

Executive summary: The benefits of expanded access to education are not shared equitably

Access to education continues to expand and the proportion of adults who are highly skilled in literacy, continues to grow; but socio-economic divisions are deepening, because the impact of education and skills on individuals' life chances has strengthened considerably.

The labour market rewards high educational attainment and high skills

Take the employment situation. On average, over 80% of tertiary-educated adults are employed compared to less than 60% of people with below upper secondary education. Yet tertiary-educated people, especially young adults, are not immune to unemployment. On average across OECD countries, the unemployment rate among tertiary-educated adults stood at 5.0% in 2012 (up from 3.3% in 2008), but among 25-34 year-olds, it was 7.4% (up from 4.6% in 2008). By comparison, the unemployment rate for 25-34 year-olds without an upper secondary education reached 19.8% in 2012 (and even higher in many countries), up from 13.6% in 2008. These data reconfirm that the recent economic crisis hit young, low-educated adults hardest.

A lack of skills only strengthens the risk of unemployment – even among people with similar levels of education. For example, on average across the 24 countries and sub-national regions that participated in the Survey of Adult Skills, 5.8% of adults without upper secondary education, but who had a moderate level of literacy proficiency, were unemployed in 2012 compared to 8.0% of adults with similar educational attainment but who had low levels of literacy proficiency. Similarly, among tertiary-educated adults, 3.9% of those with lower literacy proficiency were unemployed compared with 2.5% of those with the highest proficiency.

Data on earnings also point to a widening gap between the educational “haves” and “have-nots”. Across OECD countries, adults with a tertiary degree earn about 70% more, on average, than those with upper secondary education. Differences in skills also have an impact on earnings, even among people with the same level of education: on average, a tertiary-educated adult who performs at the highest level of literacy proficiency earns about 45% more than a similarly educated adult who performs at the lowest level in literacy, as measured by the Survey of Adult Skills.

In most countries, absolute upward mobility in education is more common than downward mobility

The expansion of education systems in many OECD countries, both at the upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary levels of education, has given 25-34 year-olds an opportunity to attain a higher level of education than their parents. On average across the OECD countries that participated in the 2012 Survey of Adult Skills (a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, or PIAAC), 32% of young people have achieved a higher level of education than their parents, while only 16% have not attained their parents' education level. In all countries except Estonia, Germany, Norway and Sweden, absolute upward mobility in education is more common than absolute downward mobility. The expansion of education has been particularly pronounced in France, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Spain and the Russian Federation, where the difference between upward and downward educational mobility is 30 percentage points or more.

Other findings

- Close to 40% of 25-34 year-olds now have a tertiary education, a proportion 15 percentage points larger than that among 55-64 year-olds.
- There is a 10 percentage-point increase, on average, between the share of older and younger adults scoring at the highest levels of literacy proficiency.
- In a majority of OECD countries, education now begins for most children well before they are 5 years old. More than three-quarters of 4-year-olds (84%) are enrolled in early childhood and primary education across OECD countries; among OECD countries that are part of the European Union, 89% of 4-year-olds are.
- Some 72% of students who begin upper secondary education complete the programmes they entered within the theoretical duration of the programme. Giving two extra years to students to complete their upper secondary programmes, 87% of students successfully complete programmes two years after the stipulated time of graduation, on average across OECD countries.
- On average across OECD countries in 2012, 49% of 15-29 year-olds were in education. Of the remaining 51%, 36% held a job, 7% were unemployed, and 8% were outside of the labour force.
- Tertiary institutions and, to a lesser extent, pre-primary institutions obtain the largest proportions of funds from private sources: 31% and 19%, respectively. Public funding on educational institutions, for all levels combined, increased between 2000 and 2011 in all countries (except Italy) for which comparable data are available. However, with more households sharing the cost of education, private funding increased at an even greater rate in more than three-quarters of countries.
- While the proportion of public expenditure devoted to education shrank in two-thirds of countries between 2005 and 2011, during the shorter period 2008-11 – the height of the economic crisis – public expenditure on education grew at a faster rate (or decreased at a slower rate) than public expenditure on all other services in 16 out of the 31 countries with available data.

- A master's degree is required of pre-primary school teachers in only four of the 35 countries with available data, while it is required of upper secondary teachers, who teach general subjects, in 22 of the 36 countries with available data.
- Professional development for teachers is compulsory at every level of education in about three-quarters of OECD and partner countries with available data. While it is required of all lower secondary teachers in 17 countries and for promotion or salary increase in 8 countries, it is not required in 6 countries.
- In 2012, more than 4.5 million students were enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship. Australia, Austria, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have the highest proportion of international students as a percentage of their total tertiary enrolments.



From:
Education at a Glance 2014
Highlights

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2014-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "Executive summary: The benefits of expanded access to education are not shared equitably", in *Education at a Glance 2014: Highlights*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2014-2-en

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.