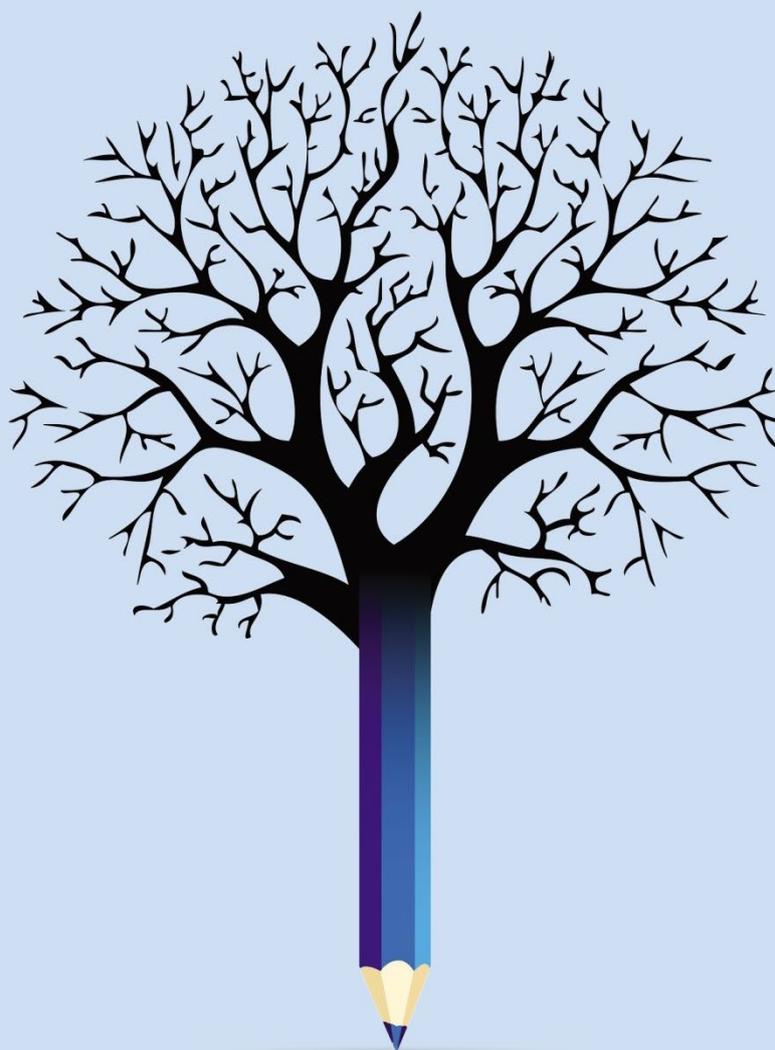




EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK IN **SPAIN**



EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

This updated policy profile on education in Spain is part of the *Education Policy Outlook* series, which presents comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the OECD's substantial comparative and sectorial policy knowledge base, the series offers a comparative outlook on education policy. This country profile is an update of the [first policy profile of Spain](#) (2014) and provides: analysis of individual countries' educational context, strengths, challenges and policies; analysis of international trends; and insight into policies and reforms on selected topics. It is an opportunity to take stock of progress and where the education system stands today from the perspective of the OECD through synthetic, evidence-based and comparable analysis.

Designed for **policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy, and taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile reviews the current context and situation of a country's education system and examines its challenges and policy responses according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future.
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) institutional improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment.
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles contain spotlight boxes that draw attention to selected policy issues that are promising or showing positive results, and may be relevant for other countries.

Special thanks to the Government of Spain for its active input during consultations and constructive feedback on this report. We also thank the European Commission for its valuable analytical and financial support for the update of this country profile.

Authors: This country policy profile was prepared by Jonathan Williams, Diana Toledo Figueroa, Gillian Golden, and Shiana Crosby in the Policy Advice and Implementation Division, led by Paulo Santiago. Administrative support was provided by Jonathan Wright. This profile builds on the knowledge and expertise of many project teams across the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, to whom we are grateful. Mónica Képe-Holmberg and Antonio García Gómez contributed on behalf of the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.

Sources: This country profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Survey of Adult Skills of the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the annual publication *Education at a Glance*, and refers to country and thematic studies, such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, teachers, school leadership, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, vocational education and training, and tertiary education. Much of this information and documentation can be accessed through the OECD Education GPS (<http://gpseducation.oecd.org>). This profile also benefitted from responses from the Government of Spain to the OECD Education Policy Outlook National Survey for Comparative Policy Analysis (update for 2016/17).

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the sources used throughout the country profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading, and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

The *Education Policy Outlook* series also includes a recurring publication. The first volume, [Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen](#), was released in January 2015. The second volume, [Education Policy Outlook 2018: Putting Student Learning at the Centre](#), was released in June 2018.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills (www.oecd.org/edu) and its web pages on the Education Policy Outlook (www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm).

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HIGHLIGHTS

Spain's educational context

Students: Spain achieved performance and equity indicators close to the OECD average in PISA 2015. Spanish upper secondary attainment rates remain below the OECD average, with increases in recent years, and tertiary attainment is close to the average. Early school leaving has declined significantly but remains prevalent. There is important variability in educational performance and early school leaving too. Meanwhile, the literacy and numeracy skills of Spanish adults are below the average of peer countries participating in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, although Spain had one of the widest gaps between the literacy skills of older and younger adults, which speaks at least in part to significant improvements in the education system.

Institutions: Teachers in Spain must complete a pre-service training programme (at least a bachelor's degree, and also a master's degree for secondary school teachers), then pass a competitive examination, and then complete a teaching practicum. Once on the job, OECD evidence indicates that Spanish teachers could benefit from receiving more support for continuous improvement. Teaching conditions in Spain include moderate workloads and competitive compensation compared to the OECD average, although the economic crisis has brought some restraints. School evaluations, teacher appraisal and student assessments are the responsibility of the education authorities of each autonomous community. INEE undertook national general diagnostic evaluations in primary and lower secondary education in 2009 and 2010.

System: The Spanish education system is decentralised. Typically, the national government defines overall framework policies, but the autonomous communities handle most day-to-day policy-making and administer the great majority of funding. In primary to secondary education though, schools have very limited autonomy. Universities are more autonomous, notwithstanding some constraints notably on their ability to hire. The economic crisis led to fiscal constraints at this education level, too, and a shift towards private funding sources (which remain well below the OECD average level), but public expenditure has been increasing since 2015.

Key policy issues

Despite improvements, a large share of Spanish youth is still not in employment, education or training. Key contributing factors include early school leaving from education and low levels of skills. Strengthening vocational education and training (VET) could offer an important pathway to support persistence in education and ensure students obtain skills that correspond to labour market needs. In terms of improving schools, a key challenge is to build a stronger practice of continuous improvement for teachers through assessment and support for professional development. Strengthening the quality of school leadership could be addressed through improved training, a clearer professional role within schools and greater school autonomy. School evaluations formally contain both external and internal components. This can be an important strength of the system if adequately used for improvement (formative) purposes of the student, the institutions and the system, and provide a coherent view of how the overall education system can move further. Achieving greater resource efficiency in Spanish education under strict financial constraints can be complex, but OECD research suggests that improving attainment and skills is important to help Spain increase its economic competitiveness, generate higher wages and spur greater labour force participation. Spain needs to continue working to provide its population with better education opportunities to become active citizens who are capable of participating fully in the labour market and society.

Recent policy responses

Spain has moved strongly to reduce early school leaving from education and improve education quality, with the current goal to reduce rates to 15% by 2020. Certain policy initiatives targeting students at greatest risk of leaving have achieved positive effects, such as the Territorial Co-operation Programme to Reduce Early School Leaving and the Programmes for Reinforcement, Guidance and Support.

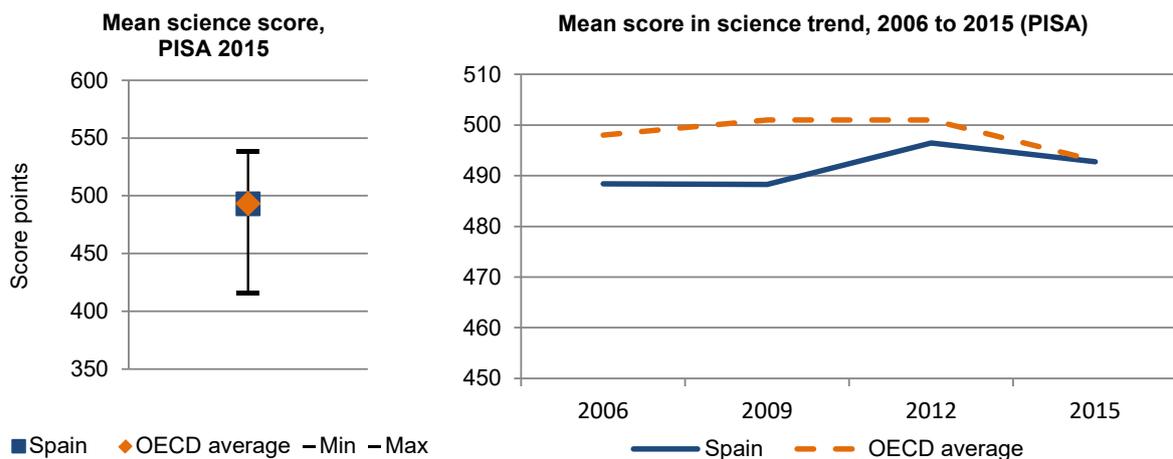
[The Organic Law 8/2013 for the Improvement of Educational Quality](#) (*Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa*, LOMCE) has been the legal instrument for a number of reforms targeting school leaving and other outcomes. Improving vocational education and training (VET) has been an especially important focus, through clearer VET pathways throughout lower and upper secondary education and into tertiary education, expanded course offerings and greater employer engagement. The Dual Vocational Training Model has also been expanded since 2012 to provide VET students with greater workplace opportunities. Other measures have aimed to strengthen school autonomy and improve school leadership. Some additional elements of the LOMCE, however, have been deferred pending another comprehensive education reform.

In tertiary education, Spain has adopted measures, for example, to promote greater specialisation, improve institutional hiring and promotion practices, facilitate better collaboration with the private sector and provide better labour market information.

KEY TRENDS IN PERFORMANCE AND ATTAINMENT

In PISA 2015, Spain’s performance was at the OECD average in science (493 score points) and reading (496 score points) and slightly below the OECD average in mathematics (486 score points). Performance in science has been stable across PISA cycles with an average positive change of 2.1 points. Socioeconomic status had an impact close to the OECD average on science performance, explaining 13.4% of the variance in student performance whereas the OECD average was 12.9%. The mean literacy and numeracy proficiency among adults (16-65 year-olds) is below the OECD average of countries that participated in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills in 2013 and 2015.

Figure 1. Trends and comparative performance of 15-year-olds in science, PISA 2015

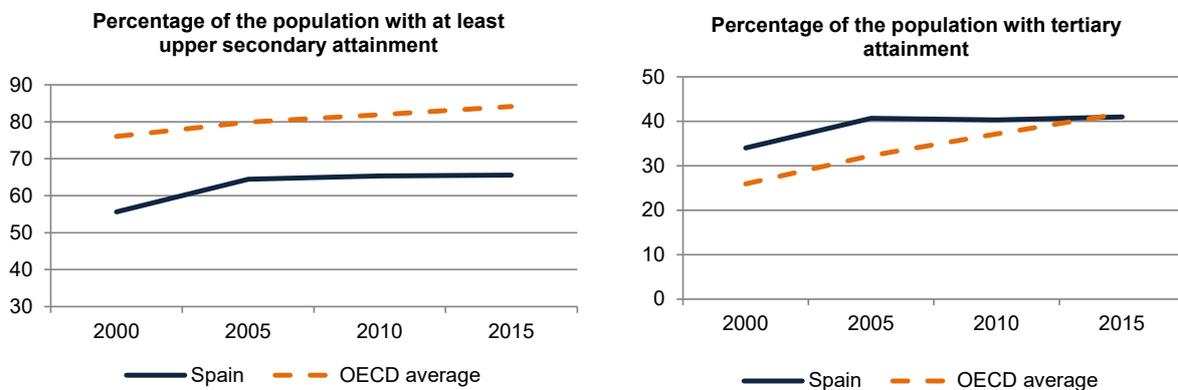


Note: “Min”/“Max” refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.

Sources: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>. OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>.

Attainment rates improved between 2000 and 2015, based on increases in attainment among young adults, and then population replacement. They remained, however, well below the OECD average, particularly at the secondary level (Figure 2). In 2016, 65% of adults aged 25-34 had completed at least upper secondary, while 41% had completed tertiary education, as compared to the respective OECD averages of 85% and 43%.

Figure 2. Evolution of secondary and tertiary attainment of the adult population, 2006 to 2016



Source: OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>.

Spotlight 1. Key policies, key challenges and previous OECD recommendations in Spain

Main education policies and practices included in this country profile

Key challenges and recommendations identified in previous OECD work

STUDENTS

- 2014-2020 National Plan to Reduce Early School Leaving (Plan para la Reducción del Abandono Educativo Temprano)
- Individual Training Permit (Permiso Individual de Formación, 2017)
- Programmes for Reinforcement, Guidance and Support (Programas de Refuerzo, Orientación y Apoyo, PROA, 2011)
- Territorial Co-operation Programme to reduce early school leaving (Programa de Cooperación Territorial para la reducción del abandono escolar, 2011)
- Dual Vocational Training Model (2012) and subsequent regions' efforts on dual VET
- National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (under revision every 5 years) and updating of the National Catalogue of VET courses
- The Organic Law 8/2013 for the Improvement of Educational Quality (Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa, LOMCE)
- Royal Decree 592/2014 regulates collaboration between universities and private businesses.
- Integrated University Information System (Sistema Integrado de Información Universitaria, 2010)
- Initial Teaching of Basic Education for People of Adult Age (Enseñanzas Iniciales de Educación Básica para Personas en Edad Adulta, 2006)
- Secondary Education for Adults (Educación Secundaria para Personas Adultas, 2014)
- Reform of the Training for Employment Subsystem (Subsistema de Formación para el Empleo, 2015)

Key challenges identified [2010, 2014, 2015, 2017]*: The proportion of the population aged 25-64 with lower secondary education as the highest level of attainment in Spain is among the highest in the OECD, and NEET rates are significant as well. The main reason for the persisting large share of poorly qualified youth is that the early school-leaving rate from secondary education remains too high. Despite recent improvements, the OECD has identified persistently high rates of early school leaving (18.3% in 2017). This has implications for skills, employment outcomes, and the efficiency of education spending. The proportion of tertiary graduates employed in jobs that do not require this type of qualification has been consistently higher than most of the rest of Europe over the past decade, indicating that this is a structural problem.

Summary of previous related OECD recommendations: The OECD recommended that Spain allocates resources to regions struggling the most and students the most at risk; and autonomous communities should evaluate how they are spending to reallocate resources in ways that reduce early school leaving. In the same way, the OECD has recommended that Spain develops and modernises VET, especially through measures that strengthen employer engagement and input; increases the practical component of VET programmes that are completed at firms; facilitates access to teaching in vocational schools for practitioners and eases requirements for firm tutors to increase the pool of qualified teachers and training opportunities.

INSTITUTIONS

- Requirement of certificate programme for all school principals (2013)
- Organic Law for the Improvement of Education Quality (*Ley Orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa*, LOMCE, 2013)

Key challenges identified [2017]*: Limited opportunities for continuous improvement of teachers, in terms of support for participation in professional development, as well as feedback mechanisms.

Summary of previous related OECD recommendations: The OECD recommended that Spain could improve the quality of teaching through better initial preparation, selection and on-the-job education for teachers. Spain could also strengthen the use of diagnostic student assessments to reach out to youth with a high risk of falling through the cracks of social and employment support.

| SYSTEM | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Modifications to Royal Decree 14/2012 ▪ The Strategic Plan for School Coexistence (<i>Plan Estratégico de Convivencia Escolar</i>, 2015/16) ▪ The Strategic Plan for School Health and Healthy Lifestyles (<i>Plan de Salud y Estilos de Vida Saludables</i>, 2016-2020) ▪ The Strategic Plan for Educational Inclusion for Students with Special Educational Needs (<i>Plan de inclusión del alumnado con necesidades educativas especiales</i>, 2011) ▪ Reforms in 2015 also reduced the number of required degree programmes to eight. ▪ Integration of the National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity (<i>Comisión Nacional Evaluadora de la Actividad Investigadora</i>) into the National Agency of Evaluation of the Quality and Accreditation (<i>Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación</i>, ANECA) in 2014 ▪ Ongoing changes to control expenditures established in 2012. | <p>Key challenges identified [2009, 2014, 2015]*: The OECD identified that the composition of universities' governing councils and the method of electing rectors can foster a focus on internal stakeholders instead of responsiveness to the needs of the public and employers. Furthermore, the OECD identified as a challenge that funding to universities is based on enrolment and not aligned to the achievement of outcomes or delivery of outputs sought by the public and employers.</p> <p>Summary of previous related OECD recommendations: The OECD recommended Spain to replace elected senior university management with management selected using modern recruitment practices. In the same way, the OECD considered that greater business representation on university governing councils could foster better linkages between tertiary institutions and employers that would improve the labour market relevance of programmes. The OECD also recommended incorporating incentives into higher education funding models that ensure a better alignment between supply and demand for skills. Performance-based funding systems could also relate to aspects to be enhanced in institutions such as internal efficiency (costs, completion rates) and external efficiency (e.g. quality of graduates). Spain could also adopt performance indicators that reflect public policy objectives rather than institutional needs.</p> |
| <p>Notes: The information on key challenges and recommendations in this spotlight draws from a desk-based compilation from previous OECD publications (subject to country participation). The spotlight is intended for exploratory purposes to promote policy dialogue, and should not be considered an evaluation of the country's progress on these recommendations. Causality should not be inferred either: while some actions taken by a country could correspond to previous OECD recommendations, the OECD acknowledges the value of internal and other external dynamics to promote change in education systems.</p> <p>Main sources: 2010, 2014, 2017: The Economic Survey of Spain; 2015: OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: Spain; 2009: OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education: Spain.</p> | |

Spotlight 2. The European Union perspective: Spain's education and training system and the Europe 2020 Strategy

In the European Union's growth and employment strategy, [Europe 2020](#), education and training is recognised as a key policy area in contributing to Europe's economic growth and social inclusion. The European Union set a two-fold target in education by 2020: reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10%, and reaching at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing tertiary or equivalent education. Countries set their own related national targets. The Europe 2020 goals are monitored through the European Union's yearly assessment of the main economic and growth issues.

The [European Semester Country Report 2018](#) identified a number of key issues for Spain in education and training:

- Spain's early school-leaving rate is significantly decreasing (from 23.6% in 2013 to 18.3% in 2017) but remains among the highest in the EU (still around 8 percentage points above the EU average). Educational outcomes continue to vary considerably across regions. Regional early school-leaving rates ranged between 7% and 26.5% in 2017, although this gap has also been decreasing since 2013. As well, student performance in the three PISA tested fields (reading, mathematics and science) differs across autonomous regions by between 46 and 66 percentage points – equivalent to one full school year. These gaps can be explained by GDP per capita, employment and poverty rates, level of education expenditure per family, or student socioeconomic background.
- Education is a regional competence and policies differ considerably. The institutional set-up allows for co-ordination through the exchange of best practices and peer review among regions, but this does not happen systematically. Targeted measures to help regions improve educational outcomes have so far only had a small effect in reducing differences between them.
- Tertiary education attainment among 30-34-year-olds (41.2%) exceeds the EU average. However, differences in attainment remain, for example, by gender (47.5% among women compared to only 34.8% among men) or place of birth (45.2% among Spanish-born compared to 25.1% for non-EU-born). Tertiary graduates face difficulties finding adequate jobs, and both over- and under-qualification are widespread. The share of tertiary graduates employed in jobs that do not require higher education was 39.7% in 2016 (compared to the EU average of 23.5%). Across the Spanish workforce, some 25% of workers were over-skilled in both literacy and numeracy in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, compared to the OECD average of 16.4%. Under-skilling was also widespread, ranging from 15% of workers in numeracy to 17% in literacy competencies (the OECD average was 9% in both areas). At the same time, low-skilled workers also face significant difficulties in accessing the labour market.
- In 2016, Spain adopted a higher education strategy that aims to modernise institutional governance structures, including providing increased autonomy for institutions to assess their own performance and capacity. Furthermore, the government plans to reinforce institutional co-operation with the private sector and better address in-job training challenges. University-business co-operation in education has improved, but barriers remain. The Industrial doctoral programme for training researchers in companies is seen as a positive policy development by all actors involved. Some regional administrations and universities have also been particularly proactive in responding to the 2016 Country-Specific Recommendation to foster co-operation between universities and businesses. Yet, stakeholders identify as the main obstacles for co-operation a lack of funding, limited capacity of small and medium enterprises to take in interns or researchers, and excessive bureaucracy.
- Currently, one in four Spanish school teachers has an interim contract, the highest rate since 2009. To reduce this, the government decided in 2016 to replace 100% of permanently employed retiring teachers (rather than only 50% as in the previous years) and opened recruitment competitions for permanent posts in the public sector in early 2018. In 2017, Spain allocated EUR 115 million to training and improving competences and mobility of teachers at all education levels. Other recent initiatives aim to address the challenge of providing teachers with digital skills. Teachers' unions consider that budget cuts during the crisis have deteriorated their working conditions (e.g. with an increase of teaching hours, fewer opportunities for professional development courses and tightened requirements for leave).
- Enrolment in VET decreased from 35% in 2014 to 35% in 2016. Participation in adult learning decreased from 11.4% in 2013 to 9.4% in 2016 (below the EU average of 10.8%). Spain finished reorganising the "training for employment" subsystem in 2017.

In 2018, the [Council of the European Union recommendation](#) to Spain with regard to education and training is: "reduce early school leaving and regional disparities in educational outcomes, in particular by better supporting students and teachers" and "increase co-operation between education and businesses with a view to mitigating existing skills mismatches".

EQUITY AND QUALITY: PERFORMANCE AND EQUITY INDICATORS CLOSE TO THE OECD AVERAGE, BUT STILL HIGH EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Spain combines OECD average performance in science with around average **PISA equity indicators**. Performance in science, reading and mathematics has remained basically stable across PISA cycles, with score point changes averaging 2.1 between PISA cycles in science. Spain has fewer students performing below level 2 in science (18.3%) than the OECD average (21.2%), but also a below average share (5%) of high achievers (OECD average: 7.7%). This basic pattern holds in reading and mathematics as well. Students' socioeconomic status had an impact close to the OECD average on science performance in PISA 2015, explaining 13.4% of the variance in performance (OECD average: 12.9%). The significance of socioeconomic status has remained unchanged in PISA 2015 since 2006 for Spain, whereas it declined by 1.4% on average across the OECD. The gap in science and mathematics performance between boys and girls in Spain is also larger than the OECD average. Boys outperformed girls by 7 points in science and 16 points in mathematics in PISA 2015, whereas average differences across the OECD are 4 and 8 points, also in favour of boys. The score difference in mathematics between boys and girls has been growing in Spain, which contrasts with declines in performance gaps among boys and girls in mathematics across the OECD. According to students' self-reports, girls also have a slightly lower expectation to work in a science-related occupation.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies can increase the equity of education systems. In Spain, enrolment in pre-primary education (*Educación infantil segundo ciclo*) generally begins at the age of 3 and lasts for 3 years. In 2015, 94.9% of Spanish 3-year-olds attended ECEC and pre-primary education, much higher than the OECD average of 77.8%. Enrolment rates among 4-year-olds were even higher at 97.4%. Autonomous communities (also referred to as regions) stipulate only the basic objectives and requirements for curricula. Between the ages of 0 and 3, there are educational programmes combined with childcare. PISA 2015 results indicate that after accounting for students' and schools' socioeconomic profiles, students who attended two years or more of ECEC in Spain performed 41.7 points better in science than students who attended less than two years of ECEC. This average advantage for Spain was much higher than the average OECD advantage of 15 points.

OECD evidence indicates that some **system-level policies** can favour equity, such as delayed tracking and limited ability grouping. Education in Spain is compulsory from the age of 6 until the age of 16, similar to the OECD average. Students can be first streamed into different educational pathways at the age of 15, which is slightly later than the OECD average of 14, and evidence from PISA 2015 suggests that ability grouping takes place to a lesser extent than on average across the OECD. School choice levels are relatively high – in PISA 2015, fully 40.6% of parents reported that there was a choice of more than one school in their area, compared to 36.8% across the OECD. At the same time, grade repetition rates reported by 15-year-olds in Spain for PISA 2015 remained among the highest in the OECD at 31.3% (the OECD average was 11.3%), down just 3 percentage points from 2012. OECD research indicates that grade repetition does not improve student outcomes, can raise costs and contributes to early school leaving over the long term. Spain has among the highest early school-leaving rates from education and training in the European Union, although it has made considerable progress. In 2013, 23.6% of 18-24 year-olds were leaving school in Spain. In 2017, this share has dropped to 18.3%. Many students who leave early return to education later – 23% of students complete school two years later than under the standard pathway. However, variations remain in early school-leaving rates within the population, such as a 31.8% rate for young people born outside of Spain.

Spain has substantial **regional differences** in education performance. In PISA 2015, gaps between the strongest and lowest performing regions were greater than [40 points](#) in science, reading and mathematics, which is equivalent to one year of study. These performance gaps relate largely to socioeconomic characteristics, as well as differences in demand for low-skilled workers. Furthermore, there are substantial regional differences in early school-leaving rates, ranging from 7% in the Basque country to 26.5% in the Balears. Progress since 2011 has also been uneven across regions, however regional differences have decreased as many poorer performing regions have improved the most, such as la Rioja, Ceuta, las Canarias and Extremadura. In 2017, seven regions out of the 19 regions in Spain had reached the target for Spain of 15% of early school leaving or below.

| Key strengths | Key challenges |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spain has achieved an extensive coverage at ECEC level for children from the age of 3. ▪ Early school-leaving rates have improved markedly, even if they remain high. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance gaps remain among students related to region, gender and socioeconomic status. ▪ Spain could further reduce grade repetition and early school leaving. |

Recent policies and practices

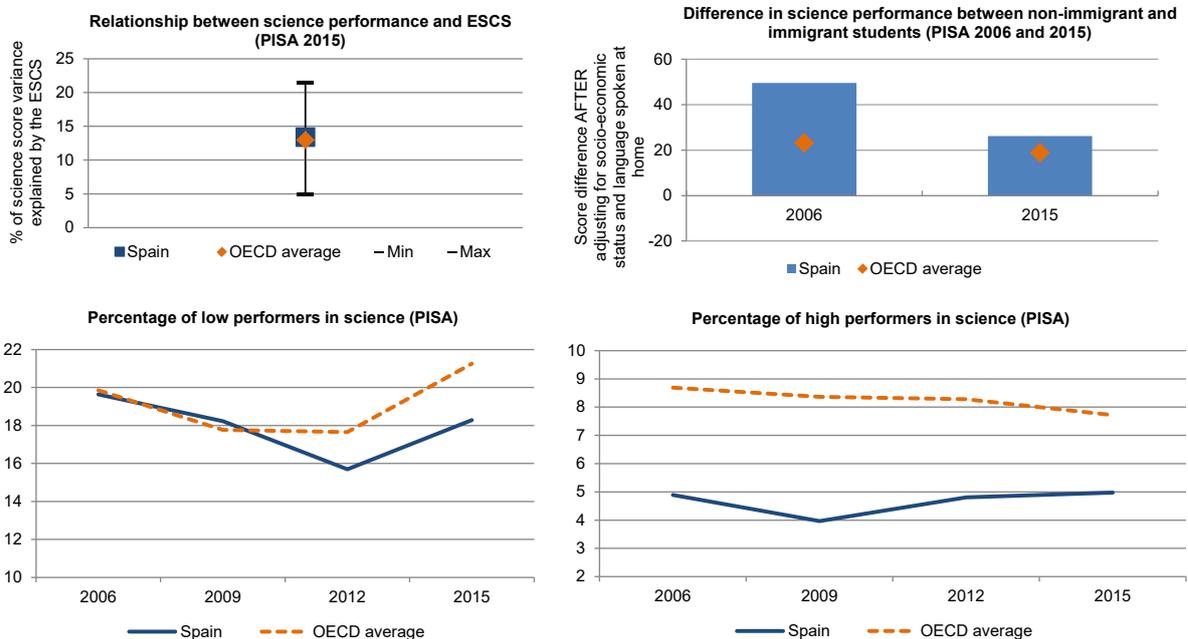
Spain aims to reduce early school-leaving rates to 15% by 2020 as part of the [European Union 2020 Strategy](#), and pursuant to a [2014-2020 national plan](#).

The [Programme to Reduce Early School Leaving in Education and Training](#) (*Programa para la reducción del abandono temprano de la educación y la formación*, 2014-2020) provides funding for preventive measures, such as external evaluations in certain grades to detect early difficulties in learning and minimise the risk of early leaving. A royal decree regulates the general system of scholarships and study aids annually. Studies are conducted to identify areas with high early school leaving to analyse causes and profiles, and to evaluate and design specific intervention pathways. Awareness campaigns target students and their families to ensure the best possible use of training. Specific programmes are also implemented in areas and groups with the highest early school-leaving risk through co-operation and co-ordination with institutions and local and regional authorities. In addition, to facilitate reintegration, young 16-24 year-olds who leave school early are supported through adult education institutions and local authorities. An evaluation has shown that programmes on second-chance opportunities and vocational training measures offered by adult education institutions have contributed to the reduction of early school-leaving rates in Spain.

The Programmes for Reinforcement, Guidance and Support (*Programas de Refuerzo, Orientación y Apoyo*, PROA, 2011) provided additional resources to schools concentrating students with low socioeconomic status, including additional tutoring, support and mentoring, as well as programmes to change school culture and expectations. An [evaluation](#) found PROA had significant, positive effects on students in the short and long term, most of all in reading.

The Territorial Co-operation Programme to reduce early school leaving ([Programa de Cooperación Territorial para la Reducción del Abandono Temprano de la Educación](#), 2011) has targeted areas and populations at greatest risk of early school leaving, such as immigrants and ethnic minorities, or provided support to reintegrate youth who have left. A 2013 [evaluation](#) found a significant reduction in early school leaving (with the magnitude of effects dependent on the intensity of funds allocated per student), and found that measures to prevent early school leaving were more effective than those aiming to reintegrate students.

Figure 3. Selected equity and quality indicators for Spain, PISA



Note: “Min”/ “Max” refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE LINK BETWEEN SKILLS, DIPLOMAS AND LABOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

The capacity of a country to effectively develop informed **skills and labour market perspectives** can play an important role in the educational decisions of the population. This is key for Spain, as the country has among the highest unemployment rates in the OECD. In 2016, unemployment among 25-34-year-olds with less than upper secondary education was 30.5%, almost twice as high as for tertiary degree holders (16%), and 9.6 percentage points higher than for those with just upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary. In contrast, the OECD average unemployment rates were each respectively 16.8%, 9.1% and 6.6%. Spain's share of 18-24 year-olds that are not employed or in education or training (NEETs) is also very high, at 23.2% in 2016 compared to the OECD average of 15.3%. In the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), adults' literacy (252 points) and numeracy (246) scores for Spain were lower than the OECD averages (268 and 263 points, respectively). Spanish tertiary graduates aged 25-64 also have lower literacy proficiency (282 points) than the OECD average (292 points) and enjoy a smaller advantage in literacy over those who have completed less than upper secondary (57 points) than across the OECD (61 points). Yet, the gap in literacy skills between older and younger adults in Spain is among the widest in the OECD, which likely reflects improvements in the education system, as well as low skill use and development in the workplace.

Spain's **educational attainment** had improvements in the 1990s and early 2000s, but remains comparatively lower. Among younger adults aged 25-34, attainment of at least upper secondary is 65.3%, well below the OECD average of 84.6%, which is partly due to more than 20% (in 2015-16) of lower secondary students failing to graduate with the certificate required to access upper secondary. The share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary level qualification in Spain is 41%, much closer to the OECD average (43.1%). However, a larger share of tertiary credentials in Spain are short-cycle degrees. About 31% of Spanish tertiary graduates aged 25-64 have completed short-cycle tertiary as their highest level of education. This is above the OECD average of 22%, while the share of new entrants to tertiary going into short-cycle degrees in Spain is double the OECD average (35% versus 17%).

Vocational education and training (VET) programmes aim to ease entry into the labour market. The Spanish education system offers VET in compulsory (lower) secondary, upper secondary and tertiary education. However, VET has been relatively smaller and less established than general education at the upper secondary level. The share of the population aged 25-34 who have completed vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary (11.1%) is lower than the OECD average (26.5%), as is the share of upper secondary students following a vocational programme (35.2% compared to the OECD average of 45.7%). Low take-up of VET is particularly pronounced among those aged 15-19, at 20% compared to 43% across the OECD. Upper secondary graduation rates for VET programmes are 30% in total and just 22% for those under the age of 25, much lower than the respective OECD averages of 44% and 36%. Meanwhile, relatively few students who complete upper secondary level VET continue into tertiary VET often because their academic achievements are insufficient for admissions – tertiary VET students are mostly graduates of academic upper secondary. VET is almost certainly improving, however securing practical training opportunities is a critical barrier to expansion, due largely to Spain's large share of micro-firms with nine or fewer employees (89% of all firms). Participation in apprenticeship and training contracts remains equal to just 2% of students in upper secondary.

Spain's **higher education** system includes 50 public and 34 private universities, as well as thousands of mostly public vocational providers (many of which are secondary schools), and specialised institutions that are also mostly public. Vocational institutions offer two-year programmes up to ISCED level 5. OECD analysis suggests that in 2013 the private internal rate of return (IRR) to tertiary education in Spain – based on differences in employment rates and incomes – was just 9% for men, well below the OECD average of 13%. However, for women the IRR was 13%, well above the OECD average of 11%. Spain also has among the highest share of tertiary graduates (39.7%) in occupations considered not to require a tertiary credential in the European Union (the EU average is 23.5%). This likely reflects graduates' low skills, the low take-up of innovative practices in Spanish workplaces and qualification mismatch (See Spotlight 3).

| Key strengths and challenges in school improvement (pre-crisis analysis) | |
|---|---|
| Key strengths | Key challenges |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High rate of conversion of upper secondary graduates into tertiary education. ▪ Spain's current performance in terms of attainment and skills is substantially higher than in the not-too-distant past. ▪ Spain has been undertaking efforts to improve the quality and relevance of VET through varied approaches. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raising educational attainment, especially at the upper secondary level. ▪ Lowering NEET prevalence among youth. ▪ Continuing to improve the attractiveness and relevance of VET. ▪ Ensuring that educational attainment reflects the skills expected according to the diploma, and reducing qualification mismatch. |

Recent policies and practices

Spain has undertaken extensive efforts to expand and continuously improve its VET programmes, to offer new student career pathways and to increase the attractiveness and perceived value of VET credentials. Strengthened VET can be a key instrument to reduce early school leaving, promote lifelong learning, increase the labour market relevance of education, and provide greater vocational guidance.

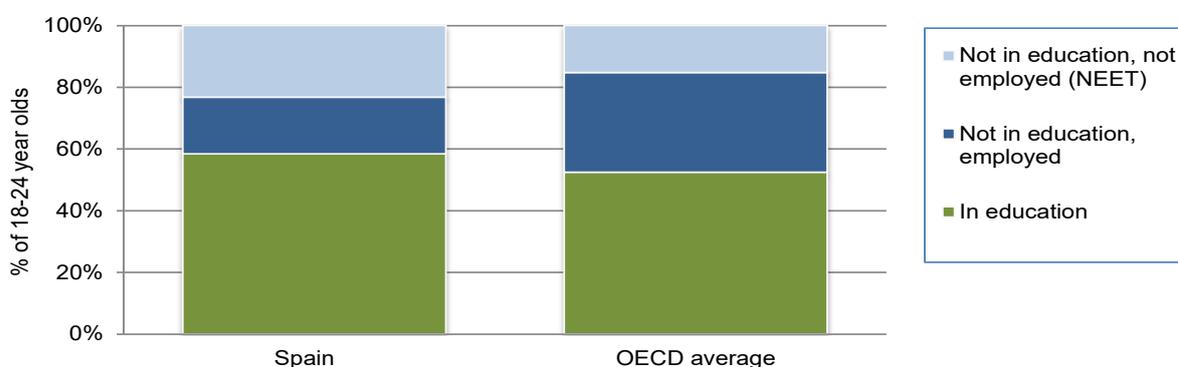
In 2012, Spain introduced its Dual Vocational Training Model that combines training with employment in companies. The aim of the system is to provide a professional qualification through teaching and learning processes that are harmonised between training institutions and workplaces. The MECED established basic requirements for the dual system and employers are co-responsible for the design of the training offer and its implementation. In 2012/13, 513 companies and 4 292 students participated in the dual VET system, and this rose to 24 000 students and over 10 000 companies in 2016/17, (provisional figures). In 2016, the Minister for MECED set a target to increase the number of spaces in dual VET by the end of the legislature to 100 000. At the same time, a 2016 evaluation by a private non-governmental association identified points for improvement that included: increasing the scale, while ensuring quality; developing knowledge and awareness on the model to avoid the emergence of divergent VET models; increasing co-operation among the different stakeholders; and implementing a framework to clarify all essential system components and guide the development of all regional models.

Another area of policy work has been adjusting VET programmes to ease student pathways. Regulations established in the LOMCE allow VET upper secondary schools to provide additional courses to assist students in transitioning successfully into tertiary VET. Furthermore, the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications, for example, is subject to revision every five years, in order to adapt VET Certificates to match professional profiles required in the labour market.

The Government of Spain has adopted various measures to strengthen higher education, including by improving relevance. In 2016, the Spanish government adopted a strategy for higher education, which envisages the modernisation of the governance structures, including further autonomy to assess their performance and institutional capacity. Previously, Royal Decree 43/2015 granted institutions the option to offer three-year undergraduate degrees and one-year master's degrees to help adapt Spanish university degree lengths to the European Bologna model. Royal Decree 592/2014 regulates the collaboration between universities and businesses, and has sought to facilitate student participation in internships that complement their study programmes to support professional development, facilitate employability and foster entrepreneurship. Under the European Union 2020 Strategy, Spain is aiming to raise tertiary attainment among 30-34-year-olds to 44%, with the current level in 2017 at 41.2%, and 44.3% among 25-29-year-olds.

Lastly, Spain has been endeavouring to improve the collection and diffusion of labour market information. The MECED mapped university graduate employability based on data from the Integrated University Information System (Sistema Integrado de Información Universitaria, 2010) and has made the data available publicly through the What and Where to Study in University (Qué estudiar y dónde en la universidad – QEDU) online portal with the objective of better informing students and their families about academic and career pathways and encouraging institutions to focus on programmes with higher employment rates. The 2015 Report on Insertion in the Labour Market (Informe de Inserción en el Mercado Laboral) also sought to map the employability of VET graduates to help match demand for VET training and quality job opportunities.

Figure 4. Percentage of 18-24 year-olds in education and not in education, by employment status, 2016



Source: OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>.

Spotlight 3. Promoting education and training for low-skilled adults in Spain

Approximately 10 million adults have low levels of literacy or numeracy in Spain, meaning they have difficulties working with simple written information, and/or conducting basic quantitative reasoning. This is equal to 37% of the population aged 25-64, compared to the OECD average of 23%. Approximately one-in-five adults with low literacy skills are immigrants. Low-skilled adults aged 25-64 are 1.5 times more likely than more skilled counterparts to be unemployed and three times more likely to be out of the labour force but not studying.

The skill levels of Spanish adults can be strengthened by the education system, but also by the workplaces. However, Spanish low-skilled adults are among the least likely in the OECD to receive job-related training, with only 19% participating in formal or non-formal adult education or training in 2012 compared to the OECD average of 31%. Among those employed, only 33% participated in job-related education and training, and employers sponsored the training of just 51% of those who participated, compared to the OECD average of 56%. The association between insecure tenure and lower investment by workers and employers in skills to improve current job performance may partly explain limited training activity among low-skilled workers in Spain, as these workers are more likely to have temporary contracts. Also, a large share of employment in Spain (55%) is in micro and small enterprises, and substantial evidence indicates smaller firms are less likely to invest in worker skill development – only 26% of Spanish micro-firms train their workers, compared to 93% of large firms.

The OECD considers that strengthening the skills of Spain's workforce is crucial to generate good jobs and boost Spain's productivity and growth potential. Strong initial education is the best strategy for developing a skilled adult workforce, but as two-thirds of the current cohort of low-skilled adults will still be in the labour market in 2025, and more than one-third in 2035, Spain has thus undertaken an array of programmes to strengthen adult skills.

The Initial Teaching of Basic Education for People of Adult Age (*Enseñanzas Iniciales de Educación Básica para Personas en Edad Adulta*, 2006) offers the qualifications to access lower secondary education through institutions targeting adults alone, regular primary and secondary schools, and other private operators. While modifying the legal framework for basic adult education to place a greater emphasis on skills for entrepreneurship, the [LOMCE](#) created a legal basis for (lower) Secondary Education for Adults (*Educación Secundaria para Personas Adultas*), targeting participants who have passed the sixth grade of primary education, Initial Teaching of Basic Education for People of Adult Age, or an entrance examination. These programmes are typically offered at regular secondary schools during evenings, under the authority of autonomous communities (which was clarified further in 2014). Adults can also obtain an upper secondary education diploma through evening and distance classes and access a preparatory programme for entrance examinations, basic and intermediate vocational training, and vocational training for employment. All these programmes are open free of charge to eligible adults over the age of 18, or for people as young as 16 whose employment hours conflict with regular schooling. [University access exams](#) are also open to learners over ages 25, 40 and 45 free of charge, while additionally the Ministry of Employment and Social Security finances Spanish language training and employment support programmes for immigrants. Distance learning is prevalent, while modular programmes, credit-based qualifications, flexible pathways and assessment and recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning are other key facets of adult learning.

The MECED developed its Strategic Plan for Lifelong Learning ([Plan Estratégico de Aprendizaje a lo Largo de la Vida](#)) in 2014 in collaboration with the autonomous communities, prioritising distance learning, free tests for obtaining upper secondary credentials and expanded online resources. MECED has sought to strengthen adult education in concert and also as part of with its broader reforms to the VET system, including within the 2015 reform of the Training for Employment Subsystem ([Subsistema de Formación para el Empleo](#)).

Spain has implemented a host of measures to lower the cost of participation in education and training. For example, Spain grants workers with lower levels of educational attainment preferential access to allowances for paid training leave, and to officially recognised training activities that lead to an official qualification under the Individual Training Permit ([Permiso Individual de Formación](#), 2017), although participants require employer's authorisation. Co-funding measures also target groups such as adults with disabilities, unemployed women and victims of gender-based violence, and the unemployed can also access financial support for skills development, such as maintained unemployment benefits while in training or funds to help defray training costs. Additionally, various recent reforms have sought to strengthen training and learning contracts, which allow employers to deduct all or part of the cost of training from social security contributions. Since 2012, conditions for firms to provide training have eased, notably by permitting training to focus only on professional content, allowing the accreditation of training, and temporarily extending eligibility from the traditional 16-24 age bracket up to 29 – for those who lack a formal credential or vocational qualification or become employed in a new sector. A further 2015 reform required that all training under these contracts lead to a certification. The total number of training contracts more than doubled from 60 000 in 2012 to 140 000 in 2014, and reached 175 000 in 2015, before falling back to 46 384 in 2016. Importantly, the share of training contracts used for low-skilled workers increased from under 15% before 2012 to over one-third by 2015.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: STRONGER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS COULD ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

To raise achievement in schools, it is key to develop positive **learning environments** for students that enable school leaders and teachers to succeed. In the PISA 2015 index of disciplinary climate, based on student reports, Spain obtained a score of -0.08, which was less favourable than the OECD average (0.00). As well, 24.7% of 15-year-olds reported skipping at least one day of school in the two weeks prior to the PISA 2015 test, well above the OECD average of 19.7%. At the same time, PISA found that the share of students who reported having been bullied was lower in Spain (14%) than across the OECD (19%), and adaptive instruction appears more prevalent in Spain, with an index value of 0.15 on a scale where the OECD average is 0.01 (Figure 5).

A strong supply of highly qualified and engaged **teachers** is vital to the success of every education system. Teachers in Spain must complete a pre-service training programme (at least a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree for secondary school teachers), then pass a competitive examination, and then complete a teaching practicum. Once on the job, OECD evidence indicates that Spanish teachers receive less support for continuous improvement than teachers in other OECD countries. According to principals, approximately three-quarters and 59% of teachers are respectively in schools without induction programmes and without mentoring systems, compared to TALIS averages of 34% and 26%. Spanish teachers are also slightly less likely to participate in various forms of professional development than across TALIS countries. Two-thirds of Spanish teachers agree or strongly agree with a statement that no relevant professional development activities are offered and 80% that there are no incentives to participate in professional development, compared to respective TALIS averages of 39% and 48%. As well, fewer Spanish teachers reported in TALIS receiving different types of support for pursuing professional development. However, the overall age distribution of teachers in Spain is similar to the OECD average: over 50% of teachers in primary and secondary education are above the age of 40, and 35.2% above the age of 50.

Attracting, retaining and developing good quality **school leaders**, is key to improving the quality of learning environments. The Spanish education system could improve further in this area. In the PISA 2015 index of educational leadership, which measures principals' engagement in leadership activities, Spain's score was among the lowest in the OECD at -0.41 (the average was 0.01). Principals in Spain are responsible for adapting the curriculum and co-ordinating the work of the leadership team, which includes the head teacher, head of studies and school administrators. They are typically elected or designated by the education community, from among the teaching staff, to temporary posts, and most school leaders continue to teach a weekly load reduced by 5-12 hours. Autonomous communities define principals' salaries according to the type of education and size of school, and they are usually 20% higher than a teacher's salary. Principals have typically focused more on administrative tasks than pedagogical leadership, in part because they have faced a host of constraints, including limited training. In 2013, 40% of principals in Spain indicated that they had never received training for instructional leadership, almost double the TALIS average of 22%. Historically, school leaders only had to participate in short initial training programmes, with details established by the autonomous communities. Recent national policy changes aim to target many of these concerns (See Recent Policies).

Teaching conditions in Spain include moderate workloads and competitive compensation compared to the OECD average, although the economic crisis has brought some restraints (see Recent Policies). Annual teaching hours are 880 in primary schools and 713 in lower secondary schools, higher than the respective OECD averages of 794 and 704, although the average total working time is lower than the OECD average. Class sizes average 22 in primary education and 26 in lower secondary, slightly larger than the respective OECD averages of 21 and 23. For teachers with 15 years of experience and typical qualifications, salaries in Spain were equivalent or higher than for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education, and exceeded OECD and EU22 averages across levels of schooling in 2015. In addition, 88.2% of teachers in Spain indicated in TALIS 2013 that they would still become a teacher if they could choose again, which was the highest figure for any participating jurisdiction (the TALIS average was 77.6%). However, only 8.5% of teachers felt that the teaching profession was valued in society, well below the TALIS average of 30.9%.

| Key strengths | Key challenges |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spain has some positive indicators for school learning environments, such as students' reports on adaptive instruction or comparatively less bullying. ▪ Teachers have comparatively moderate workloads and remain with competitive salary compensations. ▪ Spain has adopted important steps to improve school leadership. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spain could strengthen its structures to promote and support the strong performance and continuous development of teachers. ▪ Continuing to develop the career paths and institutional structures for school leaders is also important for Spain. |

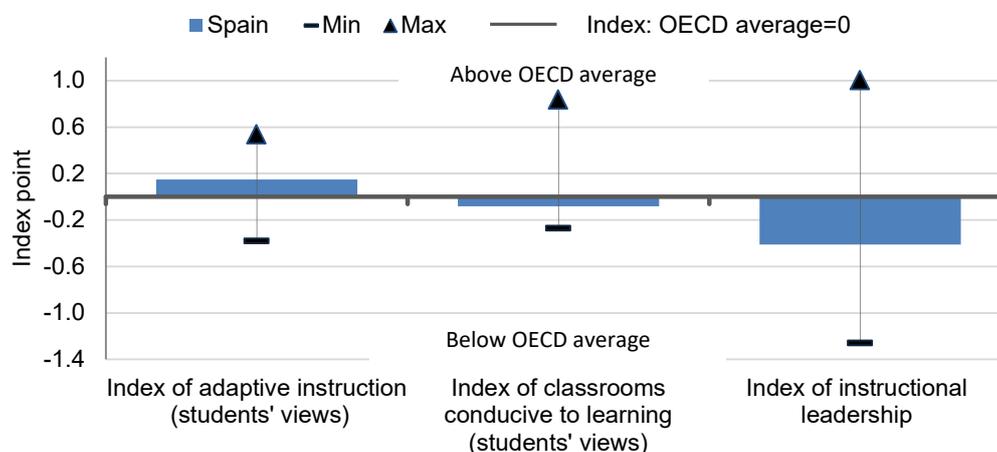
Recent policies and practices

Recent reforms required that all principals have completed a certificate programme offered by the MECD or autonomous communities that covers areas of management/administration/budgeting, legislation, and leadership/teamwork. The training is valid throughout Spain, and almost 600 teachers participated in the programme in 2017. The law also specified the process of principal selection for different types of institutions, and specific competencies that will be subject to regular review. Relative to the past, principal hiring should account more for previous experience and be more open to considering candidates from outside of the hiring school.

The economic crisis created restraints in different areas of spending with implications for learning environments, and working conditions of educational staff. For example, growth in salaries of primary and secondary school teachers was constrained, teachers were permitted to work more hours, and class size restrictions were relaxed. Replacement rates for retiring teachers were also tightly restricted to as low as 10%, with interim teachers filling many of the vacancies. Many of these policies have been associated with a decline in job satisfaction. More recently, the government has relaxed many of these restrictions, however. Allowing replacement rates to rise to 100% as of 2016 is expected to create 130 000 new positions in just three years, and reduce the share of interim teachers from 20% in 2016 to 8% in 2020. In 2017, the government also committed additional funds for training, skill development and mobility of instructors across all education levels, as well as to improve school activities.

Digital skills have long been another area of focus. From 2009 to 2012, the School 2.0 Programme sought to expand access to computers and the use of digital classrooms in classrooms of the fifth and sixth grades of primary schooling and the first two grades of early secondary schooling, with funds from the MECD and autonomous communities. An [evaluation](#) found, though, a significant negative association between PISA 2012 mathematics results and both the number of computers per student and having a computer or tablet for individual use. Spain has pursued measures since 2013 to enhance the digital competencies of teachers, which are now based on the [European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators](#). Associated training courses take place online, and from 2014-2016 had roughly 20 000 enrolments per year from across Spain. Lastly, Spain and 12 other European countries have participated in the [Mentoring Technology-Enhanced Pedagogy](#) project, which has engaged 1 000 Spanish teachers from 49 schools across the country.

Figure 5. The learning environment, PISA 2015



Note: “Min”/ “Max” refer to OECD countries with the lowest / highest values

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT: KEEN NEED FOR IMPROVING TEACHER APPRAISAL, WITH ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

Defining strategies for evaluation and assessment is important for improving student outcomes and developing a higher quality and more equitable school system. System evaluations can provide evidence for decision-makers to develop informed policies and increase the transparency of the education system outcomes. In Spain, the [National Institute for Educational Evaluation](#) (*Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa* – INEE) and the educational authorities of the autonomous communities are responsible for carrying out the **system evaluation**. INEE develops the [National System of Education Indicators](#) (*Sistema Estatal de Indicadores de la Educación*), coordinates diagnostic evaluations with the autonomous communities and international student assessments (e.g. PISA), and contributes to the annual report of the [State School Board](#) (*Consejo Escolar del Estado*) – a body representing key education stakeholders in Spain.

Schools in Spain are expected to participate in internal and external **evaluations**. Education authorities within autonomous communities are responsible for external evaluations and support school staff in carrying out internal evaluations. Results inform the preparation of development plans for each school. From OECD experience, internal and external evaluations should focus on improving student outcomes and be complementary to provide a broader perspective of evaluation and assessment. External evaluations especially should also take into account students' socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, along with the school's environment and resources. Approximately 74% of schools in Spain reported in PISA 2015 to participate in some sort of external evaluation, the same as the OECD average (75%), while 88% of schools reported conducting self-evaluations, slightly below the OECD average of 93%. However, some formative practices could be strengthened. For example, according to school principals' reports in PISA 2015, only 32% of students are in schools where the principal or senior staff observes lessons (compared to the OECD average of 81%), and only 27% of students are in schools where peer reviews are used (compared to the OECD average of 66%).

According to OECD research, **teacher appraisal** models can strengthen teachers as professionals when they include an improvement component emphasising developmental evaluation and a career progression component that associates career advancement with a certification of competencies for practice (based on a variety of instruments). In Spain, no formal national teacher appraisal system exists, as each autonomous community is responsible for appraisal and improvement of its teachers. Appraisal activity is, however, for the most part relatively limited. For example, in TALIS only 21.7% of all teachers in Spain reported having received appraisal in the previous 12 months, much lower than the TALIS average of 66.1%. Additionally, fully 32% of teachers reported never having received any feedback in their current school, and 36% worked in schools where teachers are generally never formally appraised, compared to respective TALIS averages of 13% and 7%. Relatively few teachers also reported that they received feedback that led to changes in their teaching practices (45%, versus the TALIS average of 62%). There also appear to be few connections between appraisal and promotion, as for example the selection of teachers for permanent positions is based almost entirely on years of service. Principals' reports in PISA 2015 indicated that only 33% of Spanish students attended schools where appraisals of teachers and feedback led directly to changes in the likelihood of career advancement, well below the OECD average of 52%.

As is true of school evaluation and teacher appraisal, the education authorities of each autonomous community have also been responsible for creating **student assessment** processes, linked to the core curriculum and for carrying out their own evaluations in a common, general framework. Within each school, teachers (whose representational and collegiate body is the Teachers' Council) are responsible for implementing student assessments. The practical use of student assessments appears limited. Fewer Spanish secondary schools (19.6%) reported using student assessments to make decisions on student promotion or retention of students than the OECD average (31.3%), and only 41.5% use standardised tests to monitor school progress from year to year, well under the OECD average of 69.4%, according to principals' reports in PISA 2015.

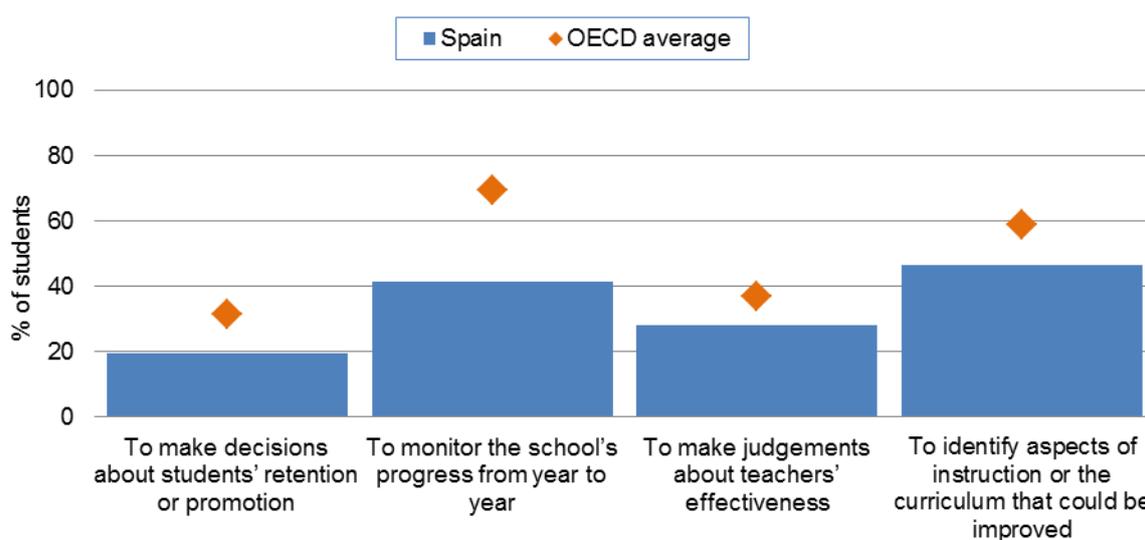
| Key strengths | Key challenges |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School evaluations formally contain both external and internal components. This can be an important strength of the system if adequately used for improvement (formative) purposes of the student, the institutions and the system and provide a coherent view of how the overall education system can move further | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teacher appraisal activity is limited and does not systematically influence career advancement. ▪ Strengthening the use of diagnostic student assessments for helping to improve teaching and student learning in schools. |

Recent policies and practices

The Organic Law for the Improvement of Education Quality (*Ley Orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa*, LOMCE, 2013) aimed to introduce external, standardised evaluations of student competencies at years three and six of primary schooling, and in the last year of each of compulsory (lower) secondary schooling and upper secondary. In primary schooling, these exams would seek to measure the extent to which students have obtained the competencies suitable for their grade level, primarily to mobilise targeted support for students facing difficulties in learning to reduce early school leaving. The reform envisioned secondary exams for general and vocational streams as academic exercises with lower stakes and higher stakes, especially for upper secondary level, as they would be considered as part of the rating to pursue tertiary education. In 2016, however, the government agreed through [Royal Decree 5/2016](#) to redesign the tests so that they are diagnostic and based on samples at the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education until the National Pact on Education is approved.

Spain is also one of ten countries to participate in the [PISA-based Test for Schools Programme](#) (*Prueba PISA para Centros Educativos*) in collaboration with the OECD. The assessment aims to provide schools with data on student achievement comparable to country-level PISA results. Spain piloted the test in 2013-14 with 225 schools, and has continued to implement the programme, with an estimated 100 schools in 2016-17. All autonomous communities have participated in the programme, which is optional for schools.

Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students, PISA 2015



Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

GOVERNANCE: SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES

The Spanish education system is decentralised. Through the MECD, the central government establishes the legal framework regulating the principles, objectives, and organisation of the different school levels, and develops part of the curriculum. Ministries (or departments) of the 17 autonomous communities are free to develop and manage their education systems within the bounds of the national policy framework however. Other bodies that shape education policy include:

- The [Education Sector Conference](#) (*Conferencia Sectorial de Educación*), which brings together the MECD and autonomous communities to establish common policy approaches.
- The [State School Council](#) (*Consejo Escolar del Estado*) proposes regulations and offers other advice for improving school-level education. It is the key body representing stakeholders, such as school owners, teachers' unions, parents and student representatives.
- The [National Conference of University Rectors](#) (*Conferencia de Rectores de Universidades Españolas*, CRUE) represents Spain's universities.
- The MECD is responsible for higher-level arts education but takes advice from the [Higher Board of Arts Education](#) (*Consejo Superior de Enseñanzas Artísticas*), autonomous communities and the [Regional Artistic Education Councils or Institutes](#) (*Consejos e Institutos Autonómicos de Enseñanzas Artísticas*).
- Regional Councils for Vocational Training (*Consejos de Formación Profesional*) develop regional plans, evaluate offerings and propose improvements in VET.
- Local authorities or municipalities work with the ministries of autonomous communities to monitor early childhood education and care, as well as compulsory and special education schools.

There are three types of schools in Spain: public schools, subsidised private schools and non-subsidised private schools. In 2015-16, 74.3% of schools from ECEC to secondary education were public and 21.8% were private-subsidised, leaving just 3.8% private unsubsidised. Subsidised schools must meet more extensive MECD conditions than other private schools. The share of general education students in public schools that same year was 51.4% in first-cycle ECEC, 67.6% in second cycle ECEC, 67.7% in primary education, 65.6% in compulsory secondary education, and 73.4% in conventional upper secondary. In PISA 2015, 68.7% of 15-year-old students attended public schools, well below the OECD average of 82.4%.

Autonomous communities and the MECD make most **schooling decisions** in Spain, leaving relatively little discretion to school-level actors (Figure 7). Spain's score on the index of school autonomy in PISA 2015 was 57.5%, well below the OECD average of 71.3%. Only 41.3% of principals reported that the school had primary responsibility for resource allocation, compared to 53.8% across the OECD, while just 63.6% of principals reported that the school had primary autonomy over curricula (the OECD average was 73.4%). School Councils (*Consejos Escolares*) participate in school-level decision-making, and typically include representatives of teaching staff, non-teaching staff, town councils, students and parents. Councils for vocational training schools may also include representatives of labour or employer organisations.

In principle, **universities** operate independently from Spanish governments, regardless of whether they are public or private. They are subject to a number of rules, however. [The National Agency of Evaluation of the Quality and Accreditation](#) (*Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación*, ANECA) is the primary body responsible for institutional quality assurance and accreditation of professors (universities may only hire accredited professors to salaried roles). Regional accreditation agencies also play varying roles with diverse practices, standards and capacity, which the OECD considers may foster inequitable regional outcomes. National regulations also limit public universities' ability to hire, promote and compensate academic staff, which along with traditional practices tends to favour insular hiring practices and limit inter-institutional mobility. Other regulations have established a minimum number of degree courses that Spanish tertiary institutions must offer, which can pose an obstacle to institutional specialisation and create inefficiencies given that approximately 30% of programmes have fewer than 30 enrolled students. The private universities belonging to the Catholic Church are also subject to special agreements between the Spanish government and the Vatican. Within institutions, traditionally academics elected for fixed terms occupy most positions, in terms of both senior administration and governing boards, which may undermine responsiveness to the needs of society and employers.

| Key strengths | Key challenges |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The national government and autonomous communities have longstanding patterns of collaboration in policy-making. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building consensus for ongoing reforms while balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders. ▪ University governance structures could better align institutional incentives with the interests of the public and employers. |

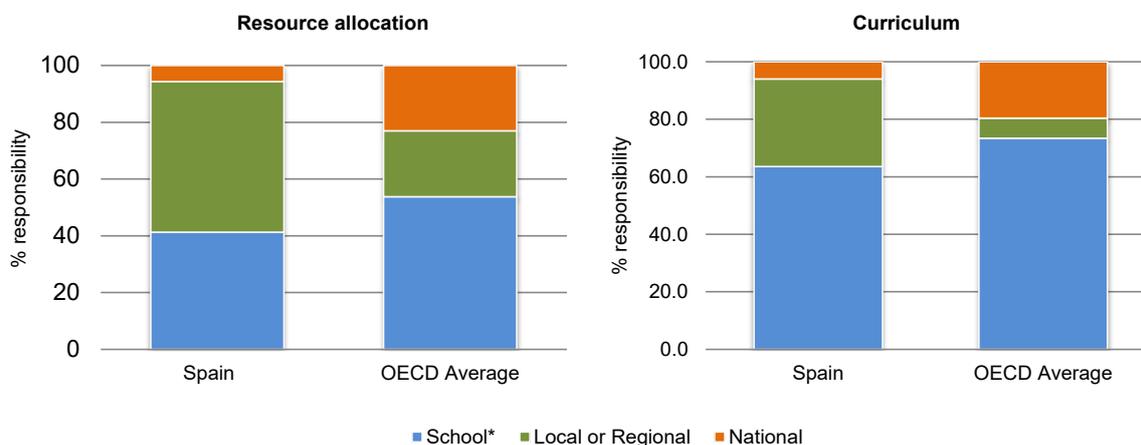
Recent policies and practices

Recent Spanish policy has sought to expand school autonomy in various dimensions. Since 2014, all educational administrations of the autonomous communities must now [promote schools' pedagogical and organisational autonomy](#). The aim is to allow schools to develop and complement the curriculum and measures of educational administrations to meet the needs of their specific students and contexts, as well as promoting agreements with local stakeholders for specific activities to facilitate educational progress. Schools have also gained greater flexibility to define their own educational projects in terms of content and pedagogy, provided these respect the basic curriculum established by the national government and autonomous communities, and schools have substantial administrative autonomy to determine their own organisation and operations, including in terms of scheduling. These reforms are closely tied to measures strengthening school leadership. The MECD has also identified expanded school autonomy as a key objective for the Social and Political National Pact on Education.

The Education Sector Conference has remained active in recent years, meeting multiple times per year to ensure dialogue and collaboration between the national government and autonomous communities. Recent decisions included approving the Strategic Plan for School Coexistence ([Plan Estratégico de Convivencia Escolar](#), 2015/16), the Strategic Plan for School Health and Healthy Lifestyles ([Plan de salud y estilos de vida saludables](#), 2016-2020), the Strategic Plan for Educational Inclusion for Students with Special Educational Needs ([Plan de inclusión del alumnado con necesidades educativas especiales](#), 2011), and the Territorial Co-operation Programmes (See Equity and Quality).

A series of reforms have also sought to expand institutional autonomy in higher education to facilitate improvements in teaching and research, many pursuant to recommendations of the February 2013 report by the Committee of Experts for the Reform of the Spanish University System. A key area of focus has been staff hiring and promotion, where policies have allowed public university to transfer staff between them without facing public service complement restrictions. Reforms in 2015 also reduced the number of required degree programmes to eight, which should allow institutions to eliminate programmes with limited demand and reinvest resources in areas of greater strength. The MECD and advisory groups have proposed reforming university governing council arrangements to expand private sector and civil society representation, and proposals have also been advanced for the National Pact on Education. [Royal Decree 15/2014](#) also integrated the National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity (*Comisión Nacional Evaluadora de la Actividad Investigadora*) into the National Agency of Evaluation of the Quality and Accreditation (*Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación*, ANECA), creating a unique agency responsible for quality assurance and evaluation of higher education institutions and teaching staff.

Figure 7. Distribution of responsibilities for school governance, PISA 2015



Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

FUNDING: RELATIVE SPENDING HAS BEEN LOW AND DECLINED FURTHER DURING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Overall expenditure on education in Spain is low relative to the rest of the OECD. Relative to GDP, spending on primary to tertiary education in Spain was 4.3%, below the OECD average of 5.2%. Spending was declining from 2010 to 2013 but has been increasing since 2015. A slightly higher proportion (17.9%) of education expenditure in Spain comes from private sources than across the OECD (15.4%).

Expenditure per student is closer to the OECD average. In 2014, annual per student spending was USD 6 970 at the primary level, USD 8 528 at the secondary level and USD 12 489 at the tertiary level (including spending on research development), which trailed the respective OECD averages of USD 8 733, USD 10 106, and USD 16 143. However, annual expenditure per student as percentage of GDP per capita from primary to tertiary education was close to the OECD average in 2014 (with 26% compared to 27% at OECD average).

Autonomous communities provide roughly 80% of total public funding, which explains why resources per student, their composition and trends vary considerably across different regions. Education spending (from primary to tertiary) as a share of total public spending was 8.2% in 2014, well below the OECD average of 11.3%. Private-subsidised schools generally receive public funding for their core activities, and may only charge fees for complementary services, materials, extracurricular activities, or parents' associations.

Spain's low levels of spending partly reflect the impacts of recent **economic difficulties**. The financial crisis hit Spain hard as the country experienced five straight years of negative or negligible GDP growth from 2009 to 2013. In response, public spending on education declined in total and as a share of total public spending. Total spending per student fell by 15% from 2010 to 2014 for primary through post-secondary non-tertiary, and by 14% in tertiary education, which were among the largest reductions in the OECD (average spending across the OECD increased for these levels of education by 5% and 6% respectively). The composition of funding also shifted, as the proportion for primary to post-secondary non-tertiary education from public sources fell by 14.1 percentage points from 2010 to 2014 and the share from private sources increased by 35.3 percentage points from 2008 to 2013 – the largest such changes in the OECD during the period. Spending restraint has largely coincided with Spain's efforts to expand VET, which OECD experience suggests would cost more per student to deliver than academic programmes, although the MECED has made some investments to address this need.

Recognising that Spain has limited scope for fiscal expansion, the OECD has argued that Spain would do well to shift spending towards education, active labour market policies and research and development to help improve productivity and stimulate growth. At the same time, however, there remains scope for efficiencies in education spending. For example, the OECD estimated that the cost of grade repetition was equal to almost 8% of total expenditure on primary and secondary education in 2015.

Apart from some national research funding, autonomous communities distribute the public funding that public universities receive based mostly on enrolments. The OECD has found that tying funds to desired outcomes and outputs more effectively provides institutions with incentives to pursue public goals. Higher education institutions also collect tuition fees. Central government regulations and decrees of autonomous communities establish maximum and minimum tuition amounts that public institutions can charge, which results in substantial variability in fees across regions. Fees for public institutions in 2015-16 were approximately USD 163 in short-cycle tertiary programmes, USD 1 830 in first-cycle degrees, and USD 2 858 in second-cycle degrees. These rates are higher than among many other European OECD members, but low relative to non-European OECD countries.

The national government also provides study grants to higher education students based on parental income, academic performance and family size, while most autonomous communities provide supplementary grants, for example to cover expenses on books or transportation. In 2015-16, roughly 33% of Bachelor's-level students received grants equivalent or greater than tuition fees, and 47% of students received grants in some amount. Grant coverage for master's studies is lower, at approximately 24% in total. Approximately one-third of students lose their grants after their first-year of studies due to inadequate academic performance. Financial aid is also available to students in compulsory education, especially for different costs incurred by students with disabilities, but also with respect to other students for costs of complementary services such as cafeterias, school transportation, and housing.

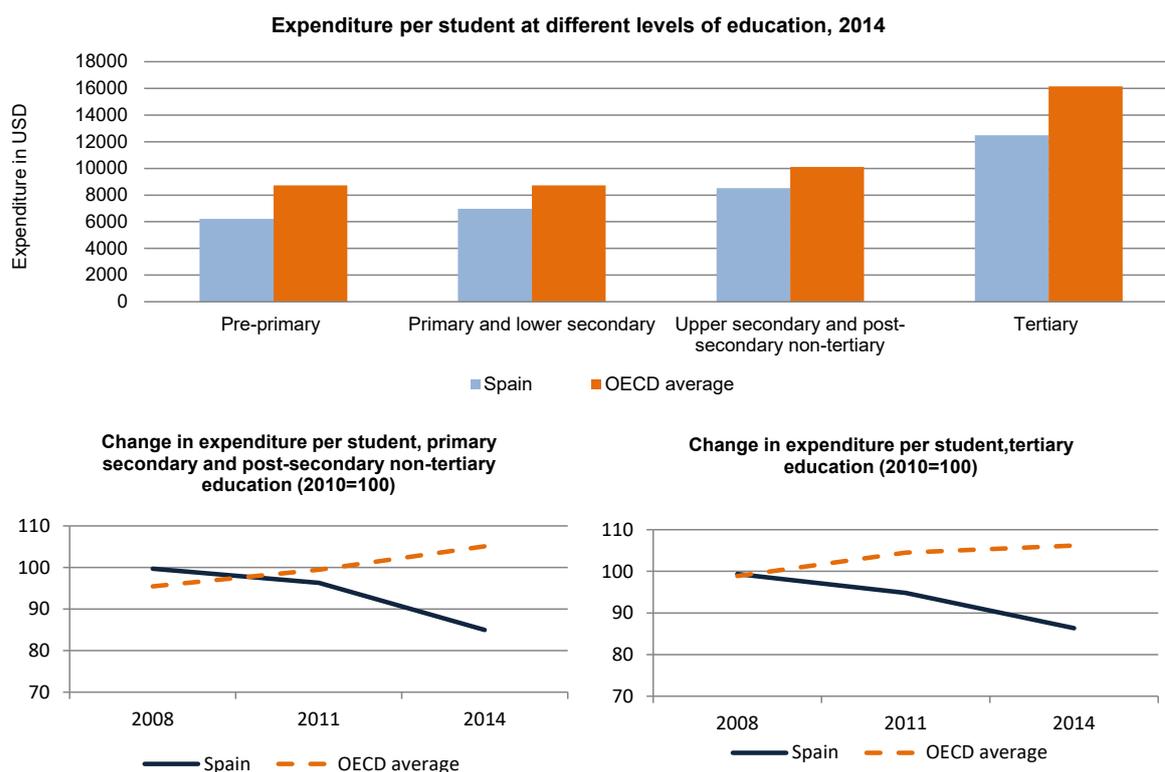
| Key strengths | Key challenges |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spain finances higher education through a mix of public and private sources, which mitigates the impacts of fiscal constraints on learning. ▪ Spain has reduced grade repetition, which is improving the efficiency of education spending. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic challenges constrain regional governments' capacity to invest in education. ▪ Spain needs to better align university funding with objectives of enhancing quality and relevance. |

Recent policies and practices

In response to the economic crisis and pursuing fiscal targets under European Union policy, Spain passed the [Royal Decree 14/2012](#) to temporarily or permanently control expenditures and suspend various policies or regulations that would drive up costs. The law addressed all levels of education and affected not only institutions but also autonomous communities, although it left the autonomous communities considerable discretion in implementation. The MECED also adopted stricter programme evaluations, which led to the termination of a series of funding programmes in 2012, such as the Territorial Co-operation Programmes. As the recession spurred high levels of default given increased levels of youth unemployment, Spain also discontinued its student loan system, which operated from 2009 to 2011, to replace it by scholarships.

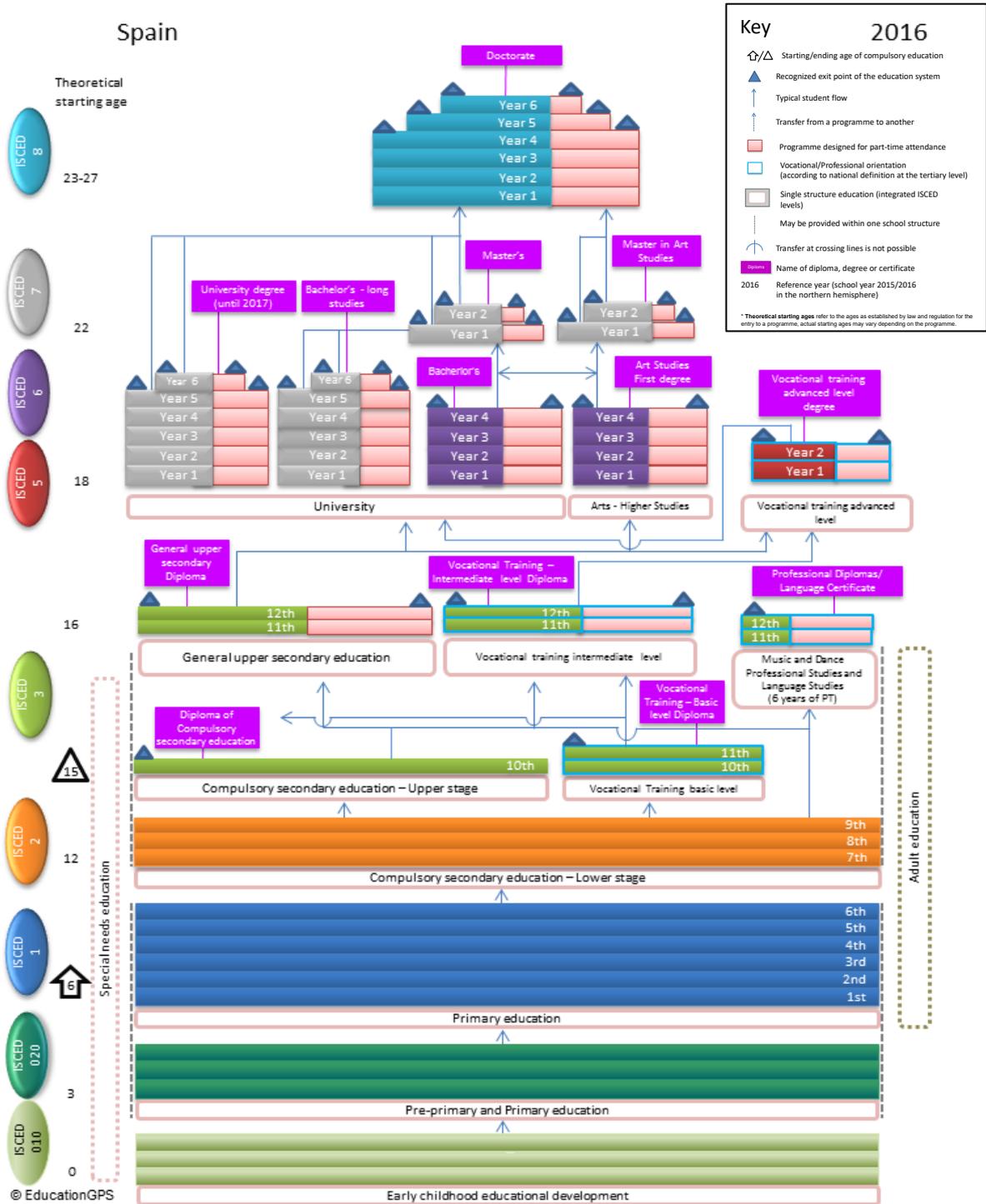
The constraints of Royal Decree 14/2012 have been loosened somewhat to permit some increases in spending in strategic areas, such as to raise the replacement rate for retiring teachers to reach 100% in 2016 (See School Improvement). The government allocated EUR 964 149 503 to finance the implementation of the LOMCE from 2014 to 2017, with financial assistance from the European Social Fund, and relaunched the Territorial Co-operation Programmes in 2016 to support vulnerable students. In 2016, the MECED allocated EUR 325 million to support autonomous communities in implementing new VET programmes and assist socioeconomically vulnerable families with the costs of school materials, while a 2017 allocation of EUR 115 million aims to support training, competences and mobility of teachers across all levels of education, and also to strengthen school activities. In higher education, Royal Decree 14/2012 permitted increases in university tuition fees, which occurred mostly immediately in 2012-13 in some regions. For the most part, fees have since been frozen, however. The law also allowed for the introduction of international differential fees to cover 100% of the cost of instruction, pursuant to policies established by autonomous communities. As of 2016-17, four autonomous communities had set [international differential fees by decrees](#), five allowed universities to set their own differential fees, and eight did not permit differential fees.

Figure 8. Annual expenditure per student (2014) and recent trends, by level of education



Source: OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.

ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF SPAIN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM



Source: OECD (2018), "Spain: Overview of the Education System", OECD Education GPS, http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/ESP/ESP_2011_EN.pdf

ANNEX B: STATISTICS

| List of key indicators | | Spain | Average or total | Min OECD | Max OECD |
|---|--|--------|------------------|----------|----------|
| Background information | | | | | |
| <i>Economy</i> | | | | | |
| 1 | GDP per capita, 2014, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (OECD Factbook 2015/2016) | 33 169 | 38 865 | 17 831 | 97 273 |
| 2 | GDP growth 2014 (OECD Factbook 2015/2016) | 1.4% | 1.8% | -0.4% | 5.2% |
| <i>Society</i> | | | | | |
| 3 | Population density, inhab/km ² , 2016 (OECD Statistics) | 92 | 37 | 3 | 511 |
| 4 | Population aged less than 15 as a percentage of total population, 2010 (OECD Factbook 2014) | 15.0 | 18.6 | 13.1 | 29.6 |
| 5 | Foreign-born population as a percentage of total population, 2013 or latest available year (OECD Factbook 2015) | 13.4 | n/a | 0.8 | 43.7 |
| Education outcomes | | | | | |
| 6 | Mean performance in science (PISA 2015) | 493 | 493 | 416 | 538 |
| Average three-year trend in performance across PISA assessments, by domain (PISA 2015)^{4,5} | | | | | |
| 7 | Science performance | 2.1 | -1.4 | -10.6 | 7.6 |
| | Mathematics performance | 0.5 | -1.0 | -9.7 | 10.1 |
| | Reading performance | 1.6 | 0.7 | -5.2 | 9.2 |
| 8 | Enrolment rates of 3-year-olds in early childhood education and pre-primary education as a percentage of the population of the same age group, 2015 (EAG 2017) | 94.9% | 77.8% | 9.1% | 100.0% |
| 9 | % of 25-64 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is lower secondary education, 2016 (EAG 2017) | 30.6% | 14.3% | 0.6% | 33.1% |
| Educational attainment of the population aged 25-34 by type of attainment, 2016 | | | | | |
| 10 | At least upper secondary education, 2016 (EAG 2017) | 65.3% | 84.6% | 46.7% | 98.3% |
| | Tertiary education, 2016 (EAG 2017) | 41.0% | 43.1% | 21.8% | 70.0% |
| | Vocational upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (EAG database) | 11.5% | 25.6% | 2.1% | 56.1% |
| Unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds by educational attainment, 2016 (EAG 2017) | | | | | |
| 11 | Below upper secondary | 30.5% | 16.8% | 3.5% | 37.8% |
| | Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary | 20.8% | 9.1% | 4.2% | 30.2% |
| | Tertiary education | 16.0% | 6.6% | 2.5% | 28.0% |
| Students: Raising outcomes | | | | | |
| <i>Policy lever 1: Equity and quality</i> | | | | | |
| 12 | First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2015) | 16 | 14 | 10 | 16 |
| Students performing at the highest or lowest levels in science (%) (PISA 2015) | | | | | |
| 13 | Students performing below Level 2 | 18.3% | 21.3% | 8.8% | 47.8% |
| | Students performing at Level 5 or above | 5.0% | 7.7% | 0.1% | 15.3% |
| 14 | Percentage of students in schools where students are grouped by ability into different classes for all subjects, PISA 2015 | 6.0% | 7.8% | 0.0% | 56.1% |
| 15 | Percentage of students whose parents reported that the schooling available in their area includes two or more other schools, PISA 2015 | 40.6% | 36.8% | 20.4% | 56.9% |

| # | List of key indicators | Spain | Average or total | Min OECD | Max OECD |
|--|---|-------|------------------|----------|----------|
| 16 | Percentage of students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2015) | 31.3 | 11.3 | 0.0 | 34.0 |
| 17 | Percentage of variance in science performance in PISA test explained by ESCS (PISA 2015) ⁴ | 13.4% | 12.9% | 4.9% | 21.4% |
| 18 | Score difference in science performance in PISA between non-immigrant and immigrant students AFTER adjusting for socio-economic status (PISA 2015) ⁴ | 28 | 31 | -5 | 83 |
| 19 | Score differences between boys and girls in science (PISA 2015) ⁴ | 7 | 4 | -19 | 19 |
| <i>Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future</i> | | | | | |
| 20 | Adjusted mean proficiency in literacy among adults aged 16-64 on a scale of 500 (Survey of Adult Skills, 2012) | 251.8 | 267.7 | 220.1 | 296.2 |
| 21 | Difference in literacy scores between youngest (25-34) and oldest (55-65) adults (Survey of Adult Skills, 2012) | 23.8 | 15.6 | -8.3 | 37.6 |
| 22 | Share of students of all ages in upper secondary education in 2015 following: | | | | |
| | General programmes (EAG 2017) | 64.8% | 55.6% | 26.8% | 100.0% |
| | Vocational programmes (EAG 2017) | 35.2% | 45.7% | 8.3% | 73.2% |
| | Combined school and work-based programmes (EAG 2017) | 0.4% | 17.0% | 0.4% | 59.0% |
| 23 | First-time graduation rates from tertiary education (EAG 2017) | 60.4% | 49.1% | 24.5% | 76.1% |
| 24 | % of 18-24 year-olds not in education, employment or training, 2016 (EAG 2017) | 23.2% | 15.3% | 5.2% | 33.0% |
| Institutions: Improving schools | | | | | |
| <i>Policy lever 3: School improvement</i> | | | | | |
| 25 | The Learning Environment - PISA 2015 | | | | |
| | Mean index of adaptive instruction in science lessons | 0.15 | 0.01 | -0.38 | 0.53 |
| | Mean index of disciplinary climate based on students' reports | -0.08 | 0.00 | -0.27 | 0.83 |
| | Mean Index of Instructional leadership | -0.41 | 0.01 | -1.26 | 1.00 |
| 26 | Percentage of teachers in lower secondary education above the age of 50, 2015 (EAG 2017) | 36.3% | 35.9% | 17.5% | 59.6% |
| 27 | Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions by education level, 2015 (EAG 2017) | | | | |
| | Primary education | 880 | 794 | 573 | 1157 |
| | Lower secondary education, general programmes | 713 | 704 | 486 | 1157 |
| 28 | Ratio of actual teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, lower secondary education, general programmes, 2015 (EAG 2017) | m | 0.88 | 0.58 | 1.30 |
| 29 | Proportion of teachers who believe the teaching profession is valued in society (TALIS 2013) | 8.5% | 30.9% | 4.0% | 66.5% |
| 30 | Proportion of teachers who would become a teacher again if they could choose (TALIS 2013) | 88.2% | 77.6% | 53.4% | 95.5% |

| # | List of key indicators | Spain | Average or total | Min OECD | Max OECD |
|---|---|--------|------------------|----------|----------|
| Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes | | | | | |
| 31 | Percentage of students in schools where the following arrangements aimed at quality assurance and improvement at school are used (PISA 2015): | | | | |
| | Internal/Self-evaluation | 87.7% | 93.2% | 74.8% | 100.0% |
| | External evaluation | 73.9% | 74.6% | 20.8% | 97.4% |
| 32 | Percentage of students whose school principals reported that standardised tests are used for the following purposes (PISA 2015): | | | | |
| | To make decisions about students' retention or promotion | 19.6% | 31.3% | 3.4% | 60.6% |
| | To monitor the school's progress from year to year | 41.5% | 69.4% | 26.2% | 97.7% |
| | To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness | 28.1% | 37.0% | 4.4% | 87.5% |
| 33 | To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved | 46.4% | 58.9% | 14.1% | 92.4% |
| | Percentage of lower secondary education teachers reporting appraisal/feedback from the school principal on their work at least once per year (TALIS 2013) | 21.7% | 66.1% | 11.2% | 96.8% |
| Systems: Organising the system | | | | | |
| Policy lever 5: Governance | | | | | |
| 34 | Distribution of responsibilities for school governance in resource allocation and curriculum, 2015 (PISA 2015) | | | | |
| | National government (Resource allocation) | 5.7% | 23.1% | 0.0% | 69.9% |
| | Local or Regional government (Resource allocation) | 53.0% | 23.1% | 0.0% | 72.9% |
| | School (Resource allocation) | 41.3% | 53.8% | 11.2% | 92.9% |
| | National government (Curriculum) | 6.0% | 19.6% | 0.0% | 96.5% |
| | Local or Regional government (Curriculum) | 30.5% | 7.0% | 0.0% | 42.2% |
| | School (Curriculum) | 63.6% | 73.4% | 3.5% | 97.0% |
| Policy lever 6: Funding | | | | | |
| 35 | Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (from primary to tertiary), 2014 (EAG 2017) | 4.3% | 5.2% | 3.6% | 6.6% |
| 36 | Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2014 (EAG 2017) | | | | |
| | Pre-primary education | 6 224 | 8 723 | 4 432 | 21 210 |
| | Primary education | 6 970 | 8 733 | 2 896 | 21 153 |
| | Secondary education | 8 528 | 10 106 | 3 219 | 21 595 |
| | Tertiary education | 12 489 | 16 143 | 6 952 | 46 526 |
| 37 | Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2014 (EAG 2017) | | | | |
| | Public sources | 82.1% | 84.6% | 64.4% | 99.0% |
| | All private sources | 17.9% | 15.4% | 1.0% | 35.6% |
| 38 | Index of change in expenditure on educational institutions 2014, EAG 2017 (constant prices, 2010=100) | | | | |
| | Public sources | 86 | 103 | 86 | 147 |
| | All private sources | 135 | 113 | 69 | 192 |
| Notes 1. The average, total, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in TALIS and the Survey of Adult Skills, where they refer to participating countries. 2. "m": included when data is not available. 3. "NP": included if the country is not participating in the study. 4. Statistically significant values of the indicator are shown in bold (PISA 2015 only). 5. The average three year trend is the average change in PISA score points from a country's/economy's earliest participation in PISA to PISA 2015. 6. "a": included when the category is not applicable. | | | | | |

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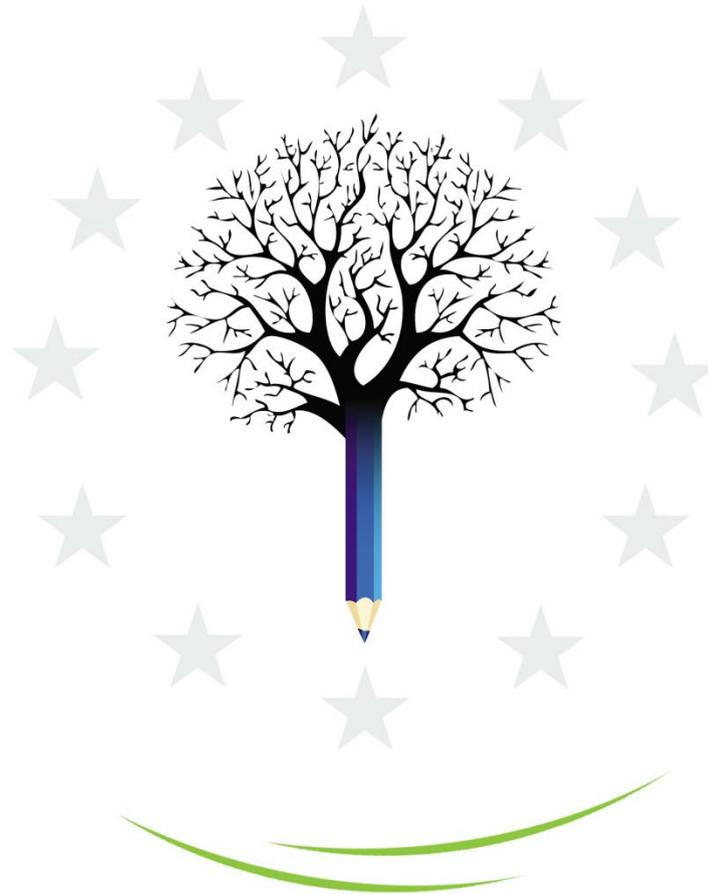
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This document has also been published as:

OECD (2018), *Education Policy Outlook: Spain*, available at: www.oecd.org/education/policyoutlook.htm



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