



Education Report

Education Policy

Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2019

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 (e.g., reflected in PISA results). 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. Estonia has already reached some of the European Union's Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) benchmarks and is close to achieving other benchmarks.

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 and low salary levels for teachers have been solved. Education in public institutions is free at all levels. There are about 500 schools providing general education, 50 VET institutions and 24 higher-education institutions (HEI) including six public universities.

Interestingly, while higher education is generally associated with better employability and a higher salary, this appears less true in Estonia than elsewhere. Recent policy measures strengthening links between education and training and the labor market (e.g., involving companies and social partners in VET curricula development, including entrepreneurship skills in university curricula, and providing adults with low skills better access to lifelong learning) have sought to ensure that the provision of education keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy.

Citation:

EU Education And Training Monitor 2018. Estonia. https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-factsheet-2018-estonia_en.pdf (accessed 21.10.2018)

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.

Education is under the jurisdiction of the provinces. Allocated resources are reasonable and, in general, efficiently used. The federal government has recently increased grant money for students from low- and middle-income families by 50%.

Despite the strengths of the Canadian education and training system, there are challenges, the biggest of which is the gap in educational attainment between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Schools on reserves are funded federally through Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. A recent evaluation carried out for the ministry found that education opportunities and results are not comparable to those off the reserves, that the comparatively lower quality of teacher instruction and curriculum is affecting student success, and that funding gaps relative to provincially funded regular (off-reserve) schools persist, especially in isolated, low-population communities. The 2016 federal budget included CAD 2.6 billion for First Nations schooling, grades primary to twelve, in an effort to narrow the education gap. Furthermore, in December 2016, an agreement was reached to establish a First Nations School System in Manitoba. However, the largest portion of this spending will not be allocated until the 2020 – 2021 fiscal year.

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

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2017 Federal Budget “Building a Strong Middle Class,” posted at: <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2017/docs/plan/budget-2017-en.pdf>

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Finland

Score 8

Built on the principle of lifelong learning, education policy in Finland promotes and maintains high educational standards. Teachers are well-trained and teaching is still considered an attractive profession. In comparison with most other countries, teachers in Finland enjoy a high level of autonomy and are not formally evaluated, and there are very few national tests for students. All people by law must have equal access to high-quality education and training, basic education is free, and municipalities are responsible for providing educational services to all local children. By and large, Finland’s education system has proved successful and in recent years ranked at the top of the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment. However, while Finland remains among the top performers, the ranking of the country appears to be slipping as gender and regional disparities in student performance significantly grow. The Education and Research Development Plan, revised every four years by the government, directs the implementation of education- and research-policy goals as stated in the government program. Since 2011, the plan has focused on the alleviation of poverty, inequality and exclusion. While Finland’s expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP was above the OECD average some years ago, heavy cuts by the government in the education sector have now weakened the financial conditions for designing and pursuing education policy. In 2016, new curricula for compulsory basic education was introduced, designed to increase equality in compulsory education, enhance pupil participation in goal-setting and evaluation, and integrate more technology in teaching. While the curricula reflect more thoroughly the growing needs of a knowledge society, it has been criticized for the short period of transition involved with implementing it and the lack of resources and training for teachers. Additionally, partial restrictions on the right to day care for children whose parents are not participating in the labor market undermine equal access to early education in some communities, especially in socially vulnerable families.

Citation:

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“The new curricula in a nutshell”, http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/basic_education/curricula_2014; oecd.org/edu/highlightsfinland.htm.

“Finnish Teachers and Principals in Figures”, https://www.oph.fi/download/189802_finnish_teachers_and_principals_in_figures.pdf

Germany

Score 8

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is still an important indicator for the quality of a country's educational system. Since the first PISA study in 2000, the OECD has often repeated its criticism that access to education in Germany is stratified and educational attainment is dependent on pupils' social backgrounds. Educational opportunities are particularly constrained for children from low-income families and for immigrants. PISA results from 2012, however, had shown significant improvements, 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. Until 2018, the overall quality of the primary and higher education system constantly improved. Germany now ranks 4 out of 137 countries.

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 2018 still lags behind the OECD average but improvements are obvious. Overall, close to 60% of the population have completed upper secondary education. The risk of being unemployed is five times higher for people without upper secondary education than for people who have completed tertiary education. The teaching workforce is one of the oldest in the OECD, only surpassed by Italy. Teacher salaries are among the highest of OECD countries. Participation in high-quality early-childhood education is high. In 2017, more than one-third (37%) of children under the age of three are enrolled.

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. The employment rate for vocation graduates aged 25 to 34 years old is almost as high as for those with tertiary education. 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 second 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.

Citation:

Global Competitive Report (2018):

<http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2018/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2018.pdf>

OECD (2018a): Education at a Glance, Country Note: Germany.

https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018/germany_eag-2018-47-en#page8XXXXX

OECD (2018b): Germany, Overview of the Education System.
<http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=DEU&treshold=10&topic=EO>

New Zealand

Score 8

New Zealand's education policy continues to deliver high quality, equitable and efficient education and training. According to the OECD's Education at a Glance 2018 Report, performances across all levels of New Zealand's education sector compare well with those in other developed countries, especially in relation to early childhood achievement. Young New Zealanders are more likely to leave school sooner, entering the workforce and perhaps returning to further education when they're older. Accordingly, employment rates for youth are high relative to other OECD countries. While New Zealand spends less per student than the OECD average, as a percentage of total public expenditure it remains one of the highest in the OECD.

Literacy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments are higher than OECD averages across all education levels, while numeracy skills are closer to the OECD average. Around 14% of tertiary qualified adults in New Zealand have a qualification in engineering, manufacturing or construction, compared with an average of 18% across OECD countries. This group is closely followed by graduates with a qualification in science, mathematics or computing, at 13% some two percentage points above the OECD average.

Teacher statutory salaries start lower than the OECD average, although they increase faster. However, they reach a maximum level lower than the OECD average. The gap between the salaries of teachers and other similarly-educated workers is smaller in New Zealand than it is in many other OECD countries.

Although public investment in tertiary education is high, an increasing proportion of it goes to students as loans and grants rather than as direct funding to institutions. As a result, public expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of total public spending remains one of the highest in the OECD. International students are a key feature of the national education system. New Zealand has a large proportion of tertiary students who are international students, especially at doctoral level where 45% of students are international students.

Participation in vocational programs is also high, as are levels of part-time study and adult participation rates in non-formal education. While today's adults are significantly more educated than their parents across all OECD countries, New Zealand's educational upward mobility has been faster than the OECD average, which partly reflects higher levels of qualified immigrants in New Zealand than in most other OECD countries.

During the 2017 election campaign, Labour promised fee-free tertiary education for first year students. In contrast, the first budget of the new government failed to hand out new operational funding for universities and polytechnics. Another campaign promise concerned the abolition of National Standards in schools and from 2019 schools will no longer have to report on them annually. The decision was welcomed

by the teachers' and principals' unions but opposed by the opposition National and ACT parties, which argued that this would make it more difficult to secure the promised improvement in student achievement. In spring 2018, the government also introduced legislation to shut down charter schools. This prompted strong criticism, including from Māori educators who had helped to set up some of these schools. Eventually, a compromise allowed charter schools to stay open, with the proviso that they seek approval as special character state schools – which almost all have done.

Citation:

OECD. 2018. Education at a Glance 2018. OECD Indicators. (http://www.cnedu.pt/content/noticias/internacional/Education_at_a_glance_2018.pdf).

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South Korea

Score 8

Education policy is a key priority for the South Korean government. On the positive side, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results are good, and tertiary enrollment rates are high. Levels of private expenditure on education are exceptionally high, while public expenditure is just about the OECD average (4.1% of GDP). Many Koreans spend a large share of their income on private schools and tutoring academies (hagwons), a practice that puts low-income households at a disadvantage. Despite a number of announcements in this area, the new administration has as yet been unable to address the issue successfully. Numerous curriculum-reform efforts have been unable to overcome the reliance on cramming and rote learning over teaching critical thinking, analytic skills, discussion and creativity. After Moon's first year in office, a survey conducted by Gallup Korea ranked the Ministry of Education as least popular among all government departments, with an approval rate of 30 percent.

Citation:

OECD, Education at a Glance 2017

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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 in comparison to other countries. During the past 20 years, Switzerland experienced very strong growth in tertiary education. The number of students enrolled at the tertiary level doubled between 1999/2000 and 2016/2017. This is chiefly due to a growth in colleges of education and universities of applied sciences, which were institutionalized in 1998. Students with vocational training can acquire a diploma to enter these universities of applied sciences either during their training or through a special one-year course after they have finished their apprenticeship. In 2016/2017, almost a fifth of all students were at the tertiary level (compared to 11% in 1999/2000). About half of all students in tertiary education attend universities and a third attend universities of applied sciences. While in 2000 only 50% of those who are entitled to attend universities of applied sciences did so, this share increased to 64% in 2017. The share of female students in tertiary education increased since 1999 from 42% to 50% (2017).

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

There is, however, a federal particularity in higher education. Cantons such as Geneva, Basel-City and Ticino have followed international trends favoring general qualification for university entrance, while others, especially in the German-speaking parts of the country, have focused on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the canton of Geneva, 29% of the respective age group acquire the matura secondary-school exit diploma, allowing them to go directly onto a university or university of applied sciences; while in the canton of Obwalden, only 11% gain direct access to a university or university of applied sciences (2016). There is a strong path dependence: two-thirds of the variation in the 2016 figures can be explained by similar figures from 1980, with some notable exceptions such as the cantons of Lucerne and Glarus. 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:

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BFS – Statistik der Bildungsabschlüsse (SBA), Statistik des jährlichen Bevölkerungsstandes, 1981-2010 (ESPOP), Statistik der Bevölkerung und der Haushalte (STATPOP)

Cyprus

Score 7

Primary and secondary education in Cyprus is mainly public. Tertiary education is provided domestically by both public and private institutions, while a significant number of students attend overseas educational institutions. 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. Reforms have been undertaken since the 1990s, but previous agendas were sometimes overturned when a new government took charge. Recent decisions resulted in the revision of the teacher appointment system, while the implementation of semester exams in secondary schools has been postponed until 2019. Following a severe crisis in their relationship, teachers unions and the ministry of education engaged in 2018 in talks that may lead to long-due reforms.

Schooling from the pre-primary level to the age of 15 is compulsory. Kindergarten facilities are provided by public and communal authorities, but mostly by private entities. Vocational schools, apprenticeship programs, and other education and professional training schemes also exist, funded largely by public authorities in addition to educational institutions and other organizations. Tertiary-level students in public and private institutions receive a modest allowance, the provision of which is subject to income since 2012. While public education is free, various education-related costs are paid by parents.

A significant challenge for the system is providing education to immigrant children and adults to facilitate their social inclusion.

The European Commission observes overqualification along with limited choice in vocational education, while noting also that disciplines linked to innovation (e.g., STEM) are attracting only a small number of students. It further notes that the very high expenditure on education (as a share of GDP) has not matched education outcomes, which are considered poor. Outcomes evaluation is based on PISA results, though the overall education system requires more adequate evaluation tools and processes than a competition of 15-year-old students.

Citation:

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Denmark

Score 7

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

These improvements are partly attributable to recent reforms, including reforms to the primary and lower-secondary school systems. A major reform in 2013 granted more discretionary power to the school principal to allocate teacher resources and keep pupils in school for more hours. Since 2014, school days have become longer, there is more assisted learning, there are more lessons in Danish and math, and the teaching of foreign languages has been strengthened (English made compulsory from level 1, German and French from level 5). To strengthen the continued development of teachers' competencies the government has allocated one billion DKK from 2014 to 2020.

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

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

Vocational and university educations have also been on the political agenda. In February 2014, a broad political agreement was reached focusing on better and more attractive vocational education and training. In October 2017, the government reached an agreement with labor market stakeholders to allocate DKK 2.5 billion to adult education and training. Universities have been under pressure to shorten the length of study and channel students into educational programs oriented toward business.

Citation:

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France

Score 7

The French education system can in many aspects be characterized as rather successful but, contrary to the past, it fails to integrate and promote the weakest segments of society. In the 2016 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, French results did not progress but remained slightly above the OECD average, with France ranked 26 out of 70 countries. Overall spending on educational institutions amounted to 5.5% of GDP in 2014, slightly above the OECD average. Spending at the preschool level is exemplary, with nearly all children three years old and older attending preschool (*écoles maternelles*), and France is still above the OECD average at the primary schooling level. An alarming result of the PISA assessment is that, more than in any other OECD country, individual success depends on the socioeconomic background of students. Secondary education is rather good but uneven, excessively costly and, in recent years, has fallen behind other OECD countries. Higher education is dual, with a broad range of excellent elite institutions (prestigious *lycées* and *grandes écoles*) and a large mass university system, which is poorly funded and poorly managed, and does not prepare its students well for a successful entry to the labor market. Spending on universities lies below the OECD average. More importantly, drop-out rates are dramatic: only 40% of registered students obtain a university degree.

One major problem concerns professional training. The transition from education to professional training is poor. Organized by state schools, the system offers only a few alternative training courses in cooperation with businesses and diplomas are often not accepted by companies. This is a major reason for high youth unemployment in France.

The Macron government is approaching these issues in a more open and pragmatic way by distancing itself from the powerful teaching lobby, which has traditionally

co-managed the system with the government (to the main benefit of professors). Many significant measures have been taken and immediately implemented. First, these measures placed greater emphasis on training young people from less affluent backgrounds. In areas with significant social problems, the government has decided to immediately cut in half the number of students per elementary school class, bringing down the maximum number of students to 12 per class. Second, most of the disputed reforms put in place by the Hollande-Valls government are being dismantled (for instance the “bi-langues” classes have been reintroduced in secondary schools and more emphasis is put on the fundamentals). Third, international evaluations and rankings (such as the PISA report) have been taken into account and will likely form the basis for further changes. Finally, an immediate action program has been launched, mobilizing €15 billion for job training measures (targeting the long-term unemployed and young people leaving school without diploma), and a far-reaching renewal of the professional training system was passed in 2018. In spite of the hostility of the trade unions, the minister for education has declared that the evaluation of schools and teachers will become normal practice. The government has also succeeded in tackling two “sacred cows” of the education system, which every minister over the past 20 years had failed to reform: the higher school degree (baccalauréat) will become more manageable and will integrate continuous checks and a final exam; and a new process for the registration of students at university has been set up, based on both students’ requests and evaluation by the universities.

Citation:

OECD: Education at a glance 2018, Country Note France

Israel

Score 7

Israel’s average education-attainment levels are high, and the value of education is well established in the community as a whole. The country has a heterogeneous education system. From primary to upper-secondary level, students are generally sorted into one of four primary school streams: three for the Hebrew-speaking community (secular, religious and ultra-orthodox), and one for the Arabic-speaking community (Arab, Druze and Bedouin minorities together). Nevertheless, the different streams are not equal in educational achievement or budget. According to 2018 UNICEF report on inner-country education gaps, Israel has one of the widest gaps between the highest and lowest achieving primary school students among OECD countries.

Surveys indicate that 50.9% of adults (aged 25 to 64) have achieved a tertiary level of education, above the OECD average of 36.9%. Israel spends a little more than 5.8% of its GDP (nearly 11% of the government budget) on education, again higher than the OECD average of 5.2% of GDP. However, expenditure on tertiary education is below the OECD average, at less than 1% of GDP. Two Israeli universities (the

Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) ranks in the top 100 universities worldwide according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities list produced by the Shanghai Ranking Consultancy. Primary and secondary teachers' salaries have increased significantly in recent years, and are now well above the national average salary.

However, while the average primary-school class size within the OECD as a whole is 21, the average primary-school class size in Israel is 26.7. This is a much-discussed aspect of the education system, leading to frequent expressions of frustration in the local media, although local research has failed to find significant effects of class size on student achievement. PISA results are also deemed problematic. In the 2015 PISA tests, Israel scored under the OECD average in all fields (science, mathematics and reading), mainly because of low scoring in the Arab-speaking sub-group. Teachers in Israel also score low. In the recent PIAAC (OECD adult skill tests), Israeli teachers' average score was far below the OECD average. However, Israel is above the OECD average with regard to equity indicators in all fields (boys vs girls, social background, and immigrant students). Moreover, Israel has almost no gender gap in the completion rate of bachelors or equivalent programs.

Despite all the positive progress, Israel still shows gaps in educational performance among sub-groups of the student population. For example, average class sizes in the Hebrew-language school streams are lower than in the Arab stream, despite the 2007 policy reform designed to institute changes across all streams.

There is another significant gap between the ultra-orthodox minority group and the secular majority. In May 2017, the National Council of Higher Education signed a program aimed at extending access to tertiary education within the ultra-orthodox community, setting a goal of increasing the number of tertiary students drawn annually from within this group from 11,500 to 19,000. This program is currently paused as the Israeli Supreme Court examines multiple and conflicting appeals discussing the legality of gender-segregated classrooms, which the ultra-orthodox community requires for participation in the program. Despite this program's positive goal, it sparked widespread opposition, especially regarding the decision to create gender-segregated tertiary programs in order to make it more accessible to ultra-orthodox men.

Citation:

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Japan

Score 7

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. The government has developed the Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (2018-2022), which stresses developing creativity through curriculum reform, improved school organization and lifelong learning.

A separate issue is the problem of growing income inequality at a time of economic stagnation. The Economic policy Package for 2018 includes human-resources development as one of its two major policy fields. It includes measures for free early-childhood education, free higher education, and in particular, measures related to the country's expensive private high schools.

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

There is growing concern that reform measures have not achieved their intended goals. Despite major university reforms and the government's well-publicized intention to place 10 universities among the world's top 100, the rankings accorded to leading Japanese universities has proven disappointing in recent years. In the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019, the University of Tokyo, Japan's top school, only ranks at 42nd place.

Citation:

OECD (Directorate for Education and Skills): Education Policy in Japan: Building Bridges Towards 2030, Paris 2018

Lithuania

Score 7

The educational system in Lithuania is comprised of the following stages: 1) early childhood education and care (preprimary and preprimary class-based education); 2) compulsory education for children aged seven through 16 (including primary education, lower-secondary general education, vocational lower-secondary education); 3) upper-secondary and post-secondary education (for people aged 17 to 19); and 4) higher education provided by universities (undergraduate, graduate and PhD studies) and colleges (undergraduate studies). Lithuania's high level of tertiary attainment has been gradually increasing further in recent years (58.7% in 2016). Its rate of early school leaving is also below the EU average, at just 4.8% in 2016. However, enrollment rates in vocational-education and training programs are low.

The reputation of vocational education and training in Lithuania could still be improved. According to an OECD survey of education released in September 2016, only 15% of all students are expected to graduate from vocational training programs compared to an OECD average of 46% and EU average of 50%. Preprimary education attendance is also low, with only 78.3% of Lithuanian children aged four to six attending preprimary education programs, compared to the EU-27 average of 92.3%. Adult participation rates in lifelong learning programs are also comparatively low. Moreover, Lithuania needs to increase the quality of its education programs. In the 2009 and 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports, which evaluate student performance in the areas of reading, mathematics and science, Lithuania was ranked below the OECD average. A 2017 OECD report on education in Lithuania stated that Lithuania's schools and higher education institutions would benefit from clarifying and raising performance expectations, aligning resources in support of raised performance expectations, strengthening performance monitoring and quality assurance procedures, and building institutional capacity. Furthermore, the country must address mismatches between graduates' skills and labor-market needs, as the country's youth-unemployment rate of about 14.5% in 2016 was partly associated with young people's insufficient skills and lack of practical experience. The European Commission has recommended shifting the focus of education to improve its labor-market relevance.

In terms of equitable access to education, the country shows an urban-rural divide and some disparities in educational achievements between girls and boys. However, there are no significant gaps in access to education for vulnerable groups (with the exception of the Roma population and, to a certain extent, the migrant population). Overall, government spending on education fell somewhat during the financial crisis, with higher education given a higher priority at the outset of the crisis thanks to an ongoing higher education reform. However, spending on education in Lithuania has been above EU average (6.1% of GDP and 5.6% of GDP in 2011 and 2014 respectively compared to an EU average of 5.1% in 2011 and 5.0% in 2014). Though it has reached €1.1 billion in 2016, it was dispersed through a large number of institutions. The average salary of a researcher in Lithuania is four times lower the EU average (adjusted for purchasing power). While mean years of schooling in Lithuania are relatively long (Lithuania ranked 11 out of 140 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2018), ease of finding skilled employees is relatively poor in the country (Lithuania ranked only 123 out of 140 countries in the same report).

The total number of school graduates declined significantly in recent years due to demographic changes, from around 29,500 in 2010 to 17,800 in 2018 and estimated to decline further to 14,700 in 2022 – a reduction by half compared to 2010. 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. For example, in 2016, there were an estimated 2.9 higher education institutions per 10,000 students in Lithuania, while there 1.2 in Finland and 1.1 in Ireland per 10,000 students. Consequently, discussions on reducing the overall number of higher education institutions to concentrate resources in the country's top-performing institutions have intensified. This has led to proposals to consolidate the network of Lithuanian state universities, and vocational education and training institutions. However, it is not clear if and how these proposals will be implemented. The strongest driver to merge or close down study programs is likely to come from declining graduate numbers, higher university entry thresholds and performance-linked funding.

Citation:

The Eurydice reports on Lithuania are available at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Overview>
COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, country report Lithuania 2017: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-lithuania-en.pdf>
The 2018 Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum: <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2018/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2018.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
OECD, Education in Lithuania, 2017. http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-in-lithuania_9789264281486-en;jsessionid=8scv3cpilndh.x-oecd-live-03

Norway

Score 7

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

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

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

Slovenia

Score 7

Slovenia has moved relatively rapidly from the socialist curriculum tradition toward a more flexible organization of education. With a high share of the population aged 25 to 64 having completed at least upper secondary education as well as high ranks in international educational achievement tests, the education system fares relatively well by international comparison. The most pressing problems remain the small (but slowly growing) share of pupils enlisted in vocational education, as well as an underfunded tertiary-education system with high dropout rates and large fictitious enrollment figures. Compared to previous governments, the Cerar government has devoted more attention to education policy. In September 2016, it announced increases in spending on education in 2017 and 2018, and in November 2016 parliament amended the Higher Education Act to make the higher education system more flexible, close the gender gap and ease bureaucratic burdens connected with internationalization processes. However, the implementation of the legislation by the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has progressed slowly.

Spain

Score 7

Despite the education system's outstanding improvement since the 1980s, Spaniards largely regard educational outcomes within their country as mediocre. In fact, the education system was ranked at only 24th place among OECD countries (based on PISA test results). Reasons for the poor results, although the causes differ strongly across regions, include a curriculum regarded as out of date, poor teaching quality and the large number of students who repeat years. Although early school-leaving rates continue to decrease, figures are still very high.

In 2016, education spending was one point of GDP below the OECD average. However, spending levels vary across the regions (most public spending on education is managed at the subnational level by the autonomous communities' governments). This diversity is the result of differing orientations on education policy, the financial resources available and number of private centers in each region.

The education system continues to experience challenges related to quality and equity. However, the system has been shaped not only by socioeconomic struggles over distribution, but also by conflicts over religious, linguistic-cultural and national identity issues, as well as political factors. In 2018, the government announced that it would provide universal access to preschool education (0-3 years), and would reverse measures implemented during the hardest austerity years, such as the increase in the teacher-student ratio and the increase in instructors' teaching hours. However, as of the time of writing, funding for these measures had not yet been guaranteed.

Citation:

OECD(2018), Education at a Glance, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance_19991487

EC(2018), Education and Training Monitor, Spain

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

Sweden

Score 7

Education policy remains a subject of heated debate in Sweden. Critics point to how Sweden has slipped in recent years in most international comparisons in terms of student knowledge and analytical skills. Sweden now ranks 19th on PISA (up from 32nd in the previous PISA report), which indicates that the decline appears to have been arrested. Notwithstanding, this remains an alarmingly poor ranking for a country relying on knowledge-intensive sectors for its economic growth and competitiveness. Recent studies suggest that Swedish students' knowledge in key subjects are falling behind students in other countries. Some studies attribute the decline to the decentralization of primary education in the early 1990s; others argue

that the teaching profession is not held in high enough regard within society and thus fails to attract highly qualified professionals; while yet others suggest that poor performance could in part be attributed to the fact that many teachers lack the formal qualifications needed to teach the subjects they are teaching. Promisingly, all three potential sources of deterioration in primary education are now on the policy agenda. Overall, it remains clear that Swedish schools continue to deliver high-quality education.

Critics also point to the high level of youth unemployment, which suggests that the education system fails to provide skills and knowledge demanded by the contemporary labor market. However, the NEET data provided by the OECD show that the share of Swedes (15-24 years old) who are neither employed nor in education is slightly lower than in Germany. 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 center-right government (2006 – 2014) argued that it was extremely active in reforming education at all levels. The former government as well as the current red-green government (2014 – 2018) 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 increase the number of the staff present in schools. However, due to the current stalemate in parliament, it remains to be seen if the red-green government will be successful in reaching these ambitious goals.

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

Concerning graduate output of secondary and tertiary education, Sweden's performance in this respect could be seen as good but not great. Sweden is not as

high in the rankings as its need for skilled and well-trained students to enter the research sector would require. Perhaps of greater concern is the combination of a relatively high ranking (11th) in tertiary attainment and poorer PISA ranking (19th), which suggests that institutions of tertiary education may be lowering the bar with respect to entry requirements.

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

In summary, the data show that resources are not the key problem and public debate shows no shortage of ideas and inclination for reform. In the spring of 2017, a major royal commission on education presented its findings and recommendations. Thus far, very few of the commission's proposals have been implemented. Meanwhile, education remains at the very top of the political agenda, although the political parties differ significantly in their analysis of the problems that the education system is facing and what should be done to address those problems.

Citation:

OECD (2018), *Education at a Glance* (Paris: OECD).

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

United Kingdom

Score 7

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

Ongoing programs, such as Pupil Premium, are designed to simultaneously improve educational outcomes and strengthen social cohesion by encouraging well-performing schools to accept disadvantaged children. However, the socioeconomic composition of many of the United Kingdom's schools still poses a significant

challenge for students from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds. A Children's Commission on Poverty inquiry indicated that interschool competition has increased financial costs for pupils and their families, as many schools try to stand out by introducing fancier uniforms, new textbooks or extravagant field trips. Education has been among the areas largely protected from public spending cuts. Prime Minister May announced plans for new grammar schools, state run secondary schools subject to selection on academic grounds, but considered by many in the United Kingdom to be contrary to social mobility. May's announcement has not yet been put into action. However, the key points from Budget 2018 suggest a development program involving a £400 million investment in schools, an average of £10,000 per elementary school and £50,000 per secondary school.

In the higher education sector, the substantial increase in tuition fees, from £3,300 to levels now in excess of £9,000 per student per year, has been contentious, and there have been suggestions both that fees should fall and that the student loan system needs to be reformed. This could put students off from studying in the most expensive parts of the country, such as London and Oxford. However, so far, there has been no discernible effect on overall student enrollment rates or on access to higher education for students from poorer backgrounds. Though concerns about the level of student debt have prompted renewed debate over the funding of tertiary education. British universities are concerned that the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union will be damaging, especially if accompanied by a clampdown on EU migrants.

Fears that students from other EU member states will be deterred from applying to what is a highly successful sector, that EU nationals will be put off from working in British universities and that participation in EU research programs will become harder have led to demands from university leaders for a "soft" Brexit. There have been reports of EU consortia being reluctant to include British researchers in new research proposals.

Citation:

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

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<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/29/key-points-from-budget-2018-at-a-glance>

Australia

Score 6

The quality of Australia's education system tends to be higher in non-government schools and in major metropolitan regions. Overall the high school completion rate is around 80%. However, the low level of preschool spending continues to be a weak point: Australia spends 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. Unsurprisingly, given the high levels of government subsidy of private education, rates of enrollment in private schools in Australia are significantly higher than the OECD average. Despite subsidies, tuition fees at private school are often beyond the means of less affluent parents, creating inequality. Moreover, inequity has increased, as government funding per student in non-government schools has increased at a faster rate than government funding per student in government schools. The 2017 budget took steps toward reducing inequity, boosting funding to government schools and reducing funding to some non-government schools in the period 2017 - 2027. However, following a backlash from the Catholic school sector, which accounts for approximately half the non-government school sector, in September 2018 the government announced an increase in funding to Catholic schools of AUD 4.5 billion over 10 years.

In the higher education sector, the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP), introduced in 1989, continues to be an important mechanism for equitably and sustainably funding higher education. The scheme has increased the extent to which students bear the cost of their education without diminishing access to higher education for students from poor families. Several measures in recent years have sought to reduce the cost to government of the higher education system. The 2015 budget contained measures requiring Australians living overseas to repay HELP debts on the same terms as those faced by Australian residents. This took effect on 1 January 2016. Additional measures in 2017 included decreased direct government funding of universities, increased student fees and a reduced income threshold at which students begin repaying their HELP debt.

With regard to efficiency, there is much room for improvement. Australia's educational system is complex, with shared responsibilities between the states and the government, with funding coming primarily from the latter, which contributes to inefficiencies. Federal funding for vocational education and training is limited. State and territory governments are highly revenue-constrained, and as a consequence the sector is relatively poorly funded. In recent years, a HELP scheme for vocational training, called VET Student Loans, has been established, but applies only to diploma-level courses. The higher education sector is generally efficient and universities have had to be entrepreneurial to prosper, aggressively marketing to international students and pursuing independent sources of research funds.

Citation:

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

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

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

https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018_eag-2018-en

Lisa Pryor, The End of the Australian Dream. The New York Times. 2. May 2017. p. 1, 13.

Austria

Score 6

The Austrian educational system still does not perform to its potential. Considering Austria's economic position, the country should have a significantly higher number of university graduates. The reason for this underperformance is seen by research institutions and experts such as the OECD to lie with the early division of children into multiple educational tracks, which takes place after the fourth grade. Despite the fact that there has been some improvement and partly as a result of the increasing role of the "Fachhochulen" (universities of applied science, polytechnics), the Austrian educational system still is highly socially selective. Parents' social (and educational) status is reflected in students' ability to access higher education, more so than in comparable countries. This state of affairs violates the concept of social justice and time fails to exploit the population's talents to the fullest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The new government has started with a “roll back” of some structural elements introduced by former governments to allow a streamlining of the school system. One of the government’s first activities within the realm of the school system has been to reduce the significance of the “New Middle Schools,” a type of school that was intended to improve access to high schools and university for students from disadvantaged social milieus. It is too early to say what affect this will have on the rather unbalanced social structure of university students.

Citation:

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

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

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

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

Belgium

Score 6

The OECD deems Belgium’s performance to be “top” level with regard to youth skills. However, an increasingly large set of indicators (e.g., OECD and European Council indicators) show that Belgium’s educational performance is weakening, in particular regarding inclusiveness, youth integration into the labor market and participation rates for higher education.

Most recent improvements in the education system were achieved before 2010, with the country’s education system has largely stagnated since then. The chronic underfunding of universities has translated into a widening skills gap, such that many available job vacancies remain unfilled, while job-seekers cannot find employment (see the Council of Europe’s recommendations for Belgium, the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report, and Dumont and Kegels (2016)).

Aggregate spending in the country's education system remains rather high, but inefficiencies in the organization of primary and secondary education have translated into higher-than-necessary costs, which has limited financing for tertiary education. These inefficiencies remain entrenched in part because they originate in the coexistence of a public network with a “free,” publicly funded (Catholic) network. The coexistence of these networks reflects party division lines, with each network having gained a sacred status for a given political faction.

The education system also has evident difficulty stimulating 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 Anglo-Saxon countries. De facto discriminatory factors include the very minimal or nonexistent study grants for poorer students, and the increasingly overcrowded classrooms. OECD assessments of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results highlight the substantial drop in education performance in the French-speaking part of the country.

As reported by Vanden Bosch (2014), the European Commission has also pointed to the “lack of coherence between education and employment policies, given the specific needs of the migrant population.” Within the French-speaking universities, the regional government is imposing increasing administrative control on education procedures, which diverts human resources away from teaching and research. Consequently, the situation is worsening.

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

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0910\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0910(01)&from=EN)

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

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

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

Croatia

Score 6

As a percentage of GDP, public expenditure on education aligns with the EU average. However, spending is not particularly efficient. The share of 15-year-olds who underachieve in reading, mathematics and science according the PISA tests is

above the EU and OECD average. Conversely, the share of early leavers from education and training is far below the EU average. The system's inefficiency is exacerbated by the high degree of selectivity in upper secondary education. Over 70% of upper-secondary students attend such vocational schools in Croatia, which is higher than the EU average. As in other former Yugoslavian countries, however, vocational education is very weak, as there is a high degree of mismatch between what is taught and the demands of employers, so that vocational education is not an assured route to a job. The quality of tertiary education varies significantly across institutions and even between departments within universities. The share of the population aged 30-34 years who have successfully completed university education in Croatia is slightly below the EU average. The resources spent on education appear further wasted by the high level of unemployment of school and university graduates. Another problem is the high degree of inequality in access to higher education, since students from better-educated family backgrounds tend to be over-represented in higher education.

Education reform has suffered from a lack of continuity. In 2014, the Milanović government charged an expert team headed by education policy scholar Boris Jokić with providing a proposal for a new curriculum. The finalization and eventual implementation of this team's work, which built on the contributions of more than a hundred teachers and experts from individual educational fields, faced delays under the Orešković government, but has regained momentum since fall 2017. Blaženka Divjak, who became minister of science and education in the Plenković government in June 2017, launched an experimental curricular reform that took into effect at the beginning of the new school year in September 2018. The reform comprises all subjects in the first and fifth primary-school grades, science (i.e., chemistry, biology, physics) in the seventh primary-school grade, all subjects in the first secondary-school grade and general subjects in four-year vocational schools. Accompanied by great expectations, the reform is intended to shift the focus of education from learning piles of facts to problem-solving and critical thinking. While this shift has broadly been welcomed, the minister's focus on the strengthening of the so-called STEM disciplines in higher education has been more controversial. Critics have raised concerns that the reforms will create narrow specialists and neglect the humanistic aspect of education.

Citation:

Žiljak, T., N. Baketa (2018): Education Policy in Croatia, in: Z. Petak, K. Kotarski (eds.), *Policy-Making at the European Periphery: The Case of Croatia*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 265-283.

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Czechia

Score 6

Public expenditure on education relative to GDP has increased since the economic crisis and is slightly above the EU average. While the educational mobility of children with a non-academic background is limited, educational outcomes and the

employability of graduates with a secondary education are good. One problem, however, is the low tertiary education attainment rate. While it continues to rise, the 32% national target won't be met until 2020. The early school-leaving rate remains among the lowest in the EU, but regional disparities are significant and the rate has been increasing steadily since 2010. It currently exceeds the 5.5% national target for 2020. A particularly vulnerable group are Roma. Around 25% of Roma children are educated in "special schools" (populated almost exclusively by Roma), before being placed in so-called practical schools with lower learning standards.

The new Babiš government has continued the policies of the Sobotka government and has increased teachers' wages. However, the low salaries of Czech teachers and school heads remain an issue and have fostered the feminization and aging workforce of the education sector. Low salaries in tertiary education have made it difficult to recruit and retain high-quality staff.

In the period under review, the absorption of EU funds in education improved. The 2018 targets of the operational program on research, development and education were already met at the beginning of November. These targets included achieving an increase in high-profile scientific publications, improving the mobility of scientists, deepening educator training, and increasing the number of school assistants and afterschool activities.

Iceland

Score 6

Public expenditure on education increased prior to 2008, but has since been cut. In 2012, public expenditure on high schools, colleges and universities was significantly less in proportion to GDP than in 2008. Since then, the ratio has gone down further and was almost 12% lower in 2016 than in 2008.

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools. After the 2008 collapse, considerable cutbacks and rationalization measures were introduced, including a shortening of the school year. Upper secondary schools and public universities are the responsibility of the central government. The government cabinet during 2013-2016 managed to shorten the duration of upper secondary matriculation from four years to three. This means that students now enter university at the age of 19 rather than 20.

Iceland's universities have been seriously underfunded for a long time. However, the cabinet of Jakobsdóttir, which came to office in late 2017, revised the state budget and raised funding for universities by 3%. In the state budget for 2019, universities received a 5% raise compared with the year before.

There are seven universities: two private universities supported by state grants and five public universities, including two agricultural colleges. In the first few years

following the 2008 economic collapse, several initiatives to rationalize the university sector were considered, while several steps were taken to improve cooperation between institutions. Two attempts to merge universities were discontinued during the mandate period 2013 – 2016. The previous cabinet (January 2017 – September 2017) did not introduce any measures to merge universities during its brief tenure and the current cabinet of Katrín Jakobsdóttir (November 2017 – present) has not announced any further initiatives.

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 2018, Iceland's music schools continued to fight for their survival, with no end to the struggle in sight.

The OECD, among other institutions, has long highlighted the relatively low proportion of the labor force of Iceland with secondary or tertiary education qualifications – a key factor in explaining Iceland's low productivity, long working hours and high rates of labor force participation. Though Statistice Iceland recently published new statistics that purported to show that Icelanders do not work longer hours than workers in neighboring countries, these new figures have been met with skepticism.

Iceland's low PISA scores, the lowest in Western Europe, remain a source of concern. Though the sensitivity of Iceland's PISA scores to students' socioeconomic status is the lowest in the OECD region.

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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.

Luxembourg

Score 6

The country’s education policy must deal with the challenges of a multilingual society and a high proportion of migrant students.

After six years of elementary school, students face a junction and must choose one of two tracks, a general (former: *secondaire technique*) or an academic (*classique*) one. The number of students who must repeat a whole academic year is among the highest in the European Union; more than 50% repeat one or more academic years. Although Luxembourg has the highest percentage of university graduates and smallest class sizes in Europe, about 25% of students do not achieve sufficient basic skills in math (range 33), science (range 33) and reading (range 36), to complete their education successfully, according to the PISA study.

The assessment notes that only 40% of the students graduate in the prescribed timespan. This places Luxembourg well below the OECD average, behind France, Belgium and Germany. In addition, the government has decided not to participate in all PISA studies which was criticized in Luxembourg’s media.

There is a marked division between Luxembourg nationals and migrant students, as migrants (especially the Portuguese minority) generally struggle with the country’s three languages and often end up in the technical track (*secondaire technique*), which

affects their progress toward a university education. Recent studies have shown that migrant students are four times less likely to transfer to the higher-level university-oriented early school track (*enseignement secondaire*) than Luxembourgish nationals. To counter this, more affluent migrants often send their children to international schools. This leads to yet another division between high-income and low-income migrants. A further reform with more permeable structures (including a more open guidance procedure with parent input) to avoid early tracking is being tested.

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

With 4,525 students in 2018, Germany is the primary destination for Luxembourg's university students. This number has grown by 300 people over the previous year (2017) and is a new record. In second place is the University of Luxembourg with 3,723 students. The University of Luxembourg sees itself as a multilingual university, with courses taught in English, German and French. Other destinations are Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Austria and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, "German universities are in vogue," concludes the Luxembourg newspaper *Tageblatt*: "Luxembourg students prefer to find their way into German-speaking countries."

The fact that relatively few Luxembourgers enroll at the state-owned university is based, on the one hand, on the sterile design of the university campus in Esch-Belval and also on the fact that some subjects, such as medicine, are not yet fully offered.

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Netherlands

Score 6

In terms of quality, the average education attainment level for the population is high, somewhat exceeding the OECD average in 2017. The Ministry of Education follows a policy in which individual schools publish their pupils' performance (as measured by the School Inspectorate), enabling parents to choose the best or most appropriate school for their children. Quality-improvement policies – including CITO testing, performance monitoring, efforts to intensify and improve teacher professionalization programs, better transition trajectories between school types, and quality-management systems at school level – do not yet appear to be effective. For the first time, the debate focused this year on substantial elements of the Dutch educational system, such as the streaming of students from age 11/12 – which is seen as excessively early and detrimental to a growing number of children.

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. Social background and parents' level of educational attainment are increasingly predictive of students' educational achievements. 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).

Equitable access to education for minority ethnic groups has not been achieved and is worsening at the university level. There remain considerable gender gaps in education. The teaching workforce is primarily female, except in tertiary education. The proportion of women studying science, technology, engineering, mathematics, manufacturing and construction is low, while women are overrepresented in the education, health care and welfare sectors. The growing gap between higher education and secondary professional education reflects differences in socioeconomic status and ethnic backgrounds.

In 2018, because of the increased demand for technically educated professionals, secondary professional schools received extra financing, while measures to improve the image of the schools and the status of the students were introduced.

Children with minor learning disabilities often get caught in a bureaucratic back-and-forth between mainstream schools and specialized youth care services who see them as “light cases.”

At the tertiary level, the system of equal access through study grants has been abolished and every student now pays for university education, with low-interest

loans available to students. Calculations suggest that university fees will result in an average lifetime income loss of 0.2% for tertiary-level students. The deterrence effect of the new student loan system has proven to be more substantial among lower-income families, particularly at the higher-professional level.

The Dutch school system stresses efficiency in terms of resource allocation. Expenditure for education is below the average for OECD countries. Among primary and secondary level school teachers, following massive strikes in 2017, salaries were significantly increased in 2018, and will be further increased in 2019 and 2020. However, this does not seem to be enough to meet the substantial shortage of teachers. The Council of Education suggested that the system of teacher certification needs to be drastically changed to address the issue. 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 to adapt quickly to changing labor market needs. As a result, the Netherlands faces a shortage of skilled technical workers. Life-long learning is poorly supported by the government.

In January 2016, the national dialogue on a reformed "curriculum for the future" for primary and secondary education received substantial input. Teachers and school managers worked together on a new curriculum. The ambition to establish three broad knowledge domains was watered down to a collaborative development of specific teaching material in the third phase of the process in the fall of 2018.

In higher professional training and university education, inadequate government funding exacerbates existing challenges resulting from increasing student numbers (particularly international students), work pressure and quality issues.

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Portugal

Score 6

Education policy is a field in which results only come to fruition long after their implementation. In the case of Portugal, we can see a steady improvement in educational attainment since the beginning of the new millennium. At the same time, these improvements have been insufficient to reverse a historic pattern of low overall and unequal levels of educational attainment.

In terms of the three criteria under analysis, we can point to inequality in the quality of education obtained and generally low levels of efficiency. Though these have been improving, the unstable policy framework has meant that these improvements are arguably taking place at a slower rate than would otherwise be possible.

In terms of educational attainment, Portugal continues to present low and unequal levels of educational attainment. The country remains firmly anchored at the bottom of the OECD in terms of the proportion of the population having completed upper secondary education, with less than 25% of the population aged between 25 and 64 having reached this level. While Portugal fares comparatively better in terms of tertiary education (24%), it remains below the OECD average in this regard as well.

At the same time, earlier policies are now paying off. In 2009, the country extended compulsory education until the end of secondary school (12th grade). Almost a decade later, the impacts of this policy can be assessed. The proportion of 18 – 24 year olds leaving school without completing secondary school dropped from 30.9% in 2009 to 12.6% in 2017. Equally, the proportion of the population aged between 25 and 64 having completed secondary school increased from 14.5% to 21.1% over this same period, a 6.6 percentage point increase (whereas from 2001 to 2009, this increase was of 2.8 percentage points). PISA assessment results for Portugal also show a steady improvement over time, with Portugal emerging as one of the most improved countries since the first round in 2000.

These improvements are also true at the university level. In the 2006 Academic Ranking of World Universities, Portugal was the only EU-15 country not to have at least one institution in the top 500 (excluding Luxembourg, which has a limited higher education structure). In 2018, Portugal has four universities in the top 500.

However, there remains room for improvement, on at least three grounds. First, there is significant variation in the quality of education between schools. The average score in the 2017 national exams ranged from 12.87 (out of 20) for the highest rated public school to 7.08 in the lowest rated public school. The variance is even greater when we consider all schools, thus encompassing private schools also, with the best performing school presenting an average of 15.04 – more than twice the average for the lowest rated school. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that the quality of education is often unequal within schools. Second, these differences reflect policy

failures, including the lack of effective accountability mechanisms and incentives, weak lifelong training, and inefficient management systems. Third, considerable instability in the sector – with substantial changes from year to year – means that the educational system is unpredictable and the impact of changes is limited. This instability has continued through the period under review, with the adoption of a new system for special needs education in July 2018, decree-law 54/2018, which seems likely to lead to shortages in the provision of necessary support.

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United States

Score 6

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

Whereas Federal engagement became more extensive and ambitious during the Obama administration, the Trump administration cut federal education programs by more than \$10 billion. Under Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, the administration has redirected funding to support school-choice initiatives, which seek to improve education by enhancing accountability to parents while reducing the power of teachers’ unions and state-level education bureaucracies – a conservative strategy that has significant support in research findings.

As college and university costs have increased, financial aid for low-income students has failed to keep up. As a result, students from the top income quintile are now at least three times as likely to graduate as those from the lowest quintile. Trump has cut budgets for college loan programs and has relaxed accreditation requirements for the often-predatory for-profit higher education sector.

Citation:

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Chile

Score 5

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

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

Furthermore, there is wide variance in standards between universities and even technical training centers, with insufficient quality-control standards. In general, Chile's education system – with the exception of a few top universities – fails in the task of enabling students to acquire the knowledge and skills required for the country to make a quantum leap in economic 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 strong teachers' lobby that has effectively opposed necessary reforms to school curriculums and management structures, and has blocked attempts to link teacher pay to teaching productivity.

The general ideological disagreement between the government and opposition, regarding the role of the free market and of the state in the education system, has made it more difficult to pass reforms. In addition, there have been conflicts between teachers' boards and the corporations or enterprises offering private education services. The former government's campaign platform included reforms that sought to abolish profit-seeking in the education sector. A series of legislative proposals on the issue were submitted to Congress, but not all have been passed. The latest significant changes were introduced in March 2016 by the enactment of Law Nr. 20,845 (Ley de Inclusión Escolar), which increased subsidies for the most vulnerable students in primary and secondary education. At the same time, public subsidies for providers of education are now granted only to private entities which legally count as non-profit organizations. Additionally, financial contributions (copagos) by those families whose children attend a public school should be lowered. Prior to this latest reform, Law Nr. 20.882 (Ley de Presupuestos del Sector Público), enacted in December 2015, introduced subsidies to the tuition fees for most vulnerable students who attend higher education (about 25% of the newly matriculated students in 2017).

In summary, the education reform of 2015/16 aimed at eliminating profit, selection and copayments within the private-education sphere, and was 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 former President Michelle Bachelet to Congress on 1 October 2014 included a 27.5% increase in public investment. Public education received a funding increase of 10.2%, largely dedicated to nurseries, kindergartens, public-school infrastructure and training programs for teachers. As one of the programmatic focuses of the former government of President Bachelet, the past national budgets included an increase in educational spending. In 2018, the current government under President Sebastián Piñera continued this trend with an increase of 5.9% in comparison with the fiscal year 2017. However, a significantly lower increase of 2.9% (roughly equal to inflation) is foreseen for educational spending in 2019.

In January 2018, three months before Piñera's inauguration, the Congress adopted a tuition-free policy for university education ("gratuidad"), professional institutes and technical training centers after some modifications to Bechelet's initiative were made by the Senate and objections against one article by the Constitutional Court were resolved. Thanks to the new law, 60% of students from lower-income families who study in institutions attached to this benefit will not have to pay tuition fees.

The effects of the latest reforms, especially regarding coverage of higher education and quality of the public education system as a whole, will be reliably measurable in the medium and long term. Nonetheless, they can be seen as an important step toward more equitable access to (higher) education and an improvement regarding the quality standards of public education.

Citation:

Education budgeting

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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. 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.

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.

The new government has not yet given any sign of having a significant interest in this policy field.

Latvia

Score 5

Latvia has a relatively well-educated population and performs reasonably well in international comparisons, such as PISA. The 2015-2018 PISA results show that performance in the most significant indicators is now at the OECD average or below.

Key challenges to the education system include a shrinking population, a high rate of early retirement among teachers and a level of public funding significantly lower than the OECD average. Furthermore, around 45% of primary to upper secondary school teachers are at least 50 years old in Latvia. Consequently, a large number of teachers will retire over the next decade. In addition, teachers' salaries remain low, which – paired with the aging teacher population – constitutes a future challenge. Some steps were taken in 2018 to increase the minimum wage for teachers (from €680 to €710 per month), but longer term plans remain unclear.

While being successful in making upper secondary education nearly universal (88% of adults have attained an upper secondary level of education), Latvia lags behind other OECD countries in vocational education. In contrast, access to tertiary education has expanded remarkably in the recent decades. The proportion of 25 to 34 year olds having attained a level of tertiary education (i.e., a bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification) increased from 26% in 2007 to 42% in 2017. Incentives such as better employment prospects remain a strong driving force for young people, as 87% of tertiary educated 25 to 34 year-olds were employed in Latvia in 2017.

When it comes to enrollment rates, Latvia has seen a large increase in early years education. The enrollment rate of three and four year olds increased between 2005

and 2016, from 66% to 89% and from 73% to 93% respectively, which is larger than the average across OECD countries. Furthermore, between 2013 and 2016, incoming international student mobility almost doubled in Latvia, which again is high relative to other OECD countries.

Latvia has exceeded the EU 2020 education target of 40% of 30 to 34 year olds holding a university-level qualification. The IMF has, however, warned that the current system is unsustainable due to a disproportionately high number of institutions, limited financing and falling student numbers. Similarly, in 2017, the Bank of Latvia recommended a drastic reduction in the number of higher-education institutions, from 56 to 20, as well as a reduction in the number of study programs, from over 900 to less than 500. There is some evidence that the process of downsizing the large body of higher education institutions has begun. For example, the Riga Pedagogical Academy was recently merged with the University of Latvia. In addition, steps were taken to close a number of rural schools.

In general, education reform has been high on the government's agenda. The total number of general education schools has dropped from 824 in 2014/2015 to 790 in 2016/2017, while the number of vocational schools has dropped from 63 to 51 over the same period. Further consolidation of the school system is planned. The process of consolidation aims to simultaneously reduce expenditure, and increase school size and quality at the secondary school level, particularly in Latvia's rural regions where schools are often unsustainably small with poor educational outcomes. However, these reforms are opposed by local governments, which fear the loss of jobs that accompany school closures.

A significant curriculum reform has been underway, and was to be implemented on a rolling basis between 2018 and 2022. In 2018, after heated discussions in the parliament, it was agreed that most of the planned changes will only be introduced fully from September 2020.

Finally, as part of the educational reforms, Latvia has continued working on gradually phasing out minority schools. Amendments to the Law on Education and the Law on General Education, which will gradually make Latvian the principle language of instruction in secondary schools by the 2021/22, were approved by the parliament and proclaimed by the president of Latvia in 2018. Though the amendments also maintain support for state-funded education in minority languages at primary school level and support for teaching in minority languages for subjects related to national minorities' culture and history at secondary school level.

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Malta

Score 5

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

Since 2013, the government has implemented a number of programs, some with fiscal support, to encourage more students to continue their educations. These include free support for students at risk of failing and/or who have failed admission to higher-education institutions, as well as the extension of services and facilities at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) to better address learning challenges at different educational levels. Extra summer classes for those wishing to retake regular-level exams and an alternative-learning program have been introduced. The Malta Visual and Performing Arts School was officially inaugurated in 2018, catering specifically to secondary students with special talents in the arts. New vocational subjects have been introduced in schools with the aim of complementing the traditional academic route. A project to provide every child in the fourth year of primary school with a tablet computer is also underway. New schools are being built and others modernized. A staggered removal of exam fees was announced in the 2018 budget.

Despite these investments, attainments are not strong. The 2016 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) ranked Malta 20th for mathematics and 22nd for science out of a total of 39 participating countries, while the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) ranked Malta 40th out of 50 participating countries.

Furthermore, in 2015, just 27.8% of the Maltese population had attained a tertiary level of education compared to an EU-28 average of 38.7%. Malta currently has the highest early leavers rate in the EU, with nearly one in every five Maltese youth between the ages of 18 and 24 withdrawing from education or training. The PISA 2015 survey found that Maltese students had improved their ranking in the subjects of mathematics, reading and science, and noted additionally improved performance among immigrant children and a narrowing of the academic-achievement gender gap.

Malta provides a high level of equitable access to education at all levels. A total of 80% of all schools are free, while various measures exist to support students. Access to higher education remains open for all due to the absence of tuition fees and the availability of stipends for students. The provision of free preschool state facilities for children three years and over has been greatly expanded. Changes to the education system outlined in the last quarter of 2017 have attempted to address remaining concerns. These include the establishment of the consultative National Board for Compulsory Education, enhanced services for children who require additional support, increased investment in applied learning and scholarships for post-graduate studies, and increased financial support to Gozitan and adult students. In 2018, a new post-graduate diploma in the Maltese sign language was launched with the aim of providing greater assistance for deaf children in school.

A proposed Malta University Act intended to render the university more financially secure while making its structures more efficient and transparent met with opposition, and was withdrawn by the government. The same is true of recently proposed changes to the Education Act. A number of administrative challenges have also slowed reforms. These include difficulties with teacher recruitment, high student-teacher ratios and delays in the building of new schools. The education sector more generally has long failed to meet the needs of the economy in various sectors, a fact that should also prompt further reforms.

Citation:

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

https://servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Education_-Science-and-Technology/Education-Services/Primary-and-Secondary-Education/WEB547/default.aspx

Youth Guarantee Malta Implementation Plan p.22

<https://newsbreak.edu.mt/2018/03/16/the-visual-performing-arts-school-is-a-first-in-malta/>

<http://www.digital.edu.mt/>

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

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

Budget Speech 2018 (English) p.71-76

TIMSS 2015 Malta Report (2016) p. vii

PIRLS 2016

European Semester Thematic Factsheets – Tertiary Education Attainment p.7

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PISA 2015 Survey

Claudia Vallejo and Melinda Dooley, (2008) Educational Policies that address Social Inequalities: Country Report Malta p. 16

National Reform Programme Malta 2018 p. 29

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The Malta Independent 04/04/ Government scraps governing board proposal for University of Malta

Times of Malta 6/10/2018 Teachers' strike called off, back to school on Monday

Press Reader 2/11/17 MIM calls for substantial reform in education and accreditation system

Times of Malta 07/03/2018 Third of companies in Malta reporting skills shortage

Times of Malta 24/11/18 Education of deaf children still poor

Mexico

Score 5

Mexico's education system is relatively weak despite significant public investment in the sector. According to the 2017 OECD's Overview of the Education System, education spending in Mexico in 2014 (last year with available data) was 5.4% of the country's GDP. While this is slightly over the OECD's average of 5.2%, it is below other Latin American countries like Argentina, Chile and Colombia. Moreover, the per student expenditure of Mexico (,611 in 2015) is the lowest of all OECD countries. This can explain to a great extent why student performance is lower than in most other OECD countries, including Chile (the other Latin American OECD member). Also, there are strong regional differences in education and some states (e.g., Guerrero) are continuously failing to cope with national minimum standards in education at the primary and secondary levels.

The problem, therefore, appears to be related to resource allocation rather than funding per se. Too much is spent on salaries in contrast to capital spending and an excessive share of the budget is spent in an unaccounted for fashion. Aiming to mitigate the strong political influence of the teachers' union on the Education Ministry, the outgoing Pena Nieto government's recent reforms aimed at facilitating a meritocracy in the teaching profession. However, the reform still lags behind expectations. It created a national organization that would implement periodic evaluations on teacher performances. This was definitely a step in the right direction as it renders teachers and the union accountable for the quality of their teaching. It has also faced severe criticism in several areas. The most relevant is related to evaluation instruments that fail to account for the obstacles faced by teachers in the most rural and deprived areas of the country. Furthermore, investigations revealed that the Education Ministry spent a lot more money on communications than on teacher's training, which undermined the credibility of the reforms.

Some critics argue that the reform's goal is to undermine teachers' unions across the country and increase the centralized control of education. On the other hand, some criticism has been addressed to the remaining power of the teachers' union to control the allocation of positions among teachers. Until she was jailed on corruption charges, teachers' union leader Elba Esther Gordillo was considered politically untouchable as she controlled many votes. However, she was recently released to continue her sentence in home confinement. The same day she was released, the PRI formalized a coalition with Panal (New Alliance Party), which was close to Gordillo and the SNTE union. In August 2018, she was absolved of the corruption charges.

There is evidence of the union collecting salaries for nonexistent teachers. One of the provisions of the reform requires the National Statistics Institute to ascertain how many teachers are actually employed by the Mexican state. Another creates a National Institute for Education Evaluation, which will take on the functions of an inspectorate – tasks for which the union was previously responsible. Mexico's new

president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), promised during his campaign that he would replace the current reform proposal with his own and increase public education spending. The newly elected president is undoing the controversial education reforms launched by his predecessor, which sparked violent protests by teachers. AMLO has proposed a new plan that would scrap teacher evaluations and make public education free.

Private education is generally of much higher quality in Mexico. At every level, privately educated students typically outperform students enrolled in public schools. The private-education sector accounts for 1.4% of GDP in comparison to the state's 5.4%, much of this being spent at the secondary or university level.

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

Citation:

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

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

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/15/mexico-education-reform-controversy-presidential-election>

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Bulgaria

Score 4

The Bulgarian education system is dominated by government-owned institutions and government-set standards at all levels. From a comparative perspective, public spending on education is relatively low. It is projected to increase from 3.7% of GDP in 2017 to 4.0% in 2021.

The quality of education in Bulgaria falls short of the needs of a modern competitive economy. While the PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS scores have slightly improved since 2006, they are still relatively low. With respect to higher education, the QS World University Ranking features only one Bulgarian university, Sofia University, among the world's top universities. However, the university's ranking has worsened and it no longer ranks among the best 800 universities covered.

The level of equity in the Bulgarian education system is average to low. Many children in upper-income families are able to attend private schools, which show better results in the external evaluations after fourth, seventh and 12th grades. 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.

Citation:

World University Ranking: <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2019>

Greece

Score 4

Education outcomes in Greece are close to the OECD average in math, reading and science. However, student performance on PISA tests have not shown any significant improvement in the last decade. Particularly in science, Greece had the largest decreases among PISA participating countries between 2006 and 2015, in an environment of decreasing public expenditure in education (a 6% decrease between 2014 and 2015).

Tertiary institutions are nominally autonomous, but the Ministry of Education is responsible for their funding as well as the distribution of students to undergraduate programs. Since the mid-1990s, governments have promoted a policy of opening university access, including the opening of admissions to universities and the establishment of new universities and departments.

Obtaining a high school diploma (rather than a vocational school qualification) is an aim sought by almost all families. Such a diploma, combined with success in nationwide university examinations, leads to access to tertiary education. Over time and in particular between 2010 and 2017, participation in tertiary education has increased. This achievement is probably due to the fact that there are no tuition fees for undergraduate studies at the 22 state universities and 14 state polytechnics (Technological Educational Institutes, TEI).

Access to tertiary education is, however, not equitable, as students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are more likely to successfully pass entrance examinations. Moreover, to the extent their parents can afford it, Greek high school students receive extensive private tutoring before nationwide university entrance examinations. This reflects a cultural contradiction. While tertiary education is an entirely public-sector activity (i.e., university students pay neither tuition fees nor textbook costs and private universities are officially banned), success in entering universities depends on private tutoring.

In 2016 and 2017, the Syriza-ANEL government shifted more resources to education (for hiring new university lecturers), but other reforms have stalled or even been reversed – especially in tertiary education. Competency tests to pass a class (or grade) in elementary and high school have all but been abolished, timid efforts for teacher evaluation were largely abandoned, and the status of vocational training (in technical and professional high schools) has been further degraded to the benefit of general education in high schools (this latter trend has persisted for decades).

Meanwhile, the age-old patronage-based allocation of education resources continued. The Greek state spends less on education (4.3% of GDP) than the EU average (4.7%). In addition, public funds are misspent: the allocation of teachers in public schools and lecturers in university departments is often uneven, university libraries are under-resourced and housing for students is far from adequate. The distribution of infrastructure among university departments is generally unequal and academic and administrative staff are underpaid.

The education system is extremely top-heavy, with public resources channeled to sustain a large number of state universities and polytechnics, while private resources are used to pay for “cramming schools” which prepare 11th and 12th grade pupils for the nationwide university entrance examinations. It is unsurprising that Greece is ranked among the lowest in the OECD with regard to expenditure on pre-primary education. The primary and secondary education system is unevenly structured and resourced, while there remains a national fascination with university entrance examinations.

The quality of education across Greek universities is very uneven. Some university departments have a long tradition of excellence, such as the Athens Law School and most of the engineering departments of the National Technical University of Athens. Many other schools, however, including most polytechnics, are below standard.

In the period under review, the Ministry of Education introduced several measures that further reduce the autonomy of higher education institutions. In detail, the government again changed the law on university education, as it had done in the previous period. Major policy shifts included merging departments of polytechnics, which are scattered all over Greece, with nearby universities. This major reorganization was launched almost overnight and without prior planning or consultation with the affected universities.

As economic stagnation prevails, salary, pension and welfare benefit increases cannot be offered by the incumbent government. A solution to the government’s declining popularity has been the distribution of non-monetary favors. Examples include the symbolic renaming of polytechnics to universities, their “presidents” to “rectors” and the overnight transformation of professors of polytechnics into university professors.

In summary, Greece’s education system is one of the most centralized among OECD countries, with education policy suffering from politicization and a lack of policy continuity. The economic crisis and government policy have further exacerbated the mismatch between the allocation of resources and actual needs. Thus, the divergence between employment and education trends has worsened (for more, see Labor Market Policy).

Citation:

Information on the performance of Greece’s educational system is based on data provided on this SGI platform. Data on public expenditure on education is drawn on Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics->

explained/index.php?title=File:Total_general_government_expenditure_on_education,_2016_(%25_of_GDP_%25_of_total_expenditure).png
 PISA / OECD 2015 Results <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

Poland

Score 4

As one of its first measures, PiS had reversed the controversial obligatory lowering of the school age and made it possible for parents to send their children to school at the age of seven, as was the case until 2014. On 4 September 2017, with the start of the new school year, another new law on education entered into force, despite massive protests against it by the teachers' union ZNP (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego), which collected more than 900,000 signatures for a referendum against the reform. Under the terms of the new law, the lower secondary or middle schools (gimnazjum) introduced in 1999 will be closed by 2019, and the previous two-tier school system (eight-year primary school followed by upper secondary school for another four years or vocational education) will be reinstated. The reform has been badly prepared, and the costs of this lack of preparation will be borne by local administrations at the lowest (gmina) level, and teachers, parents and students. Most experts fear that the reduction in the duration of universal general education will increase inequality in educational outcomes. Criticism has also been leveled against government attempts to change the curricula with a view to rewriting Polish history, removing many liberal and cosmopolitan texts and values from the core of teaching programs, and returning to old-fashioned teaching methods. Supervisory school authorities have been staffed with people close to the governing PiS party.

As for higher education, Minister of Science and Higher Education Jarosław Gowin presented a first major reform bill in September 2017. Two of its central aims, the reduction in the overall number of university students and the promotion of the so-called STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), have been controversial. In June 2018, the Sejm passed a second, rather comprehensive bill on higher education that covers issues as diverse as the financing of universities and student loans. It aims to diversify the missions of vocational and academic higher-education institutions, in part through the creation of different subsidy-distribution systems. Teachers and university personnel have protested, considering it to be an ill-conceived, poorly prepared and expensive education reform.

Citation:

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

Kaluza, A. (2018): Die Reform des Schulsystems in Polen. Polen-Analysen Nr. 224, Darmstadt/ Bremen (<http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen224.pdf>).

Wojniak, J., M. Majorek (2018): Polish education system under 2017 reform:

Assumptions, aims and controversies. SHS Web of Conferences 48, 010432 (<https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184801043>)

Romania

Score 4

Romania's ailing education system was a major reason for Romania's poor showing in the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index. The Dăncilă government's approach to education policy has been two-pronged, largely focusing on investments in infrastructure and increases in teachers' wages. In 2018, the government reported that it had completed investments in 145 schools and 45 childcare and daycare facilities. Furthermore, teachers' incomes experienced an increase by nearly 40% increase. Both changes might help to limit the drain of qualified teachers, a key obstacle to improving education in Romania. However, their effects are limited by the failure of the government to launch a more comprehensive reform of the education system and to address structural issues such as the outdated curriculum and the disparate access in rural and urban areas. Education policy has continued to suffer from frequent changes at the head of the ministry of education. Three different ministers held office during the period under review.

Citation:

World Bank, Human Capital Project (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital>).

Slovakia

Score 4

The Slovak education system has suffered from a number of weaknesses. While public spending on education has risen, its level is still among the lowest in the European Union. The teaching profession is unattractive, therefore the graduates tend to opt for different, better paid jobs. There are huge regional disparities in teaching outcomes, and students from socially disadvantaged groups tend to achieve only half the points of their peers from socially more favorable environments. Vocational education has been neglected since the fall of communism and universities focus on non-technical education. As a result, the education system is insufficiently geared to increasing Slovakia's economic potential in that Slovakia faces a shortage of skilled workers needed for its industry-oriented economy. In 2015, Slovakia reintroduced a dual vocational education training system, but the implementation is slow and interest among potential participants remains limited. At the beginning of 2018, there were only 2,500 students and 70 companies involved. Tertiary educational attainment has improved, but remains below EU average and quality control in higher education does not meet international standards. The implementation of the anti-segregation legislation adopted mid-2015 in order to improve education for Roma children has been hindered by low teacher participation and a lack of teachers able to teach in multicultural settings.

After the 2016 elections the government, as one of its priorities, announced the drafting of a 10-year National Education and Training Development Program by the end of 2016. However, the finalization and implementation of the reform program

was delayed by the resignation of Minister of Education Peter Plavčan and his replacement by Martina Lubyová in August 2017. At the beginning of 2018, Lubyová dissolved the Institute of Education Policy (IVP), a major analytical pillar of the ministry, and dismissed its head. After harsh criticism, the minister eventually backtracked and promised to restore the IVP. This episode illustrates the administrative chaos and the lack of political consensus that have haunted education policy in Slovakia.

Citation:

European Commission (2018): Education and Training Monitor 2018: Slovakia. Luxembourg (https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/education-and-training-monitor-2018-slovakia-report_en).

Hungary

Score 3

Since the second Orbán government assumed office in 2010, the education system has undergone major changes. Spending has been cut, competencies and monitoring duties have been centralized, private and religious schools have been strengthened, and secondary education has been restructured with a view to strengthening vocational education. While the quality of public education has declined, the children of the “royal court” have attended horrifically expensive private schools that remain out of the financial reach of average citizens.

The government’s efforts to exercise control over universities has proceeded over a series of several steps. Under the second Orbán government, the University of Public Service (Nemzeti Közzolgálati Egyetem, NKE) was established and tasked with controlling public administration and, to some extent, legal education. In addition, the government appointed “chancellors” in all universities. The third Orbán government passed a new act on higher education in April 2017 that targeted the Central European University (CEU), the most prestigious institute of higher education in Hungary, in an effort to force it out of the country. Massive protests both inside and outside Hungary, including threats of an infringement procedure on behalf of the EU, led the government to amend the act in October 2017, without really giving up on its goal of disturbing the work of the CEU. Under the fourth Orbán government, government control over the higher education sector has continued with the transfer of the prestigious Corvinus University from the Ministry of Human Resources (which is the successor to the Ministry of Education), to the newly created Ministry of Innovation and Technology. The goal here is to transform Corvinus University into a “private” university for a new business elite that is loyal to the government. The privatization of higher education has also been favored by the establishment of a new system of “private” universities with a clear pro-government profile that derives its resources from various foundations established by the Hungarian National Bank (e.g., Neumann János University in Kecskemét). So far, the Orbán government’s impact on universities has had a negative effect on teaching and research quality and on Hungarian higher education’s international reputation.

Turkey

Score 3

In Turkey, children typically attend pre-primary education starting at age three, and the programs last between one and three years. Compulsory education begins at age five/six and ends at age 17. Turkey has made significant progress in increasing access to education. In the 2016 school year, although the pre-primary education enrolment rate was quite low at 30.3%, Turkey achieved almost universal primary-school enrollment. Secondary-school enrollment was 85.5% 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. Vocational education and training (VET) programs are available to students who leave the education system after primary school. The standard length of VET programs is four years, with most of the four years spent in workplaces. Finally, the percentage of the population aged 25 – 34 with a tertiary level qualification was 30.5% in 2016.

The gender-based enrollment gap has nearly disappeared for primary education and has narrowed significantly for secondary education. The Gender Gap Report 2017 emphasized that 92.6% of women and 98.6% of men are literate, the enrollment rate in primary education is 93.7% for women and 94.6% for men, the enrollment rate in secondary education is 85.5% for women and 87.2% for men, and the enrollment rate in tertiary education is 88.3% for women and 101% for men. Furthermore, pre-primary education and higher education enrollment rates are increasing rapidly. However, Turkey ranked only 101 out of 144 countries for educational attainment.

Despite announcements on the issue, the government continued to refrain from strengthening universities’ autonomy, which had deteriorated after the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016. The aftermath of the failed coup attempt had a severe impact on academic freedoms. During this period, according to the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, a large number of academics were dismissed through appended lists in emergency decrees, without any due process or judicial remedy.

Citation:

Commissioner for Human Rights (2017) ‘Human Rights in Turkey – The Urgent Need for a New Beginning’, Council of Europe (March 10 2017).

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018) ‘Turkey’ in Education at a Glance 2018, OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris: OECD

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