

## **Education at a Glance 2018: An Education International Briefing**

### **Introduction**

The OECD's Education at a Glance (EAG) is published annually. Unlike the OECD's other flagship publications such as PISA, TALIS and PIAAC it does not have its own survey instruments. Rather it is an analysis of existing data drawn from all the OECD's sources including the European Union's from the past year. As such it contains few policy proposals. Nevertheless, its conclusions can often have significant implications for education policy and can be very useful for EI affiliates.

The theme of this year's Education at a Glance focuses on Education and Equity. One feature of this year's EAG is that it gives a much higher profile to referencing the progress of countries against the UN's Sustainable Development Goals including not only SDG 4 on education but others such as those focussing on the environment.

Education at a Glance is an enormous volume. In an effort to make the EAG live up to its name, a selection of key EAG findings relevant to policy making plus a brief commentary are set out below.

### **Executive Summary (Page 23)**

The Executive Summary refers to a number of the EAG's main themes, but not all of them. Two of the starkest findings focus on the gender gap and the impact of socio-economic status. The children of poorly educated parents participate less in early years education and this has a lifetime effect. The striking improvements in girls' education are not reflected in labour markets.

### **Chapter A. The Output of Educational Institutions and the Impact of Learning**

In all OECD countries, the influence of each schools' location and students' socio-economic status have a strong influence on students' mathematical achievements as does children's participation in early years education. One stark finding shows that only 31% of children under three whose mothers had not participated in tertiary education took part in early childhood education whereas 41% of children whose mothers had completed tertiary education took part. (Page 29)

Another key finding is that boys are at least 40% more likely to take part in vocational education than girls. (Page 30)

For the first time the OECD concludes that in 'increasingly digitalised economies literacy and numeracy skills may not be enough to thrive in the labour market'. (Page 31)

Yet the OECD finds that some digital skills are not widespread. With the exception of a few countries (eg Denmark and Iceland) under 10% of adults over 15 have used specialised programming language. (Page 33)

Germany gives the highest amount of development assistance to Education with the US, followed by the UK, France and Japan also among the top five. (Since these are 2016 figures it is likely that US assistance has since been slashed.) (Page 34)

China has the highest number of 25-34 year olds who have not received upper secondary education whereas South Korea has the lowest. (Page 42)

Turkey has the highest percentage of 18-24 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) whereas Iceland has the lowest. (Page 58)

On average across OECD countries, the unemployment rate is almost twice as high for those who have not completed upper secondary education than for those who had. (Page 71)

Employment rates are particularly low for women without upper secondary education. (Page 72)

On average across OECD countries, 25-64 year old adults with a tertiary degree earn 54% more than those who took part in upper secondary education while those who did not receive upper secondary education received 25% less. (Page 89)

The public sector also benefits from a large number of tertiary educated individuals through tax returns. On average in OECD countries, men still earn far more than women over their careers. (Page 102)

The 2018 EAG gives a much higher profile to environmental issues. It emphasises that Education for Sustainable Development is explicitly recognised as a target for the goal on inclusive and equitable education. (Page 121) However, what is worrying is that levels of education do not always correlate significantly across countries with levels of awareness and action. (Page 120) Nevertheless, on average 7 out of 10 students across OECD countries were aware of such issues as environmental degradation such as pollution and preservation of natural resources but were less aware of problems around technologically induced products such as greenhouse gases. (Page 122)

On average over two thirds of adults have a positive attitude towards protecting the environment although that is mainly in Europe. (Page 125) Interestingly the highest percentage of adults (70%) when asked about what personal actions they would take on environmental issues said that they would sort waste for recycling. (Page 126)

The graph on page 134 shows a great variation across countries between the achievements of native born adults and foreign born adults. In some there are wide gaps; in others no gaps.

## **Chapter B. Access to Education, Participation and Progression**

On average at least 90% of 4-17 year olds in OECD countries are enrolled in education. (Page 148)

In about one third of countries with available data, a larger share of upper secondary students are enrolled in vocational programmes than in general programmes with at least 70% of students in the Czech Republic, Finland, and Slovenia in such programmes. In contrast, in Argentina and Ireland vocational programmes are not offered at all at this level. (Page 151)

Grade repetition is much more common in upper secondary education. (Page 153)

Across the OECD around one third of children below the age of three are enrolled in early childhood education (ECEC) although children from more advantaged backgrounds are more likely to participate. (Page 162)

On average the number of children enrolled in pre-primary education increased by 18% between 2005 and 2016. (Page 163)

On average, 86% of children between 3 and 5 years are enrolled in ECEC services. (Page 166)

The average expenditure across the OECD on ECEC education is 0.8% of GDP with Australia, Greece, Ireland and Japan spending 0.3% and countries such as Sweden, and Iceland spending over 1.00%. (Page 170)

On average, across OECD countries, there are 8 children per teacher in ECE programmes. (Page 171) On average, the number of ECEC teachers has increased by 25% between 2005 and 2016. (Page 172)

While in many countries VET is an important part of general secondary education in some it has been marginalised and neglected in favour of general academic education. (Page 182) An average of 58% of young adults in OECD countries will enter bachelor's degree programme or equivalent in their lifetime and 24% are expected to enter Masters or equivalent programme. (Page 195)

There is a large gender gap in fields of study in degree programmes. Twenty-five per cent of males graduate in engineering manufacture and construction compared to 6% of females. Only 5% of males received a degree in education compared to 14% of female graduates. (Page 206)

International students represent 6% of those enrolling for degree programmes and 25% of the total enrolment for Doctorate programmes. Luxembourg, New Zealand, the UK, Australia and Austria, in that order, are the top five countries taking international students. (P 218)

The proportion of international students is on the rise particularly for Masters students and above. (Page 220)

Individuals whose parents have not attained tertiary education are under-represented among graduates. (Page 232)

## **Chapter C. Financial Resources Invested in Education**

On average, OECD countries spend 10,500 USD per year on educational institutions per student although there is a wide variation between countries. (Page 246)

Average annual expenditure per student in educational institutions as a share of GDP education spend is 22% at primary, 25% at secondary and 38% at tertiary levels. (Page 247)

Page 250 shows the cumulative expenditure per student by country on educational institutions between the age of 6 and 16.

Between 2010 and 2015, total expenditure on educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels as a share of GDP decreased in more than two thirds of OECD and partner countries. (Page 258)

On average, across OECD countries, educational institutions are mainly publicly funded with government funding accounting for 90% of primary, secondary and post-secondary spending and 66% for tertiary education. The US and UK have the highest levels of private spending on education. (Page 270)

Page 280 shows changes in public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure. Significant declines are registered for Ireland, Portugal, Lithuania, Italy, Spain and Slovenia.

Page 292 shows the levels of tuition fees by country paid by tertiary students. The UK, US and Chile in that order have the highest levels of tuition fees.

Page 324 continues the debate on class sizes and teacher salaries. Again the OECD proposes that teachers' salaries should increase at the expense of smaller class sizes although it concedes that smaller classes may be more advantageous for disadvantaged students.

## **Chapter D. Teachers, The Learning Environment and the Organisation of Schools**

Page 334 shows the amount of compulsory instruction time annually that teachers are expected to work to. Australia and Denmark have the highest levels of instruction time and Hungary the lowest.

Page 350 shows the average class sizes in primary education per country.

In over half of OECD countries teachers' salaries increased in real terms between 2000 and 2017. Notable exceptions were the UK, France and Greece where there was a significant decline in teachers' salaries over this period. (Pages 365-366)

In OECD countries, on average 12% of primary teachers are under the age of 30 with the UK having the highest proportion of teachers under 30 (31%).

Page 408 shows where the key decisions are taken in educational systems.

Page 410/11 contains an account of teacher unions' involvement in policy making at country level.

## **Education International Commentary**

The great benefit of Education at a Glance is that it contains 'killer facts'. Irrespective of its use to governments EAG data is also enormously useful for teachers' unions who will find the EAG a source of valuable evidence for campaigns and policies.

One of the most disturbing findings of this year's EAG is the recorded decline in education spending's share of the majority of countries' GDPs. Not only that, there is a decline in education spending's share of the total public expenditure in a number of countries. Given the fact that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals apply to all countries including those in the OECD there needs to be a concerted policy push from all sections of civil society, and from education unions in particular, to raise levels of education spending.

As the EAG makes clear, it is those from disadvantaged backgrounds who suffer most from flatlining or declining education budgets. The EAG highlights how vital early years education is for all children. It provides the necessary foundation for success through to higher education and indeed in the Labour Market.

Although there have been significant advances in the education of young women it is clear that gender stereotyping is still significant both in the choice of higher education courses, vocational education and in pay/compensation in the world of work. Much more has to be done to open up the opportunities for both girls and boys in statutory education and in tackling pay discrimination in the workplace.

The section in the EAG on Sustainable Development is welcome and encouraging. If the majority of the public across the OECD is now aware that raw materials are finite, that is a positive foundation to build on for both education for sustainable growth and for sustainable economic growth itself.

While much of the EAG is extremely valuable, the OECD's continuing arguments that there is a trade off between lower class sizes and higher teachers' salaries is invidious. It would be much more productive if it started arguing strongly for reducing class sizes for students with significant needs including those from disadvantaged backgrounds - policy which the OECD itself has started to recognise as important.

