

Education and skills

EQUIPPING THE YOUNG WITH SUFFICIENT BASIC SKILLS TO SUCCEED IN LIFE

- ▶ PISA results show that Greece is not equipping its young people with the basic skills they need to compete in today's world economy.
- ▶ Ongoing high levels of youth unemployment, inefficient resource allocation and a lack of individual institutional responsibility are likely to hold Greece back from unleashing the potential of its young people.
- ▶ Greece needs to ensure that all students – including the children of migrants and refugees who are likely to stay in the country – acquire basic skills.

What's the issue?

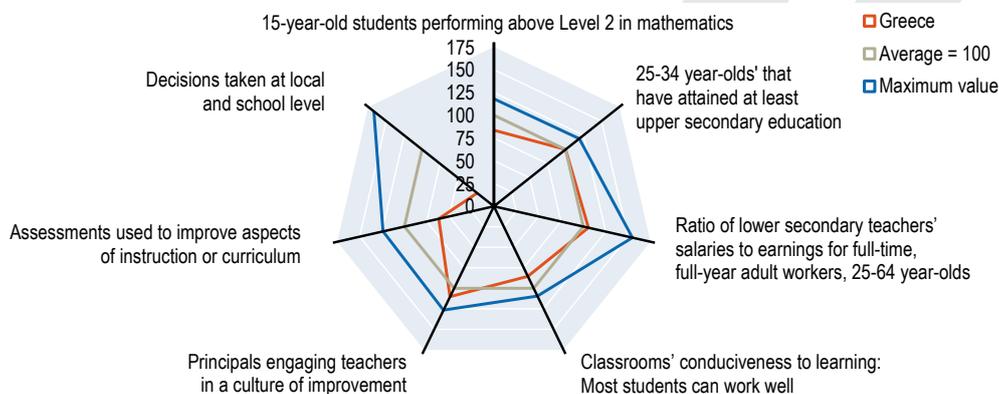
The 2012 OECD PISA survey shows that Greece has one of the weakest performances in Europe with regard to basic skills in reading or mathematics (see Figure). The proportion of low achievers is higher than the EU average in reading, mathematics and science, and was significantly higher in reading. Greece's performance has slightly worsened since the 2009 PISA round and stagnated in all three fields over the last decade.

And while tertiary attainment is on the rise, several pressing issues remain. The employability of recent graduates is quite poor as reflected in very low levels of employment. The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates stood at 47.4% in 2014 (EU average of 80.5%) and the employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates at 38.8% (EU average of 70.8%). Moreover, participation in initial vocational education and training

(VET) remains modest in Greece, with a rate of 33.7% in 2013, compared to an EU average of 48.9%. Finally, the rate of young people (15-19) not in employment, education or training (NEET) was 33.1% in 2013, the second highest in the EU and the third highest in the OECD.

While Greece's dire economic situation is of course an important driver of these disappointing outcomes, weaknesses in the education system also play a role. Whereas other countries have moved to empower schools, increasing their responsiveness (and that of tertiary institutions) to the needs of their students, Greece remains one of the most centrally governed education systems in Europe. And as tertiary education enrolments have increased, the number of departments and institutions, especially in technology institutes, has

On many indicators of the education system, Greece performs worse than OECD average



Source: OECD PISA 2012 database; OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance*, OECD Publishing; OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance*, OECD Publishing.

proliferated, leading to a high level of duplication in some fields and departments with few or no students.

Even with the recent fiscal consolidation, the share of the Greek GDP devoted to education (4.5%) is close to the EU (5%) and OECD (5.2%) averages, while its PISA performance lags behind many countries that spend the same or less per student and countries with similar levels of economic development. The problem is not a lack of investment but a resource allocation and management system which fails to target expenditure where it is most needed. For many, shadow education compensates for the inadequacies of the public system, particularly in preparing students for the tertiary education entrance examination.

Why is this important for Greece?

Despite nearly universal access to education, a portion of the population fails to achieve basic skills. Improving learning outcomes at school by just 25 PISA points – about the level of improvement that countries like Poland or Portugal have achieved over the last decade – could generate over USD 990 billion in additional economic output over the working life of today’s school children. And while such estimates are never wholly certain, the cost of improving education outcomes is just a fraction of the high cost of low student performance. And good skills are not only important for economic outcomes. They also foster equity, inclusion and participation. People with higher levels of education and skills are, for example, more likely to report positive social outcomes such as good health, trust in others, participation in voluntary activities, and political engagement.

What should policy makers do?

- ▶ Increase participation in early childhood education and care, while improving its quality.
- ▶ At later stages of education, ensure that all students acquire basic skills.
- ▶ Pursue, and strengthen measures to assist all primary and secondary schools to tackle early school leaving and low levels of basic skills.
- ▶ Strengthen VET, particularly by ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to the labour market by increasing collaboration with social partners.
- ▶ Expand hands-on workplace training to better integrate diverse groups of young people, encourage them to stay in or re-engage with education and smooth the transition to work.
- ▶ Use work-based learning also to retrain older people who have lost their jobs.
- ▶ Over time move, move from a system which controls the inputs into education to one which devolves responsibilities and holds education institutions accountable for outcomes.
- ▶ Use international examples to ensure the most effective and efficient use of the education budget.
- ▶ Do more to collect robust statistical information on both mismatches and potential shortages in specific areas of the Greek labour market, and to link this information to its potential policy uses.



Further reading

OECD (2015), *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/publications/education-policy-outlook-2015-9789264225442-en.htm>

OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>

OECD (2011), *Education Policy Advice for Greece, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264119581-en>