Education Report

Education Policy

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2022

SGI Sustainable Governance Indicators

BertelsmannStiftung

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.

Canada

Score 9

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 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, released in December 2019 and covering results for 2018 results, showed that Canadian students score well above the OECD average in reading (fourth place among 77 countries), science (sixth place) and mathematics (10th place). Research has emphasized how these strong results have come without the existence of a federal ministry of education (Wallner, 2014).

Equity in access to education is impressive. A very high proportion of Canada's population has some post-secondary education, thanks in part to the extensive development of community colleges. There are many educational second chances for Canadian youth. The high school completion rate is also high. 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 contributes grant money to post-secondary students with financial need. It also offers grants for education through a Registered Education Savings Plan if parents also contribute. Moreover, there exists federal and provincial loans programs.

Despite the strengths of the Canadian education system, a major challenge is the gap in educational attainment between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Citation:
Jennifer Wallner, Learning to School. Federalism and Public Schooling in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

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 all education levels are above the international average.

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 at public institutions is free at all levels and there are various social support measures for students, such as free school lunches and transport through school buses. Vocational education and training (VET) students have access to subsidized dormitories and there are needs-based allowances for university students.

Interestingly, while tertiary-level education is generally associated with improved employability and higher salaries, this appears less true in Estonia than elsewhere. 30% of registered unemployed persons have completed higher education, while 27% have completed VET (Töötukassa 2021), which highlights a mismatch between the education system and labor market situation. Recent policy measures strengthening links between education and training and the labor market (e.g., involving companies and social partners in VET curricula development, which includes entrepreneurship skills in university curricula, and providing adults with skill levels better access to lifelong learning) have sought to ensure that the provision of education keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy.

Citation:
Töötukassa (2021). Majandusaasta aruanne 2020. Tallinn. https://www.tootukassa.ee/sites/tootukassa.ee/files/tootukassa_aastaaruanne_2020.pdf (accessed 02.01.2022)

Finland

Score 8

Governance of the education system in Finland is shared between central and local authorities. The Finnish government defines and sets educational priorities. Meanwhile, municipalities (local authorities) maintain and support schools and daycare centers, and have significant responsibility for organizing education, defining educational curricula, funding and hiring personnel. A national Education and Research Development Plan outlines education policy priorities every four years, and guides the government when it is preparing and implementing education policies. Social and political agreement on the value of education has provided stability on the structure and key features of the education system. Decisions in

schools are made by either the local government or the school, depending on how decision-making is organized in the municipality.

Centered 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 even 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 grow significantly. 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.

Finland's expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP (for all education levels combined) is above the OECD average, with one of the highest shares of public funding among OECD countries (OECD 2015). The government's education policy facilitates learning for everyone and allocates resources effectively across the different levels of education (e.g., preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary). In Finland, students complete nine years of basic education (comprehensive school), with the system focusing on equity and preventing low achievement. At upper-secondary level, students can choose between general education and vocational education and training options, both of which can lead on to tertiary education.

Recently, compulsory education has been extended to ages six to 18, from ages seven to 16 previously. Attainment rates in upper-secondary and tertiary education are higher than the OECD average, with one of the OECD's highest enrollment rates in upper-secondary vocational education and training (VET) programs. School dropout rates are lower in Finland than in other EU member states, but are higher than the country's average among people with an immigrant background. In Finland, the lack of tuition fees combined with universal access to study grants (covering both living costs and housing) and student loans guarantee equitable access to education. However, the children of parents who themselves attended higher education institutions, and who have above-average incomes, still have a higher likelihood of studying at university.

Adults (16- to 65-year-olds) in Finland were among the most skilled of any participating country in the Survey of Adult Skills, with younger adults (16- to 24-year-olds) scoring higher than all adults in Finland and young adults in other countries.

Citation:
Education and Research 2011-2016. A development plan. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2012:3;
“Education Policy Outlook Finland,” oecd.org/edu/highlightsFinland.htm;
“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
https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/rinne/government-programme/finland-that-promotes-competence-education-culture-and-innovation

OECD, 2015. “Education Policy Outlook Finland: Finland.” Accessed 18.12.2020.
http://www.oecd.org/education/highlightsfinland.htm

Germany

Score 8

Since the first PISA study in 2000, the OECD has often repeated its criticism that educational attainments in Germany are relatively poor for a country of this income level and that educational success strongly depends on pupils’ social backgrounds. However, Germany has shown some improvements since 2000. In the latest PISA test from 2018, the country ranked slightly above the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science, but fell somewhat relative to 2012 (OECD 2018). The impact of students’ socioeconomic background has lessened and is now comparable to the OECD average (OECD 2021). School funding is generous with respect to teacher salaries but less so regarding infrastructure. Teachers in Germany have the highest average salaries within the OECD, with levels at 1.7 times that of the OECD average in 2020 (OECD 2021). Access to preschool early education (ECE) has considerably improved over the past two decades. Today, Germany has more children enrolled in ECE services both aged under three and at pre-primary level than on average in the OECD (OECD 2021).

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields of study are attractive in Germany, a total of 35% of German university graduates hold a degree in one these fields, which are of particular importance for a country’s technological and innovation capacities, compared to a 25% average across the OECD (OECD 2019). However, women are highly underrepresented in the field of engineering. In addition, regular studies report a persistent labor shortage in STEM professions, which suggests that the educational system does not fully meet the demand of labor markets (Anger et al. 2021).

In addition, the proportion of young people with tertiary education in 2020 still lags behind the OECD average (OECD 2021). In 2000, only 26% of young adults (aged 25-34) held a tertiary degree whereas it increased to 35% in 2020. Despite this increase, tertiary attainment in Germany remains below the OECD average of 45%, and is mostly a result of its strong vocational education system that offers a reliable path into qualified employment as well. The share of upper secondary or post-secondary education again is high compared to the OECD average (52% to 40%).

Concerning vocational training, Germany's education system is strong and provides skilled workers with good jobs and income prospects. The rate of post-secondary vocational education and training is about 20%, which is much higher than the OECD average. All in all, the German education system excels in offering competencies relevant for labor market success, resulting in a very low level of youth unemployment. 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.

Before the pandemic, education sector employees had only limited experience with digital teaching formats. The most important problem on the eve of the pandemic was the lack of technological equipment and the respective lack of technological training for teaching staff. The consequence was that German schools were significantly less prepared than schools in northern Europe or the Baltic states for the sudden need to shift to remote education formats in the spring of 2020. However, thanks to massive federal and state-level digital investment packages and rapid learning curves during the pandemic, the situation has improved. By the time the second wave of the pandemic hit at the end of 2020 and resulted in national school closures, the conditions for digital learning formats had clearly improved, both as a result of greater access to digital hardware and substantial learning effects among educators, children and their families. However, as was the case in other OECD countries, educationally disadvantaged groups were often left behind in remote learning contexts because of their lack of access to digital equipment and weak independent learning skill sets. (Grewening et al. 2020).

Citation:
Anger, Christina, Enno Kohlisch, and Axel Plünnecke, 2021: MINT-Herbstreport 2021: Mehr Frauen für MINT gewinnen - Herausforderungen von Dekarbonisierung, Digitalisierung und Demografie meistern. https://www.iwkoeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Studien/Gutachten/PDF/2021/MINT-Herbstreport_2021.pdf (accessed 6. February 2022)

Grewenig, Elisabeth / Lergetporer, Philipp / Werner, Katharina / Woessmann, Ludger / Zierow, Larissa (2020): COVID-19 and Educational Inequality: How School Closures Affect Low- and High-Achieving Students. Munich: CESifo Working Paper No. 8648, available at https://www.cesifo.org/de/publikationen/2020/working-paper/covid-19-and-educational-inequality-how-school-closures-affect-low

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OECD (2019): Education at a Glance 2019, Germany, Country Note.

OECD (2020): Education at a Glance 2020, OECD Indicators, www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm/?refcode=20190209ig

South Korea

Score 8

Education policy is a key priority for the South Korean government, and investments have yielded above-average performance on Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests and the OECD's highest tertiary education rate (69.8%) for

those aged 25 to 34. However, Korea's level of public expenditure (3.8% of GDP) on primary-to-tertiary education is below the OECD average (4.1%), though private expenditure (1.3%) is higher than the OECD average (0.8%). Although general access to education is very good, admission processes for elite universities are remain extremely competitive and unfair, as they favor children from privileged families. Many Koreans spend a large share of their income on private schools and tutoring, a practice that puts low-income households at a disadvantage. A 2020 government survey found that 75% of Korean students participate in some form of private education. Average monthly spending is $377, but middle- and higher-income families spend five times more on private education than do lower-income families. This reliance on privately financed education leads to education inequality in Korea, which has been exacerbated by pandemic-related school closures and distance learning. To address the widening gap between the strongest (generally more privileged) and weakest (generally less privileged) students, the Ministry of Education temporarily assigned instructors to ensure that underprivileged students (29,000 primary; 2,300 secondary) did not fall behind due to COVID-19. More structurally, President Moon vowed to do away with elite schools – either by closing or converting them into public schools. This reform stalled after a group of elite schools filed a petition with the Constitutional Court in 2020 to block the measure. The court's decision is expected in 2022.

While reforms of elite schools and the university entrance examination system have initially faltered due to insufficient public consultation and support, educational reforms have been folded into the New Deal launched by Moon in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, the Human New Deal includes measures to upgrade and reorient teaching to foster critical thinking, analytic skills, creativity, interpersonal skills and digital technology competence – so that human resources are better aligned with Korea's transition toward green and digital economies. To promote inclusivity in this period of transition, the Human New Deal will provide specialized support for disadvantaged learners (e.g., disabled, multi-racial, rural and low-income people).

Citation:
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University World News. Is South Korea in a Higher Education Access Trap? July 14, 2017. http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170711111525929
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Spain

Score 8

Despite significant improvements in the education system since the 1980s, educational outcomes in Spain are low compared to those of other OECD countries. The main reasons for the poor results, although the causes differ strongly across regions, include a curriculum that is widely regarded as being out of date, poor teaching quality and the large number of students who repeat years. Although early school-leaving rates continue to decrease (30.9% in 2009; 16% in 2020) figures are still very high (the EU average in 2020 was 9.9%). The employment rate among recent graduates is still below the EU average, although the 2019 rate was the highest since the beginning of the 2008 financial crisis.

As result of the COVID-19 outbreak, all education centers were closed from March until the end of May 2020, and in-person education was replaced by distance learning. Schools were well equipped with digital infrastructure and tools, and – even though teachers were not fully prepared – their reaction was overwhelmingly positive. Autonomous communities prepared digital learning platforms for teachers and students. The schools have remained open since September 2020. However, the pandemic posed significant challenges for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Education authorities estimate that around 10% of the country's 8.2 million students did not have access to digital devices or the internet at home. The Ministry of Education, city councils and NGOs launched initiatives to alleviate the digital divide. Some companies contributed by providing free tablets, smartphones and broadband access.

The RRP includes specific measures in the area of education and skills. The main goals include enhancing the digital skills of teachers and pupils, boosting vocational training, and extending nursery education for children up to three years old. In 2021, due to European funding, transfers from the central government to the autonomous communities for education increased by 70.2%, and the share of public money allocated to maintenance grants for students from poor backgrounds was also increased.

The education system is based on a strong commitment to inclusiveness and values at all levels of education. The government's commitment to equity is reflected in the new Organic Education Law, the LOMLOE (Organic Law Amending the Organic Law of Education) which came into force on 19 January 2021. The law includes measures to ensure that students from low-income families are equally represented in public and semi-private centers (i.e., centers that receive state funding, many of

which are run by Catholic groups). Extracurricular activities that must be paid for will not be allowed within school hours, and city councils will be able to cede public land only for the construction of public education centers. Digitalization and the development of digital competences are together one of the 10 priorities of the law, which will also provide a reference framework for digital teacher competence. However, like all the other education laws before, the law (which was approved with 177 votes in favor, 148 against and 17 abstentions) failed to produce political consensus, with identity issues (language and religion) again serving as the main conflict lines.

In December 2021, the parliament approved a new Vocational Training Law which aims to create 200,000 new vocational training places by 2023. A total of €5.47 billion has been allocated to implement the law between 2022 and 2025, €1.55 billion of which is coming from the EU Recovery Plan.

Citation:
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Consejo Escolar de España (2022): Situación actual de la educación en España a consecuencia de la pandemia`Current situation of education in Spain after the pandemic] https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:d6fb3623-2fee-47b3-899b-f9c47ae48ab8/situacion-educacion-covid–avance-15-ene-.pdf

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. Two out of three young people undertake basic occupational training. The state plays an active role in orchestrating the vocational training system (Busemeyer et al. 2022, see in particular the section on Switzerland). 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 (universities, universities of applied sciences and professional education institutions) more than tripled between 1999/2000 and 2020/21. 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 2017/2018, almost a fifth of all students were at the tertiary level (compared to 11% in 1999/2000). For the educational year of 2020/21, 61% of all students in tertiary education attended universities, 31% attended universities of applied sciences and 8% professional education institutions. While only 50% of those entitled to attend universities of applied sciences did so in 2000, this share increased to 64% by 2017. The share of female students in tertiary education increased from 39% in 1990 to 52% by 2020/21. In 2019, 41% of the population had completed tertiary education; in 2000, this figure was at 26%.

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.

Higher education in Switzerland is affected by the federal system. Whereas cantons such as Geneva, Basel-City and Ticino have followed international trends favoring general qualifications for university entrance, other cantons and in particular the German-speaking parts of the country, have focused on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the canton of Geneva 34% of the respective age group acquire the matura, a secondary school exit diploma, which allows them to go directly to a university or university of applied sciences. In contrast, in the canton of Uri, only 13% gain direct access to a university or university of applied sciences (2019). 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. Men with vocational training in particular have similarly high employment rates over the course of their working life as do 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. Average figures indicate that workers with vocational education earn about 60% of that earned by a worker with a university degree (Korber and Oesch, 2016; BASS 2017).

With regard to digital skills, 43% of the population possess digital skills, according to Eurostat and the OECD. Switzerland lags top performing countries, such as the Netherlands and Norway (around 50%), but is ahead of neighboring countries (Austria 36%, Germany 37% and France 29%) (OECD 2019). Given the competencies of cantons, national plans and policies for digital education are limited. A study by the European Commission showed that learning outcomes on all three school levels target six out of eight basic areas of digital competence. This is fewer than in the highest performing countries (e.g., Estonia), almost equal to neighboring

Austria, and slightly more than in Germany and Italy (European Commission 2019: 43).

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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Cyprus

Score 7

Primary education in Cyprus is almost exclusively public, as is 80% of secondary education. Public and private institutions offer tertiary education, while significant numbers of Cypriots study abroad. While literacy is near 100% for young persons, the rate of students leaving school early (11.5%) is higher than the EU average (9.9%). This is due to very high rates among non-Cypriots. Reforming education and solving chronic problems has been slow. This remains a challenge as it depends on the political and ideological antagonisms of successive governments, and the diverse interests of the stakeholders. The implementation of executive decisions or new laws is often problematic because of stakeholder reactions. Talks between teacher unions and the Ministry of Education have been in progress since 2018.

Schooling from the pre-primary level to the age of 15 is compulsory. The kindergarten enrollment rate is 90.1% (2020), with kindergarten places offered mainly by public and communal authorities, while nurseries are mostly private. Vocational schools, apprenticeship programs, and other education and professional training schemes are provided by public authorities and educational institutions,

among other organizations. Attendance rates remain lower than the EU27 average. Depending on income criteria, tertiary-level students receive a modest allowance. While public education is free, parents pay various education-related expenses.

The pandemic has revealed weaknesses and deficiencies in organization, digital skills and infrastructure. Actions under the Recovery and Resilience Fund aim to address these and other significant challenges. They include responding to the needs of immigrant children and adults to facilitate social inclusion, reallocation of resources to increase participation in ICT and STEM subjects, new infrastructure and plans to improve vocational education and training (VET), and improving the skills match between education and the market.

The high expenditure on education (5.4% of GDP compared to an EU27 average of 4.7%) has to be justified against the achieving educational outcomes, which are still considered poor.

Citation:
1. European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2021, Cyprus, December 2021, https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/cyprus.html#B8

Denmark

Score 7

Education spending in Denmark is among the 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. Longer school days, more assisted learning, lessons in Danish and math, and the teaching of foreign languages (English made compulsory from level 1, German and French from level 5) were also part of the policy.

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 – particularly female – students perform relatively better than first-generation students. Efforts are made through an "allocations mechanism" designed to ensure a more socioeconomically diverse student body in upper secondary education contexts.

Vocational and university education has also been on the political agenda, but challenges remain both in relation to the intake of students and lifelong learning issues. Universities have been under pressure to shorten the length of study and channel students into educational programs oriented toward business. Recent efforts have been aimed at ensuring a more geographically balanced access to educational institutions, but the extent to which this measure will compromise quality is subject to debate.

Since 2016, the education sector has been affected by the so-called reprioritizing contribution (omprioritetsbidrag), which has reduced the education budget by 2%. The new Social Democratic government has announced that it would end this annual saving target and transfer the money back to the education system, although the precise mechanism has not yet been determined.

Citation:
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France

Score 7

In many aspects, the French education system can be characterized as rather successful, but in contrast to the past, it fails to integrate and promote the weakest segments of society. In the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study (the next study having been postponed to 2022), the country's results did not improve, but remained slightly above the OECD average, France ranking

20th out of 70 countries. Overall spending on educational institutions amounted to 5.45% of GDP in 2017, slightly above the OECD average. Spending at the preschool level is exemplary. A law adopted in 2019 makes preschool attendance mandatory for all children three years old (écoles maternelles). France now falls slightly below the OECD average public expenditure at the primary level. However, one alarming finding of the PISA assessment is that, more than in any other OECD country, individual success depends on the student's socioeconomic background. 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. This is a major reason for the high rates of youth unemployment in France. However, some improvement has occurred thanks to the boom in training contracts (contrats d'apprentissage) which have tripled in number during the Macron presidency. The government has approached 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 (largely to the 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 decided to cut the number of students per elementary school class by half immediately, reducing the maximum number of students to 12 per class. Second, most of the disputed reforms put in place by the previous socialist government have been dismantled (for instance, the "bi-langues" classes have been reintroduced in secondary schools). Third, international evaluations and rankings (such as the PISA report) have been taken into account and will likely form the basis for further changes. 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: the degree obtained at the end of upper secondary education (baccalauréat) will become less complex, integrating a series of successive tests at school and a simpler final exam; and a new process for registering students at universities has been set up, based on both students' requests and evaluations by the universities themselves. This system has proven to work well and pushes parents, students and professors to develop strategies and make choices well before the final year of secondary school.

Another important development took place in September 2019. The Constitutional Court declared that fee increases were unconstitutional, and affirmed that education should be offered for free at all levels; however, it did state that a "modest"

registration fee would be allowable. The education system has been deeply shaken by the pandemic, but on the whole demonstrated resilience. Among the remaining issues one can mention are the low appeal of teaching positions due to relatively low salaries, the difficult situation of schools in some suburban areas and the excessive student dropout rates at the university level.

Citation:
OECD: Education at a glance 2019, Country Note France
OECD: Education Policy Outlook France, Paris, June 2020

Israel

Score 7

Over the last decade (2010–2020), Israel's education spending has increased by 25%, substantially more than the OECD average of 9% increment. However, due to population growth, spending per pupil remained stable. Teachers' salaries have increased significantly in recent years and are now well above the national average salary. A possible reason for the salary increases is the rise in tertiary and quaternary education among teachers. This has led to some improvement in two major shortcomings in the education system: the relatively high number of pupils per teacher and the relatively low skill levels of teachers (Bllas 2020).

The allocation of resources inside the educational system depends on national/religious divisions within it. There are four school streams: three for the Hebrew-speaking community (secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox Jews), and one for the Arabic-speaking community. Most ultra-Orthodox schools do not include the basic curricula elements required by the Ministry of Education due to religious objection and, therefore, receive only 8.8% of the budget, significantly less than their pupil share (18%). While the budget of the Arab school system has increased significantly in recent years, lower-class Jewish pupils are still budgeted almost twice as much as Arabic pupils. These gaps affect the opportunities of these sectors and their achievements (as reflected in PISA tests results), as well as their potential to deal with crises and their financial strength (Dvir 2020).

The gaps mentioned above directly influence the ability of the weaker sectors to handle extreme situations. Defense needs in Israel required the government to create a plan for distance learning. When the coronavirus reached Israel, the educational system was somewhat prepared. For example, the foundation of home learning already existed, while systems and licenses for relevant software were acquired and used by students and teachers (Ministry of Education 2020). Despite these efforts, moving toward distance learning was not smooth. Some emergency protocols for rockets attack were relevant, but did not match perfectly to the pandemic. For example, pupils without access to a computer were supposed to team with their neighbors for mutual learning, which was impossible under social distance requirements.

To allow for the continuation of schooling during the pandemic, the education system moved to online teaching. While this allowed pupils to continue studying during the pandemic, it also exacerbated inequality among publics. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2019, about 24% of households with children in Israel did not have access to the internet and 16% did not have a personal computer at home. About 78% of all Jewish households have an internet connection, but 51% of Arab households do not. Among Jews, the lack of internet connection is highest among the ultra-Orthodox community (Ilan 2020).

In response to these gaps, the Ministry of Education purchased 150,000 computers and provided internet connections (Kadri-Ovadia 2021). Although the government took measures to support those in need, criticism about the situation was still plentiful because learning via online platforms required a large amount of involvement by parents, who were not always available to help with online studying (Odem 2020).

Because of the social distancing policy, pre-primary schools were fully closed for an average of 64 days between 1 January 2020 and 20 May 2021. Meanwhile, primary schools were closed for 80 days, lower secondary for 139 days and upper secondary general schools for 112 days. In comparison, the respective closures were 55, 78, 92 and 101 days on average across the OECD (OECD 2021). The latest developments, in addition to former gaps in the system, created a massive challenge and increased the differences between the educational sectors.

Efforts to maintain a routine are necessary because there is a direct connection between graduating secondary and upper education, and a skilled labor force. The Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that only 69.7% of all pupils graduated from secondary education in 2019. According to statistics published by the Education Ministry, the high-school graduation rate in the 2019–2020 school year stood at 73.4%, despite the challenges faced by the education system.

Citation:
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Lithuania

Score 7

The educational system in Lithuania is comprised of the following stages: 1) early childhood education and care (pre-primary and pre-primary 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 has a very high and increasing level of tertiary attainment. Its rate of early school leaving is also below the EU average, at 5.6% in 2020. 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%. Pre-primary education attendance is also low, with only 78.3% of Lithuanian children aged four to six attending pre-primary 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. According to the most recent PISA report, released in early December 2019,

Lithuania's students continued to score lower than the OECD average in the areas of reading, mathematics and science. In addition, the share of students in Lithuania performing at the highest level of proficiency in at least in one subject was lower than 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 is partly associated with young people's insufficient skills and lack of practical experience. In a staff working document, the European Commission recommended improving quality and efficiency at all levels of education and training, including adult education.

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). Spending on education in Lithuania has been above or around the EU average (4.6% of GDP in 2019 compared to an EU average of 4.7%). However, this expenditure is spread across a large number of institutions, and is often used to maintain buildings instead of to improve education quality. The salaries of researchers and teachers have been increasing in the last several years but still remain insufficient. While the country has a relatively high figure with regard to mean years of schooling (Lithuania was ranked 10th out of 141 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index 2019 in this area), it is relatively difficult to find skilled employees (in the same report, Lithuania was ranked only 124th out of 141 countries in this area). Therefore, Lithuanian authorities should improve the labor market relevance of education and training in order to increase the efficiency of resource allocation.

The total number of school graduates declined significantly in recent years due to demographic changes, from around 29,500 in 2010 to 14,100 in 2020 – a reduction by half compared to 2010. The absolute number of foreign students studying in Lithuania has been increasing, but this population still makes up 6% of tertiary students. Decreasing student numbers have intensified pressure on the network of higher-education institutions, especially among less popular institutions. For example, in 2016, there were an estimated 2.9 higher-education institutions per 10,000 students in Lithuania, while there were 1.2 per 10,000 students in Finland and 1.1 in Ireland. In addition, more than 50 (out of 614) study programs in Lithuanian universities and colleges failed to attract enough student applications, and thus may be abolished in the future. Although this has led to proposals to consolidate the network of Lithuanian state universities, and vocational education and training institutions, progress in implementing this reform has been slow.

The Šimonytė government has laid out an educational reform plan, placing a priority on improving access and the quality of education. The government aims to reduce the number of secondary schools with an eye to increasing efficiency and, even more importantly, ensuring an adequate level of quality throughout the country. Furthermore, the government has rolled out a plan to create so-called Millennium schools. These schools would have modern infrastructure and emphasize state-of-the-art learning tools, such as leadership and informal education. By 2025, the plan is to have 150 such schools, which would in turn set a good example for others. Private schools and schools that select students by competition will not be eligible for the program. The national Recovery and Resilience Plan (to be financed by the EU economic recovery fund) foresees reform measures in the field of education, with goals including digitalization and improvement in educational performance. This may improve the chances of advancing those reforms and continuing them after the next parliamentary elections, which are scheduled for 2024.

Citation:
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New Zealand

Score 7

New Zealand’s education system performs well on a number of indicators. According to the 2021 OECD Education at a Glance report, New Zealand spent the OECD’s fourth-highest proportion of its GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions (6.2% of GDP, compared to 4.9% on average across OECD countries). A total of 90% of three- to five-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education, care programs or primary education in New Zealand, compared to 88% on average across OECD countries. The percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who have attained a bachelor’s or equivalent tertiary education degree is among the OECD’s highest (29.1%, rank 3/46) (OECD 2021).

However, at the same time, New Zealand has one of the most unequal education systems in the industrialized world. According to UNICEF’s 2018 Innocenti Report Card, which analyses the gaps between the highest and lowest performing pupils in OECD countries, New Zealand ranks 33rd of 38 for educational equality across

preschool, primary school and secondary school levels. The reading gap at age 10 for New Zealand's best and worst readers puts the country at 230 points, compared to 153 points for the Netherlands – the country with the smallest gap (UNICEF 2018). More recently, UNICEF's 2020 Innocenti Report Card found that only 65% of 15 year olds in New Zealand have basic proficiency in reading and maths, well below the top performers, Estonia (79%), Ireland (78%) and Finland (78%) (UNICEF 2020).

The inequality of the education system has a strong ethnic component, as education outcomes are generally poorer for Māori and Pasifika (Pacific Islander) students. In particular, Māori and Pasifika students are significantly less likely than Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) students to leave the education system with a degree. In the 2018 census, 80.6% of Māori and 83% of Pasifika 15- to 24-year-olds had at least a level 1 qualification or equivalent, compared with 85.8% of 15- to 24-year-olds nationally. Older age groups show an even larger difference, with 73% of Māori and 72.1% of Pasifika 45- to 54-year-olds having at least a level 1 qualification or equivalent, compared with 84.6% of 45- to 54-year-olds nationally (Stats NZ 2020)

Meanwhile, expenditure on tertiary educational institutions as a percentage of GDP is comparatively high (1.7%, rank 7 out of 37 countries) (OECD 2021), although public expenditure is only 0.9%, making it 15th place in the OECD rankings. Moreover, New Zealand's tertiary education system stands out by having one of the largest proportions of international or students enrolled in tertiary education among OECD and partner countries (20.8%, rank 3 out of 44 countries) although this data is from 2018 in the pre-pandemic era (OECD 2021). At that time, international students pumped around $5 billion into the economy annually, making the university sector New Zealand's fifth-largest export earner. However, this dependence on international tuition fees means that the COVID-19 pandemic – and the government's strict border rules – put a real strain on universities' finances (Kenny et al. 2021).

Citation:
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Norway

Score 7

Norway has a tradition of high educational attainment and aims to ensure that all young people obtain 13 years of formal education. The Norwegian labor force is thus one of the most educated in the world, as measured by the share of its working population that has completed secondary or tertiary-level education. Like other Scandinavian countries, the Norwegian government spends a comparatively significant share of its budget on public education. Education is tax-financed and available without fees for everyone and at all levels, including PhD students at state universities. Free education for all is a shared, important policy objective. The state provides both grants and subsidized loans in order to achieve this objective. Most schools and universities are public. Private alternatives exist, but they are primarily financed by the state and run on a non-profit basis. 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 concern is the quality of education in certain subject areas. In the OECD's PISA study, Norwegian students' performance have, for several years, been below the OECD average in math, problem-solving and general 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.

Both the Šarec and Janša governments have slightly increased spending on education. While the Šarec government failed to adhere to a five-year old decision of the Constitutional Court on the public funding of accredited private school programs, the Janša government managed to implement the aforementioned decision of the

Constitutional Court, providing 100% of the funding for the compulsory program and 85% for the extended program in all private schools. The Janša government also announced several additional concessions for selected higher education areas (e.g., media studies, healthcare, social gerontology and the management of smart cities), bringing more competition to the tertiary education sector, a move that has been harshly criticized by some public academics and universities.

In February 2020, a process of modernizing basic and upper secondary general education, and the kindergarten curriculum was started. In particular, the process aims to improve digital and sustainable development competences in basic and upper secondary general education, as well as to improve the integration of migrant children.

Citation:
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Sweden

Score 7

Education policy remains high on the political agenda in Sweden, partly as a result of a low international ranking a few years ago. The highest ranking the Swedish educational system received in the international PISA comparison, which measures the aptitude of 15-year-old students in math, learning comprehension and the natural sciences, was in the year 2000, when the system started. Sweden subsequently slipped in the rankings until 2012 (Ekonomifakta, 2021). As of 2018, the most recent year of available results, the country was ranked at 11th place, which is still not satisfactory for an economy highly dependent on knowledge industries for its economic growth and international competitive advantage.

For this reason, the quality of education is a major concern for politicians as well as for businesses. In order to improve the quality of the Swedish education system, the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) operates seven national development programs focusing on areas such as digitalization, school and work life, systematic quality, and assessment and grading. Substantial resources are also channeled into educational research, with the Swedish Institute for Educational Research (www.skolfi.se) serving as a major funder. Rules granting municipalities responsibility for the provision of schools since 1989, as well as the introduction of a school voucher system in the 1990s, have led to a far-reaching privatization of schools, broad variation in pedagogical approaches and the methods used for teaching and learning, and the implementation of different learning platforms (see Edmark et al. 2014, Hinnerich and Vlachos 2017). In 2020, 84% of the Swedish population was reported to have at least a high school education, above the average of about 79% for all OECD countries (OECD, 2021).

In an effort to reverse a downward trend in terms of schools' and teachers' reputations and pedagogical suitability, the government introduced national certifications for teachers at all school levels in 2011. Only certified teachers are eligible for permanent positions. A new career program for teachers was launched in 2013, providing opportunities for professional development and higher salaries. As a corollary to this, the prognosis of the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) is that there will be a lack of qualified teachers through 2035, mainly at the level of high school professional education and in subjects taught in the 7th to 9th grades (Skolverket, 2021). Concomitantly, the skills required to enter a teachers' education program at universities today are relatively low, hence there is very little competition for entrance into those programs. As a result, new teachers may have only a limited aptitude to teach successfully.

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. 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 services, and where students who seek to continue their education arrive at universities well-prepared. In Sweden, a very large proportion of the population is integrated into the labor market. Contrary to the high official youth unemployment rate, the OECD's NEET indicator (not in employment, education or training) shows that the integration of Swedish young people into the labor market is just as successful as it is in Germany, the country praised for its dual education system.

Another way to assess Sweden's education policy concerns equitable access to education. Education policy has performed rather well in this respect. 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, which could trigger a "race to the bottom" in tertiary education standards. Nevertheless, equitable access to adult education has been realized to a very large extent. Sweden is rather successfully targeting the ambitious goals of lifelong learning, as a high percentage of adults are regularly in contact with further education organizations. In 2020, the number of adults in Sweden with three years or more of post-secondary education was 29%, up from 16% in 2000 (SCB, 2021).

Finally, the government invested in more university places and provided additional financial assistance for prospective students as part of its pandemic response. Meanwhile, education remains high on the political agenda, although performance problems continue to persist.

Citation:
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United Kingdom

Score 7

Education is a competence devolved to the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom, an assignment that long pre-dates the more recent devolutions of power that established the devolved national administrations. In Scotland, for example, the school curriculum, the exam system and the structure of undergraduate university degrees have long differed markedly from those in England. Consequently, it makes little sense to talk in terms of UK education policy and performance. Specifically, the Department for Education (DfE) in the UK government covers only England. In Scotland, a delegated agency of the Scottish government, Education Scotland, is responsible for delivering education and there is a similar agency in Northern Ireland, although local authorities have a primary role in implementation.

The latest PISA results for 2018 showed some improvement for the United Kingdom, with the UK ranking jumping from 22nd to 14th in reading, from 27th to 18th in science and from 15th to 14th in mathematics, and a widening of its advantage compared with the OECD average. Scotland has seen some decline from its previous PISA levels, leading to criticism of the SNP, which has been in power for well over a decade. This is a sensitive matter, because, as an OECD report commissioned by the Scottish government observes, “Scotland has an historic high regard for education.”

The last two decades have seen a succession of initiatives 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 (the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills). 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 suggested 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.

The increasing political salience of education in recent years has seen a concerted effort to improve the quality of education in schools, including the development of new curricula in Wales and Scotland. In England, the DfE and Ofsted were jointly tasked with ensuring the quality of the educational system. In 2015, the DfE proclaimed its intentions to support underperforming schools in England, which was followed by the Education and Adoption Bill that planned to convert failing schools into academies. The Educational Excellence Everywhere whitepaper also extends this to primary schools in England, which were to have been converted into academies by 2020. The government introduced a spending program of £4.3 billion by 2022. This measure aims to reverse the trend of declining education spending, which had fallen by 9% in real terms per pupil between 2009/10 and 2019/20. In addition, the government will focus on further and technical education, and establish 20 institutes of technology. The institutes will offer higher technical education and training in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects).

In the higher education sector, the substantial increase in tuition fees, from £3,300 to levels now in excess of £9,250 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.

International students make up about 20% of students and are thus a considerable source of income for the higher education sector in the country. About 30% of them come from EU member states. As the United Kingdom has left the European Union (which implies a substantial rise in student fees for EU citizens to the level paid by international students), it remains to be seen how these numbers will develop. A 40% fall in applications in 2021 might be influenced by the coronavirus pandemic, but – if it were to stabilize afterward – this would be a substantial loss of income that UK universities will struggle to make up for. Further problems may come from EU nationals finding working for British universities less attractive.

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://ifs.org.uk/publications/15858

United States

Score 7

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, but this is a low rate 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.

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 cut budgets for college loan programs and relaxed accreditation requirements for the often-predatory for-profit higher education sector. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a pause on student loans was enacted. This pause continued during the first year of the Biden administration.

In March 2021, Dr. Miguel Cardona became President Biden's Education Secretary and the new Democratic administration made it clear its goal was to overturn many of Trump's education policies, particularly in areas such as anti-discrimination measures targeting racial and sexual minorities as well as students with disabilities (Waters, 2021). More generally, education equity within a better-funded public education system became a major aspect of the Build Back Better agenda of this Biden administration.

Citation:
http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/09/charter-schools-losing-the-narrative-but-winning-the-data.html
Waters, Laura. 2021. "Biden Pledged to Overturn Trump's Education Policies. So, How's It Going?" Education Post, June 30.
https://educationpost.org/biden-pledged-to-overturn-trumps-education-policies-so-hows-it-going/

Australia

Score 6

The quality of Australia's educational institutions 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 ranking lists as compared to the countries in its region.

Regarding equity, the continued high level of government subsidies to non-government schools means that inequity in schooling outcomes is high. Unsurprisingly, given the high levels of government subsidy, private-school enrolment rates are significantly higher in Australia than the OECD average. Despite subsidies, tuition fees at private schools are often beyond the means of less affluent parents, contributing to 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 2017 – 2027 period. However, following a backlash from the Catholic school sector, which accounts for approximately half the non-government school sector, the government in September 2018 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. For example, since 1 January 2016, Australians living overseas have been required to repay HELP debts on the same terms as those faced by Australian residents.

With regard to efficiency, there is much room for improvement. Australia's educational system is complex, with responsibilities shared between the states and the federal government. Funding for vocational education and training is limited. State and territory governments are highly revenue-constrained, and the federal government has shown little willingness to step up. 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. However, in 2019, concerns were expressed about the sector's reliance on fee-paying international students, especially from China. Some Australian universities derived up to 20% of their income from Chinese students, making them very vulnerable to a downturn in this market. The arrival of COVID-19 saw international student enrolments plummet, with students denied entry to Australia from early on in the pandemic until December 2021. Most universities in Australia have, therefore, suffered financially and continue to do so given that international student numbers appear unlikely to return to pre-COVID-19 levels for some years to come.

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/pb201 3n02.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

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-21/australian-universities-too-dependent-on-chinese-students-report/11427272

https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/media-item/17000-uni-jobs-lost-to-covid-19/

Austria

Score 6

The Austrian educational system does not perform to its potential. Considering Austria's economic position, the country should have a significantly higher number of tertiary 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 Fachhochschulen (universities of applied science, polytechnics), the Austrian educational system continues to be highly socially selective. Parents' social (and educational) status is highly reflected in students' ability to access higher education. This state of affairs violates the concept of social justice and 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. Perhaps ironically, the ÖVP and FPÖ, parties many of whose members hold strong anti-immigrant views, recently increased resources devoted to German language teaching for immigrants in Austrian elementary schools. Ultimately, this can be seen as a reflection of their strong commitment to the idea of an Austrian Leitkultur.

A recent survey (2021) – interviewing teachers, pupils and parents – that focused on the quality of teaching in schools and school infrastructure reported medium-level satisfaction scores (2.8 on a scale of one to five); only 9% of all respondents judged Austrian schools as "very good." Another recent study (2021) involving teachers, pedagogues, pupils and parents reported that, while the coronavirus pandemic put a heavy burden on Austrian schools countrywide, 60% of respondents were convinced that the pandemic seemed likely to become a catalyst for structural reform, particularly digitalization reform. As the coronavirus pandemic wore on, there were

increasing worries among experts and the general public that the government's handling of the COVID-19 challenge in schools, with recurrent "emergency teaching programs" and "digital-only teaching," risked increasing inequality in education and society in the longer run.

Inequity has long been an issue at the level of higher and, in particular, university education. 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 new university reform bill, passed by the ÖVP-Green governing majority in March 2021, increased social inequity in higher education. Among many other things, the law introduced a new regime, obliging students to gain a higher number of ECTS points per semester to continue their studies, which makes it increasingly difficult to combine university education with employment in Austria. There was little change in the perceived overall performance of Austrian universities between 2020 and early 2022, compared to 2017–19, as documented by international university rankings, such as the QC or Times Higher Education rankings.

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. For all its proven strengths, however, critics have pointed to several weaknesses, when compared with the neighboring German dual system, and the continued limited public appreciation of this educational sector.

Citation:
https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20210622_OTS0105/mega-bildungsstiftung-praesentiert-1-oesterreichischen-bildungsklima-index-anhaenge

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https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000127332990/auf-ab-und-quer-fuer-oesterreichische-universitaeten

https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000122916023/hat-oesterreich-tatsaechlich-das-beste-duale-ausbildungssystem

Belgium

Score 6

OECD data show that Belgium invests more than the OECD average on education (,322 per student vs an OECD average of $10,454) and yet achieves one of the lowest "proportion of 25- to 64-year-olds who attained a doctoral or equivalent tertiary education degree" (OECD, EAG 2021). That proportion was just 0.6% of the population, placing Belgium at rank 28 out of 36 countries in 2020.

Altogether, the evidence suggests that Belgium is a top performer in the early stages of education (with 98% of three- to five-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education, 10 percentage points above the OECD average); however, the country fails to sustain that performance in later stages. Recurrent problems include the lack

of integration of less well-off populations (non-native speakers being a case in point) and the increasingly substantial underfunding of tertiary education.

Over the last decade, the decline in education indicators prompted a flurry of reforms by both the Flemish and Francophone subnational authorities (education is a decentralized competence). However, being overly complicated and ill-designed, most of these reforms actually had adverse effects.

As a result, many available job vacancies remain unfilled, while job-seekers cannot find employment (see the Council of the European Union's recommendations for Belgium, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, and Dumont and Kegels (2016)). The Flemish community is trying to address the mismatch problem by improving the financing of higher education and has initiated a specific science, technology, engineering and mathematics program. Though this approach has not yet produced concrete results.

The general affordability of education helps render access to tertiary education equitable on paper. University fees remain quite low (€835 per year in French-speaking universities, about €960 in Flemish universities). De facto discriminatory factors include the minimal study grants for poorer students, and the increasingly overcrowded classrooms. 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." Nonetheless, it is altogether fair to say that higher education fares well in terms of quality, both in universities and in the country's diverse non-university higher education institutions.

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

Czechia

Score 6

Educational outcomes in Czechia are good, graduates with a secondary-level education are quite employable and the employment premium to tertiary-level education is among the highest in the European Union. However, the Czech education system faces challenges in terms of producing an adequately skilled labor force and ensuring equity among social groups.

Socioeconomic inequalities in school outcomes continued to rise prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as did school dropout rates. There are wide regional disparities, and educational inequalities are quite often passed through the generations. Roma children continue to be marginalized, and are disproportionally educated in special schools (Roma children represent about one-third of the pupils; 10.3% of Roma children are educated in special schools, compared to 2% of overall children). Participation in early childhood education has increased, but some conservative political forces are opposing measures that would enable enrollment for two year olds, arguing for the "indispensability of maternal care." Tertiary-education attainment rates continue to rise, but completion rates remain low. Financial support is limited, with only 1% of students receiving financial aid. The share of publicly funded Ph.D. fellowships is also below the EU average. The rate of absorption of EU funds within the education sector is excellent. However, implementation of some programs (e.g., digital literacy) has been delayed, mainly because school equipment is outdated, and many teachers lack relevant skills and training. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the educational sector was uncoordinated and exposed continuing inequalities. Due to large differences in digitalization, children from poor families, and those with special needs, were often left behind when some schools shifted to online instruction. Tertiary education adapted better to online instruction.

Iceland

Score 6

General government expenditure on education in Iceland amounted in 2018 to 7.6% of GDP compared with 4.9% for the OECD region as a whole and 4.6% for the European Union. These figures include expenditure funded by local, regional and central governments. The composition of education expenditure also matters. In 2018, government expenditure on tertiary education in Iceland amounted to 2.8% of total general government expenditure compared with 2.9% for the OECD and 2.5% for the European Union. This marked a clear improvement from 2016, when government expenditure on tertiary education in Iceland amounted to 20% of total general government expenditure on education compared with 23% for the OECD and 22% for the European Union. In 2018, Iceland spent more than the OECD average on each primary and secondary student, and only slightly less than the OECD average on each tertiary student (OECD). Iceland's universities are no longer underfunded to the extent they used to be. Iceland caught up.

Municipalities are responsible for primary schools. Upper secondary schools and public universities are run by the central government. The duration of upper secondary education was reduced in 2015 from four years to three so that students now enter university at the age of 19 rather than 20, a sign of increased efficiency.

In recent years, Iceland's music schools, once the pride of Iceland's education system due to their unique model of mixed private and public funding, as well as their important contribution to Iceland's cultural life, continued to fight for their survival, with no end to the struggle in sight.

The OECD has long highlighted the relatively low proportion of Iceland's labor force with secondary or tertiary level qualifications – a key factor in explaining Iceland's low productivity, long working hours and high rates of labor force participation. In 2020, 70% of Icelandic 25 to 64 year olds had not attained an upper secondary education compared with 58% for the OECD region on average. Recently revised figures from Statistics Iceland show that Icelanders worked 1,440 hours per year on average in 2020 compared with 1,420 hours on average in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and 1,690 hours on average in the OECD. Earlier figures had shown much longer hours of work in Iceland than in the rest of the Nordic region.

Iceland's low PISA scores, last updated in 2018, have declined since 2000 and are now well below average in the OECD region, and remain a source of concern.

Equity issues arise in education policy only in connection with education in rural areas where high-quality schooling is more difficult to provide to small numbers of pupils of different ages spread over large areas. Pupils from immigrant families appear to be well served.

Citation:
OECD: Education at a Glance 2021, Paris. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2021_b35a14e5-en. Accessed 1 February 2022.

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World Bank, World Development Indicators (2022).

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 mathematical skills and lack of proficiency in foreign languages, as well

as an overemphasis on the Irish language. Reform of the leaving certificate – the final high school exams, which are coordinated nationally – has continued throughout the pandemic, especially regarding the nature of assessment, given the system's emphasis on final exam results, as opposed to continuous assessment.

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 terms of the high-tech sectors, which remain a central part of the Irish economy. 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 locating investment in Ireland, alongside the ease of doing business and the country's relatively stable political environment.

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 in Ireland 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 per pupil per 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 the selection of pupils for entry. There is also significant under-investment in pre-primary education relative to equivalent jurisdictions in Europe.

Irish students at tertiary institutions are not charged fees for most undergraduate courses. However, the "student contribution" charge – which was radically increased in the context of the country's financial bailout by the Troika of the European Union, ECB and IMF in 2011–2013 – rose from €2,500 in 2014 to €3,000 in 2015, and has remained at that level since. In spring 2022, after many years of the university sector criticizing successive governments, a large and graduated increase in spending on higher education was announced by government, along with an intention to reduce the student charge to around €2,000 over a number of years. This was greatly welcomed by the higher education sector (O' Brien, 2022b).

Teacher and university lecturer 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.

Citation:
O' Brien, C., 'Major changes to leaving Cert will see students sit some exams in fifth year', The Irish Times, 29 March 2022, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/major-changes-to-leaving-cert-will-see-students-sit-some-exams-in-fifth-year-1.4839186?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-

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O' Brien, C., 'Student Contribution Fee of €3,000 to be reduced', The Irish Times, 4 May 2022, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/student-contribution-fee-of-3-000-to-be-reduced-harris-1.4869307?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Feducation%2Fstudent-contribution-fee-of-3-000-to-be-reduced-harris-1.4869307

Italy

Score 6

The Italian education system is a predominantly public system headed at the national level by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR). MIUR dominates education policy, including hiring and funding. 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 comparatively low. However, given the scarce amount of resources allocated for scholarships or similar support mechanisms for financially needy students, access is socially discriminatory at the upper secondary and tertiary levels. The share of individuals who do not complete their studies is above the OECD average.

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.

The ability of the education system to provide an adequate number of skilled workers, particularly in specialized fields, is insufficient – a situation that is often lamented by private firms.

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 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 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 number of university graduates is comparatively low and growing very slowly.

The allocation of public resources to universities has increasingly incorporated a mechanism linking government funding to academic research and teaching results.

This has had significant effects with regard to stimulating a more competitive and quality-oriented university system.

During the pandemic emergency, the education system has been put under severe stress and regional differences in coping with it have clearly emerged. Southern regions proved much less effective in providing distance learning when needed and school abandonment levels have been higher than average (Openpolis).

The Draghi government is now directing more resources to the education system thanks to Next Generation EU funds. Overall, €31.9 billion in investment has been pledged to improve all educational sectors (starting from kindergarten). Furthermore, various reforms should be approved in 2022, including a new recruitment and career system for schoolteachers, while university teaching is likely to be significantly liberalized.

Citation:
on school abandonment: https://www.openpolis.it/perche-sullabbandono-scolastico-resta-ancora-molto-da-fare/ (accessed 5 January 2022)

Japan

Score 6

The Japanese educational system has experienced a steady gradual downturn over the last few decades. One of the challenges it currently faces is to deliver adequate quality. The LDP-led coalition has renewed emphasis on reaching the top international tier as well as on improving students' English-language skills. While the number of students studying abroad has been on the decline for a number of years, this trend seems to have halted more recently.

The government is actively promoting reforms. In the context of the Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (2018 – 2022), which stresses the development of creativity, policymakers announced in May 2019 that the general curriculum taught at schools would be revamped. A government panel in June 2019 proposed the inclusion of more digital, tech-based elements in the education system.

Another issue is rising income inequality at a time of economic stagnation. Measures providing free early-childhood education and free higher education, as well as additional policies related to the country's expensive private high schools, have to be implemented.

In terms of efficiency, the ubiquity of private cram schools indicates that the ordinary education system is failing to deliver the desired results. However, 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 have been disappointing in recent years. In the Times Higher Education 2022 World University Rankings, only two Japanese universities of (Tokyo and Kyoto) made it into the global top 200. However, this ranking seems to underrate the country's university system.

Citation:
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Luxembourg

Score 6

The constitution of Luxembourg guarantees a fundamental right to education (Art. 23), and primary and secondary education are free of charge. Early childhood education is optional starting at age three, but school attendance is compulsory from the age of four years until 16. The Luxembourg school system includes public, private and international education institutions. Pupils may also attend school in a foreign country, as well as home (under certain conditions). For children with special needs, a special education system ("éducation différenciée") has been put in place, but the aim is to integrate children with special needs into the mainstream education. After six years of elementary school, students must choose one of two tracks, a general (the former "secondaire technique") or an academic ("classique") one. There is also a dual apprenticeship system ("formation en alternance") for students aged 15, which combines an apprenticeship with vocational classes.

Luxembourg's education policy must deal with the challenges of a multilingual and multicultural society, which produces a high proportion of foreign students. According to the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) released in December 2019, secondary education is a cause of concern. Luxembourg is ranked 28th, behind its neighbors Germany (12th), Belgium (21st) and France (27th). Among the causes can be mentioned the difficulties of the trilingual school system approach (covering the German, Luxembourgish and French languages), as well as the economic difficulties encountered by students (55% of 15-year-old pupils are immigrants). Three in eight immigrant students in Luxembourg were socioeconomically disadvantaged (similar to the OECD average). The ongoing reform of fundamental education (the first nine years of schooling) is based on five key skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration and coding),

with an emphasis on the “Einfach Digital” (simply digital) strategy. In 2020, the Ministry of Education invested €4.8 million to provide students with 10,603 iPads (including €2.5 million each year for licenses and software). Thus, pupils were well equipped to shift to full home schooling on several occasions between March 2020 and December 2021.

In the 2022 state budget, education expenditure will amount to €3.1 billion (+10% compared to 2021). This will finance the recruitment of 1,000 more teachers, free daycare during the school periods, free school lunches for children from low-income families and free music education.

The University of Luxembourg, which is a multilingual, international, interdisciplinary and research-oriented public institution, has a current enrollment of 6,783 students originating from 130 different countries. The academic staff (drawn from 94 different countries) numbers 1,668 people, including doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, research associates, professors and lecturers. According to the multi-year contract (“convention pluriannuelle”) signed on 13 January 2022 by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the University of Luxembourg, the university’s public endowment for the years 2022-2025 will reach a record total of €908.3 million, an almost 17% increase over the previous four-year period.

The Luxembourg government offers grants for studies abroad allocated in the form of a grant (“bourse”), a loan (“prêt”) or assistance with enrollment fees (“frais d’inscription”). Without giving too many details, it is useful to mention that Luxembourg has lost several cases before the European Court of Justice regarding problems in allocating study grants to the children of cross-border workers.

In 2021, Luxembourg’s lifelong learning system provided about 11,916 trainings programs in 62 training domains, delivered by 299 training providers. The University of Luxembourg, the Luxembourg Learning Centre, the Center of Competences (located in Belval), the House of Training, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chambre des Salariés, are among the main actors in this field.

Citation:
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Malta

Score 6

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. Malta's IQ world ranking is 10th.

The government has implemented a number of programs since 2013 seeking to encourage more students to pursue educational opportunities. Some of these have entailed fiscal support, such as the provision of 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) in order to better address learning challenges at different educational levels. The Malta Visual and Performing Arts School was officially inaugurated in 2018, catering specifically to secondary students with special talents in the arts. A secondary school for students gifted in various sports disciplines is also operational. New vocational subjects have been introduced in schools with the aim of complementing the traditional academic route. A "One Tablet per Child" scheme is in place. New schools have been built and others modernized. To eliminate possible financial obstacles, exam fees were eliminated in 2019.

At 16.7%, Malta had the European Union's highest school drop-out rate, with 28% of adults having attained a tertiary level of education, in 2020. This latter figure indicates substantial growth compared to the figure of 10.3% in 2005. The government has continued with its efforts to reduce the drop-out rate and the country's second early school leaving strategy has been published. Experts recommend that compulsory education should be extended to 18 years of age in conjunction with an overhaul of the education system.

In 2021, Maltese students took second place in the global Supertmatik Mental Maths Challenge. The island's 2018 PISA scores remain relatively unchanged from previous years, with Malta falling within the lower range of the middle third due to scoring below the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science. However, the mean performance level in mathematics has improved relative to 2010. The country's gender gap (in favor of girls) in reading, mathematics and science was

higher than the average OECD gap. Some 13% of disadvantaged students in Malta were able to score in the top quartile in terms of reading performance (OECD average 11%). New PISA findings have been postponed until 2025 to reflect pandemic-related difficulties.

Malta provides a high level of equitable access to education at all levels. A total of 80% of all schools are free, and various measures exist to support students who need help. Children with special needs are mainstreamed. Access to higher education is open to all due to the absence of tuition fees and the availability of stipends for students. The provision of free state preschool facilities for children three years and over has been greatly expanded.

The Maltese educational system continues to be characterized by a lack of alignment between education and the needs of the economy in various sectors. Reforms have been slow due to a number of difficulties including teacher recruitment, high student-teacher ratios, expanding student populations (due to relatively high birth rates among migrant communities that make up 9% of the school population) and delays in the building of new schools. Throughout October and November 2021, the first skills census was conducted with the aim of gathering much needed data that will serve as the basis for future policies to counteract present shortcomings. Meanwhile, the education system continues to be broadly exam-based, though there has been a shift toward a mixed assessment method, with substantial emphasis placed on a large number of subjects. This makes it more difficult for students to focus on core foundation subjects. Integration challenges for foreign students still persist and cyberbullying is increasing. More than 500 cases of bullying were reported in 2019.

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Netherlands

Score 6

The dominant theme for Dutch education over the last two years obviously was the response to COVID-19. The crisis exacerbated some structural weaknesses of the system and accelerated other developments. In 2019, the Dutch education system was performing strongly, with attainment somewhat exceeding the OECD average. Educational spending was below the OECD average, and was geared toward efficiency. Amidst lockdowns and other restrictions, the educational system remained resilient. The mix of autonomy and innovation in the Dutch educational system, combined with broad support for the social role of schools, resulted in a swift initial response to the coronavirus crisis. School closures were seen as a measure of last resort. Elementary schools reopened as soon as possible. For children of essential workers, schools and daycare centers never closed. At-risk children – particularly from vulnerable families or those at risk of domestic abuse – also returned to school quickly. Since the pedagogical environment in Dutch schools is not overly competitive, concerns about "missing material" were not as great as feared. Instead, quite quickly, attention shifted to "vulnerable children."

However, this flexibility has a downside: inequality in education deepened during the COVID-19 crisis. This continued a trend seen over the last 10-15 years. Income, social status and migrant origin determine to a large extent the school outcome of children. A recent study states that PISA achievements are the worst among students whose parents have completed only lower levels of education, and/or among those who are from migrant families. Also, those children are more likely to follow lower education paths (vocational education as opposed to general or academic education). These issues of inequity deepened during the pandemic. Schools differed substantially in the quality of online education. Families differed in their ability to offer support to children, material or otherwise (e.g., electronic devices, adequate internet access, a quiet place to study or parental assistance with homework assignments). In particular, single parents – mostly women – faced severe burdens. Here again, parents with higher levels of education and greater work autonomy, as well as two-parent households, were better able to home-school children as compared to single-parent households, parents with less education and parents with less flexible working environments. Innovations in curriculum and teaching have always been encouraged in Dutch schools, with only a few general requirements. This allowed schools to adapt quickly to the pandemic, without significant disruption. Most schools offer adequate digital-learning platforms – with smart boards being standard from the elementary to the higher education level, and many interactive elements in teaching. However, variation between schools is considerable. Some schools needed to be trained to make video recordings within a week, while others simply expanded their blended learning platforms to full-time use. Generally, the crisis accelerated the acquisition of ICT skills by teaching staff, including among older teachers who might have been more reluctant prior to the pandemic.

Still, an overall drop in the quality of teaching cannot be attributed entirely to the COVID-19 crisis. Elementary school pupils' test results in basic skills are dropping, and falling behind the ambitions formulated in 2010. The share of students reaching basic math and reading skill levels is lower than expected. It seems that teaching writing poses organizational difficulties in the context of elementary education in the Netherlands. While elementary schools returned to in-person teaching after the first wave, secondary and post-secondary institutions struggled to provide at least first year students with a minimum amount of face-to-face education, never exceeding 30% of all study hours. This resulted in a significant rise in psychological issues among adolescents, due to the disturbance of school's socialization role during the lockdowns. The quality of higher education in the Netherlands is guaranteed by mass entrance exams at age 11 and mass centralized exams for graduates. Both had to be skipped and/or adapted over extended periods of time and with more exemptions, due to the pandemic. Discussions about the pros and cons of these examinations have been fueled by this unintended experiment, particularly in the light of deepening inequality.

Vocational schools suffered the most deeply, and disadvantaged students suffered doubly. A strength of the Dutch education system – its practical orientation, with substantial workplace-learning components – turned into a liability during the COVID-19 crisis. It became increasingly difficult to arrange work-study places, as many businesses had to close and work from home became the norm for extended periods of time. This was true particularly for secondary vocational education programs, but also for higher professional education and some professionally oriented university studies. Due to the segregation of Dutch education, in which children from lower socioeconomic and migration backgrounds are overrepresented in vocational education, the disturbance of the learning-on-the-job model affected more vulnerable students to a greater extent. Combined with lower-quality housing and the loss of access to digital resources due to school closures, already vulnerable students experienced a disproportionate delay in their studies.
In the higher education sector, the general feeling is that hybrid forms of teaching will be here to stay. Many higher education institutions were already used to fewer contact hours and a relatively high share of independent project work. Small project groups were generally allowed to work together until the second lockdown. While the changes were rather minor for many students, the loss of social contact with fellow students, and the inability to undertake lab or practical work for some study programs, were significant impacts. Other programs, especially small-scale professional programs that relied on personal contact and supervision, had to make more drastic adjustments.

Many students experienced psychological issues as a result of the isolation, but also because they lost their part-time jobs and thus incomes. The extent to which this has led to study delays has yet to be estimated, and effects seem to vary widely both at the individual level and between programs and universities. The student loan system

contributed to delays, stress and inequality and became unsustainable. The new government announced a plan to reverse it back to basic student financing.

Both at the higher vocational training and university levels, issues of skewed financing (favoring research in technical and natural sciences over social sciences and education in general), combined with an increased number of international students, have resulted in work pressures and quality issues. Academic staffers reportedly regularly work from one-quarter to one-third longer than their paid hours. The most overwork is in education. The demands of online education added to the strain. Structural problems that were not adequately addressed before the crisis also deepened due to the increased sick leave and higher workloads. The greatest concern before the crisis, the acute shortage of teachers, has yet to be resolved, in spite of salary increases, including designated bonuses for teachers at schools with many disadvantaged students. The gap in remuneration between elementary school teachers and high school teachers still remains, and is perceived as unfair by many. The government came up with a national plan for recovery. The plan is aimed at making up for the delays and at mitigating the inequalities. The National Education Program is aimed at turning the COVID-19-repair efforts into sustainable improvements across the education sector. The primary points of focus include the shortage of teachers and school administrators, improvements in quality and efforts to equalize opportunities, sustainable investment in knowledge structure through knowledge sharing and utilization, and local efforts to improve youths' future prospects. However, the program has been widely criticized for being oriented only to the short term, and for failing to address structural issues. For example, school buildings are 40 years old on the average, and over 80% do not meet the requirements for clean air, but the financing for renovation is lagging behind. In addition, lots of private parties take part in the recovery efforts, which contributes further to a process of hidden privatization in public education. The number of private schools in the Netherlands is still negligible; however, other channels are gaining in importance: private "homework coaching," additional payment for exclusive forms of education such as bilingual classes (English-Dutch), as well as many extracurricular activities, including language lessons, that take place at school during school time. Add to this a significant number of individual remedial teachers, coaches and mentors, many of them also privately paid, and you get an interesting landscape of inequality achieved through private means in public settings.

In the midst of COVID-19 concerns, the issue of freedom of education was prominent in 2021. Art. 23 of the constitution, which grants freedom of confessional education, came under attack, because some schools have actively promoted homophobia and have failed to create a safe environment for LGBTQ students. This was triggered by many cases of homophobia and intolerance in religious schools, both of Muslim and Christian affiliation. Advice provided by the Dutch Council of Education stressed the necessity to specify the mandatory portion of curriculum and the idea of democratic citizenship, stating that freedom of education has its limits.

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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.

From a formal perspective, Portugal offers equitable access to education. Compulsory schooling in the public sector is free through the end of secondary education. Higher education has comparatively low fees as well as means-tested support for low-income students.

However, this coexists with inequality in the quality of the 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 show 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 27.2% of the population aged between 25 and 64 having attained this level in 2020, although this was a 2.4 percentage point improvement vis-à-vis 2018. While Portugal fares comparatively better in terms of tertiary education (28.2% in 2020, a 3.2 percentage point improvement vis-à-vis 2018), it is still over 10 percentage points below the OECD average.

There remains room for improvement, on at least four grounds.

First, there is significant variation in the quality of education between schools. The average school score in the 2020 national exams ranged from 15.24 (out of 20) for the highest-rated public school to 9.08 in the lowest-rated public school. The variance is even greater when we also consider private schools, with the best-performing school posting an average of 18.03 – almost twice the average for the lowest-rated school. Additionally, 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, the considerable instability in the sector – with substantial changes from year to year – means that the educational system is unpredictable, and that the impact of changes is limited.

Finally, the failure to recruit new teachers should be noted. Portugal now has one of the oldest teaching populations in the OECD. In 2007, there were 102 teachers aged 50 or over for every 100 teachers aged under 35, across all levels from primary to secondary. In 2019, there were a staggering 1,595 teachers aged 50 or over for every 100 teachers aged under 35 – an increase of more than 200 vis-à-vis 2018 (1,358).

Moreover, it should be noted that improvements appear to have stagnated in recent years. Unlike previous rounds, the latest 2018 PISA assessment show a stagnation in terms of student performance. Likewise, in higher education, there were three universities in the top 500 of the Academic Ranking of World Universities. While this is a significant improvement vis-à-vis 2006, when Portugal was the only EU-15 country (excluding Luxembourg) not to have at least one institution in the top 500, it is a decrease when compared to 2018, when Portugal had four universities and outranked Ireland.

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Chile

Score 5

Chile's school and education attainment levels are very mixed and 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. However, 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-education systems; this failure has led to strong public protests in the past. The demand for a more equitable and qualitatively better education was also implicitly part of the mass protests and demands for social justice that at the end of 2019.

Traditionally, high-quality education in Chile has been accessible only to those able to afford it. There is a huge quality gap deriving in part from a significant financial divergence between the private- and public-education systems, with per month spending per public-system pupil 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%. 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.

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the structural bias. Although 87.5% of the households do have access to the internet, the digital literacy gap among different socioeconomic groups in Chile is significant. Whereas private schools were broadly able to implement online classes and distance learning methods, most public schools

found it difficult to do so, because schools and teachers did not have access to the necessary infrastructure and/or knowledge and methods needed to successfully implement distance teaching.

There is a basic ideological disagreement between the government and opposition regarding the respective roles of the free market and the state in the education system. Moreover, a strong teachers lobby 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 latest significant changes to the education system were introduced in March 2016 by the enactment of Law No. 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 that legally count as nonprofit organizations. Additionally, financial contributions (copagos) by families whose children attend a public school have been lowered. Prior to this latest reform, Law No. 20,882 (Ley de Presupuestos del Sector Público), enacted in December 2015, introduced subsidies for the tuition fees paid by the most vulnerable students attending higher-education institutions (about 25% of the newly matriculated students in 2017).

In January 2018, the Congress adopted a tuition-free policy for university education, professional institutes and technical training centers after some modifications to the original initiative. Thanks to the new law, 60% of students from lower-income families who study in institutions covered by the measure will not have to pay tuition fees. The effects of the latest reforms, especially regarding higher-education access and the public-education quality, will be reliably measurable only in the medium and long term. Nonetheless, they can today be seen as an important step toward more equitable access to (higher) education and as an improvement in the quality of the country's public-education system.

Furthermore, the Supervisory Board for Higher Education was created in 2018. Its main tasks are to monitor compliance with regulations, ensure that institutions maintain the requirements for official accreditation and to ensure the presence of a transparent information system that prevents misleading advertising.

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Croatia

Score 5

The year 2021 did not bring about any significant change in the way education policy is implemented. On the positive side, during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no major school closures, and only a handful of schools and universities were occasionally compelled to move temporarily to online classes. On the negative side, the legacy of the pandemic 2020 has not been completely reversed. The online classes conducted through much of 2020 led to a deterioration in pupils' skill formation, motivation and performance. Furthermore, the mental health of pupils and students has worsened. It is too early for any international performance comparison, since the PISA 2021 assessment was postponed until 2022.

In contrast to 2021 and earlier years, 2022 should witness one of the biggest reforms of the education system since Croatia's independence, across all major areas (pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education). The major intention of this overhaul is to adapt the education system to key priorities outlined in the National Development Strategy 2030 and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan submitted to the European Commission. Minister of Education Radovan Fuchs, who also performed this role 10 years ago, is eager to achieve breakthroughs in the aforementioned areas this time around. The key aspects of his reforms include changes in the way tertiary education is funded, changes in the system of vocational education, changes in the pre-primary education system and finally, changes in the primary and secondary education sectors. First, according to the announced reform, earmarking of funds to institutions of higher education should be tied strictly to learning outcomes. Second, children will be required to attend pre-primary education for two years instead of the existing mandate of one year. The capacities of towns and municipalities should be improved to handle this new requirement, since Croatia has one of the EU's lowest shares of children less than five years old attending pre-primary education. Third, despite some very praiseworthy achievements in the past, such as the fact that Croatia has the EU's lowest share of early leavers from the education and training systems in the 18-24 age cohort (3.3%), the system needs a substantial update to improve pupils' relatively poor skills profiles, as evidenced by modest PISA assessment scores. Finally, vocational schools within the secondary

education system will be pushed to undertake further steps toward establishing a dual system of vocational training, so as to improve graduates' practical skills. It is to be seen whether vested interests will inhibit this reform.

The proposed reforms could also improve the system's efficiency. Croatia's share of education spending as a percentage of GDP is approximately equal to the EU-27 average. Moreover, Croatia's student/teacher ratio is generally lower than the majority of its peers. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily equate to higher quality, as previous PISA assessment scores indicate.

Access to higher education is relatively unequal, as students from better-educated family backgrounds are over-represented in higher education. However, this outcome is not caused by the presence of burdensome tuition fees acting as a barrier to entry, especially since higher education is overwhelmingly financed out of the public purse. This has more to do with the cost of living for students in major cities and the lack of private scholarships for students from poorer families. The employment rate for recently graduated students is far below the EU average. It is very common that employers in the private and even public sector complain of the lack of necessary skills on the part of fresh graduates.

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Greece

Score 5

In Greece, the education system is extremely top-heavy, with the Ministry of Education exercising a "hands-on" type of management over all levels of education and schools, including the distribution of public resources to schools and universities. Pre-primary education in Greece has become compulsory for all four-year-old children since 2018, while enrollment in schools is compulsory for all children in the 5–15 age group.

The Greek state spends less on education than other EU member states, 4% of GDP in Greece compared to an EU-27 average of 4.7% (Eurostat data for 2019). However, public funds are misspent. For example, the allocation of teachers in public schools and professors 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.

Despite the above problems with universities, higher education is more generously supported than other levels of education. While public spending is lower than the EU average in primary and secondary education, it is slightly higher than the EU average in tertiary education.

This discrepancy is explained by the very high demand for university education. Greece performs relatively well with regard to tertiary attainment: one-third of Greeks in the age group 25–64 have a university degree. This is the result of many factors, including the Greek population's fascination with obtaining a university-level degree, often regardless of department or school. Traditionally, the symbolic value and social status accompanying a university degree are high, while success in passing the competitive entrance examinations to universities is considered a major achievement. University entrance examinations are written, very competitive and traditionally require memorization rather than critical-thinking. They are conducted every June on a nationwide scale through a centralized examination mechanism. As a result, teaching and learning in high schools is oriented toward the requirements of exam preparation. Pupils enroll in the country's fee-supported private cramming schools, where they are taught more systematically than in high schools.

Greece is a laggard with regard to upper-secondary attainment and its PISA results. In other words, while primary schools and universities may not show an outstanding performance, they function somewhat better than Greek high schools. Greece's PISA test performance did not show any significant improvement in the last decade. In fact, Greek children performed worse in all three categories in the 2019 PISA compared to the previous survey in 2015.

Tertiary institutions are nominally autonomous, but the Ministry of Education is responsible for their funding, as well as for the allocation of teaching posts per university and the distribution of students across undergraduate programs. Since the mid-1990s, governments have promoted a policy of enlarging university access, primarily through establishing new universities and departments.

Obtaining a high school diploma (rather than a vocational-school qualification) is an aim sought by almost all pupils who tend to avoid vocational high schools and prefer general education high schools as graduating from the latter provides easier access to tertiary education. However, such access is not equitable, as students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are more likely to pass the national entrance examinations. Moreover, to the extent their parents can afford it, Greek high school pupils receive extensive private tutoring in the cramming schools noted above. This reflects a cultural contradiction. While tertiary education is an entirely public sector activity (i.e., university students do not pay tuition fees or textbook costs, and private universities are officially banned), success in entering universities largely depends on private tutoring.

The quality of education in primary and secondary schools is very uneven, as private schools are better resourced and staffed than state schools. In the latter, until the

change of government in 2019, the curricula of taught subjects were outdated, teachers completely rejected performance review and access to digital resources was limited. While in 2020–2021 there was progress on these fronts, state schools still suffer from understaffing and a lack of material resources (e.g., laboratories and libraries). Distance-learning became necessary in 2020–2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of schools and impacted negatively on the quality of education. Meanwhile, the quality of vocational training (in technical and professional high schools) is very low – a trend has persisted for decades.

Similarly, the quality of education across Greek universities is very uneven. However, most former polytechnics, which were given university status by a law passed in 2018, without any prior performance review, are at a considerably lower level.

In 2021, arguing that Greek universities have long been plagued by violence, the new government passed a bill that aims to create a special police force to guard university campuses. It seems that public opinion supported the reform. However, the new law proved controversial, provoking mass student demonstrations.

In summary, Greece's education system is one of the most centralized among OECD countries, with shifting education policies depending on the government in power or even the minister in office. The pandemic crisis of 2020–2021 has further exacerbated problems in the quality of education. However, after the change in government in 2019, there were positive developments, such as the subsidized distribution of laptops or tablets to pupils, the drafting of new curricula for all subjects taught in primary and secondary education, and, belatedly, the start of performance evaluation of school units and teaching personnel.

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/images/9/95/Total_general_government_expenditure_on_education%2C_2019%2C_%25_of_GDP.png

Data on the school performance of pupils is drawn on PISA / OECD 2015 Results http://www.oecd.org/pisa/

Latvia

Score 5

Latvia has a relatively well-educated population and performs reasonably well in international comparisons, such as PISA. The 2018 PISA results show that performance in the most significant indicators is at the OECD average or below average. Latvia is also successful in making secondary education nearly universal – 88% of adults aged 25-64 have completed upper secondary education, which is higher than the OECD average of 78%. At the same time, Latvia lags behind other OECD countries in the area of vocational education.

While 39.3% of the population aged 25-34 had higher education in 2019, a wide gender gap exists, with 51.1% of women and only 28% of men holding a tertiary-level qualification. Furthermore, among 25- to 64-year-olds, 34% of the population had attained tertiary education in 2018, 3% lower than the OECD average.

The IMF has warned that the Latvian higher education system is unsustainable due to a disproportionately high number of institutions, limited financing and falling student numbers. 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. In 2017 the Riga Pedagogical Academy was merged with the University of Latvia, but since then the number of higher education institutions has stayed unchanged.

Latvia has undertaken comprehensive reforms in both general and vocational education, switching to a competency-based educational approach. From September 2020, schools have started to gradually introduce curricula that are in accordance with new standards.

In general, education reform has been high on the government's agenda. Nevertheless, there are still challenges to address in the education system – a shrinking population, a high rate of early retirement among teachers, and a level of public funding that is significantly lower than the OECD average. There are also equity concerns regarding students in rural schools, as emigration and urbanization have contributed to geographic inequalities in educational access, engagement and quality.

Furthermore, Latvia's spending on primary school teachers is near the OECD's lowest on a per-pupil basis, mostly due to lower-than-average teacher salaries and shorter instruction time. From September 2019, the minimum salary for teachers increased to €750, and it increased further to €900 in 2022.

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6. OECD (2020) Education Policy Outlook: Latvia, Available at: https://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Latvia-2020.pdf, Last accessed: 05.01.2022.

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Slovakia

Score 5

The Slovak education system has been suffering from a number of weaknesses (European Commission 2021). 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. While tertiary education attainment rates are close to the EU average, quality control in higher education does not meet international standards. 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.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools remained closed for rather long periods. As many socially disadvantaged children did not have access to remote learning, social disparities in learning outcomes have risen. The Ministry of Education tried to address these problems by providing additional funds for the purchase of technical equipment for teachers and students and by supporting summer school. In August 2021, it also launched the campaign Open schools, supporting vaccination of all eligible persons as a way to begin the 2021/22 school normally and to avoid repeated school closures (Gerbery 2021; Terenzani/ Hrabovská Francelova 2021).

In October 2021, Minister of Education Branislav Gröhling also presented a much-awaited comprehensive reform package consisting of three laws on primary and secondary education. Slovakia plans to expand early childhood education and care, reform school curricula to support digitalization, reform teacher education and professional requirements, improve inclusiveness at all levels of education, reduce Roma segregation and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. A first step was to introduce compulsory pre-primary education for five-year-old children in September 2021. Another was the action called the "digital leap" in education, which initially invests €40 million in digital technologies. Greats parts of the reform will be funded in part by the EU Resilience and Recovery Fund. The government also plans to introduce reforms in higher education. An amendment to the Higher Education Act is meant to attract better professionals from abroad and give incentives for quality universities. Finally, the Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030, approved in 2021, entails improvements for Roma children such as support for the creation of a stimulating environment for pupils from marginalized Roma communities.

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Bulgaria

Score 4

Public spending on education is relatively low. According to EUROSTAT, spending on education increased from 3.86% of GDP in 2016 to 4.09% in 2018 but remained significantly below the EU-27 average of 4.64% in 2017 and 4.71% in 2018. In 2019-2021 the state budget financed an increase in primary and secondary school educators' gross wages by nearly 80%. Total spending on education for this period has been at 3.9-4% of GDP.

The Bulgarian education system has an average to low level of equity. Many children in upper-income families are able to attend private schools, which show better results in the external evaluations after the 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.

In a more positive light, in 2021, Sofia University ranked in 2021 among the world's top 600 universities (591th).

In the 2018 PISA survey of reading, mathematics and science skills, 15-year old students from Bulgaria scored approximately 20% below the averages of comparable student groups in Poland and Estonia.

The percentage of adults (25-64 years of age) who participate in lifelong learning schemes is about 2%, far below the 10%-11% EU average for 2019 - 2021.

Poland

Score 4

In 1999, the first Tusk government launched a number of education reforms that have significantly increased the quality of education in Poland (Bitek et al. 2021; Wiśniewski/ Zahorska 2020: 185-198). The main aim of the reforms was to reduce the system's lack of synchronization with labor markets. The reforms have led to greater emphasis being placed on mathematics, science and technology; a

strengthening of vocational education; attempts to attract more students to economically relevant areas; the introduction of measures to improve the quality of research and teaching at universities; and the adoption of a national strategy for lifelong learning. Although education expenditure in Poland is lower than the average expenditure in the European Union more broadly, Polish students scored relatively well in the 2018 PISA tests (European Commission 2020: 27).

Under the PiS government, Poland has returned to the traditional two-tier school system with eight years of primary school and four years of upper-secondary school or vocational education. This reform was poorly prepared and insufficiently discussed with teachers, teachers' unions, parents and students. The reform allowed the government to change the content of textbooks and curricula in which national ideology became more visible, while project-based learning ceased to be mandatory. The abolition of middle schools (gimnazjum) and the bringing forward of entry exams for upper-secondary schools (liceum) have placed children under unnecessary stress. Equity in access has declined, as wealthier and better-educated parents have tended to pay for extra tuition or for private schools. The PiS government's reforms, along with low salaries and poor working conditions, have prompted the resignation of many teachers as well as frequent teachers' strikes. In order to end a large strike, in which 80% of teachers participated, the government promised some salary increases in April 2019. However, it did nothing to fill the gaps or to replace the many qualified and motivated teachers that had quit their jobs in recent years. The PiS government's school reforms also placed a heavy burden on municipal budgets, as expenditure on education by municipalities has been increasing faster than the corresponding ministerial subventions (European Commission 2020: 27).

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of homeschooling in spring 2020 and again in winter 2020/21, the lack of proper didactical and technical preparedness became visible (Bitek et al. 2021; Marczewski 2020). As a result, exam performance has worsened. In 2020, only 74% of youth – in contrast to 80.5% in 2019 – passed the final exam for high school. At the same time, educational inequalities have further risen. The government provided teachers with vouchers worth PLN 500 to buy computers, but did little to staff the schools properly. Moreover, due to health issues and educators' dissatisfaction with the government's crisis management, the number of teachers in 2020 fell by almost 10,000 compared to 2019. The controversial minister of science and education, Przemysław Czarnek, instead focused on the content of school education. He continued to rewrite Poland's history curriculum, remove liberal and cosmopolitan texts and values from core teaching programs, return to old-fashioned teaching methods, and attack sex education and equal gender roles.

Universities have had fewer problems to weather during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, recent decisions by Minister Czarnek to give Polish journals greater weight in rankings used for assessing the quality of research are at odds with the PiS government's announcements that it will strengthen the quality of higher education.

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Romania

Score 4

Romania's Ministry of Education heads and organizes the state's education and technological innovation system, while working alongside subordinate institutions at the national, central and local levels. The organization and functioning of the education system are established according to constitutional and legal parameters (i.e., the Law of National Education). Romania's national educational system is both open, allowing for the mobility and transfer of pupils, and pluralistic, offering education in public and private settings, and in recognized native languages. While the education system remains a national priority for the Romanian government, disparities are prevalent in its organization. The phenomenon of Romania's struggling education system is not novel. Since the fall of the communist regime, public schooling has never received adequate funding. The Romanian state spends about €33,000 on education from kindergarten to graduating higher education for each person who graduates with a master's degree, but it collects €300,000 from an entire person's working life – a return on investment of 700%. Due to the lack of access to education, however, the state spends €18,000 for an unemployed person with only primary education throughout his or her lifetime. Under the present pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, education has been pushed even closer to the edge. Some 400,000 children in Romania don't attend school or complete compulsory education requirements. Moreover, OECD findings show that 44% of 15 year olds cannot read or write properly. The poor academic outcomes stem from Romanian governments undercutting funding to the education system, which stands at only 3.4% of the state budget – 2.6 percentage points below the legally mandated level of 6%.

The rural-urban disparity is telling, however, and underscores the dual trajectory of young people in the education system. Because of the state's limited investment in broadband infrastructure, digital schooling is lowest in rural areas. More than 50% of rural households do not own a digital device necessary for remote learning. Furthermore, one-in-three villages have "very weak, or no, internet signal," limiting communication between educators and their students. Rural areas have alarmingly high dropout rates, which can only be exacerbated by the lack of digital equipment, and the pandemic has exacerbated the underperformance of rural areas of Romania. The lack of IT-based infrastructure and limited state funding of the public education

system, alongside a lack of basic amenities (e.g., running water or indoor plumbing at schools, or dwindling family incomes in rural communities) and the COVID-19 pandemic, will intensify social exclusion, inequality and poverty. While the revision to law 292 on social assistance will give children and their families access to basic community services provided by a small team of local professionals (e.g., social workers, nurses and school counselors), 38% of Romania's young people remain subject to poverty and under the auspices of social welfare.

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Turkey

Score 4

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 2020 – 2021 school year, although the pre-primary education enrollment rate was quite low at 58.5%, Turkey achieved almost universal primary-school enrollment (97.6%). During the same period, lower-secondary-school enrollment was 96.1%; upper-secondary school enrollment was 95.6%, and the higher-education enrollment rate was 43.3%. Gender-based statistics show that female enrollment ratios are 97.7% at the primary education level, 84.8% for secondary education and 87.9% for higher education. With these scores, the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum ranked Turkey 133th out of 156 countries.

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, almost all of which is spent in workplaces. A total of 36% of 25- to 34-year-old women have a tertiary qualification in comparison to 35% of men. These numbers are respectively 51% and 39% on average across OECD countries.

The results of the 2019 PISA study showed Turkey making some improvements compared to previous years, and thus indicated some degree of effective policymaking and implementation. However, Turkey still ranks at the bottom of the test group, suggesting serious issues with the overall quality of education.

For the 2020-2021 education year, the total number of teachers in the country reached 1,112,305. Among them, 950,090 work in public schools and 162,215 work

in private schools. There are 53,620 public and 13,501 private schools in Turkey. The number of classrooms is 732,381. Despite the extent of institutionalization, the education system does not provide students with high-quality instruction. In the YKS test in 2021, out of 2,416,748 candidates, 217,504 had no correct answers in the mathematic test (out of 40 questions).

Equitable access for Syrian refugees to Turkey's education system remains a matter of concern. Although the number of refugees who are enrolled in formal education rose from 684,728 in 2019 to 768,839 by December 2020, more than 400,000 school-aged refugee children cannot still access education. Similarly, the school enrollment rate among disabled people remained low despite enhancements in online teaching and TV broadcasting.

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Hungary

Score 3

Since the second Orbán government assumed office in 2010, the education system has undergone major changes. Government spending on education fell from an already low level of 4.6% of GDP in 2010 to 3.8% in 2020. At the same time, 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. Education outcomes are below the EU average, show wide disparities and the education system obstructs social mobility. The salaries of teachers are still low compared to other tertiary education graduates. The regular PISA surveys have shown a marked decline in the quality of education in Hungary. Foreign language learning in primary schools has been stagnate for a decade and especially smaller languages are chosen less often. At the same time, the content of school textbooks has been increasingly influenced by ideology. Pupils are educated in a nationalistic fashion, which celebrates the greatness of the Hungarian

people and their “historic suffering,” while often denying historical facts. This ideological infiltration begins at kindergarten level, and is a common feature in primary and secondary education. While the quality of public education has drastically declined, the children of the “royal court” have attended expensive private schools that remain out of the financial reach of average citizens.

Education received a serious blow during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 deepened tensions in the educational, psychological, social and political dimensions. The setback in the educational dimension resulted from the much lower efficiency of the online education and the frequent interruptions to educational courses due to infections. Psychologically, COVID-19 could have been even more damaging due to individual’s lack of personal contact with peer groups, larger families and society, which are necessary for the socialization of young people. Socially, COVID-19 weakened the role and position of teachers, and led to conflicts between underpaid teachers, underfinanced educational institutions, wider society and the government. Finally, COVID-19 created political controversies over the budget and the curriculum between the teachers’ associations, and central and sometimes local governments. While these tensions have been observed in other countries as well, they have been especially strong in Hungary where government communication about school closures and quarantine provisions was chaotic, and little progress with digital learning has been made.

Instead of addressing the pressing educational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has continued to increase its grip on universities. In September 2020, it appointed a board of trustees over the heads of the prestigious University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE), prompting massive protests both inside and outside Hungary. In December 2020, the government also complemented the “privatization” of universities by adopting a constitutional amendment that makes future changes to the operation of the new “private” foundations, which run the newly privatized universities and research organizations, dependent on a two-thirds majority in parliament, thereby cementing the influence of Fidesz over these foundations, even if the opposition wins the next election (Kazai 2020). The Orbán government has also pressed ahead with its project of establishing a network of educational institutes as schools for party propaganda training. These institutes are designed to socialize selected candidates from the younger generation to become Fidesz activists and to cultivate them for government posts. The Mathias Corvinus College (MCC) has been the main actor in this field, it has recently received huge amounts of financial support from the government, while the public education system remains underfinanced, particularly given the current crisis management needs. MCC benefits from a large presence in the capital and major cities, and has been provided a special training center at lake Balaton in Révfülöp.

Citation:
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Mexico

Score 3

Mexico's education system is relatively weak despite significant public investment in the sector. According to the 2021 OECD Overview of the Education System, education spending in Mexico in 2018 (last year with available data) was 4.6% of the country's GDP (the OECD average is 4.9%). Mexico's per student expenditure (,918 in 2018) was the lowest of all OECD countries. This can explain to a great extent why student performance is lower than in most other OECD countries. What is clear is that rising student numbers will require an increase in overall funding. Also, there are strong regional differences in education and some states are continuously failing to cope with national minimum standards in education at the primary and secondary levels.

López Obrador promised that he would replace his predecessors' reform proposals with his own and increase public education spending. After lengthy negotiations, an education reform package was passed in May 2019. The reform eliminates the Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación (INEE), a highly criticized evaluation facility for teacher performance; makes preschool education (from 0 to 3 years) mandatory; and states that the state must guarantee access to higher education.

The higher education sector faces several major challenges. Mexico's student population increased from 2 million students in 2001 to 4.5 million in 2018. Universities need to adapt to this higher level of demand, and align their study programs with the needs of a developing and diversifying economy. Nevertheless, the tertiary enrollment rate is still far below comparable figures in other major Latin American countries. As in most other countries in the region, private education in Mexico is generally of much higher quality than public education. At every level, privately educated students typically outperform students enrolled in public schools.

Like other areas of public life, the education system was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. Poorer pupils and students were particularly hard hit by university and school closures. This was in part due to the very uneven access to technology, which made it impossible for many pupils and students to attend classes. This was accompanied by further deterioration in and vandalization of school buildings. The Mexican education system will probably need years to recover from the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

Citation:
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