

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

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

### Estonia

Score 9

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

Municipalities provide preschool education, which is accessible to the great bulk of the population (the enrollment rate is about 95%). Earlier concerns regarding a shortage of places in urban areas have diminished, but problems associated with a shortage of financial resources, including low salary levels for teachers, have yet to be solved. Education in public institutions is free at all levels. There are about 500 schools providing general education, 50 VET institutions, and 24 higher-education institutions (HEI) including six public universities.

Interestingly, while higher education is generally associated with better employability and a higher salary, this appears less true in Estonia than elsewhere. Recent policy measures strengthening links between education and training and the labor market, 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.

## New Zealand

### Score 9

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

In the field of primary and secondary education, investment and participation rates are high, with teacher-student ratios being among the lowest in the OECD. The main elements of the current government's approach to education include increasing participation of disadvantaged groups in early childhood education, encouraging students to stay in school longer by improving pathways to further learning and work, and raising teaching quality through increasing collaboration between schools.

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

Tuition costs have been a source of some concern for NZ's political parties. The three largest opposition parties (i.e., Labour, the Green Party and New Zealand First) are all committed to some version of free tertiary education. While this has been repeatedly rejected by the National government, because taxpayers were required to carry the burden of a previous Labour government policy of providing interest-free student loans. In September 2016, the Productivity Commission's "New Models of Tertiary Education" recommended reinstating interest on student loans. It was

categorically ruled out by the government.

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

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

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

Citation:

OECD Education at a Glance 2015 - Country Note New Zealand: [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oece/education/education-at-a-glance-2015/new-zealand\\_eag-2015-72-en#page3](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oece/education/education-at-a-glance-2015/new-zealand_eag-2015-72-en#page3) (accessed July 4, 2016).

OECD Education at a Glance 2016 - Country Note New Zealand: [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oece/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/new-zealand\\_eag-2016-72-en#page3](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oece/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/new-zealand_eag-2016-72-en#page3) (accessed September 18, 2016).

Teachers campaign against funding scheme. New Zealand Herald. 5 September 2016 ([http://www.nzherald.co.nz/education/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=35&objectid=11704015](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/education/news/article.cfm?c_id=35&objectid=11704015)).

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

Pathway visas. New Zealand Immigration. <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/assist-migrants-and-students/assist-students/student-visa-info/pathway-visas> (accessed 13 September, 2016).

Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand: <http://www.educationcouncil.org.nz/> (accessed November 29, 2016).

## Canada

Score 8

Education quality in Canada is high. The country has a number of world-class universities and the average quality of its universities is high. Canadian teachers are well-paid by global standards. The most recent (2016) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report gave the country scores well above the OECD average in Reading (third of 72 countries), Science (seventh), and Mathematics (tenth).

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

The level of financial resources allocated to education, largely by provincial

governments (as education falls under the provinces' jurisdiction), is reasonable and resources are, in general, used efficiently. The federal government has recently increased grant money for students from low- and middle-income families by 50%, making post-secondary education more accessible for these students.

Despite the overall strengths of the Canadian education and training system, there are challenges. Probably the biggest deficiency in education policy has been the failure to reduce the gap in educational attainment between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations. Schools on reserves are funded federally through Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. A recent evaluation carried out for the ministry found that education opportunities and results are not comparable to those off the reserves, that the comparatively lower quality of teacher instruction and curriculum is affecting student success, and that funding gaps relative to provincially funded regular (off-reserve) schools persist, especially in isolated, low-population communities. A recent study has documented the large economic benefits that can be obtained by closing the Aboriginal education gap (Calver, 2015). The 2016 federal budget includes CAD 2.6 billion for First Nations schooling, grades primary to twelve, in an effort to narrow the education gap. However, the largest portion of this spending will not be allocated until the 2020-2021 fiscal year, leaving the immediate benefits unclear.

Citation:

Summative Evaluation of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program on Reserve, report prepared for AANDC, June 2012. [http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DA\\_M-INTER-HQ-AEV/STAGING/texte-text/e\\_v\\_else\\_1365173418229\\_eng.pdf](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DA_M-INTER-HQ-AEV/STAGING/texte-text/e_v_else_1365173418229_eng.pdf)

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

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

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

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2016) "Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study: The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics" [http://cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/365/Book\\_PISA2015\\_EN\\_Dec5.pdf](http://cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/365/Book_PISA2015_EN_Dec5.pdf)

## Finland

Score 8

Built on the principle of lifelong learning, policy in Finland promotes and maintains a high educational standards. All people by law must have equal access to high-quality education and training, basic education is free, and municipalities are responsible for providing educational services to all local children. Finland has 20 universities and 30 polytechnics, and close to 70% of high-school graduates enter higher education. Nevertheless, the proportion of graduates from higher education (among 25- to 34-year-olds) has been comparatively low and the number of graduates overall has been rising more slowly than in many other OECD countries.



By and large, Finland's education system is successful, and Finland has ranked at the top of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment in recent years. However, Finland's ranking appears to be slipping as gender and regional disparities in student performance are growing significantly. The Education and Research Development Plan, revised every four years by the government, is the key document governing education and research policy in Finland, and directs the implementation of education- and research-policy goals as stated in the government program. From 2011 to 2016, the plan has focused on the alleviation of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

On 1 August 2016, new curricula for compulsory basic education was introduced. The curricula are designed to increase equality in compulsory education, enhance pupil participation in goal-setting and evaluation, and integrate more technology in teaching. While the curricula reflect more thoroughly the growing needs of a knowledge society, it has been criticized for the short period of transition involved with implementing it and the lack of resources and training for teachers.

Additionally, restrictions on the right to day care for children whose parents are not participating in the labor market undermine equal access to early education, especially in socially vulnerable families. This change in education policy is likely to decrease the quality and diminish the successes of the Finnish educational system.

Citation:

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

"Education Policy Outlook Finland", [oecd.org/edu/highlightsFinland.htm](http://oecd.org/edu/highlightsFinland.htm)

"The new curricula in a nutshell", [http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula\\_and\\_qualifications/basic\\_education/curricula\\_2014](http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/basic_education/curricula_2014)

## South Korea

Score 8

South Korea's education system is very hotly debated, and education policies are an important priority for the government. On the positive side, PISA test results are good and tertiary enrolment rates are high. In 2013, 5.9% of GDP was spent on education institutions, compared to an OECD average of 5.2%. South Korea's rankings in international student-assessment tests in 2015 PISA slipped slightly as compared to three years previously, though it still remains among the top eight countries with regard to OECD members. However, private funding makes up 36% of total national education expenditures the second-largest such share among OECD and partner countries. For this reason, much of the success of Korean education can be attributed to parents' willingness to pay for education rather than to public policies per se. Almost all parties involved in the higher-education sector agree that a change in the South Korean system is both necessary and a high priority. There are many complaints about the focus on "cramming," the curriculum content, and the teaching styles at South Korean schools and universities. University entrance exams are a particularly controversial issue. While they have played an important role in

allowing relatively equitable access to top universities, they are seen as a major cause of a lack of creativity as well as weak analytical and discussion skills. Many attempts at education reform have been made, but cramming and rote learning are still favored over analytic skills, discussion and creativity. Social and cultural templates based on school ties are also hampering educational reform in a fundamental way. The high share (6.5% as of 2015) of Korean students among the foreign-student population in U.S. universities remains controversial in Korea. The Park administration's recent policy to introduce "a single government-written history book system" could potentially undermine the liberal educational environment intended to cultivate creativity and democratic ideas. While the single government-issued history textbook was scheduled to be introduced in middle and high schools from 2017 onwards, it seems likely that President Moon Jae-in, a former human rights lawyer and chief of staff to liberal President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) will attempt to reverse this policy.

Citation:

OECD, OECD in figures 2013

OECD, Education at a Glance 2016

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

IIE, Open Doors Report, 2014

Migration Policy Institute, "International Students in the United States," May 12, 2016.

## Switzerland

### Score 8

Switzerland's education system is strongly influenced by the country's federal and decentralized structure, as education policy falls under the jurisdiction of the cantons and municipalities. The system provides a high-quality education. The university system performs very well, as is the case in many other small and open European countries. Vocational training is very solid, and seems to be one of the most important factors in the low levels of unemployment, particularly among younger people. The permeability of vocational and tertiary education has improved as compared to other countries. The number of students enrolled at universities, universities of applied sciences and colleges of education nearly doubled from 2000 to the current review period. The share of female students has increased from 39% in 1990 to 51%.

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

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

they have finished their apprenticeship. In 2015, 19,000 students earned their high school diploma at traditional high schools (“Gymnasium”), while 14,000 students received a diploma to attend universities of applied sciences.

There is, however, a federal particularity in higher education. Cantons such as Geneva and Ticino have followed international trends favoring general qualification for university entrance, while others, especially in the German-speaking parts of the country, have focused on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the canton of Ticino, 51% of all 19- to 21-year-olds acquire the matura secondary-school exit diploma, allowing them to go on to university or a university of applied sciences; in the cantons of Geneva and Neuchatel this figure is 46%, while in the canton of Uri only 30% gain direct access to a university (2015). However, the effect of this “federal” discrimination is somewhat reduced by permeability within the school and university systems.

The vocational-training system also offers considerable career prospects. In particular men with vocational training have similarly high employment rates over the course of their work life as men with tertiary education. However, there is a significant difference in earnings. At the age of 50, the median annual earnings of a male academic is about CHF 125,000, in contrast to about CHF 80,000 for a male worker with vocational training.

Resource allocation within the educational system appears to be very efficient. In general, the quality of the Swiss education system is outstanding. However, given the strong impact of parents’ social status on access to higher education, there are questions about overall equity in terms of access.

Citation:  
[dievolkswirtschaft.ch/de/2016/11/korber-oesch-11-2016](http://dievolkswirtschaft.ch/de/2016/11/korber-oesch-11-2016)

## Cyprus

### Score 7

Cyprus’ primary and secondary education is mainly public. New plans and proposals for education reforms are under discussion between the Ministry of Education and stakeholders. They follow reforms since the 1990s and efforts of previous government, albeit in different directions. A primarily knowledge-based education is ceding ground to more focus on research, experimentation and critical thought. High literacy rates (near 100% for youth), low drop-out rates and high upper-secondary attainment are indicative of a culture that places a high value on education. Students in tertiary education attend local and overseas educational institutions in almost equal numbers. In 2015, Cyprus ranked second in the EU with respect to tertiary education attainment (54.6%) for the 30-34 age group (Eurostat).

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, there are claims that tertiary students' literacy and mathematical skills are lower than expected at this level of education.

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

Citation:

1. Tertiary education attainment, Eurostat, 2016 [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Educational\\_attainment\\_statistics#Level\\_of\\_educational\\_attainment\\_by\\_age\\_and\\_sex](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Educational_attainment_statistics#Level_of_educational_attainment_by_age_and_sex)
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)

## Denmark

### Score 7

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

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

Further reforms were approved in 2013 granting more discretionary power to the school principal to allocate teacher resources and putting pupils in school for more hours. As a consequence, Danish schools went through a month-long strike/lockout conflict in the spring of 2013. Eventually the government intervened and Parliament passed a law that ended the conflict. It strengthened the powers of school principals. Since 2014, school days have become longer, there is more assisted learning, there are more lessons in Danish and math, and the teaching of foreign languages has been strengthened (English made compulsory from level 1, German and French from level 5). To strengthen the continued development of teachers' competencies the government has allocated one billion DKK from 2014 to 2020.

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

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

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

Citation:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 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 children from low-income families and for immigrants. PISA results from 2012, however, had shown significant improvements (OECD 2013), reflecting possibly a catalytic effect of the "PISA shock" in the early 2000s. Germany ranked above the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science, and the importance of students' socioeconomic background had lessened. While in 2000,

the level of social equity in German education was among the lowest of all OECD countries, Germany had risen to around the OECD average in 2012. The most recent PISA results from 2015 indicate a setback in science and mathematics, further stable performance in reading and confirm a looser link between socioeconomic background and performance compared to the 2000s (OECD 2016).

Other indicators confirm that Germany is still lagging behind the top education performers, but is steadily catching up. In 2012, Germany ranked twentieth worldwide in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, trailing 1.1 points behind Switzerland, which achieved a score of 6.0 in the overall assessment of education system quality (Global Competitiveness Report 2012 – 2013: 442). In 2016, the overall quality of the education system improved slowly (a score of 5.6, ranking the country 17th in 2016). In 2016, Germany ranked 17th out of 140 countries with an improvement score of 5.6.

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

However, Germany exceeds the OECD average in youth participation in vocational tertiary education programs by 4% (OECD 2014: 4). The success of Germany's dual vocational training approach has become a role model for southern European countries, which have high youth unemployment rates, such as Spain (where a reorganization of vocational programs has been underway since 2012).

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 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 post-secondary vocational education and training is about 20%, much higher than the OECD average. All in all, the German education system excels in offering competencies relevant for labor market success, resulting in a very low level of youth unemployment (rank 2 among OECD countries). Thus, defining educational achievement primarily on the criterion of university degrees (as the OECD does) might not do justice to the merits of the segmented German dual education system.

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

Citation:

<http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/competitiveness-rankings/#indicatorId=GCI.B.05>

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

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

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

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

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

## Lithuania

### Score 7

The educational system in Lithuania is comprised of the following stages: 1) early childhood education and care (preprimary and preprimary class-based education); 2) compulsory education for children aged seven through 16 (including primary education, lower-secondary general education, vocational lower-secondary education); 3) upper-secondary and post-secondary education (for 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 (53.3% in 2014). Its rate of early school leaving is also below the EU average, at just 5.9% in 2014. However, enrollment rates in vocational-education and training programs are low.

The reputation of vocational education and training in Lithuania could still be improved. According to an OECD survey of education released in September 2016, only 15% of all students are expected to graduate from vocational training programs compared to an OECD average of 46% and EU average of 50%. Preprimary education attendance is also low, with only 78.3% of Lithuanian children aged four to six attending preprimary education programs, compared to the EU-27 average of 92.3%. Adult participation rates in lifelong learning programs are also comparatively low. Moreover, Lithuania needs to increase the quality of its education programs. In the 2009 and 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports, which evaluate student performance in the areas of reading, mathematics and science, Lithuania was ranked below the OECD average. Furthermore, the country must address mismatches between graduates' skills and labor-market needs, as the country's youth-unemployment rate of about 19.3% in 2014 was partly associated with young people's insufficient skills and lack of practical experience. The European Commission has recommended shifting the focus of education to improve its labor-market relevance.

In terms of equitable access to education, the country shows an urban-rural divide and some disparities in educational achievements between girls and boys. However,

there are no significant gaps in access to education for vulnerable groups (with the exception of the Roma population and, to a certain extent, the migrant population). Lithuania spent €730 million on education in 2011 (compared to €780 million 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. However, spending on education in Lithuania has been above EU average (6.1% of GDP and 5.6% of GDP in 2011 and 2014 respectively compared to an EU average of 5.1% in 2011 and 5.0% in 2014). Though it has reached €1.1 billion in 2016, it was dispersed through a large number of institutions. While enrollment rates for Lithuania are relatively high (Lithuania ranked 29 out of 138 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017 for tertiary-education enrollment), the quality of education has been assessed as comparatively low (Lithuania ranked 57 out of 138 countries in the same report). The total number of school graduates continued decline in 2015 and 2016 due to demographic changes. In 2016, the number of graduates decreased by almost 10% compared to 2015. At the same time, the numbers of foreign students studying in Lithuania remain comparatively low at only 3% compared to an OECD average of 6%. Decreasing student numbers have intensified pressure on less popular higher-education institutions, while there is a relatively high number of higher education institutions (47) for a population of 3 million. Consequently, discussions on reducing the overall number of higher-education institutions, thus enabling resources to be focused on the country's top-ranking universities, have intensified. However, the current coalition government has been rather vague on identifying possible policies to consolidate resources to increase education and research quality, reduce the gap between labor market demands and supply of qualifications, and to increase attractiveness of education institutions internationally.

Citation:

The Eurydice reports on Lithuania are available at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Overview>  
COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, country report Lithuania 2016: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2016/cr2016\\_lithuania\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2016/cr2016_lithuania_en.pdf)  
See the 2016 - 2017 Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2016-2017/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2016-2017\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2016-2017/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2016-2017_FINAL.pdf)

OECD, Education at a Glance 2016, OECD indicators: [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016\\_eag-2016-en#.WFafA0a7qM9](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016_eag-2016-en#.WFafA0a7qM9)

## Norway

Score 7

Norway has a tradition of very high education attainment. The Norwegian labor force is one of the most educated in the world, as measured by the share of its working population that has completed secondary or tertiary education. Like other Scandinavian countries, the Norwegian government spends a comparatively significant share of its budget on public education. The emphasis of the primarily



public school system is on free access and ensuring equal opportunities. Students with difficulties in learning or socialization receive a high level of attention. In contrast, there is little emphasis on excellence or on providing specific attention to the most gifted pupils, although plans to remedy this are being made.

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

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

## Slovenia

### Score 7

Slovenia has moved relatively rapidly from the socialist curriculum tradition toward a more flexible organization of education. With a high share of the population aged 25 to 64 having completed at least upper secondary education as well as high ranks in international educational achievement tests, the education system fares relatively well by international comparison. The country's oldest and largest public university, the University of Ljubljana, is regularly ranked among the world's 500 best universities. The most pressing problems remain the small (but slowly growing) share of pupils enlisted in vocational education, as well as a heavily underfunded tertiary-education system with high dropout rates and massive fictitious enrollment figures. Compared to previous governments, the Cerar government has devoted more attention to education policy. In September 2016, it announced increases in spending on education in 2017 and 2018. However, the adoption of an announced amended higher education act that would, among other things, ease bureaucratic burdens connected with internationalization processes has been heavily delayed.

Citation:

OECD (2016): Education Policy Outlook Slovenia. Paris ([www.oecd.org/slovenia/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Slovenia.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/slovenia/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Slovenia.pdf)).

## Sweden

### Score 7

Education policy remains a subject of heated debate in Sweden. Critics point to how Sweden is slipping in most international comparisons in terms of student knowledge and analytical skills. Sweden now ranks 32nd on PISA scores (11th when students'

socioeconomic background is considered), an alarmingly low ranking for a country relying on knowledge-intensive sectors for its economic growth and competitiveness. Even more disconcerting, the trajectory of Sweden's PISA rankings suggests a consistent, 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 is not held in high enough regard within society and thus fails to attract highly qualified professionals; while yet others suggest that poor performance could in part be attributed to the fact that many teachers lack the formal qualifications needed to teach the subjects they are teaching. It is clear that Swedish schools no longer fully achieve high performance and quality.

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

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

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

Concerning graduate output of secondary and tertiary education, Sweden's

performance in this respect could be seen as good but not great. Sweden is not as high in the rankings as its need for skilled and well-trained students to enter the research sector would require. Perhaps of greater concern is the combination of a relatively high ranking (11th) in tertiary attainment and low PISA ranking (32nd), which suggests that institutions of tertiary education may be lowering the bar with respect to entry requirements.

A third and final way to assess Sweden's education policy concerns equitable access to education. Education policy has performed rather well in this respect. Coming back to a previous point, if anything, the system is "too equitable" in that requirements to enter some programs in university are so low that basically anyone who applies is admitted, resulting in a "race to the bottom" in tertiary education standards. Nevertheless, equitable access to education is realized to a great extent for adult education. Sweden is rather successfully targeting the ambitious goals of life-long-learning as a high percentage of adults are regularly in contact with further education organizations.

In sum, the data shows that resources are not the key problem, and public debate shows no shortage of ideas and inclination to reform. In November 2016, new policy proposals concerning grading systems were launched, and a major Royal Commission on education just presented its findings. Education remains at the very top of the political agenda.

## United Kingdom

### Score 7

The Cameron government continued the marketization strategy pursued by the previous coalition and Labour governments. It pursued a policy of liberalizing school regulation to enable non-governmental organizations – such as foundations, businesses and parent-teacher corporations – to set up their own schools, while also strengthening government powers to intervene in "failing" schools and turn them into sponsored academies. The core of this policy was to improve performance by boosting inter-school competition, as measured by performance tables administered by the regulator, Ofsted.

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

selection on academic grounds, but considered by many in the UK to be contrary to social mobility. However, May's announcement has not yet been put into action.

In the higher education sector, the substantial increase in tuition fees, from £3,300 to levels now in excess of £9,000 per year, has been contentious. However, so far, there has been no discernible effect on overall student enrolment rates or on access to higher education for students from poorer backgrounds. British universities are concerned that the departure of the UK from the European Union will be damaging, especially if accompanied by a clampdown on EU migrants. Fears that students from other EU countries will be deterred from applying to what is a highly successful sector, that EU nationals will be put off from working in British universities and that participation in EU research programs will become harder have led to demands from university leaders for a "soft" Brexit. There have been reports of EU consortia being reluctant to include British researchers in new research proposals.

Citation:

WEF ranks quality of UK education system as 21th in Global Competitiveness Report 2015/16 (CH 1st, GER 10th, USA 18th, F 30st).

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

## Australia

### Score 6

The quality of Australia's education system is variable, tending to be higher in non-government schools and in major metropolitan regions. Overall the high school completion rate is currently around 80%, with all state and territory governments currently having a target of a 90% completion rate by 2015. However, the low level of preschool spending continues to be a weak point: Australia spends only one-quarter of the OECD average on preschools and the country has been falling down the PISA rankings among countries in its region.

Regarding equity, the continued high level of government subsidies to non-government schools means inequity in schooling outcomes is high. The level of private funding in Australia is significantly higher than the OECD average. Less affluent parents cannot afford to send their children to private schools, which creates inequality. Moreover, inequity has increased, as government funding per student in non-government schools has increased at a faster rate than government funding per student in government schools.

In the higher education sector, the Higher Education Loan Program, (HELP, introduced in 1989) continues to be an important mechanism for equitably and sustainably funding higher education. The scheme has increased the extent to which students bear the cost of their education without diminishing access to higher education for students from poor families. In 2014, the Abbott government passed legislation in the lower house to cut higher education funding by 20%, deregulate

fees charged by higher education and increase the rate of interest charged on HELP debts. This would have reduced higher-education participation and equity of access, but the legislation was blocked in the senate, and Malcolm Turnbull's government is no longer proposing fee deregulation. However, the 2015 budget did contain measures that would require Australians living overseas to repay HELP debts on the same terms as those faced by Australian residents. This took effect on 1 January 2016, and will help ensure the sector's financial integrity.

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

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)

[http://www.oecd.org/edu/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20AUSTRALIA\\_EN.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20AUSTRALIA_EN.pdf)

## Austria

### Score 6

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

The hesitancy to engage in reform results in part from the considerable veto power held by specific groups, including the teachers' union and the Austrian conservative



party. Both appear to be first and foremost interested in defending the special status of high-schools and their teachers, and appear worried that this status will be lost if the two-tier organization of schools is changed.

Recent reforms of teachers' educational tracks aim at improving the first three years (BA) of teachers' training to meet higher standards. In the medium term, this will result in better-trained teachers for primary and secondary schools, the "Hauptschulen" in particular. The renaming of the "Hauptschulen" to "Neue Mittelschulen" (New Middle Schools), meant to encourage the integration of teachers of different systems, has not delivered better results, e.g. in PISA scores. In 2016-2017, new reforms concerning full-time schooling and improved competencies for school directors are on the way which seem really promising.

A sensitive issue is the integration of children who came to Austria in 2015-2016 as part of the large number of refugees and migrants. In some parts of the country the school system seems overwhelmed particularly by the challenges posed by children who don't speak German.

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

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

Citation:

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

## Belgium

### Score 6

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

communities). The education system also has evident difficulty in producing social mobility; according to the OECD, “the likelihood of a student participating in tertiary education varies greatly depending on the level of education attained by his or her parents.”

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

As reported by Vanden Bosch (2014), the European Commission has also pointed to the “lack of coherence between education and employment policies, given the specific needs of the migrant population.” Within the French-speaking universities, the regional government is imposing ever-more administrative control on education procedures, which diverts human resources away from teaching and research. Consequently, the situation is worsening. Chronic underfunding of higher education and its negative impact on productivity has also been pointed out by Dumont and Kegels (2016, see section on Research and Innovation).

Citation:

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

OECD (2016). “Education at a glance 2016, OECD Indicators” [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/belgium\\_eag-2016-43-en#.WCJXdvkrJPY](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/belgium_eag-2016-43-en#.WCJXdvkrJPY)

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

## Czech Republic

### Score 6

Public expenditure on education relative to GDP has increased since the economic crisis and is slightly above the EU average. Educational outcomes, and the employability of school and higher education graduates are generally good. One problem, however, is the low tertiary education attainment rate. Moreover, education outcomes are strongly influenced by students’ socioeconomic backgrounds. A particularly vulnerable group are Roma. Around 40% of Roma children are educated in “special schools” (populated almost exclusively by Roma), before being placed in practical schools with lower learning standards. And, while the overall early school leaving rate remains among the lowest in the European Union (5.5 % in 2014), an estimated 72% of Roma children leave school early. Also, there is an 11.6% gap between the early school leaving rate for children with and without disabilities, and regional disparities are significant and increasing.

The period under review saw the initiation of long-awaited education reforms. In January 2016, the Chamber of Deputies adopted a reform of higher education aimed at raising the standard of accreditation by setting up an independent accreditation authority. However, the reform of the funding system for higher education is still pending, as attempts to introduce output indicators as a way of increasing efficiency in the use of resources were undermined by large-scale scandals uncovering millions of Czech koruna used as rewards for publishing articles in fraudulent and unethical journals. A second reform focused on the development of a new career system for teachers and pedagogical staff with a view to increasing the attractiveness of the profession. As the new system implies higher salaries, its implementation was postponed.

Citation:

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic (2016): National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2016. Prague, 14-17([http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2016/nrp2016\\_czech\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2016/nrp2016_czech_en.pdf)).

## France

### Score 6

The French education system can in many aspects be characterized as rather successful, but, contrary to the past, it fails to integrate and promote the weakest segments of society. In the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, French results were slightly above the OECD average. Overall spending on educational institutions amounted to 5.3% of GDP in 2013, slightly above the OECD average. Spending at the preschool level is exemplary, with nearly all children three years old and older attending preschool (*écoles maternelles*) and France is still above the OECD average at the primary schooling level. Secondary education is rather good but uneven, excessively costly and, in recent years, has fallen behind other OECD countries. Higher education is dual, with a broad range of excellent elite institutions (prestigious *lycées* and *grandes écoles*) and a large mass university system, which is poorly funded and poorly managed, and does not prepare its students well for a successful entry to the labor market. Spending on universities lies below the OECD average. More importantly, drop-out rates are dramatic: only 40% of registered students obtain a university degree.

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

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

University reform has been a permanent topic on the political agenda but has failed to address the major issues which plague French higher education. The main focus has been in favor of merging existing universities along complex and bureaucratic schemes. The mergers are often more on paper than in substance and establish virtual academic institutions with 100,000 students or more. After intense debates, “selection” – with a lot of complicated measures – has been officially introduced for the first time at the second-year Master level.

Citation:

OECD: Education at a glance 2016, Country Note France

## Iceland

### Score 6

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

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools. After 2008, considerable cutbacks and rationalization measures were introduced, including a shortening of the school year. Upper secondary schools and public universities are the responsibility of the central government. Despite cuts to public expenditure on education, the number of upper secondary schools has increased, particularly outside the capital region. The cabinet during 2013-2016 managed to shorten the duration of upper secondary matriculation from four years to three.

Iceland’s universities have been seriously underfunded for a long time. There are seven universities: two private universities supported by state grants and five public universities, including two agricultural colleges. The Sigurðardóttir cabinet (2009-2013) considered rationalizing the university sector either by reducing the number of universities or by encouraging more cooperation between universities. Some steps

were taken toward cooperation. Discussions between the two private universities, concerning a possible merger, were abandoned. The plans of a merger of one of the agricultural universities, Hvanneyri, with the University of Iceland was dropped following heavy protests from citizens and politicians in the west of Iceland. In 2015, a serious attempt was started to merge three universities: two public universities Hvanneyri and Hólar University College with private university Bifröst University. That attempt faded out in 2016. So, efforts by the minister of education and culture, Illugi Gunnarsson, to reduce the number of universities were not at all successful during his time in office. The rectors of all universities have issued a common declaration of a virtual state of emergency at their universities.

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

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

Citation:

OECD: Education at a Glance 2014, Paris.

## Ireland

### Score 6

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

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

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

The two-tier structure of the secondary education system is controversial. A minority of pupils (about 10%) attend fee-paying schools where state support is augmented by the revenue from fees that can amount to €6,000 a year. These schools are socially exclusive and achieve higher academic results and higher progression rates to tertiary education than non-fee-paying schools. It is argued that the state should not subsidize



institutions that perpetuate inequality in the education system. Most of these schools face excess demand for places, and have come under pressure to establish more transparent and equitable criteria for selection of pupils for entry.

Irish students at tertiary institutions are not charged fees for most undergraduate courses. However, the “student contribution” charged rose from €2,500 in 2014 to €3,000 in 2015. There is also a lack of investment in pre-primary education.

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

## Israel

### Score 6

Israel’s education policy is adversely affected by political and cultural divisions, making it hard to estimate the degree to which it provides equitable treatment. Funding allocation favors Jewish citizens. However, educational achievement in the partially state-funded Jewish-orthodox formal education (in mathematics, English, etc.) is considerably less advanced than in the general system. Despite a constant overall rise in Israel’s PISA 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.

Even after accounting for specific problems with the Arab and Jewish-orthodox communities, Israeli students’ marks have deteriorated compared to previous generations; Israel showed high levels of attainment in the past, and the value of education is well established in the community as a whole. Surveys shows that “42% of 25- to 34-year-olds have either tertiary type A or B qualifications compared with an OECD average of 34%.” However, a Taub Center research paper suggests that Israeli education system is ill prepared for the world’s increasingly competitive and dynamic working environment. Israeli education spending as a share of GDP is relatively high in comparison to other OECD countries. However, the education system has various allocation problems, and in the last decade has been going through consecutive reforms aiming to improve the quality of education and raise teachers’ salaries.

In higher education, Israel performs significantly better as a result of having taken important steps. This year, the Council for Higher Education has published a multi-year plan allocating an additional NIS 6.8 billion, placing emphasis on integrating minority groups (such as Arabs, Ethiopian immigrants and ultra-Orthodox Jews) into

higher education. Even so, budget cuts in university programs have had a negative effect on the quality of education as well as on the future opportunities for researchers and staff. Israeli universities rank high in various ranking, with two universities in the top 100 according to ARWU Shanghai Ranking (the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology). Regarding gender equity, unlike most countries, Israel has almost no gender gap in the completion rate of bachelors or equivalent programs (nevertheless, the overall number of women in high academic-level positions is only around 30%). In addition, almost half (49%) of Israel's adult population have attained tertiary education, well above the OECD average of 35%, and the third highest rate of all OECD countries.

Some positive achievements in the Israeli school system can also be found. Access to education has been increased by introducing free, compulsory early childhood education for ages 3 and 4 and by extending compulsory education from 15 to 17 years of age.

Citation:

<https://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m03271.pdf>

"The connection between quality of education and growth: Israel compared to the world", Bank of Israel, 3.6.2015 (Hebrew):

<http://www.boi.org.il/he/NewsAndPublications/PressReleases/Pages/03-06-2015-ResearchEducationQ.aspx>

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## Japan

Score 6

Education has always been considered one of Japan's particular strengths. Nonetheless, the Japanese education system faces a number of challenges. One of these is to deliver adequate quality. Under the LDP-led coalition, renewed emphasis has been placed on reaching the top international tier as well as improving the use of English. While the number of students going abroad for study has been declining for a number of years, this trend seems to have halted recently.

The government is actively promoting reforms. From 2016, so-called compulsory education schools can be more easily designated. These schools have more freedom in dividing the first nine school years, which have traditionally been divided into primary and junior high school, which involved some friction at the transition point. Authorities are also actively working on curriculum reform, scheduled to be introduced in 2020.

A separate issue is the problem of growing income inequality at a time of economic stagnation. Many citizens send their children to expensive cram schools, believing

the quality of the public school system is lacking. Given economic hardship, poor households may miss educational opportunities, future income and improved 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.

There is growing concern that frequently reform measures do not turn out as desired. This holds for the postgraduate education system and for legal education reform, under which new law schools were established, yet there is very little demand for their graduates. Despite major university reforms and the government's well publicized intention to place ten universities among the world's top 100, the ranking of leading Japanese universities has disappointed in recent years.

Citation:

Suzuki Kan (Hiroshi), Higher Education Reform: A Tale of Unintended Consequences, Nippon.com, 26 January 2016, <http://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a05101/>

## Netherlands

### Score 6

In terms of quality, the average education attainment level for the population is high, somewhat exceeding the OECD average in 2015. School dropout rates have been on the decline for years, and the number of those entering the labor market with an education certification ("basiskwalificatie," or "basic qualification") has been on the rise (71.9% in 2000, 76.2% in 2007). The student/teacher ratio is somewhat lower than the OECD average for primary education, but considerably higher for secondary education. Teacher salaries are higher than average on all levels. Net teaching time in primary and upper secondary schools is considerably higher than OECD averages. Similar to UK schools, Dutch schools are afforded a high degree of autonomy. However, a recent trend toward school mergers and reorganized school-governance systems has eroded the autonomy of individual schools. Nationwide performance testing across all school levels and instituted by the School Inspectorate has compelled many schools to introduce standardization methods. Most recently, proposals to introduce a basic math-skills test within secondary education, as well as in primary- and secondary-level teacher-training programs, proved controversial. The international PISA test's comparative school-performance scores (corrected for economic, social and cultural background) rank the Netherlands consistently above the OECD average. Though for mathematics, the Netherlands' relative performance has declined in recent years. For a country that determines future educational tracks at age 12 and allocates 60% of its children to the lower-categorized school types, it is not surprising that differences in performance arise from differences between (not within) schools (which are far above OECD averages). School performance in the Netherlands has not declined, but there is also no internationally measured progress.

The Ministry of Education follows a policy in which individual schools publish their pupils' performance (as measured by the School Inspectorate), enabling parents to choose the best or most appropriate school for their children on the basis of comparative performance data. Quality-improvement policies – including CITO testing, performance monitoring, efforts to intensify and improve teacher professionalization programs, better transition trajectories between school types, and quality-management systems at school level – do not yet appear to be effective.

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

The Dutch school system is relatively efficient in terms of resource allocation. Expenditure for education is below average for OECD countries, but the rise since 1996 (in costs per pupil and in average salaries for teachers) is above the OECD average. Average education level and school performance are supposed to have a positive influence on a country's competitiveness. Relatively high levels of education attainment and school performance in the Netherlands should theoretically have a positive impact on the country's competitiveness. And although the Netherlands remains competitive in certain areas, the country's track-based school system makes it difficult for the education system to adapt quickly to changing labor market needs. As a result, the Netherlands faces a skilled technical labor shortage.

In January 2016, the national dialogue on a reformed "curriculum for the future" for primary and secondary education received substantial input. The idea is to have a core curriculum (Dutch, English, arithmetic and math, digital literacy, and citizenship), specialization in one of three knowledge domains (individual and society, nature and technology, and language and culture), and multidisciplinary teaching in learning-how-to-learn, design, critical thinking, problem solving and

collaboration. Over the next few years, these ideas will be systematically integrated into primary and secondary education policymaking. In higher professional training and university education, there are signs of a retreat from New Public Management-style policymaking.

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Ministerie van OCW, Onderwijs in Cijfers, 2016 ([onderwijsincijfers.nl](http://onderwijsincijfers.nl))

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## Spain

### Score 6

Despite the Spanish education system's outstanding improvement since the 1980s with regard to equity and efficiency, Spaniards largely regard educational outcomes within their country as mediocre. This perception is based in part on Spanish universities' poor international rankings (only 18 of the country's 70 made it into the 2015/2016 QS World University Rankings) as well as the country's unexceptional PISA test results. In fact, the country's education system was only ranked the 24th most efficient out of 35 OECD countries. One of the reasons for the overall bad results, although effects differ strongly across regions, is a curriculum regarded as out of date, a rote system of learning, teaching quality requiring improvement, and the large number of students who repeat years. The level of government spending on education is also an important factor; in 2016, education spending was one point of GDP below the OECD average. This concern regarding the state of the education system has created the social and political momentum needed for reforms in recent years but budgetary austerity has meant that only a few relatively inexpensive regulatory measures targeting quality and efficiency in resources allocation have been implemented; moreover, these have come at the expense of fairness in access. Equality of opportunities has been undermined since 2011 as a result of education spending cuts, an increase in fees, and a stiffening of conditions for obtaining funding and scholarships, all of which has served to exclude poor students from the system.

Therefore, the Spanish education system still suffers problems of quality and equity. Particular trouble points include access to preschool education and the socioeconomic class segmentation between students in public schools and those attending publicly funded private schools, normally affiliated with the Catholic Church.

Citation:

Spain's PISA results (2015):

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

## United States

### Score 6

The performance of primary and secondary education in the United States has long been disappointing. Historically low high school graduation rates significantly improved over the last two decades, reaching a record high of 82% in 2016 – still a low level for a wealthy country. The education system largely lacks vocational alternatives to high school education. High school students' performance in science, math and reading remains below most wealthy OECD countries. Yet the educational system is generously funded. Its shortcomings are the result of several factors, including the impact of deficiencies in the home environments of many children in low-income, minority neighborhoods; severe inequalities in school quality between wealthy and low-income areas; and a lack of accountability for outcomes in a fragmented system.

Federal engagement became more extensive and ambitious during the Obama administration. Under Obama, the federal Race to the Top Program promoted test-based national performance expectations, reflecting new standards called the Common Core. This perceived imposition of federal standards has been a focus of political controversy, with many once-supportive Republican office holders now denouncing Common Core.

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

## Chile

### Score 5

Chile's school and education attainment levels are very mixed, and are generally much lower than the OECD average. Pre-primary education coverage is still low, but rising. Primary and secondary education coverage is high, reaching nearly 100% of current age cohorts. Tertiary-education coverage is moderate but increasing, although the quality of universities and private-sector technical institutions varies significantly. The government has not achieved its aim of closing the gap that exists between the private and public systems; this failure has led to strong public protests that have endured since 2010, though these peaked in 2011 and 2012.

The general ideological gap between the government and opposition regarding the role of education and the free market has made it more difficult to pass reforms. However, conflicts between teachers' boards and the corporations or enterprises

offering private education services have also played a role. The current government's campaign platform included reforms that would abolish profit-seeking in the education sector. A series of legislative proposals on the issue have been submitted to Congress, but not all have been passed. The latest changes were introduced in March 2016 by the enactment of Law Nr. 20.845 (Ley de Inclusión Escolar), which increases subsidies for the most vulnerable students in primary and secondary education. Prior to this latest reform, Law Nr. 20.882 (Ley de Presupuestos del Sector Público), enacted in December 2015, subsidizes the tuition fees of the most vulnerable 20% of higher education students.

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

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

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

Traditionally, high-quality education in Chile has been accessible only to those able to afford it. There is a huge financial divergence between private and public education, with per month spending per pupil in the public system averaging CLP 40,000 (approximately \$60), and private-schooling fees averaging about CLP 300,000 (approximately \$450). Chile used to have a broad public-education system, but as a result of the poor quality of the public schools, the share of students attending public institutions has declined to approximately 40%. There is a great gap in the quality of education for less gifted students, as the system is strongly focused on preparing students for careers requiring higher education. There are consequently comparatively few options for applied, vocationally oriented training courses for students who cannot afford the university, do not obtain the necessary grades to enter university, or are simply skilled in fields that require solid technical training instead of an academic degree.

Furthermore, there is wide variance in standards between universities and even technical training centers, with insufficient quality-control standards. In general terms, Chile's education system – with the exception of a few top universities – fails in the task of educating and training people to acquire the knowledge and skills required if the country is to make a quantum leap in development and growth. This



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

Citation:

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

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<http://www.hacienda.cl/especiales/presupuesto/presupuesto-2016/informativo-presupuesto-2016.html>

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

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

## Croatia

### Score 5

As a percentage of GDP, public expenditure on education aligns with the EU average and is an even higher percentage of total public spending. However, the efficiency of this spending is doubtful. The share of 15-year-olds with underachievement in reading, mathematics and science is above the EU average; in the case of science, by almost eight percentage points. Conversely, the share of early leavers from education and training is far below the EU average, indicating that access to education is not a problem. The inefficiency of the system is worsened by the high degree of selectivity in upper secondary education, which offers an university-preparatory track for the brightest students and a system of underfunded vocational schools for the rest. Over 70% of upper-secondary-pupils attend such vocational schools in Croatia, compared to 49% of pupils in the EU as a whole. As in other former Yugoslavian countries, vocational education is very weak, and there is a high degree of mismatch between what is taught and the demands of employers. Thus, vocational education is not an assured route to a job. The expected length of education in Croatia is lower than the average in the EU by more than one year; similarly, only 70% of 18-year olds are still in education, compared to 80% in the EU as a whole. Access to education is open and widespread, with almost 60% of each cohort enrolled in tertiary education. The quality of tertiary education varies significantly across institutions and even between departments within universities. Universities do not function as unified institutions with common policies, resources and objectives, and the academic culture is poorly developed. The share of the population aged 30-34 years who have successfully completed university education in Croatia, at 32.2%, was about five percentage points below the EU average in 2014. The resources spent on education appear further wasted by the high level of unemployment of school and university graduates, indicated by the low employment rate of recent graduates from secondary level (47.3%) and tertiary level (72.2%) of education compared to 70.8% and 80.5% respectively in the EU as a whole.

Education reform has suffered from a lack of continuity. In 2014, the Milanović government charged an expert team headed by Boris Jokić with providing a proposal for a new curriculum. This team's work, which built on the contributions of more than a hundred teachers and experts from individual educational fields, was brought to a halt by the Minister of Education Predrag Šustar's decision to change the leadership of the project. Šustar's attempt at giving greater say to the Catholic Church and to experts close to HDZ raised fears of an "ideologization" of education policy. This led to the resignation of Jokić and provoked large-scale demonstrations by teachers and parents in various Croatian cities in mid-2016.

Citation:

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## Italy

### Score 5

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

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

In terms of tertiary education spending, Italy lags behind even more significantly. The share of education expenditure allocated to the salaries of teachers, professors and technical staff - the number of which is often unnecessarily high - compared to the share for capital expenditures and research funds, is above average. This is not because salaries are particularly high, but because capital and research funds are very limited. Selection of school and university personnel is still not sufficiently meritocratic. Although there are significant areas of high-quality education at both the secondary and tertiary levels, overall quality could be improved.

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

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

## Latvia

### Score 5

Latvia has a relatively well-educated population and performs well in international comparisons, such as PISA. Key challenges to the education system include a shrinking population, a high rate of early retirement among teachers, an unsustainably low teacher-student ratio and a level of public funding significantly lower than the OECD average.

At the primary and secondary level, there has been significant progress in learning outcomes. In the 2012 PISA, Latvia scored average among OECD countries and slightly above average in science. However, Latvia has a small number of underperforming students and there are significant disparities in learning opportunities. For example, there is a significant urban-rural performance gap, while education opportunities for students with special needs are limited.

Furthermore, here is a 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 its public funding structure for local government primary and secondary education services. Funding allocations are now tied to pupil enrollment, which has resulted in a restructuring of the school system and a reduction in the number of schools. The relationship between the rate of state funding and local government is irregular, and is based on the local government’s own funding situation. A persistent decline in pupil enrollments due to demographic change has created further financial pressure. The system promotes consolidation and efficiency. In 2016, the government reformed the teachers’ compensation system. This reform has met with resistance, including strike threats.

Vocational-education programs are low quality. To improve their quality and relevance to the labor market, social partners are being encouraged to get involved. While enrollment in vocational-education institutions had been steadily declining, it has recently increased. In 2015, 8,842 students completed secondary-level vocational education, a slight increase over 2014.

Overall, public expenditure on tertiary education is low and spread over a large number of institutions. With a population of just two million, Latvia has 58 accredited higher-education institutions, including both the public and private sectors. The country exceeded the EU 2020 education target of 40% of 30- to 34-year-olds holding university-level qualifications. In 2015, the ratio of 30- to 34-year-olds holding university-level qualifications was 41.3%, up from 39.9% in 2013. However, Latvian researchers are conspicuously absent from the Social Science Citation Index, with just 112 SSCI articles published between 1990 and 2008. The IMF has warned that the current system is unsustainable due to a disproportionately high number of institutions, limited financing and falling student numbers. In 2016, the government reformed higher education financing, focusing on improving salary levels for teachers. These reforms have been met with substantial resistance, but are currently being implemented. The physical and communication infrastructures of 29 institutions were modernized between 2011 and 2013, supported by public funds in the amount of 65.3 million LVL. In 2014, the World Bank published a study that, among other things, analyzed financing models for higher education. However, frequent ministerial changes and a lack of political support means that it remains unclear when and to what extent these reforms will be introduced.

Citation:

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## Luxembourg

### Score 5

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 migrants generally (especially the Portuguese minority) struggle with languages and often end up in the technical level (*secondaire technique*), which affects their progress toward a university education. Recent studies have shown that migrants are four times less likely to transfer to the higher-level university-oriented school track (*enseignement secondaire*) than Luxembourgish nationals. To avoid this, often more affluent migrants will send their children to a reputable international school. This leads to yet another division between high-income and low-income migrants. A reform of secondary education is being drafted for 2017.

Students in Luxembourg are very mobile and often study abroad, acquiring new knowledge and language skills. Overall, 68% of tertiary-level students study abroad, while 57% of all students in Luxembourg are foreign (an increase from 54% in 2013). Luxembourg has the OECD's highest level of education expenditure per student (435 per student in 2016), and the smallest average class size (15 primary school students per class and 19 secondary school students per class).

An increase in student numbers of more than 10% over the last five years will require more schools and more qualified teachers, especially teachers with expertise of working with pupils with special needs.

Key government reforms currently being developed include the creation of the Luxembourg Center for Educational Testing to link existing teacher training institutes, an increase in school autonomy combined with institutional development plans, the establishment of two institutes to support students with learning disabilities and behavior problems, the establishment of a center for political education, strengthening connections between kindergartens and primary schools, improving inter- and post-school student transitions, increasing teacher and school flexibility, increasing annual training hours for teachers to 16 hours in 2017, promoting native language instruction, and opening a (free of charge) International School in Differdange in 2016.

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## Malta

### Score 5

The Maltese Islands lack natural resources and consequently, economic growth is intrinsically linked to human resources. The ability to attract investment and sustain employment depends very much on the skill, quality and education levels of the workforce. In this, the results are mixed.

Since 2013, the government has implemented a number of programs, some with fiscal support, to encourage more students to pursue further education. They include free support for students at risk of failing and/or who have failed their exams for admission to higher-education institutions and the extension of services and facilities for the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) with the introduction, in 2015, of three sub-colleges (the Foundation College, the Technical College and the University College) to better address the learning challenges at different educational levels. Extra summer classes for those wishing to retake regular-level exams and a new alternative-learning program were introduced. A pilot project to provide tablet computers for school children was concluded in October 2016. New schools are being built and others modernized.

Nonetheless, the latest Trend in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) ranked Malta 40 out of 50 countries, while the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) ranked Malta 35 out of 45 participating countries.

Furthermore, Malta has the third lowest tertiary education attainment level in the EU. In 2015, 27.8% of the Maltese population had attained a tertiary level of education compared to an EU-28 average of 38.7%. As well, Malta has the second highest school drop-out rate in the EU (at 19.8%). However the PISA 2015 survey finds that Maltese students have improved their ranking in math, reading and science, and it notes an improved performance by immigrant children and a narrowing of the academic achievement gender gap.

The education system's limitations exist in spite of the system's high level of equitable access to education at all levels. A total of 80% of all schools are free, while there are various measures available to support students. Access to higher education remains open for all due to the absence of tuition fees and stipends for students. The provision of free preschool state facilities for children three years and over has been greatly expanded. Changes to the education system outlined in the last quarter of 2016 attempt to address remaining concerns. These include a restructuring in secondary schools away from a one-sided approach to allow students to choose between academic, vocational or applied subjects streams, and changes to university entry requirements to improve access for students with learning difficulties.

Citation:

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

Youth Guarantee Malta Implementation Plan p.22

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

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

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

TIMSS 2011 Malta Report (2013) p. vii

PIRLS 2011 Malta Report (2013) p. vii

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

European Semester Thematic Fiche – Early Leavers from Education and Training (Updated May 2016) p.7

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Independent 23/11/2016 Educational Reform will see vocational and applied subjects offered for O Level

Times of Malta 28/11/2016 Minister calls for easing of university entry requirements for students with learning difficulties

## Poland

### Score 5

Although education expenditure in Poland is significantly lower than the average expenditure in the European Union, Polish students now achieve relatively good results at schools due to various reforms adopted since the late 1990s. The PiS government has reversed part of the previous reforms. As one of its first measures, it reversed the controversial obligatory lowering of the school age and made it possible for parents to send their children to school at the age of seven, as was the case until 2014. Second, it passed a bill in November 2016 that aims at closing the lower secondary schools (gimnasiums) introduced in 1999 and returning to the previous two-tier school system (eight-year primary school followed by upper secondary or vocational education). The planned reorganization has been criticized by the



teachers' trade union (ZNP - Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego) and others for risking the achievements of previous reforms and worsening academic outcomes by earlier vocational streaming. Criticism has been leveled against government attempts' to change the curricula with a view to rewriting Polish history and removing many liberal and cosmopolitan texts and values from the core of teaching programs. Teachers critical of the current government fear losing their positions and or being fired.

## Portugal

**Score 5** Much has been promised by the Programa do XXI Governo Constitucional, 2015 to 2019 for the education system.

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

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

Shortly after taking office in 2015, the Costa government decided to review the national system of assessing students, with these changes taking effect in 2015 to 2016 school year. According to one analyst, this is the fifteenth change to national assessment system since 2000, with the period under review reflecting an established pattern of policy instability in the sector.

Two positive notes, including an improvement in Portugal's PISA results and the decision to introduce free primary school textbooks from the school year 2017 to 2018.

Citation:

[http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr\\_2015\\_statistical\\_annex.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2015_statistical_annex.pdf)

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

## 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 relatively 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, such as engineering and IT. According to the QS World University Ranking, only one Bulgarian university, Sofia University, ranks among the world's top universities, its rank for 2016 being in the group occupying 651 to 700th place, a slight improvement relative to 2015.

The level of equity in the Bulgarian education system is average to low. Many children in upper-income families are able to attend private schools, which seem to perform better than public schools. According to a 2016 ranking of Bulgarian middle schools, only 14 of the top-50 schools are regular public schools, the rest being either private schools, or math-focused middle schools. In addition, the school dropout rate among minorities, especially Roma, is significantly higher than the average, meaning that schools do not provide the same opportunities for all ethnic groups. Finally, geographic variance in the quality of the education provided by secondary and tertiary schools is very large, with schools in smaller towns and villages and in less populated areas unable to attract high-quality teaching staff.

As shown by the change in the head of the Ministry of Education in early 2016, education policy in Bulgaria has suffered from the lack of a clear sense of direction. Although the outgoing Minister Tanev and the incoming Minister Kuneva represented the same political party, the Reformist Bloc, their policy priorities and action plans differed significantly from each other. Whereas Tanev focus rested on secondary education, Kuneva focused on tertiary education.

Citation:

European Commission (2016): Education and Training Monitor Bulgaria. Luxembourg: European Union ([https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-bg\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-bg_en.pdf)).

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

Middle-school ranking: <http://www.danybon.com/obrazovanie/klasacia-na-uchilistata-v-bg-maturi-7-class-2016/>

World University Ranking: <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2016>.

## Greece

Score 4

While the Greek state's expenditure on pre-primary education continues to be one of the lowest among advanced economies, Greece performs better than other South European countries as far as upper secondary education is concerned. With regards to tertiary education attainment, the country scores higher than Portugal and even Germany as well as most Eastern and Southeast European countries. In short, Greece puts a relatively high priority on secondary and tertiary education, although the age-long patterns of irrational allocation of education resources and the patronage-based distribution of schools and universities across Greece continue.

Access to education is, however, not equitable as students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are usually more successful in passing entrance examinations. Moreover, to the extent their parents can afford it, Greek high school students receive private tutoring to help pass necessary pre-university exams. This reflects a cultural contradiction between seeing education as an entirely public sector activity (e.g., university students pay neither tuition fees nor textbook costs) and success being dependent on private tutoring.

Another serious problem is that 27% of 15- to 29-year olds in 2014 were neither employed nor in education or training programs (NEET) – a clear indication of economic and social distress. While the NEET rate in Greece has historically been higher than the OECD average, the difference increased from just 3 to 13 percentage points in just five years (2009-2014).

Spending for education has been affected by the economic crisis. In 2014, primary and secondary teachers' salaries had fallen to just 77% of what teachers with comparable training and experience made in 2005. However, in the 2012 PISA results, Greece receives middling to above-average rankings among OECD countries. Given the spending cuts in education, Greek secondary school students perform better than one would expect.

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 infrastructure is generally very uneven across university departments and most universities suffer from the fact that academic and administrative staff are underpaid. However, compared to previous periods, the period under review has seen a visible reduction in the number of strikes and sit-ins organized by student groups. This development is related to the ascent to power of the Syriza party, one of the major forces organizing student mobilizations under previous government. The decline in student mobilizations is also related to the disappointment of student activists, since the aforementioned government turnover has not led to any visible changes in social and economic policy, but proved to be the start of a new round of austerity policies. Thus in contrast to the previous periods, during the review period, Greece's largest universities, namely the University of Athens, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the National Technical University of Athens, functioned in a more predictable fashion, albeit with less resources as the Syriza-ANEL government implemented cuts in public expenditure on education.

Recently introduced reforms by the SYRIZA-ANEL government in tertiary education threaten to halt progress. For example university councils elected under a 2011 law saw their role undermined while new legislation on university lecturers' advancement limited the presence of foreign academics. The Ministry of Education took a number of initiatives that further threatened to reduce the limited autonomy of

higher education institutions.

One serious issue in Greek educational policy is the lack of measures to address the continuing divergence between employment trends and education trends. The university system produces disproportionate numbers of graduates in specialties which are not needed either in the public or private sector. Examples are the scores of graduating theologians, experts in theatre studies, architects and civil engineers in a country which has an over-abundance of such professionals. This problem was not addressed in 2015-2016 by the Syriza-ANEL government, which, following the example of its predecessors, continued to turn a blind eye toward the mounting phenomena of unemployment and under-employment of university graduates. In brief, while in the midst of continuing economic crisis, Greek households spend diminishing private resources to facilitate access to higher education for younger household members, while education policy far from contributes to producing a skilled labor force. This contributes to keeping unemployment at unacceptably high levels (close to 25%).

Citation:

Information on the performance of Greece's educational system is based on data provided on this SGI platform, the OECD and the National Documentation Center.

## Mexico

Score 4

Mexico's education system is relatively weak despite significant public investment in the sector. Education spending in Mexico between 2012 and 2013 was not far short of 7% of GDP and has been on a sharp upward trend since the 1980s. Teachers' salaries have also been steadily rising. While Mexico's GDP is relatively low by OECD standards, this does not fully explain the weak outcomes. Indeed, in absolute terms, Mexican education spending is comparable to that of South Korea, but Mexican students are performing far worse according to an international cross-sectional comparison. Student performance is lower than in most other OECD countries, including Chile (the other Latin American OECD member). Also, there are strong regional differences in education and some states (e.g., Guerrero) are continuously failing to cope with national minimum standards in education at the primary and secondary levels.

The problem, therefore, appears to be related to resource allocation rather than funding per se. Too much is spent on salaries in contrast to capital spending and an excessive share of the budget is spent in an unaccounted for fashion. Aiming to mitigate the strong political influence of the teachers' union on the Education Ministry, the government's recent reforms aimed at facilitating a meritocracy in the teaching profession. However, in 2015, the government agreed to water down some of the most contentious reforms. It is significant that this announcement was made public a few days before the 2015 elections.

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

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

## Romania

### Score 4

The Romanian education system has suffered from low public spending, unequal access and high dropout rates (especially among Roma and students from rural areas and poor families), low tertiary attainment and weak labor market relevance for both higher and vocational education. Moreover, the widespread plagiarism and academic dishonesty plaguing Romanian universities has eroded their credibility in- and outside the country. President Klaus Iohannis has continued to emphasize the political, economic and social importance of the education system and the need for its improvement. While modernizing curricula and changing university financing have been on the way, debates on education policy in the period under review were dominated by negotiations between the Ministry of Labor and the public education trade unions over wage increases in summer 2016. In April 2016, the Ciolos government adopted a national strategy on vocational education and training aimed at implementing a dual system involving private companies. The Ministry of Education appointed a new National Commission for Academic Titles and Diplomas, tasked with revamping the criteria for appointment and promotion, in order to restore credibility to Romanian universities.

Citation:

European Commission (2016) Education and Training Monitor Romania 2016. Luxembourg: European Union ([https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-ro\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-ro_en.pdf)).

## 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, partly as a reflection of a declining number of pupils. Because vocational education is underdeveloped and universities focus on non-technical education, Slovakia faces a shortage of skilled workers needed for its industry-oriented economy. In consequence, the education system is insufficiently geared to increasing Slovakia's economic potential. In 2015, Slovakia introduced a dual vocational education training system, but interest among potential participants remains limited. The implementation of the anti-segregation legislation adopted mid-2015 in order to improve education for Roma children has been hindered by low teacher participation and a lack of teachers able to teach in multicultural settings.

One central problem in the education sector, namely the inadequacy of teachers' education and the low attractiveness of the teaching profession, crystallized in the massive teachers' strikes that Slovakia experienced throughout 2016. In January 2016, the Slovak Teachers Initiative (ISU) called for an indefinite strike in order to break the "ignorance of the long-term need for ensuring an adequate education funding." In its government manifesto, the third Fico government announced it would present a ten-year National Education and Training Development Program by the end of 2016. This program has called for a significant increase in investment into the education sector, as well as for starting school at the age of 5 rather than 6.

## Hungary

**Score 3** Since the beginning of the decade, the education system has undergone major changes. Spending has been cut, competencies and control have been centralized and private and religious schools have been strengthened. As a result of these changes, Hungary's PISA results have further worsened. According to a recent Hungarian study on the basis of 2015 data, reading comprehension at the primary level has been higher in private and religion-based schools, whereas at the secondary level, state schools have performed better both in mathematics and reading/comprehension. Under the pressure of mass demonstrations by teachers, organized by the Tanítanék (I would like to teach) movement and supported by the larger public, the government agreed upon a formal decentralization of the over-centralized National Education Center (KLIK) into 58 territorial units. Circumventing the official Council of Interest Mediation in Public Education (Közoktatási Érdekegyeztetési Tanács), the government created a Roundtable for Public Education (Köznevelési Kerekasztal). However, the latter was boycotted by major organizations, and the conflicts between teachers and the government, while somewhat frozen, are still virulent.

## Citation:

Hermann, Z., J. Varga (2016): Állami, önkormányzati, egyházi és alapítványi iskolák: részarányok, tanulói összetétel és tanulói teljesítmények, in: T. Kolosi, I. G. Tóth (eds): Tarsadalmi riport 2016, Budapest: Társki, pp. 311-333.

## Turkey

### Score 3

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

Over the years Turkey has made significant progress in increasing access to schools. In the 2014-2015 school year, it achieved almost universal primary school enrollment. Secondary-school enrollment was 79.4% during the same year. The government is actively seeking to expand secondary school enrollment to comply with the new “4+4+4” law on education. The gender-based enrollment gap has nearly disappeared for primary education, and has narrowed significantly for secondary education. However, Turkey is ranked 109th out of 144 countries in terms of educational attainment in the 2016 Gender Gap Report. The report indicates that 93% of females and 99% of males are literate; the enrollment rate in primary education is 92% for females and 93% for males; the enrollment rate in secondary education is 85% for females and 88% for males; and the enrollment rate in tertiary education is 73% for females and 85% for males. On the other hand, pre-primary-education participation rates among three- to five-year olds are increasing rapidly, as are higher-education enrollment rates.

Regarding the quality of education, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores Turkey’s performance still relatively low. Although Turkey’s scores have improved significantly over time, and inequality in student performance has declined, the performance of Turkey’s average 15-year-old in reading, mathematics, and science is 35 points behind the OECD average. Furthermore, Turkey has a higher-than-average proportion of underperforming students, and academic achievement is particularly low among disadvantaged students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, around 22% of Turkish 15-year-olds do not read well enough to be able to analyze and understand what they read.

As the government seeks to improve the quality of education, education spending has become the largest item in the national budget. Expenditure in this area now accounts for nearly a quarter of tax revenues. The proportion of GDP allocated to education from the government budget has increased significantly, from 2.5% in 2000 to 4.8% during 2013.



The government seeks to align its tertiary-education standards with those in the EU. Currently, Turkey has 181 universities, but significant quality differences persist among the 181 universities. 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 continued to refrain from strengthening universities' autonomy, and the universities' ability to act autonomously further deteriorated after the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016.

The aftermath of the failed coup attempt had severe impact on academic freedoms. During this period according to Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe close to 4,500 academics were dismissed through appended lists in emergency decrees, without any due process and with no judicial remedy.

Citation:

Commissioner for Human Rights (2017) 'Memorandum of Expression and Media Freedom in Turkey', CommDH (2017)5, Council of Europe.

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