

Education and skills

STRENGTHENING THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS SYSTEM OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

- ▶ Skills shortages in the Western regions persist alongside skills mismatches and an uneven availability of technological and human resources in the central and Eastern regions.
- ▶ Despite projected economic growth and declining unemployment rates, the share of long-term unemployed remains high.
- ▶ Concerted efforts are needed to improve the quality and relevance of skills developed throughout the education and training system – from early childhood all the way through school, vocational and tertiary education to adult learning.

What's the issue?

The OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) shows that the Slovak Republic performs at the average in terms of literacy and above average in numeracy with respect to other participating countries. While the share of low performers in literacy (11.6%) and numeracy (13.8%) is smaller than the OECD average (18.9% and 22.7% respectively), it is still significant and means that many Slovakian adults struggle to read simple texts and solve basic mathematical problems.

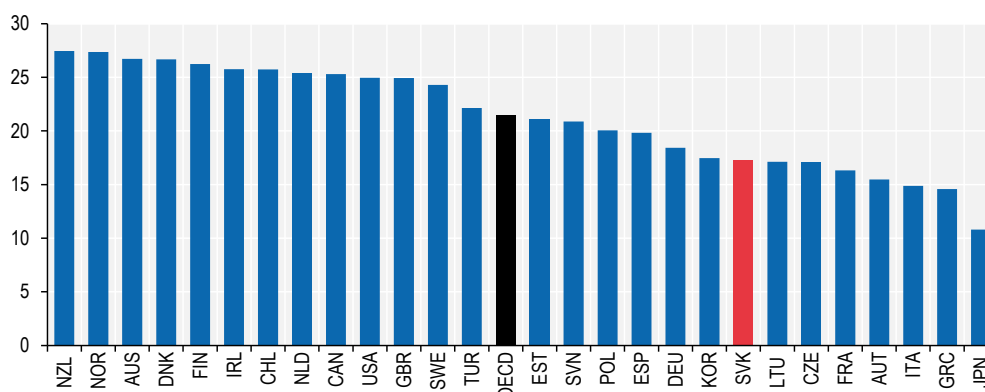
A closer look at the gap in scores for younger (16-24 years) and older (55-65 years) cohorts shows only a 10 point difference in favour of younger adults – one of the lowest gaps recorded in OECD countries. This indicates a relative stagnation over time in the ability of the education system to ensure that everyone acquires the

literacy skills required in today's workplaces. The 2015 round of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment points to a worsening of this trend, with the average performance of 15-year old students in reading, mathematics and science having fallen since 2006 and the share of low performers having risen.

The share of Slovakian adults who have no computer experience is also high, at 22%. Many of these low skilled adults will be in the workforce for decades to come and will struggle to meet changing skills requirements. The Slovak Republic is also among the OECD countries with the lowest participation rates in adult education and training. To make things worse, the high-skilled receive almost five times more training than the low-skilled: the highest such ratio among PIAAC countries. There is clearly a need for

Boosting participation in adult learning will be key to raising productivity and inclusion

Share of adults (aged 25-64) participating in lifelong learning, in %, 2015 or latest available year



Source: OECD calculations based on OECD (2017), OECD Survey of Adult Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015), OECD Publishing, Paris, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

greater efforts to boost work-based learning, strengthen foundation and digital skills while introducing measures to support adult learning.

Why is this important for the Slovak Republic?

Increased productivity and innovation will be the main source of economic growth in the future. While there is a well-established relationship between skills and productivity, all countries are struggling to understand what skills, or combination of skills, matter most for innovation and inclusive growth.

This is partly because the skills needed to succeed in both the workplace and in society are rapidly changing. The Slovak Republic's growth, prosperity and wellbeing hinges upon developing skills that are relevant to the needs of changing labour markets, facilitating transitions from school to work and making the best use of available skills in high performing workplaces. The National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2017 sets out an ambitious framework for strengthening education, employment and social inclusion, but achieving these goals in practice will require a whole of government effort to boost the country's capacity for developing relevant skills, activating available skills and using skills effectively.

The importance of improving skills goes beyond raising employment, income and aggregate growth. PIAAC data show that people with higher foundation skills, such as literacy and numeracy, are far more likely than those with lower skills to report good health, to perceive themselves as actors in political processes, and to have trust in others. That is why it is important for the Slovak Republic to help all people achieve higher skills levels, as this can not only foster equity, but also facilitate active participation in democracy and society.

What should policy makers do?

- ▶ Conduct a strategic assessment of Slovakia's skills system and review current policy settings in the fields of education, training, employment, regional economic development, innovation and tax as a first step in building a future-oriented, coherent and effective national skills strategy.
- ▶ Improve inter-ministerial coordination and engagement of all relevant stakeholders to develop shared goals, coherent and future-oriented skills policies – as well as effective implementation and evaluation mechanisms.
- ▶ Evaluate the recent government measures aimed to increase participation in lifelong learning.
- ▶ Increase spending on those training programmes for unemployed whose effectiveness has been demonstrated.
- ▶ Encourage participation in adult training programmes through a system of vouchers.
- ▶ Build robust and user-friendly skills information systems by leveraging existing national and international data (including PIAAC) to help inform choices made by policy-makers, businesses, educators and people.



Further reading

OECD (2017), *OECD Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://www.oecd.org/slovakia/economic-survey-slovak-republic.htm>

OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results - Volume I - Excellence and Equity in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, country note for the Slovak Republic. <http://www.compareyourcountry.org/pisacountry/svk>

OECD (2016), *A Skills Beyond School Review of the Slovak Republic*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://www.oecd.org/slovakia/a-skills-beyond-school-review-of-the-slovak-republic-9789264233348-en.htm>

OECD (2015), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Slovak Republic*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://www.oecd.org/slovakia/oecd-reviews-of-school-resources-slovak-republic-2015-9789264247567-en.htm>

OECD (2013), *First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-outlook-2013_9789264204256-en