

# Building back better: enhancing equal access to opportunities for all

by Laurence Boone, Aida Caldera Sanchez, Nikki Kergozou,  
Stefano Scarpetta

As some G20 countries are gradually re-opening their economies after a period of strict confinement measures, governments have the opportunity to build back better and make growth more **inclusive**. The COVID-19 crisis is generating new sources of inequality but also exacerbating the inequalities that existed before the crisis. Already disadvantaged groups, low-paid workers, those in non-standard forms of employment, including those in the informal sector, as well youth and many women have been disproportionately affected by the economic and social shock of the pandemic. These groups have been particularly exposed because of the nature of their jobs and because they suffer from weaker coverage by social protection tools. G20 Governments have acted quickly and boldly to provide immediate support for people and businesses, but building back better involves tackling these inequalities. [Our new report](#) prepared for the G20 discusses why these groups are disadvantaged and which levers governments can use to enhance access to opportunities for groups in more urgent need of support, including young people, women, informal and non-standard workers, low-income, low-skilled workers and SMEs (OECD, 2020[1]).

The pandemic is increasing the risk that children and young people struggle to access learning opportunities and potentially do not graduate, while those who do will find it

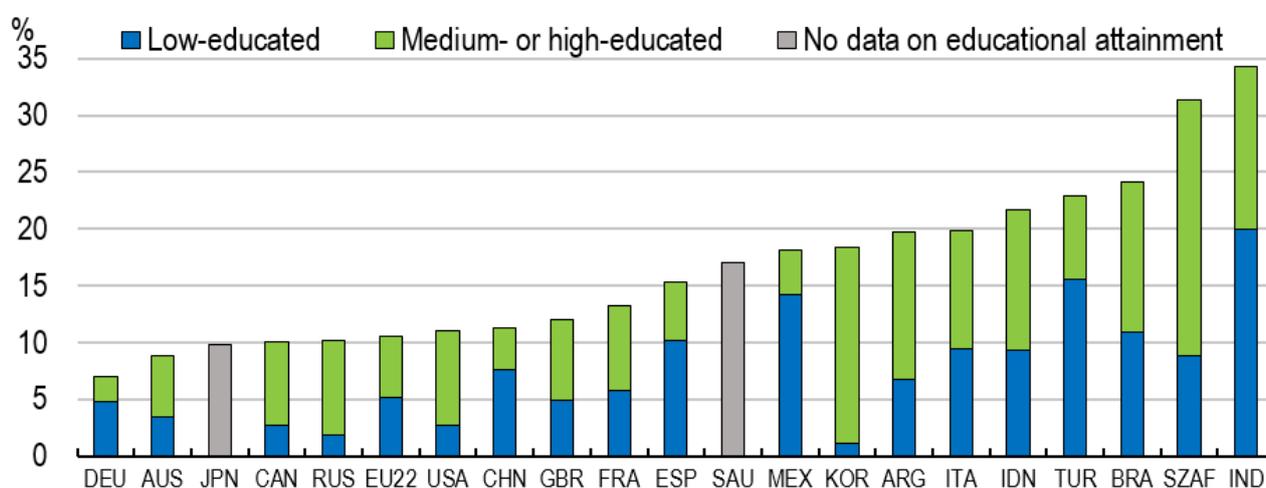
harder to find work experience and jobs. There is a risk that confinement measures compound the inequalities in children's learning linked to their family's socio-economic status as parents with higher levels of education and higher income have more opportunities to telework or arrange their work schedules to spend time with their children. In the lead-up to the crisis many young people already struggled to gain a solid foothold in the labour market, with around 19% of 15-29 year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) on average across G20 economies (Figure 1). Young people are also often among the most affected during labour market downturns as they generally hold less secure jobs (Figure 2) (OECD, 2020[2]). While the effects of the pandemic on the labour market are just starting, the increase in the youth unemployment rate was almost double that for the entire working-age population. The youth unemployment rate increased from 14.3 to 18.6 percent between February and May across G20 countries for which data is available, compared to an increase from 6.0 to 8.2% for the working-age population<sup>1</sup>.

The first experiences of young people in the labour market is crucial: youth unemployment can have long-lasting scarring effects in terms of lower pay and higher unemployment (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011[3]; Schmillen and Umkehrer, 2017[4]). After the global financial crisis it took a whole decade, until 2017, before the youth unemployment rate returned to its pre-2008 level (OECD, 2020[2]). We can promote more equal access to opportunities for children and young people by targeting resources to disadvantaged schools and students, investing in high-quality teachers and school leaders and ensuring qualified educational staff and high staff-child ratios. Effective employment and social support, such as job search assistance and counselling, and work experience opportunities are important to help young people in their transition to the labour market. Targeted employment support

and screening for barriers to access opportunities can help ensure that all young people, and particularly the most disadvantaged, receive the type and intensity of employment and welfare support that they need. Close collaboration between schools and the public and private employment services can help increase the effectiveness of these services.

**Figure 1. Many young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) have not completed high school**

Percentage of 15-29 year-olds who are not in employment, education or training, by educational attainment, 2018



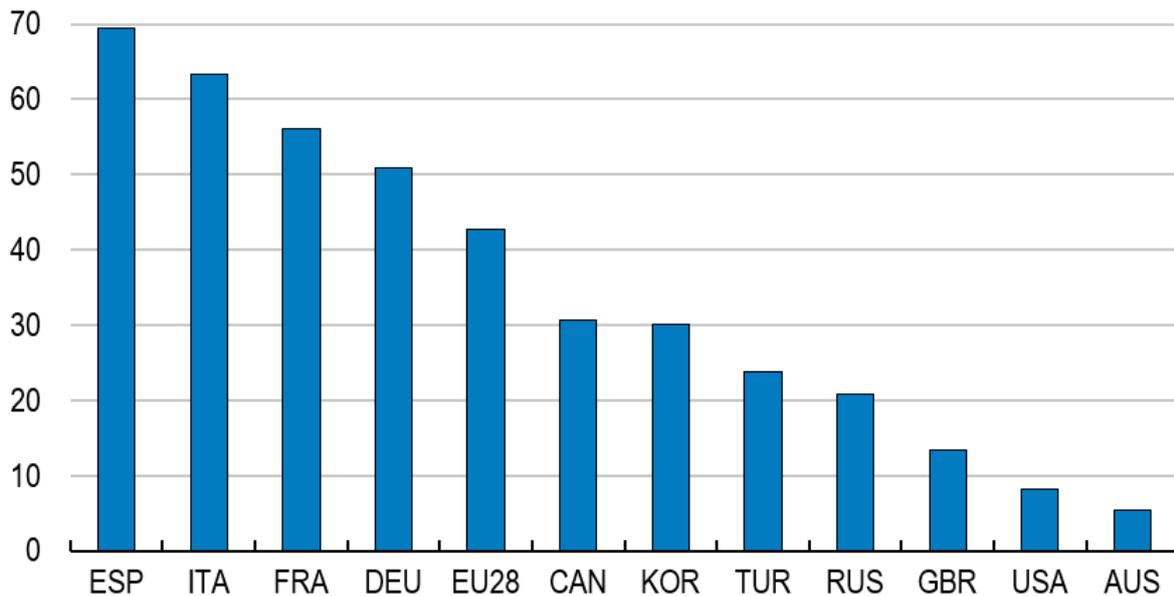
Note: A breakdown by educational attainment is not available for Japan and Saudi Arabia. The data refer to 2010 for China, 2015 for Japan, 2016 for Saudi Arabia and 2017 for Korea.

Source:

OECD (2020), Enhancing equal access to opportunities for all in G20 countries.

**Figure 2. Youth in temporary employment**

15-24 year olds, % of dependent employment, 2019 or latest available



Note: Temporary employment includes wage and salary workers whose job has a pre-determined termination date. Measured as percentage of dependent employees (i.e. wage and salary workers). Data for Australia and the United States are from 2017.

Source: OECD Employment Database.

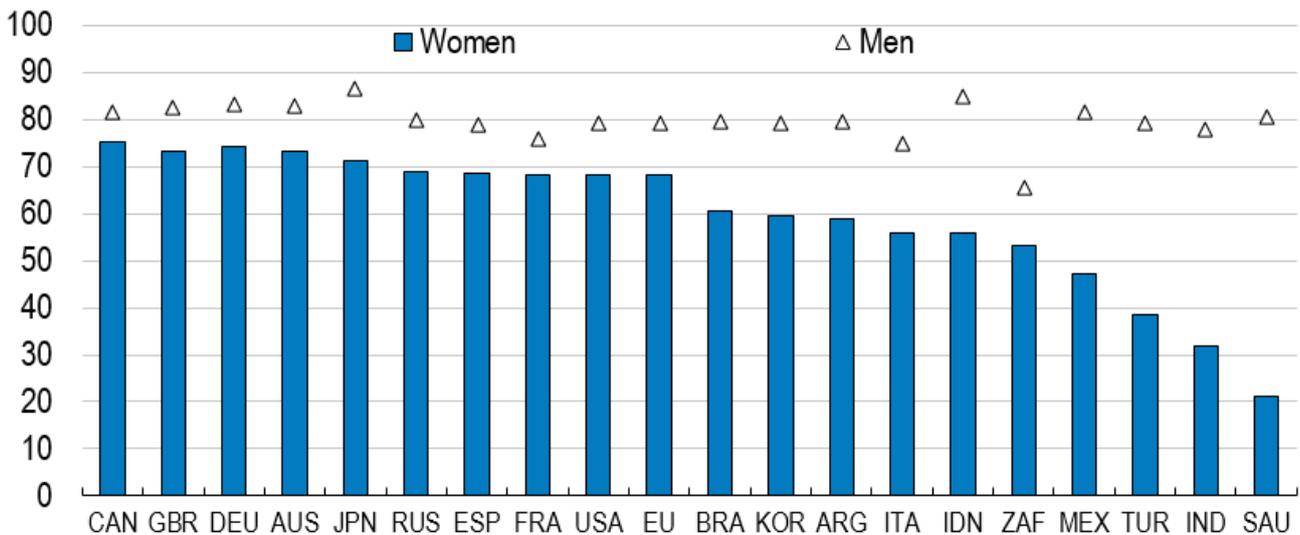
**Low-income, low-skill workers are being hit hard by the pandemic on multiple fronts.** Low-income workers are less able to work from home, are more likely to be working in sectors affected by shutdowns and are more likely to have suffered job or earnings loss. Even in the years leading up to the crisis, low-income, low-skill workers faced the risk of being replaced by digital and automated solutions (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018[5]). The crisis has pushed societies even more towards greater online sales and remote working. This push is likely to speed up digitalisation and automation trends, resulting in an even larger change in the demand for skilled jobs over the coming years. Building a sustainable and inclusive recovery means investing in people. Through upskilling and reskilling, especially in digital technologies, we can make digitalisation an enabler rather than competition for these workers. This calls, however, for reducing financial, time and scheduling barriers to participation in adult learning and for making sure that education and training programmes respond to the demand for skills in today's and future labour markets. Online

training offers many opportunities to expand access to adult learning, but low-skill workers may lack the skills to make the most of this kind of training and may need extra support.

**The pandemic recession has affected labour market prospects for women more than men so far.** Many of the sectors most directly affected by COVID-19 are major employers of women. Even at the onset of the pandemic, women already faced difficulties accessing the same labour market opportunities as men. Women are less likely to participate in the labour market (Figure 3), and those who do work on average in jobs of poorer quality, with lower earnings and a greater incidence of part-time and informal work. These gender differences in employment rates, hours worked and hourly earnings cumulate over people's lives into a substantial gender gap in labour income. Across advanced G20 countries with available data, this gap ranges from around 30% in Canada to over 70% in Turkey. Outside of their paid job, the COVID-19 crisis likely amplified women's unpaid workload at home (OECD, 2020[2]). G20 countries have made significant progress to reducing the gender gap in labour force participation but the pandemic has rolled some of this back. Recovery policies need to double down on reducing gender gaps in labour force participation by expanding access to quality formal childcare, reforming paid family-leave policies and strengthening long-term care systems. Further efforts will be needed to reduce the gender gap in earnings and the incidence of low pay among women by fighting gender biases and stereotypes, by attracting more women into careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and by increasing the representation of women in leadership positions.

**Figure 3. The gender gap in labour force participation remains large in some G20 economies**

Percentage of the population aged 15-64 participating in the labour force, 2018



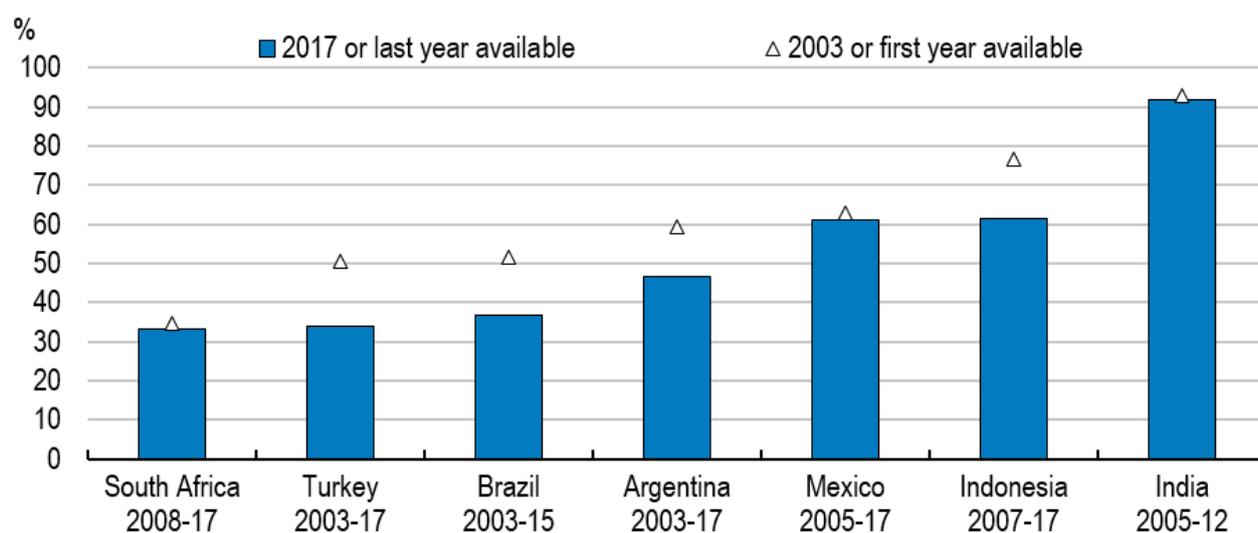
Note: The data refer to: 2015 for India and 2017 for Russia; and the population aged 15 and over for India and 16-64 for the United States.  
Source: OECD (2020), Enhancing equal access to opportunities for all in G20 countries.

**Informal and non-standard workers**, including workers on temporary contracts, in part-time jobs and the self-employed, are particularly exposed to job and income losses in any crisis (OECD, 2020[2]). At the same time, these workers often benefit less, or do not benefit at all, from social protection measures and health coverage. A sizeable share of workers undertake non-standard work (OECD, 2020[6]), while informal workers make up 33 to 91 percent of all workers in emerging G20 economies with available data (Figure 4). The crisis has highlighted the extent of this vulnerability by forcing some non-standard and informal workers to choose between protecting themselves from the virus and having an income. Many countries have recognised this difficult situation and have put in place emergency income support, scaling up means-tested assistance of last resort, introducing new ad-hoc cash transfers and providing direct support for expenses. However, these disadvantages in labour market conditions have structural roots. These workers are often faced with lower job quality and fewer opportunities for training and career development. To ensure a more resilient and inclusive economy and society, we need to help more workers get good quality jobs and benefit

from social protection systems. We can do this by encouraging formal job creation, in part by ensuring effective labour market regulation that avoids unnecessarily adding to the cost of formal employment, increasing the perceived benefits of formal employment, keeping labour taxes moderate and strengthening enforcement methods and compliance. We can improve access to training and career development for these workers by making training rights portable between jobs and available to all irrespective of employment status through individual learning schemes.

**Figure 4. Informality rates are still sizable in G20 emerging economies**

Informally employed persons as a % of the working-age employment



Note: Informality is defined to include: i) employees who do not pay social security contributions; and ii) self employed who do not pay social security contributions or whose business is not registered.

Source:

OECD (2020), Enhancing equal access to opportunities for all in G20 countries.

**SMEs are facing dramatic revenue losses and severe liquidity shortages as a result of the pandemic.** Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for the majority of overall employment and have a considerable impact on employment growth (OECD, 2019[7]; Koirala, 2019[8]). The sudden loss of revenue could translate into insolvency problems and unnecessary bankruptcy for SMEs who in normal times are viable and sound

businesses. Building back better also involves creating the right conditions for SMEs to thrive. We can create these by improving access to finance, creating a business-friendly environment that creates an equal playing field across businesses of all sizes, reducing regulatory barriers and supporting women and youth entrepreneurship.

**We have a chance to build back better and make growth more inclusive.** But to do this, we need to tackle the inequalities that existed well before this pandemic and are now getting worse. Governments have many levers to make this happen. G20 Governments need to keep acting boldly to make sure that the recovery benefits everyone.

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OECD (2020), “Distributional risks associated with non-standard work: Stylised facts and policy considerations”, OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134\\_134518-2bfush541w&title=Distributional-risks-associated-with-nonstandard-work-Stylised-facts-and-policy-considerations](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134518-2bfush541w&title=Distributional-risks-associated-with-nonstandard-work-Stylised-facts-and-policy-considerations). [6]

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Schmillen, A. and M. Umkehrer (2017), "The scars of youth: Effects of early-career unemployment on future unemployment experience", International Labour Review, Vol. 156/3-4, pp. 465-494, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12079>. [4]

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# Speeding up economic catch-up in the BRIICS with better governance and more education

by Yvan Guillemette, Macroeconomic Analysis Division, Economics Department

Economic research has established that a large part of income disparities between poor and rich countries can be attributed to differences in governance and in the quantity and quality of human capital. In the [latest long-run reference scenario published by the OECD](#), GDP per capita growth is relatively strong in the BRIICS in the coming decades, but living standards nevertheless remain less than half those of the United States in 2060, in part because of remaining gaps in governance and educational attainment. But the BRIICS can

accelerate economic catch-up by improving these aspects of the economic environment, as demonstrated in an alternative scenario.

The quality of governance depends on a cluster of related institutions, including economic, political, legal and social aspects. In the model behind the long-run projections, institutional quality is proxied by a rule of law index, one of six governance indicators regularly updated by the World Bank. It is a perceptions-based index intended to capture "...the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rule of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence". In the model, improved governance not only raises productivity in the long run, but it also boosts the speed at which the full long-run effects of reforms are attained, including in other domains, such as education.

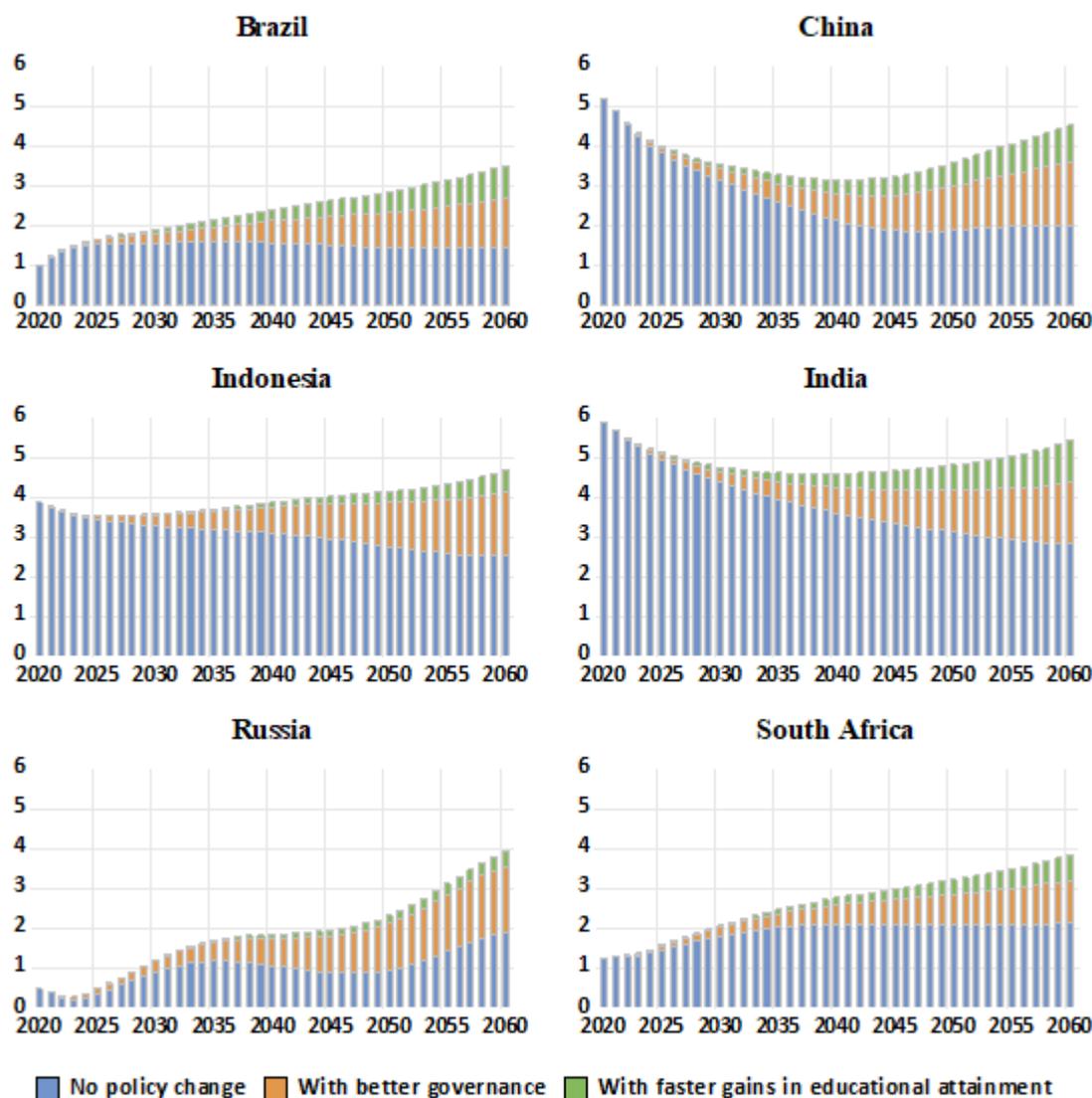
Education not only embeds knowledge and skills in individuals, raising their productivity, but it also encourages participation in groups, opens doors to job opportunities, develops social interactions, makes individuals better aware of their rights, improves health, reduces poverty and facilitates the sharing and transmission of knowledge needed for developing new technologies.

The potential for reforms in these areas to improve long-run economic prospects in the BRIICS can be illustrated by comparing the reference scenario – featuring no change to governance and only a "most likely" evolution of educational attainment – with an alternative scenario in which governance is strengthened and bigger gains in educational attainment are made. The alternative scenario assumes that rule of law scores and mean years of schooling in the BRIICS catch up to the OECD medians over the 2020-to-2060 period.

Better governance and higher educational attainment raise an

economy's productivity, allowing living standards to rise. The gains build up slowly over time but by 2060, annual growth in living standards in the BRIICS is roughly 2 percentage points higher than in the reference scenario (see figure), and levels are between 30% and 50% higher. The positive *growth* impacts from the reforms would start tapering off gradually after 2060 while the *level* impacts would continue to accumulate, corresponding to the long lags involved in benefitting fully from structural reforms. In terms of relative importance, strengthening governance makes the largest contribution in this alternative scenario, with two thirds of the aggregate BRIICS effect. It is particularly important in Russia, while Brazil, China and India also have much to gain by improving educational attainment.

## Projected annual growth in living standards (real GDP per capita) in the BRIICS, per cent



The results underscore the importance for the BRIICS of targeting education and governance as areas for improvement, and of taking a long-term view of their importance for growth and well-being. And while the BRIICS are used here for illustrative purposes, other countries could similarly benefit from faster gains in education and from governance reforms. Notably Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Turkey score relatively low on governance.

### Further reading:

Guillemette, Y. and D. Turner (2018), "The Long View: Scenarios for the World Economy to 2060", *OECD Economic Policy*

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<https://doi.org/10.1787/9cba114b-en>.

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# **Slovakia...it's time to invest in the future**

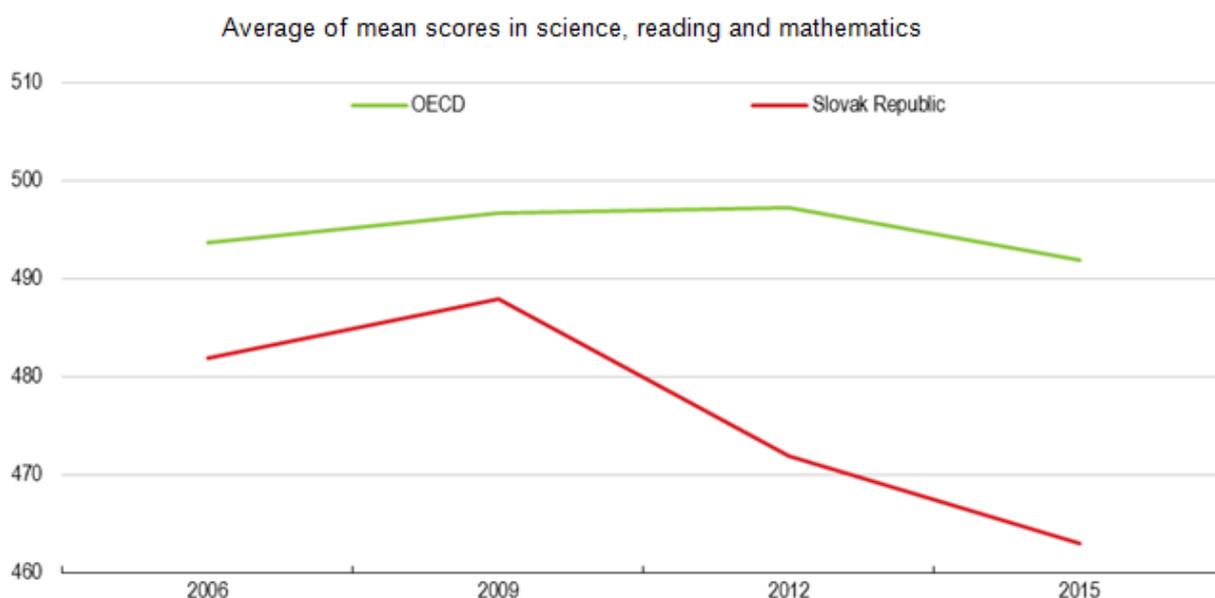
by Gabriel Machlica, Slovak Republic Desk, OECD Economics Department

The Slovak Republic continues to exhibit robust economic performance. International competitiveness is strong, fiscal and financial policies are prudent, poverty and income inequality are low, and the country's environmental footprint has improved markedly. Employment is rising, prices have been stable, and the external account is near balance. However, there are persistent, substantial public-sector deficiencies, which weigh on the wellbeing of the population and can undermine the sustainability of the economic expansion. These are mostly visible in terms of education and health-care outcomes.

The Slovak education system is not properly preparing students for the labour market. PISA outcomes for 15 year-old Slovaks are weak in international comparison and have deteriorated over time (Figure 1). At the same time, secondary schools fail to overcome the differences in learning outcomes stemming from students' socio-economic backgrounds. Almost one-third of 15 year-old Slovak students did not obtain even a basic level of

proficiency in assessed subjects. This is worrying, as weaker students have limited access to employment and better paying jobs. Slovak tertiary education is among the weakest in the OECD. University research quality as measured by international rankings is low even in a regional comparison. As a result, an increasing number of students choose to study abroad to get a better education.

**Figure 1. Students' education outcomes are weak and deteriorating**

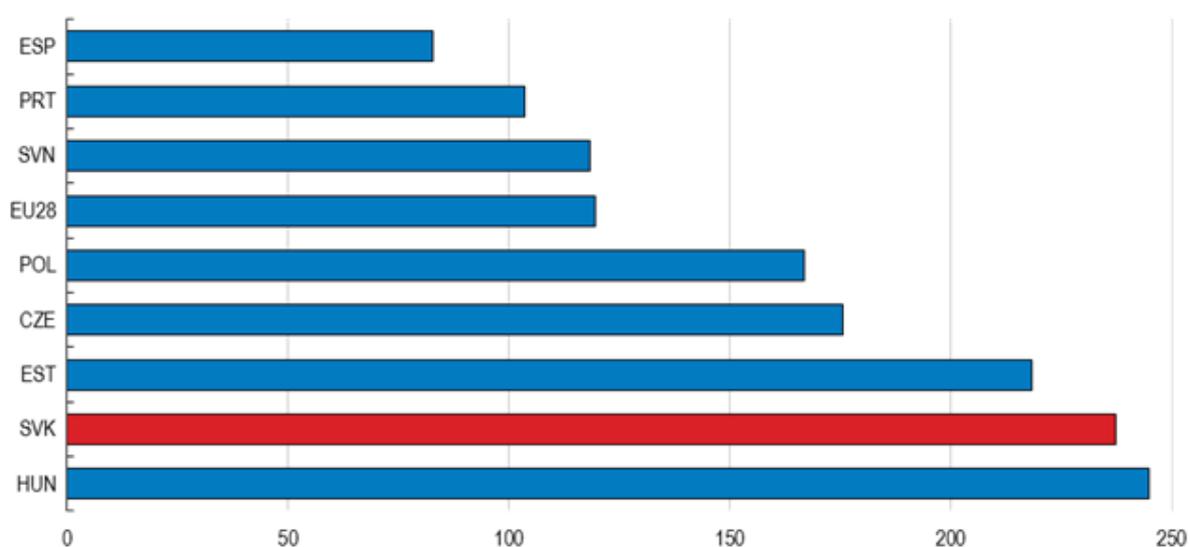


Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*.

Regarding health-care outcomes, Slovakia ranks poorly in international comparisons. Life expectancy at birth is shorter than in countries with similar or lower living standards. Life expectancy at 65 and health-adjusted life expectancy are among the lowest in the OECD. Infant mortality is high and more people in Slovakia die of diseases that could have been prevented (Figure 2). Improving the health-care system could bring large gains in well-being. For example, improving it to the EU level could save about 5000 lives per year.

Figure 2. Preventable mortality<sup>1</sup>

Deaths per 100 000 inhabitants, 2013



1. Defined as deaths from selected disease groups that could have been potentially avoided through good quality health care. Data based Eurostat's list.

Source: OECD (2016), *OECD Health Statistics (database)*; Eurostat (2016), *Health Statistics (database)*.

Over the last decade the Slovak economy has improved markedly in terms of macroeconomic fiscal and financial-stability outcomes. Nevertheless, it is important to undertake significant reform of the public services, especially education and health care, in order to spread the benefits of solid economic performance more equitably across Slovak society.

### Further reading:

OECD (2017), [OECD Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic 2017](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-svk-2017-en), OECD Publishing, Paris, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco\\_surveys-svk-2017-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-svk-2017-en)

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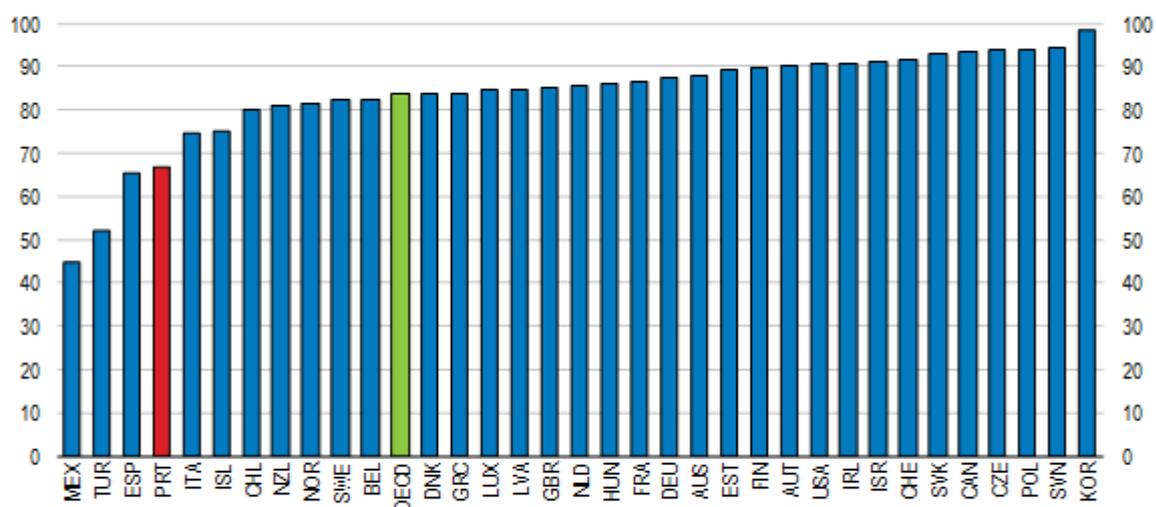
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# Raising skills holds the key to higher living standards and well-being in Portugal

by Sonia Araujo, Country Studies Branch, OECD Economics Department

For each hour worked Portugal produces about half of the output produced in the United States. A historic legacy of very low education attainment is partly to blame for Portugal's lower productivity. However, education attainment remains low even for those who have left the education system not so long ago. At 65%, the share of young adults (aged 25-34 years old) who have completed upper secondary education is still the third lowest in the OECD (Figure 1).

Figure 1. 25-34 year-olds having completed at least upper secondary education  
2015, Per cent



1. The OECD aggregate is an unweighted average; Latvia is included and Japan excluded (no data available).

Source: OECD (2016), "Educational attainment and labour-force status", *OECD Education Statistics* (database).

Low levels of skills are not only an obstacle to higher

material living standards, but also affect the well-being of Portugal's citizens and stand in the way of reducing income inequality, one of Europe's highest, as education is often a pre-requisite for higher job quality and learning opportunities.

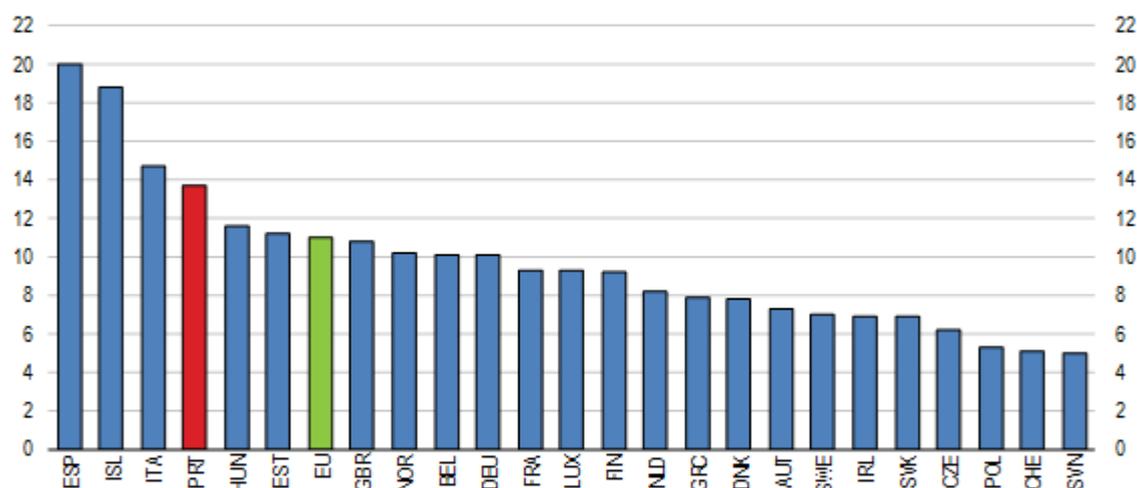
What are the priorities to enhance skills in Portugal?

As discussed in the 2017 [OECD Survey of Portugal](#), the top priority is to raise the skills of the adult population that has left the education system but will stay in the labour market for long. The challenge for Portugal is to find strategies to engage the low skilled, which are much less likely to receive training than the highly qualified young adults. Although this is not a problem unique to Portugal, other countries have managed to attract more low-skilled workers into training by raising awareness of existing training opportunities and by offering opportunities of recognition of skills acquired beyond formal education. Another area for further improvement is to define clear labour market performance indicators against which to check the success of training programs. Monitoring performance and policy evaluation is underdeveloped in Portugal and improvement in these areas would allow focusing resources on those programmes that really make a difference for labour market outcomes of low skilled adults.

Second, the education system needs to do more to reduce Portugal's early school leaving rate, one of the highest in Europe (Figure 2), and a major reason behind the low qualifications of young adults. One of the drivers of early school leaving is grade repetition, an ingrained practice in the Portuguese education system to resolve student learning difficulties. By age 15, around one third of Portuguese students have repeated a year at least once. International experience shows that grade repetition is an ineffective way of supporting underperforming students. In Portugal, grade repetition is a stronger predictor of additional repetitions

along the education system. It also exacerbates inequalities, as half of the students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to repeat a grade, in stark contrast with the OECD average of 20%. Finding alternatives to grade repetition and strengthening learning opportunities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is a priority to improve the overall level of skills. The [economic survey of Portugal](#) recommends re-focusing resources on primary and pre-primary education, detecting and providing early individualised support of students at risk, strengthening teacher training and exposure to best working practices, creating incentives to attract the most experienced teachers and principals to disadvantaged schools and taking account of students' profiles and specific needs when allocating resources across schools.

**Figure 2. Student early school leaving rate is high**  
 Percentage of the population aged 18 to 24 having attained at most lower secondary education and not being involved in further education or training<sup>1</sup>



1. The early school leaving rate for Spain covers "school drop outs".

Source: Eurostat (2016), "Youth education and training", *Eurostat Database* and European Commission (2014), "Overview of Europe 2020 Targets", [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/national-targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/national-targets/index_en.htm).

Third, the vocational education and training (VET) system needs a comprehensive evaluation. The VET system has developed quite fast in the past decade, putting an end to Portugal's strong bias towards academically-orientated programmes. However, two systems co-exist in parallel, and the courses run by the Ministry of Labour have a stronger dual nature than the VET courses organised by the Ministry of Education. The

government should unify the different VET systems by establishing a single dual VET system with strong work-based learning in companies. VET is also provided by several private training entities, risking overlaps and inefficiencies in the use of resources. The capacity to monitor training quality and labour market outcomes of VET students also needs to be strengthened. The authorities should regularly compile performance indicators and use them to streamline the VET offer and improve training quality.

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# Mind the gaps: boost early childcare education and care in Costa Rica

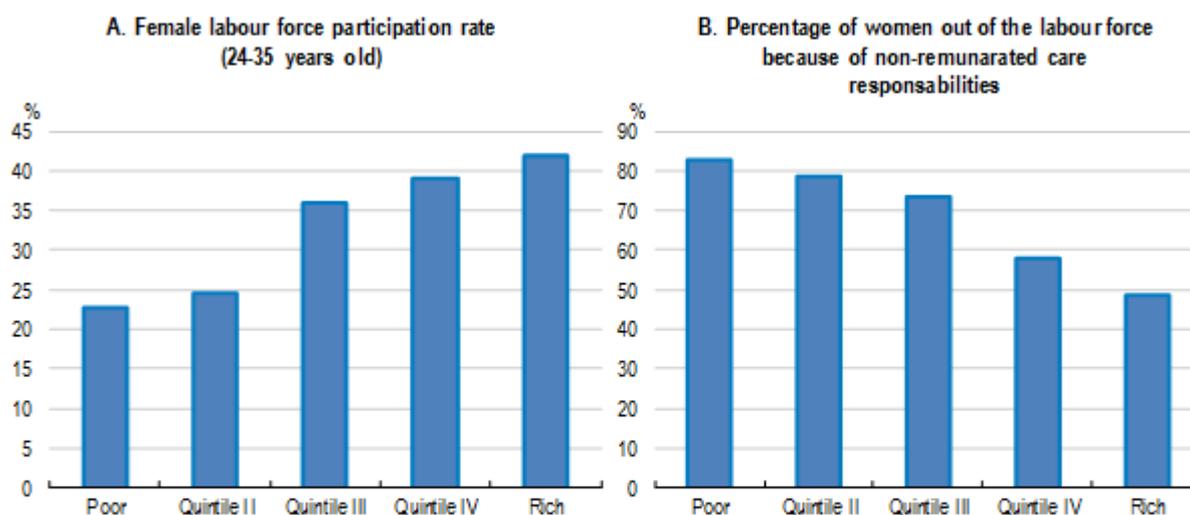
By Alberto González Pandiella, Economist, SDD, OECD Economics Department

Costa Rican well-being indicators are comparable or even above the OECD average in several dimensions (OECD, 2016a). Nevertheless, gaps with OECD countries are large in two dimensions: labour market participation and education. This

hampers both long-term growth prospects and equity. Boosting early childcare education and care would help to close both gaps (Gonzalez Pandiella, 2016).

Only slightly over half of the Costa Rican working-age women participate in the labour market. Gaps in participation start at very early ages and remain large thereafter. Women from low socioeconomic background face difficulties to continue in education and tend to drop out of the labour force. Only one out of four women in low income households in the 24-35 age bracket participate in the labour market (Figure 1, Panel A). This low participation is predominantly due to the non-remunerated care responsibilities they have to assume (Figure 1, Panel B). This highlights the need to increase the supply of publicly-funded childcare services, and to target them at women in low income households.

**Figure 1. Care responsibilities hinder labour market participation of poor women**  
By income quintile



Note: Panel A: Female labour force participation rate is the share of women (24-35 years old) working or looking for a job relative to the total population of 24-35 years old. Panel B: Proportion of women (24-35 years old) out of the labour force because of household non-remunerated care responsibilities.  
Source: OECD calculations based on ENAHO (Encuesta Nacional de Hogares, National Households Survey).

Costa Rica shows a strong commitment to invest in education. But the average education attainments remain low. Less than half of the 25-29 cohort has completed secondary education, which is well below graduation rates observed in other Latin

American countries such as Colombia, Peru and Panama. PISA scores are low in all disciplines, indicating that the quality of education is also comparatively low. Moreover, educational gaps depending on households' income are widening. These inequalities in education outcomes start early. At the end of primary education, the share of students coming from low income households lagging behind is high, and this is aggravated in lower secondary, when many drop out. Attendance to pre-primary education helps to decrease the likelihood of low performance in secondary education, even after controlling for socioeconomic factors (OECD, 2016b). Thus, boosting attendance to early childhood education and care, with an especial focus on children from low-income households, would also contribute to close educational inequalities and gaps in Costa Rica.

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## **Norway, higher education could deliver more for less**

by Vassiliki Koutsogeorgopoulou , Economist, OECD Economics

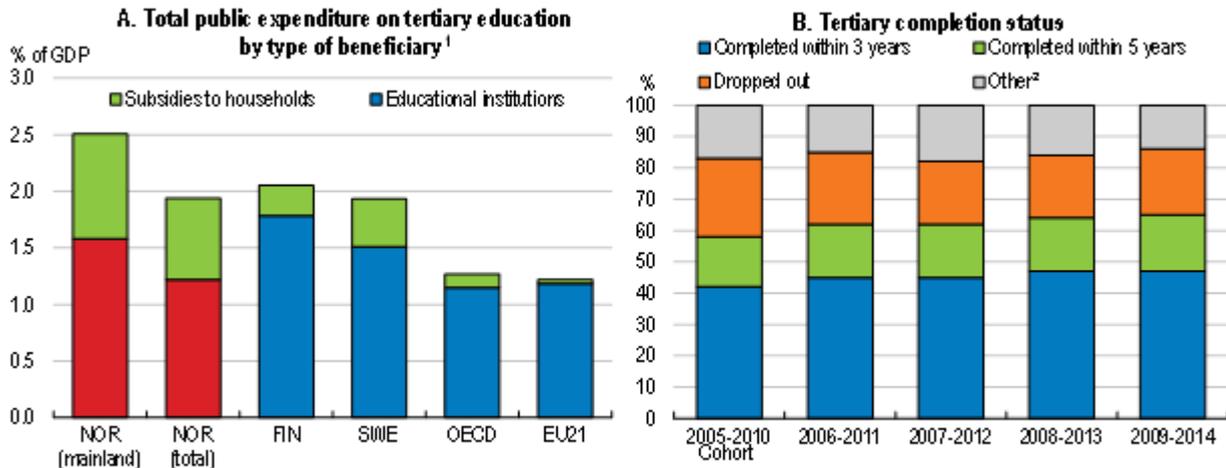
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Norway's predominately public and tuition-free tertiary education system has encouraged participation and generated high attainment rates. However, few Norwegian universities rank high in international comparisons on the basis of research related and other indicators. Also, many students take considerable time to finish their studies. Moreover, despite an increase, enrolments remain low in fields such as science and engineering, although disaggregated data show quite different labour market outcomes across STEM disciplines; and supply shortages in some more "practical" areas, namely teachers and nurses, are looming. Spending on tertiary education is comparatively high, both in terms of annual expenditure per student and as a share of GDP. Efficiency and quality can be improved.

Degree completion times are long, despite various incentives to shorten them. For instance, conversion of loans to grants for early completion has had limited success. Higher education funding has overly incentivised institutions to produce study credit points (required for the completion of courses), rather than degree completions. Plans to include the graduation rates in the formula for performance-based funding should be pursued. Further incentives and financial support for students to complete their courses on time would be helpful. The outcomes should be monitored closely. Current efforts to improve data and dissemination via mechanisms such as the annual national student survey and the development of a portal of quality indicators need to continue.

Students' choices should be better directed towards subjects with high demand, for instance, via loan discounts for such subjects. Moreover, the funding system of higher-education providers could offer differentiated rewards to institutions for successful study outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those taking up courses linked closely to labour market needs.

## Tertiary education indicators



1. Public subsidies to households cover living costs (scholarships and grants to students/households and students loans). 2012 data.
2. Still enrolled in one of the selected or other tertiary programmes or awarded another qualification.

Source: OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015*; Statistics Norway (2015), *Throughput of Students in Tertiary Education Statistics*.

The efficiency and quality of Norwegian higher education can also be influenced by the existence of many small institutions that aim to meet regional educational needs but which often do not have a critical mass of staff and students. Reforms underway to restructure the higher education through mergers that aim to overcome these problems, while retaining regional coverage, are therefore welcome.

Find out more:

OECD (2016), [OECD Economic Surveys: Norway 2016](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

Koutsogeorgopoulou, V. (2016), "[Addressing the Challenges in Higher Education in Norway](#)", *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*, No. 1285, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2014), [OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: Norway](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

# Vocational education after transition in Poland

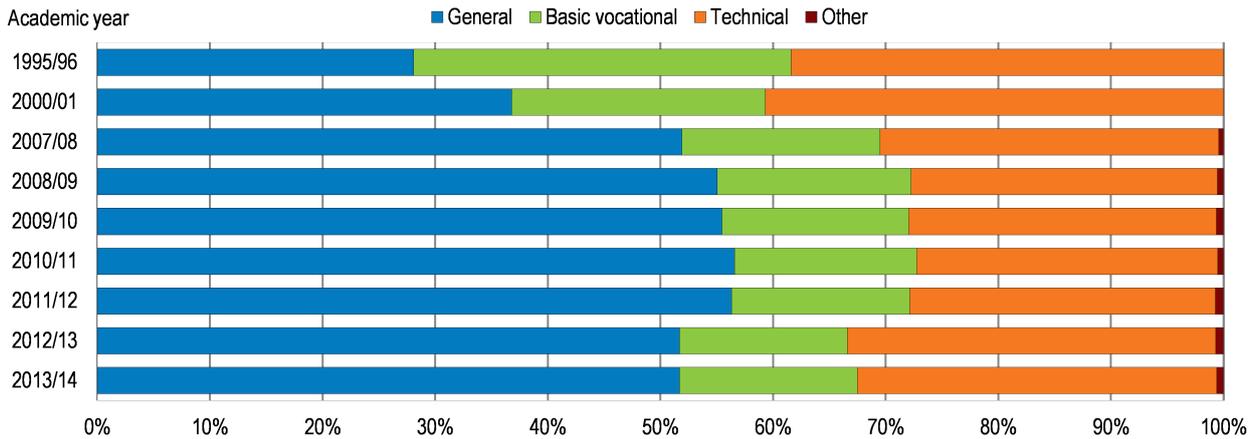
by Nicola Brandt, Head of Poland Desk,  
OECD Economics Department

Adapting vocational education to the needs of a market economy has been a challenge in Poland as in other transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Average educational attainment and literacy rates were relatively high and vocational education was strong in Poland, when the economic transformation set in. Yet, competencies taught in vocational schools were often specific to enterprises to which they were attached, many of which disappeared.

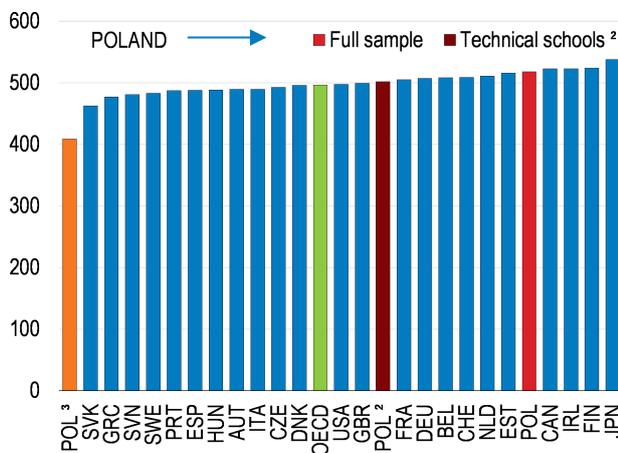
Meanwhile, it took vocational schools time to establish links to newly created firms, and the process of developing high-quality training in management, IT and other advanced technologies is still ongoing. Rote learning was widespread, and skills that help people adapt to new circumstances, such as critical thinking, creativity and leadership, were long neglected. Programmes on offer have not always been adapted to labour market needs, leading to shortages of workers in some areas and a surplus in others. As a result, the reputation of vocational education suffered. During the transition young people abandoned basic vocational education in large numbers (Panel A), while a tertiary education boom set in.

Vocational education lost ground during the transition

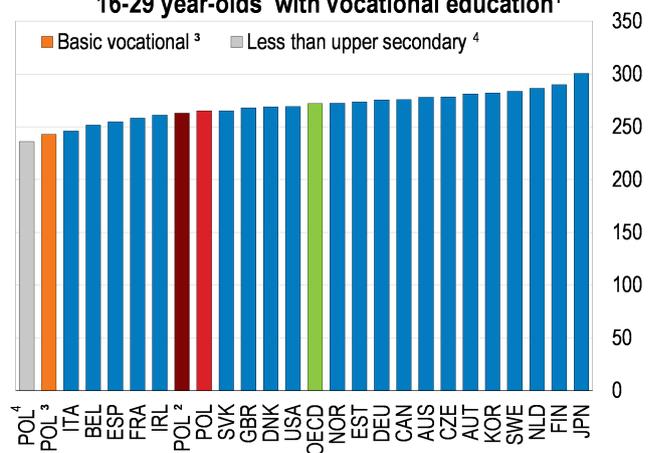
### A. First-year students in upper secondary school by type of education



### B. Mean PISA reading score



### C. Mean PIAAC literacy proficiency scores for 16-29 year-olds with vocational education<sup>1</sup>



1. The data are based solely on Flanders for Belgium and on England and Northern Ireland for the United Kingdom.
2. Mean reading score for 16 year-old students of Polish technical schools (Panel A) from an optional national study for the first grade of upper secondary school (16 year-olds) complementing PISA and mean PIAAC literacy proficiency score for Polish adults having attended technical schools (Panel B).
3. Mean reading score for 16 year-old students of Polish basic vocational education (Panel A) from an optional national study for the first grade of upper secondary school (16 year-olds) complementing PISA and mean PIAAC literacy proficiency score for Polish adults having attended basic vocational education (Panel B).
4. Mean PIAAC literacy proficiency score for adults with less than upper secondary education.

**Source: GUS (2014), Education in the 2013/2014 School Year; OECD (2013), OECD Skills Outlook 2013 Database and OECD calculations.**

The government has done much to adapt vocational schools to the needs of the market economy. Since 2012 curricula have been based on learning outcomes rather than on a narrow description of subject content. This has given schools more autonomy to adapt their programmes, including in collaboration with employers. There is now more emphasis on general competencies, such as basic skills, reasoning, problem-solving and teamwork, and the programmes also include training on setting up a business. The government launched an image campaign recently, and vocational education has started to regain some ground as shortages of workers with intermediate skills have become apparent.

But challenges remain. Many weak students are concentrated in basic vocational schools as evidenced by their low literacy scores in the OECD's PISA test (Panels B and C). Helping them level their skills requires particularly qualified teachers. Offering interesting pay and career opportunities at basic vocational schools would be one option to attract such teachers. While around 65% of students now combine study and work in firms – a considerable increase from earlier years – the rest still receive their practical training in workshops set up for training purposes. The challenge is to engage Poland's many small firms to offer work placements and contribute to the development of programmes to ensure that they are relevant for their needs.

**Find out more:**

OECD (2016), [OECD Economic Surveys: Poland 2016](#)", OECD Publishing.

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*Beyond*, The World Bank, Washington, DC, pp. 207-51.

Nešperová, A. (2000), *Employment and labour market policies in transition economies*, International Labour Organization, Geneva.