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Background Paper

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Paper prepared by Francois Leclercq

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Table of content

Introduction	5
1 - Current trends in Western Europe and North America.....	5
Population trends.....	5
Economic, technical and social trends.....	6
Cultural trends	7
Environmental trends	8
2 - Implications for education	8
3 - Status of education in Western Europe and North America	9
EFA goal 1: Early childhood care and education.....	9
EFA goal 2: Universal primary education	11
EFA goal 3: Learning needs of young people and adults	11
Completion of upper secondary education	11
Technical and vocational education and training.....	12
Higher education.....	13
Lifelong learning.....	13
Second-chance education and training for persons with low skills and qualifications.....	13
Defining a post-2015 goal for youth and adult learning.....	13
EFA goal 4: Adult literacy	14
EFA goal 5: Gender parity and equality	15
EFA goal 6: Quality of education.....	16
Learning outcomes.....	16
Teacher policies	18
4 - Education finance, strategies and policies.....	20
Public expenditure on education	20
Strategies and policies	21
5 - Relevance of the post-2015 education agenda to Western Europe and North America.....	22
Conclusion.....	24
Notes	25

Introduction

Western Europe and North America has more comprehensive education systems than any other group of countries in the world. By 2000, it had already achieved the two education-related Millennium Development Goals: enrolment in primary education was universal and there were no major gender disparities in access to primary and secondary education. Most countries were also close to achieving the six goals of Education for All (EFA) at the time they were being drafted at the World Education Forum in Dakar. Although some countries lagged behind on specific goals, the challenge for this group of countries was not to expand the overall coverage of education systems, but to improve their functioning, e.g. by making participation at non-compulsory levels of education more equitable, and raising learning outcomes. The main contribution to global development Western European and North American countries could make was as aid donors, by increasing amounts they devoted to basic education in recipient countries, and by improving the efficiency with which those amounts were spent.

As 2015 draws near and a post-2015 development agenda is being discussed, a change of perspective is needed. Even though aid to education did increase significantly after 2000, donor countries of Western Europe and North America failed to bridge the aid gap, and by 2015 the Education for All goals will have been missed at the global level. As these donors are unlikely to further increase their aid in the foreseeable future, emerging donors, private foundations, corporations perhaps, together with innovative sources of education finance at the country level, will need to play a greater part. On the other hand, the condition of education in Western Europe and North America itself deserves renewed scrutiny.

The financial, economic and social crisis affecting many countries in the region is weakening education systems, with serious implications for social equity. Changes in the labour market are creating new requirements in terms of education and training. Social and cultural change is also affecting the type of knowledge schools need to transmit, and how they can transmit it. Given progress made in terms of access to primary and lower secondary education since 2000, a post-2015 global education agenda is likely to place more emphasis on other levels of education – early childhood, higher education and lifelong learning – and on the quality of learning outcomes. Countries in Western Europe and North America face many challenges in those areas, with high stakes: addressing their learning crisis, regaining economic competitiveness, responding to widening social and economic inequality, strengthening citizenship and democracy, and preserving culture.

This paper first describes ongoing trends affecting education systems in Western Europe and North America, as well as Turkey,¹ and reflects on their policy implications. The paper then analyses current indicators of education in the region and mentions key existing strategies and policies. Finally, it reflects on the relevance of the emerging post-2015 agenda for the region.

1 - Current trends in Western Europe and North America

Western Europe and North America arguably remain the least conflict-affected, most democratic and richest group of countries in the world, yet since 2000 it has gone through relative decline compared with emerging countries. Countries within this group have also diverged, as exemplified by current tensions within the Euro area, the United Kingdom's consideration of leaving the European Union, or the United States' growing involvement with East Asia and the Pacific at the expense of Western Europe.

Population trends

The population of Western Europe and North America has long completed its fertility transition and is now ageing and on the verge of decreasing. Life expectancy is at or above 81 years for women and 76 years for men in all countries. Meanwhile, the total fertility rate is at or below 1.9 children in 18 out of 23 countries,² close to replacement level (2.0-2.1) in only four, including France and the United States, and high only in Israel (2.9). Austria and Portugal (1.3), Germany, Italy and Spain (1.5 each) have amongst the lowest total fertility rates in the world. As a consequence, the population of children aged 0-4 is declining in

ten countries – by an estimated 2% a year over 2010-2015 in Portugal – and stagnating in most others, including the United States. Total population has already started declining in Germany (by 0.2% a year).³ Turkey is similar to Western Europe: Its total fertility rate is down to 2.0 children per woman and its population aged 0-4 is decreasing by 0.6% a year.

Ageing and population decline will generate major difficulties. Pensions and health care for the elderly have to be financed from a shrinking working-age population. Political systems may be biased against the interests of young people, and the concentration of capital amongst the elderly may make it even more difficult for youth to settle in life. Excessive risk aversion may reduce innovation and productive investment in the economy. Immigration is unlikely to take place on a scale large enough to compensate for exceedingly low fertility, especially as the various national models (e.g. multiculturalism in the United Kingdom or '*intégration*' in France) for absorbing immigration are perceived to be in a crisis, and xenophobia is mounting, especially in countries worst affected by the economic and social crisis such as Greece or Italy.

Relations between countries in the region are affected by diverging population trends. Germany's contested export-oriented economic policy answers to the needs of its declining population. The United Kingdom and France could become more populated than Germany by 2060, and the population of the European Union as a whole could fall after 2035,⁴ while the population of the United States should keep growing.

Economic, technical and social trends

Economic growth has been slow in Western Europe and North America for more than a decade. Over 1999-2012, per capita income increased by only 0.7% a year in France, 1.0% in the United States, 1.1% in the United Kingdom, and 1.3% in Germany – helped by the country's declining population. The financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 hit the region badly. By 2012, 17 out of 23 countries in this group had lower per capita income than in 2007 – by 21% in Greece, 12% in Ireland, 11% in Luxemburg, 10% in Cyprus, 9% in Italy and 7% in Denmark, Spain and the United Kingdom. Per capita income in the United States had just regained its 2007 level. Israel was the only fast-growing economy in the region. Meanwhile, emerging economies are catching up. Turkey's *per capita* income grew at 3.0% a year between 1999 and 2012. The share of Western Europe and North America in global GDP is declining quickly, from 50% in 1999 to 39% in 2012.

Income gaps within the region have widened. Luxemburg has remained the richest country, and Portugal the poorest, but by 2012 Luxemburg's per capita income (expressed in purchasing power parity US dollars) was 3.4 times as high as Portugal's, as compared with 2.9 times in 1999.

Slow economic growth and the 2008 financial crisis have generated high unemployment in most countries of the region. Unemployment rose between 2007 and 2012 in 19 out of 23 countries, the exceptions being Austria, Germany, Israel and Malta. By 2012, about a quarter of the active population were unemployed in Greece and Spain, and ten to 15 percent in Cyprus, France, Ireland, Italy and Portugal. In the United States, at 8.1%, the unemployment rate was almost twice as high in 2012 as in 2007. Only Austria, Norway and Switzerland had unemployment rates below 5% in 2012. By contrast, in both Israel and Turkey unemployment was lower in 2012 than it had been during most of the 2000s.⁵

These trends reflect a deep transformation in economic and social structures:

- Globalization is changing the global division of labour, making developed countries less competitive. Jobs are being lost in particular in manufacturing industries that are intensive in low-skilled work and can be relocated in developing economies. Besides, skill-biased technical change reinforces the advantage of high-skilled workers vs. low-skilled workers in terms of employment and salaries. Education-related gaps in income and wealth, but also health and life expectancy, tend to increase.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is transforming the world of work, but is destroying jobs in the region, as well as creating others. For instance, ICT facilitates the automation or outsourcing of routines tasks – including intellectual tasks. While major new ICT corporations have developed in the

United States since 2000, Western European countries seem to have lost their edge in the sector, as exemplified by the disappearance of the European cell phone industry. More generally, research, development and innovation are not dynamic enough in several Western European countries.

- Countries differ in their ability to respond to the situation. Canada and the United States are regaining competitiveness through the exploitation of bituminous sands and shale gas and oil that has dramatically reduced the cost of energy. Germany, through its specialization in high-quality products and machine tools, as well as its low-wage policy, has managed to become the most export-oriented country in the world. Monetary union in the Euro area however makes it impossible to fine-tune monetary policy to the needs of each country, while wide fiscal deficits and high public debt constrain fiscal policy. Institutional rigidities limit the prospects for microeconomic reforms in countries including France and Italy.
- Societies are becoming more unequal, with an increased concentration of income and wealth in the hands of the richest. The trend is most visible in the United States, where the share of the richest 10% in total income increased from 42.7% to 48.2%, and the share of the richest 1% increased from 15.9% to 19.3%, over the 1999-2012 period; by 1980 the same shares were 32.9% and 8.2%, respectively.⁶ Inequality in Western Europe and North America in the 21st century may be as strong as it was at the beginning of the 20th century, shortly before the First World War.⁷

Societies are being undermined by the crisis. European societies are facing an unprecedented rise in poverty, which affects children the most. By 2011, 27% of children (aged less than 18) living in the European Union were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 24% of adults and 21% of the elderly. Child poverty rates were higher than the Union average in several countries of Western Europe, including Greece (30%), Ireland (38%), Italy (32%), Portugal (29%) and Spain (31%); the United Kingdom was just at the Union average (27%). Child poverty was often the outcome of low levels of parental education. In France and in Germany, more than half of children whose parents had studied up to lower secondary level were poor, compared with 6 to 7% of those whose parents had received tertiary education.⁸ By 2013, 17% of children aged 6-18 living in France were suffering from social exclusion.⁹

The most extreme case is **Greece**, where a quarter of the active population is unemployed and per capita income was cut by a fifth in just five years, resulting in a crash in household consumption, a resurgence of undernutrition, and the unaffordability of health care and education. Social services are collapsing, and the political stability of the country is at stake.

Cultural trends

The relative decline of the West vis-à-vis China, India, and perhaps in the 21st century sub-Saharan Africa is challenging a Western-centred worldview that prevailed for a couple of centuries. Meanwhile, national cultural identities are altered by greater openness to flows of goods and capital, immigration, and also by continental integration in Europe. Culture has become a central if not always explicit political issue, as exemplified by debates on the absorption of Islam into Western societies, or by the polarization of US politics. The lack of a clear common cultural identity is hampering the European Union's evolution towards a federal state; while the weakening of nation states is leading to a resurgence of regional identities.

The spread of ICT is having an impact on culture, facilitating communication and the emergence of a mass culture on a global scale, but also altering cultural practices centred on reading and writing, and challenging entire cultural industries such as publishing, musical publishing and cinema.

Environmental trends

Western Europe and North America have a major historical responsibility for alterations to the global environment that are threatening the future of the biosphere: climate change, the loss of biodiversity, an increasing scarcity of natural resources and pollution. Current policies are not considering these issues as central, despite the routine mention of sustainable development amongst their objectives. Commitments made in international agreements on environmental issues are rarely kept. For instance, despite a strong scientific consensus on human responsibility for climate change, governments have undertaken very limited action to curb emissions of greenhouse gases, which reached unprecedented levels in late 2013. The frail agreement reached at the Warsaw conference in November 2013 is unlikely to mark a turning point. In the United States, mass production of shale oil and gas in recent years has led to a decline in the use of coal as a source of energy, and thus of carbon dioxide emissions, but it is in itself a major source of pollution. Western European countries, Germany in particular, have been importing cheaper coal from the United States, cancelling earlier efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Trends outlined in this section are affecting the current functioning of education systems, but also raise new education and training needs that governments will have to address in a post-2015 perspective.

2 - Implications for education

Education systems in Western Europe and North America are under strain:

- **The rise in child poverty is reducing pupils' ability to learn** in primary and secondary education, and the ability of their families to support their learning. Higher education risks becoming unaffordable for many, as illustrated by the student loan crisis in the United States and high dropout and examination failure rates amongst university students who have to work to finance their studies in France. Meanwhile, mass unemployment amongst youth is reducing returns to education, including amongst higher education graduates.
- **Public spending on education is constrained** as governments are striving to reduce fiscal deficits. Low pupil/teacher ratios and a stagnating or declining pupil population reduce the need for recruiting large numbers of new teachers for basic education. However, while countries in Western Europe are almost disinvesting in higher education, lifelong learning and research and development, previous priorities on the European Union agenda; emerging countries, notably China, are investing massively. Long-term consequences of massive cuts in education spending in countries including Greece will deserve scrutiny.
- **Rising income inequality coupled with declining demand for low-skilled workers** imply that the impact of family background on educational achievement and the impact of achievement on labour market outcomes are both strengthening, putting pressure on schools as the place where lifelong destinies are being shaped. Current controversies around the reform of school hours in France focus on its perceived impact on the equity of the school system.
- **Declining learning outcomes and mounting school violence** in some countries may reflect deep changes in the functioning of families and society which threaten the transmission of knowledge through schooling. Schools as social institutions are weaker, knowledge is being valued less for its intrinsic value than for its instrumental roles, and the authority of teachers is contested.¹⁰ Pedagogical reforms based on the evaluation of specific interventions aiming to facilitate the acquisition of reading and writing skills, for instance, may not be sufficient to address the impact of these societal issues on learning outcomes.

Policies in post-2015 Western Europe and North America will need to address emerging education and training needs:

- Investing in **higher education** and strengthening links between the education system, public and private research and innovation, so as to foster the creation of new activity sectors;
- Supporting workers, especially low-skilled workers, adapt to changes in the economy by making access to **lifelong learning** more equitable;
- Facilitating the **international mobility** of students and young workers;
- Addressing **inequality in education** at all levels, from access to early childhood care and education to the mastery of basic skills and other learning outcomes in compulsory education and funding of higher education;
- Using **ICT** to the extent it can complement teaching (the evidence is mixed), and teaching students how to use it;
- Redefining the transmission of **culture** as the core of education;
- Confronting the neglect of environmental issues via **education for sustainable development**, and more generally through the teaching of natural and social sciences.

3 - Status of education in Western Europe and North America

From a broad, quantitative perspective, Western Europe and North America were closer than any other group of countries to having achieved the six goals of Education for All in 2000. However, there were issues in terms of access to pre-primary education, equity and quality of education, especially learning outcomes. An examination of current education indicators pertaining to each EFA goal shows that these issues persist.¹¹ The EFA framework was thus relevant to Western Europe and North America; and an expanded framework putting greater emphasis on higher education, research, vocational training, as well as on early childhood and on the functioning of schools and learning, will be relevant post-2015.

EFA goal 1: Early childhood care and education

All countries in Western Europe and North America have comprehensive public policies providing for the care of children aged under 3, which is reflected in health data. The average under-5 mortality rate is 6‰, and the median rates of immunization of children aged under 1 against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and against polio are both 97%. There are significant disparities within the region, though. Nordic countries have the lowest under-5 mortality rates (3‰ in Finland, Iceland and Sweden), and the United States has the highest (8‰). Austria stands apart as the only country with immunization rates below 90% (83% for both vaccines). Turkey has considerably improved early childhood care over the past twenty years but still not as advanced, with 9% of births not attended by skilled health personnel, and an under-5 mortality rate of 23‰.

In stark contrast, Western Europe and North America are not ensuring universal access to pre-primary education, though progress has been made since 1999. The weighted average gross enrolment ratio for the region went up from 76% in 1999 to 85% in 2011: The capacity of pre-primary schools has increased but is still insufficient to accommodate all young children.

Countries have distinct traditions regarding the provision of pre-primary education:

- In France and Belgium participation has long been universal, mostly in government schools in France (87% of pupils), but largely in private schools in Belgium (53%).
- Nine countries of Western Europe including Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, as well as Israel, are close to universal participation, with net enrolment ratios above 92%. In Norway and Sweden, this results from a dramatic expansion of pre-primary schooling since 1999, when only three quarters of young

children of the official age group were enrolled at this level. The private sector accounts for one-fifth to one-half of pupils in those countries, except Israel where provision is almost entirely public.

- Other European countries and Canada have net enrolment ratios between 70% and 85% and are thus still far from universal participation, although some, including Finland and Portugal, made considerable progress between 1999 and 2011. The share of the private sector varies from 4% in Switzerland to 51% in Cyprus.
- The United States (net enrolment ratio: 64%) and Ireland (67%) are lagging behind. In the United States 55% of pupils attend government schools, but Ireland has almost no public provision of pre-primary education (98% of pupils attend private schools).
- In Turkey pre-primary education started expanding only in recent years, as the gross enrolment ratio went up from a mere 7% in 1999 to 26% in 2010, mostly through government schools, which account for 91% of enrolment.

The number of years the average young child can expect to spend in pre-primary education depends not only on access to pre-schools, but also on the duration of the curriculum. This is typically shorter in Anglo-Saxon countries which also have lower enrolment ratios; hence a young child would receive only 1.3 year of pre-primary education in Ireland, 1.5 in Canada, 1.7 in the United Kingdom, and 2.1 in the United States. This contrasts with the much longer duration of pre-primary schooling for the average young child in France (3.2 years), Spain (3.8 years) and Northern Europe (up to 4.0 in Denmark).

Past and recent research highlights the benefits for young children – and for society – of participation in ECCE programmes of good quality:

- **The first three years of life are a sensitive period** in the formation of the brain, and more broadly of personality. A safe physical and emotional environment, providing appropriate stimulation and free of negative experiences (such as deprivation of care or ill treatment) is essential. ECCE programmes can provide such an environment, especially for children at risk of suffering from undernutrition, poor health, or limited language development, owing to family circumstances. They can thus limit the extent of inequalities among infants, which have lifelong consequences.¹²
- **Pre-primary education lays the foundations for further learning.** PISA 2009 data show that, in all OECD countries, students aged 15 who attended pre-primary school for at least one year perform better than those who did not – even taking family background into account. In Germany, the difference is equivalent to the gain made during one year of schooling; it is even larger in Denmark, Greece and Italy. Countries with larger shares of students who attended pre-primary education have higher average PISA scores than others, but the OECD emphasizes that quality matters. The impact of pre-primary school attendance on PISA scores depends on the number of years of attendance, on pupil/teacher ratios and on public expenditure per pupil.¹³ PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 data also show that the reading and mathematics achievement of grade 4 pupils increases with the length of their participation in pre-primary education; children who never attended pre-primary education are particularly disadvantaged.¹⁴
- **Research on ECCE in the United States finds long-term impacts** – while impacts of interventions in primary or secondary education often fade away after a few years. An evaluation of Head Start, the publicly funded national early childhood programme that focuses on poor children, found that participation in the programme increased the likelihood of graduating from secondary school by 9% and decreased by 7% the likelihood of not being in school and reporting zero wages around the age of 20.¹⁵ Longitudinal research finds extremely high economic returns to investing in ECCE programmes, over the life cycle, owing to higher rates of graduation from secondary school, higher individual earnings and thus higher tax revenue for the state, reduced dependency on welfare programmes, and reduced crime. Economists of education emphasise public investment in ECCE programmes as more productive than investment in remedial education for secondary school students.¹⁶

Policy-makers tend to neglect ECCE. The situation in the United States causes particular concern, but even in France, where parental demand for day care for children aged 0-2 is high and participation in pre-primary education is universal, there are concerns about the quality of ECCE in the future. Commitment to ECCE as reflected in public spending figures varies dramatically. Across 18 countries with data, ¹⁷ pre-primary education receives 4.0% (Switzerland) to 14.5% (Spain) of public current expenditure on education, corresponding to 0.19% (Switzerland) to 0.94% (Denmark) of GNP. Early childhood care and education should be a priority in the post-2015 education agenda for Western Europe and North America.

EFA goal 2: Universal primary education

All countries in Western Europe and North America had achieved universal primary education long before 2000. Governments played a major part in developing modern education systems and remain the main providers of primary and to a lesser extent secondary education, with a few exceptions. For instance, in the United States 91% of primary pupils are attending government schools, and in France 85% do. In Belgium, by contrast, private schools account for 54% of pupils at primary level.

Almost all children are entering primary school, completing the curriculum without repeating grades, and entering secondary education. Most will study until they graduate from upper secondary school, and a majority will have access to higher education. On average, children can expect to spend 16.6 years in the school system – less in countries such as Austria or Switzerland that rely on apprenticeship for vocational training, but up to 18.6 years in Ireland.¹⁸

In technical terms, the gross intake rate in primary education is 100% for the region as a whole, the adjusted net enrolment ratio in primary education ranges from 94% to 100% across countries, and indicators of internal efficiency are satisfactory – even negligible in comparison with other regions. Less than 1% of primary school pupils are repeating grades in a majority of countries with data. The median rate of survival to grade 5 is 99%, and in all countries but one (Spain: 94%) the rate of transition to secondary general education is above 98%. Gross enrolment ratios in lower and upper secondary education are close to 100% in most countries, indicating that education systems have the capacity to accommodate all adolescents. Grade repetition and drop out are issues at that level, though, and significant numbers of youth are leaving the school system with no more than lower secondary education. Early school leaving in the United States may account for the gross enrolment ratio in upper secondary education of only 90% – one of the lowest in Western Europe and North America. Meanwhile Turkey has achieved mass participation in lower secondary education, but its gross enrolment ratio in upper secondary education is 70%.

EFA goal 3: Learning needs of young people and adults

In comparison with other regions, all countries in Western Europe and North America provide a wide range of learning opportunities for young people and adults. However the quality of the education and training provided varies, and access tends to be inequitably distributed within countries, leaving out disadvantaged persons with the greatest learning needs.

The learning needs of youth and adults include:

- completion of upper secondary education;
- technical and vocational education and training;
- higher education;
- lifelong learning, especially continuing professional development; and
- second-chance education and training for persons with low skills and qualifications.

Completion of upper secondary education

Early school leaving has been identified as a policy issue in the European Union. By 2010, 14% of youth aged 18-24 in the Union had at most lower secondary education and were not in further education and training. The European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy aims to bring the share down to 10% by 2020.

The target is particularly relevant to Southern Europe (Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain) and the United Kingdom, where the 2010 share was higher than average – in Spain one in three youth were concerned. Disadvantaged youth were particularly at risk, e.g. low levels of parental education or the absence of the mother from the household were risk factors in Spain, and teenage pregnancy reduced the probability of being in school after the age of 16 by 24% in the United Kingdom.¹⁹

Technical and vocational education and training

Technical and vocational education (TVE) accounts for 24% of secondary school enrolment in Western Europe, ranging from 7% in Cyprus to 47% in the Netherlands. The share is high in countries with dual apprenticeship systems (Switzerland: 34%, Austria: 39%), as well as in Nordic countries (Sweden: 32%), Belgium (40%) and Italy (37%). Both France and Germany have 20% of secondary school enrolment in TVE, but many more German students engage in dual apprenticeships (and are considered employees rather than students) while most TVE in France is school-based. TVE is less developed in Spain (17%) and the United Kingdom (13%). In stark contrast with Western Europe, all secondary school students in the United States attend general education. In Turkey TVET comprises 22% of secondary school students.

The existence of parallel tracks in secondary education risks perpetuating social inequalities.²⁰ In many countries, weaker students are sent to TVET institutions of poor quality. Qualifications they acquire are not in heavy demand, and sometimes act as a negative signal for employers, who prefer hiring students with a strong general education – as observed in the United Kingdom. Initial disadvantage in terms of family background and educational achievement is thus translated into long-term disadvantage on the labour market.

- Countries tend to delay the age at which students are separated into the general track and the TVET track, and provide a common curriculum for all up to the age of 15. This helps ensure that as many students as possible acquire core skills necessary in both tracks. Countries in Western Europe and other OECD countries that conducted that reform saw the average performance of their students increase, and made their TVET systems more attractive to high performing students. On the other hand, countries which retained early tracking have wider inequalities in reading performance, as measured in PISA.
- Countries should make the separation between general education and TVET less rigid, by offering TVET students routes back into general education, or by including more general education subjects in the TVET curriculum. In Switzerland, a special one-year programme allows TVET graduates to catch up on academic subjects and enter university – in 2010 about 13% of 21-year-olds were participating in the programme.

Dual apprenticeship systems succeed in delivering quality TVET and facilitating access to employment, but they represent country-specific traditions that are difficult to replicate elsewhere.²¹ In Germany, dual apprenticeship is open to all students who completed lower secondary education at age 15, and lasts two to three and a half years. Apprentices are employees, paid by the company where they receive structured training; they also attend part-time classroom tuition in vocational and general subjects. The system operates on a very large scale, as 60% of youth enter apprenticeships, which are offered in around 340 occupations, whether in manufacturing, trades or services. 57% of those who complete their apprenticeship are immediately hired by their training company, hence the system contributes to Germany's success in keep youth unemployment at low levels. The system has existed for decades and depends on cooperation between federal and local governments, employers and employees; it responds to the needs of Germany's many export-oriented, small and medium-sized industrial firms that have a strong demand for high-skilled employees. France has tried to emulate the German model, with some success, as youth trained as apprentices are more likely to find employment than those who received classroom-based training in TVET institutions. However, the system operates on a much smaller scale than in Germany.

Higher education

Access to higher education varies dramatically across countries. Finland has made it nearly universal, with a gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education of 95%. In most other countries, the ratio ranges from 65% to 70%, up to 75-80% in the four Scandinavian countries. Two large Western European countries are lagging behind: the United Kingdom (60%) and France (58%), while Turkey has reached 55%. The high ratio in the United States (95%) reflects the attractiveness of the country's universities, which hosted 685,000 foreign students in 2011 – 33% of all foreign students in the region. Opening access to higher education and improving the quality of teaching and research are bound to be priorities on the post-2015 agenda.

Lifelong learning

Access to lifelong learning is limited and favours adults with the highest initial skills levels.²² In Europe, continuing education and training is well-developed in Nordic countries, where one-fifth to one-third of adults aged 25-64 participated in 2008, as well as in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In other Western European countries, only 5% to 10% participated – less than 5% in Greece and Turkey. In all countries, workers with low skills were considerably less likely to receive on-the-job training than those with high skills. Data from the United States also show participation in work-related courses among adults to increase with education levels, household income and occupation status, and to favour full-time employees over part-time employees and, especially, the unemployed.

Second-chance education and training for persons with low skills and qualifications

Broadly defined, **second-chance programmes** include:²³

- interventions aimed at reducing the consequences of **drop out** from secondary school, e.g. in the Netherlands dropouts can re-enrol at any point during the school year or attend adult education centres;
- **training programmes targeting youth who are 'neither in employment nor in education or training'**, e.g. the Summer Youth Employment Program in New York City, or second-chance schools in France and other European countries;
- **open and distance learning**, e.g. Turkey's Open High School and Open Vocational High School programmes, which target youth with physical disabilities, prisoners, youth living in isolated rural areas, and youth who drop out to work;
- **the formal recognition of skills acquired outside of school**, though the experience of the United Kingdom and other countries with national qualification frameworks is mixed.

Defining a post-2015 goal for youth and adult learning

The Education for All framework focused on basic education while TVET and higher education were neglected, limiting the relevance of the framework to Western Europe and North America. Whether lifelong learning in developed countries fell under goals 3 and 4 was also unclear, given the vague wording of the goals. A post-2015 education agenda will have to fully consider TVET and higher education. Any associated global education report will have to review higher education – not covered in the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* series.

The 2012 report covered goal 3, but focused on skills development for disadvantaged youth and second-chance programmes.²⁴ The report highlighted the difficulty of monitoring provisions and measuring skills, given the data at hand:

- There exists a **great diversity of providers**, which are not adequately covered in national statistics collected by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.²⁵ Young people and adults acquire skills not only by attending formal public or private institutions, but also at their workplace, whether through formal training, or informally. Second-chance programmes are often run by non-government organisations, on a small scale.

- Measuring skills beyond literacy and numeracy is difficult, and **cross-country comparable data are only starting to be available**, through the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), as well as through the Eurostat Labour Force Survey, Adult Education Survey and Continuing Vocational Training Survey. Indicators proposed by the ILO, the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank at the request of the Seoul G20 summit thus comprise mostly conventional education indicators. Two indicators however pertain directly to skills development (participation of youth in apprenticeships, participation of adults in education and training). The only direct measure of skills envisaged is limited to literacy and numeracy.²⁶

The report concluded that: ‘Any post-2015 international goals for skills development need to be more precisely defined and to set out clearly how they can be measured, based on a realistic assessment of information that can be collected.’²⁷

EFA goal 4: Adult literacy

Countries in Western Europe and North America have few illiterate adults who are unable to read and write at all, and their governments tend to consider illiteracy a non-issue. Adult literacy figures are available only for six countries of Southern Europe, where the adult literacy rate ranged between 92% (Malta) and 99% (Italy) over 2005-2011. Corresponding numbers of illiterate adults (aged 15 and above) are not negligible, especially in Spain (882,000 persons), Italy (533,000) and Portugal (415,000), but the numbers of illiterate youth (aged 15-24) almost are, hence complete illiteracy might be expected to nearly disappear in the future. Turkey stands apart from Western Europe and North America, with an adult literacy ratio of 90% for women, and 3,224,000 illiterate adults, 83% of whom are women. Household survey data show that a significant share of Kurdish-speaking youth are still illiterate.²⁸

However, conventional literacy figures underestimate the share of adults who are functionally illiterate, i.e. face difficulties – in everyday life or at the work place – in applying reading and writing skills, in performing simple mathematical operations, or in solving problems. Most of these persons were enrolled in basic education, but left school early with low skills, and have lacked opportunities to upgrade them. National assessments of adult skills show functional illiteracy to affect a significant share of the population. In Germany, a 2010 assessment found that 14.5% of the population aged 18-64, or 7.5 million persons, were functionally illiterate. Only 0.6% could not read at all (the conventional definition of illiteracy), but as many as 10%, while being able to read single sentences, were unable to understand a text. Similar assessments put functional illiteracy at 9% of the adult population in France, and at 8% in Scotland. Surveys in Canada and in the United States found particularly high levels of functional illiteracy among indigenous populations, reflecting discrimination and stigmatisation.²⁹

International surveys of adult literacy skills provide cross-country comparable data. Building up on the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) surveys conducted in 2003 and 2006-2008, the OECD recently released the first results of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) collected in 2011 and 2012 from 166,000 adults aged 16-65 in 24 countries, including 16 in Western Europe and North America. The survey focused on measuring literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills as relevant to working in ‘technology-rich environments’.³⁰

One in six adults have poor literacy skills, and one in five have poor numeracy skills:

- 3.3% scored below Level 1 on the literacy scale. They were able to ‘read brief texts on familiar topics and locate a single piece of information identical in form to information in the question or directive’, but no more. A further 12.2% of adults scored at Level 1. They could ‘read relatively short digital or print continuous, non-continuous, or mixed texts to locate a single piece of information, which is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive.’ Within Western Europe and North America, the share of adults with poor literacy skills (scoring at or below Level 1) was highest in Italy (27.7%), Spain (27.5%) and France (21.5%), and lowest in the Netherlands (11.7%) and Finland (10.7%).

- 5.0% scored below Level 1 on the numeracy scale, and 14.0% at Level 1. The share of adults scoring at or below Level 1 was highest again in Italy (31.7%) and Spain (30.6%), followed by the United States (28.7%).

Northern European countries (Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) **score higher than the international average in literacy and numeracy**; Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United States have lower scores.

Inequalities are much larger within countries than between them. Governments should not only be concerned with the average score of their country, but also make reducing skills gaps a policy priority. Categories significantly more likely to have low skills include adults with educational attainment below upper secondary level, adults whose parents had low educational attainment, workers in elementary occupations, immigrants with a foreign-language background, as well as older adults. The educational attainment gap is extreme in France and in the United States, where adults with less than upper secondary education score just slightly above Level 1 on average, while those with tertiary education score in the top of the range of Level 3. Parental education creates similar gaps in Germany and the United States.

Adults with poor skills face multiple sources of disadvantage. They are more likely to be out of the labour force, or to be unemployed; those employed receive lower wages. They also find it more difficult to participate in society, e.g. they are more likely to have lower levels of trust in others, to believe that they have little impact on the political process and not to participate in associative or volunteer activities. Finally, they are more likely to be in poor health.

A post-2015 education agenda for Western Europe and North America will need to address functional illiteracy:

- The 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* emphasized the need for interventions targeting functionally illiterate adults, starting with an official recognition of the extent of the issue and the definition of a national strategy backed by adequate financing. Successful programmes include those leading to secondary school qualifications, family or intergenerational literacy programmes, and workplace-based programmes. Difficulties met with are the lack of professional development for literacy trainers, and low expressed demand due to the stigma attached to recognising oneself as illiterate.
- Several recommendations made by the OECD based on the Survey of Adult Skills concern incentives on the labour market and the organization of work, but others are directly relevant to the post-2015 education agenda in Western Europe and North America; including ‘provide high-quality early childhood education and care at reasonable cost’, ‘continue to promote educational attainment’ and ‘take stock of the skills held by unemployed adults’.

EFA goal 5: Gender parity and equality

School participation in Western Europe and North America does not show major gender disparities at pre-primary, primary or lower secondary level. Drop out from upper primary school however is more common amongst boys, who in 2010 comprised a majority of youth aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education who are not in further education or training in all countries of the region that belong to the European Union.³¹

Girls tend to outperform boys in terms of learning outcomes, though differences are not large and vary across fields of study and countries. In PISA 2009, which covered students aged 15 in 22 of 23 countries in Western Europe and North America, as well as Turkey, girls’ average reading score was higher than boys’ in all countries. The gender gap was smallest in the Netherlands, where girls’ average score was 4.8% higher than boys’ and largest in Finland (10.8%). The gender gap in reading did not narrow in any country between 2000 and 2009; it even widened in Israel, Portugal, France and Sweden. Most students with very low proficiency in reading are boys. In mathematics, on the other hand, boys’ average score was higher in all countries but Sweden, and the difference was statistically significant in 16 countries including Turkey. Gender gaps were smaller, up to 4.4% in Belgium. In science, girls’ average score was significantly higher

than boys in three countries including Turkey, significantly lower in five, and there was no significant difference in 14 countries.³² Results on the reading and mathematical achievement of grade 4 pupils in PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 are similar.

Girls outnumber boys in higher education. In 18 of 20 countries with data, there are more females than males among students; one more (Switzerland) is at gender parity, and only one (Cyprus) has a majority of male students. As a result, girls can expect to spend more years in education than boys in 17 of 20 countries with data, especially in Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries: 0.9 year in the United Kingdom, 1.7 in the United States, and up to 2.4 in Iceland.

Policies for gender equality in education in Western Europe and North America should have three main objectives:

- **Supporting disadvantaged boys** who are at greater risk of leaving the school system early and with low skills and low qualifications;
- **Removing gender stereotypes which still exist in curricula, textbooks and classroom practices**, harming both girls and boys, and limiting their freedom. In that respect, it might be noted that, in the region, women comprise 94% of teachers at pre-primary level, 84% at primary level, 60% at secondary level, and 43% at tertiary level. Meanwhile, the median share of girls amongst higher education students is 82% in health and welfare and 76% in education, as opposed to 27% in engineering and construction and 36% in science;
- **Facilitating women's labour force participation**, which is low in several countries, preventing many women from reaping labour market returns to their education. Only 51% of women are in the labour force in Italy, 58% in Greece, 61% in Israel and 62% in Ireland; the share reaches 75% or more only in the four Scandinavian countries and in Switzerland.

Turkey stands apart from Western Europe and North America as far as gender disparities are concerned.

The country nearly eliminated gender disparities in primary and lower secondary education between 1999 and 2010 as girls' enrolment ratios caught up with boys', but has not achieved the same yet at upper secondary level, where the gross enrolment ratio is 65% for girls against 74% for boys. Participation in higher education has progressed quickly for both genders since 1999, but young men still outnumber young women, with gross enrolment ratios of 61% and 50%, respectively. Boys can expect to spend 1.1 years more than girls in the school system, and women's labour force participation is a mere 30%.

EFA goal 6: Quality of education

Maintaining the quality of education is the greatest challenge facing countries of Western Europe and North America. Several countries in East Asia and the Pacific now have higher learning outcomes than any country in the region. Learning outcomes are stagnating or decreasing in several countries, reflecting a deep crisis in teaching and learning. As pupil/teacher ratios are low, education policy answers need not focus on hiring large numbers of additional teachers, but should seek to improve the education, training and management of teachers.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes in primary and secondary education are well documented for Western Europe and North America as most countries conduct regular national assessments and participate in international assessments. The most recent international data available are:

- The 2011 rounds of PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), collected by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) in respectively 49 and 63 countries or sub-national entities.³³ TIMSS covers mathematics for grade 4 and grade 8 pupils, and PIRLS covers reading for grade 4 pupils. 18 of 23 countries in the region, plus Turkey, participated in at least one of the surveys. The next rounds will take place in 2015 (TIMSS) and 2016 (PIRLS).

- The 2009 round of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), is collected by the OECD in its 34 member states as well as 41 partner countries or sub-national entities.³⁴ PISA 2009 focused on the reading performance of students aged 15, but also covered mathematics and science. A module was introduced on reading, understanding and applying digital texts – PISA seeks to assess students' ability to use knowledge gained in the classroom not only in the school system, but also in society. Except Cyprus, all countries in Western Europe and North America participated, as well as Turkey. Results from PISA 2012 will be available on 3 December 2013, and the next round will take place in 2015.

PISA 2009 results revealed that Western Europe and North America no longer lead the world in academic excellence. Shanghai (China) had the highest average score in reading (556 points), followed by the Republic of Korea; Finland, the former leader, was third (536). Seven of the top ten performers belonged to East Asia and the Pacific – including Australia and New Zealand. Besides Finland, Canada and the Netherlands were the only countries in Western Europe and North America in the top ten. France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States did not perform significantly better than the OECD average of 500 points. Countries of Southern Europe performed significantly worse, including Greece, Italy and Spain (481 points). Israel (474) and Turkey (464) were catching up with Western Europe and North America, reaching scores similar to the Russian Federation's. They were also scoring much higher than emerging economies of Latin America. PISA 2009 results in mathematics and science were similar, although countries including Germany and the United Kingdom had higher scores than in reading.

Several countries in Western Europe and North America have large shares of students who do not reach the baseline proficiency level necessary for further education and access to employment – Level 2 on the PISA reading scale. For boys, that share is above one-quarter in six countries including France (25.6%), Italy (28.9%) and Austria (35.2%), plus Turkey (33.4%). Several countries also have very few highly proficient readers, reaching Levels 5 and 6 – seven countries plus Turkey have less than 4%. In the Republic of Korea, only 8.8% of male students do not reach Level 2, and in New Zealand, as many as 11.9% reach Levels 5 and 6.

Trends in PISA scores for Western Europe and North America are a cause for concern:

- Between 2000 and 2009, the average reading score stagnated in 11 out of 16 countries with data for both years, and declined in two: Ireland and Sweden. Scores increased only in Germany, Israel and Portugal.
- The share of students not reaching Level 2 increased in five countries including France and Spain, particularly among boys. The share of students performing at Levels 5 and 6 declined in Ireland and Sweden.
- No country saw an improvement in the average reading score of boys.
- The share of students who reported reading for enjoyment decreased in ten countries, from more than 80% to 65% in Portugal, and from 70% to 60% in France.
- Performance in mathematics declined between 2003 and 2009 in seven countries including France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Considerable improvement took place, though, in five countries including Germany, Portugal and Turkey.

Within countries, learning outcomes reflect socio-economic inequality, but some education systems are more equitable than others. The share of the variance in student scores in reading that can be explained by students' socio-economic background is low in egalitarian countries like Iceland (6%) and Finland (8%), as well as larger countries including Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom (12% to 14%). It is much larger in Belgium, France, Germany and the United States (17% to 19%), as well as Turkey (19%). Students attending schools in rural areas have lower scores in reading in some countries, e.g. Germany, Italy and Turkey. In Canada, on the other hand, scores hardly vary whether students live in villages, small towns, larger towns or metropolitan cities.

Countries differ in their ability to integrate students with an immigration background, especially those whose home language differs from the language of instruction. Four patterns of integration, or the lack thereof, maybe distinguished:

- In Austria, 64.1% of first-generation migrants fail to reach Level 2, compared with 43.1% of second-generation migrants and 23.0% of native students. The same pattern of disadvantage obtains in Finland, although overall far fewer students fail to reach Level 2: 38.8% of second- vs. 17.5% of first-generation migrants, and 7.4% of native students.
- In Belgium, France and Germany, the gap between native students and migrants is not as wide, but second-generation migrants face almost the same difficulties reading as first-generation migrants, indicative of lack of cultural integration. In France, 42.2% of first- and 35.1% of second-generation migrants fail to reach Level 2, compared with 16.8% of native students.
- In the United Kingdom, migrant disadvantage is much smaller, and second-generation students catch up with native ones. The share of students not reaching Level 2 is 28.7% for first-generation migrants, vs. 19.7% for second-generation migrants and 16.7% for native students.
- In Canada, Israel and the United States, students with an immigration background face little disadvantage. In Canada, only 13.4% of first- and 9.8% of second-generation migrants fail to reach Level 2, almost on par with native students (9.4%).

TIMSS 2011 data confirm the East Asian lead: the five top performers in both grade 4 and grade 8 mathematics are the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong (China) and Singapore, followed by Chinese Taipei and Japan. East Asian grade 4 pupils surveyed in 2007 were outperforming pupils from Western Europe and North America. Between 2007 and 2011 they made much more progress, so that the gap had widened when the same cohort was surveyed as grade 8 students in 2011: 49% of grade 8 pupils in Chinese Taipei reached the TIMSS 'advanced benchmark' in mathematics, and 27% in Japan, as compared with 12% in Israel – the best-performing country in Western Europe and North America. Within the region, both TIMSS and PIRLS 2011 confirm the lead of Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries vis-à-vis continental and, particularly, Southern Europe.

The IEA studies paint a brighter picture of education in Western Europe and North America than PISA does, however. It might be that policies succeeded in raising grade 4 achievement by 2011, so that achievement at age 15 will be higher in next rounds of PISA. But stark differences in the relative position of countries and in trends over 1995-2011 and 2000-2009 suggest that the two sources are not fully consistent. Ireland is a top performer in PIRLS 2011, but has a learning crisis in PISA, with a mediocre reading score of 496 in strong decline since 2000.

- Top ten performers in grade 4 reading in PIRLS 2011 include five countries of Western Europe and North America (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United States) and two in Central and Eastern Europe, vs. only three East Asian countries.
- In PIRLS 2011 most European countries have very few students who do not reach the 'low benchmark', contrasting with the high shares not reaching Level 2 in PISA 2009.
- There are many more countries in Western Europe and North America in which achievement is increasing in the IEA studies. For instance, in TIMSS 2011, grade 4 achievement in mathematics increased in 12 of 17 countries, remained stable in two and decreased in three, compared with 1995. The share of students not reaching the low benchmark declined significantly in countries including England, Italy and Norway. PIRLS 2011 also finds improvements in reading (compared with 2001 or 2006) in several countries, including England, Norway and the United States.

Whatever the inconsistencies between PISA and the IEA studies, both sources highlight that Western Europe and North America has lost its advance in learning outcomes, and countries in the region need to address the functioning of their school systems.

Teacher policies

Teacher policies are central to improving learning outcomes in Western Europe and North America. While social and family background shapes a student's potential achievement, attending a school that functions well can compensate for disadvantage. TIMSS 2011 data show how schools that provide a safe and orderly environment and emphasise learning – by setting rigorous curricular goals, motivating pupils and gaining parental support – are the most likely to succeed. Resources associated with higher achievement include

buildings and equipment, and pedagogical resources (from libraries to computers) – but teachers are the key resource.³⁵

Most countries have low pupil/teacher ratios and do not need to recruit large numbers of teachers, besides replacing those who go on retirement or otherwise leave the profession. Average pupil/teacher ratios for the region are 14:1 at pre-primary, 14:1 at primary and 12:1 at secondary level. There are two exceptions, though. First, additional recruitments would be needed to universalise pre-primary education in countries including the United Kingdom (present ratio of 18 pupils per teacher), and especially Turkey (23:1), and to universalise upper secondary education in Turkey (18:1). Second, the present policy of hiring 60,000 teachers in France may be justified, as the country has some of the highest pupil/teacher ratios in Western Europe and North America (20:1 at pre-primary, 18:1 at primary, 13:1 at secondary level), and one of the highest fertility rates.

The quality of teachers varies widely across countries in the region. In TIMSS 2011 data, 78% of grade 8 pupils in Finland were taught mathematics by a teacher who had completed a postgraduate university degree, compared with 38% in England and 1% in Norway. Two-thirds to three-quarters of grade 8 pupils in the United States were taught by teachers who had received professional development in the past two years, in mathematics content, pedagogy, or curriculum, compared with one-quarter to one-half in Italy. Grade 4 mathematics teachers had only 12 years of experience on average in Ireland, compared with 19 in Germany.³⁶

Investing in teacher initial education, pre-service training and professional development helps achieve high learning outcomes. In Germany, future teachers are recruited from the top third of high school graduates; they receive extensive preparation at university, with a focus on identifying and addressing the specific problems faced by students with low achievement. They go through an extended period of mentoring by an experienced teacher before becoming full-time teachers. The quality of teacher training facilitated the implementation of education reforms undertaken after PISA 2000 had revealed German students were performing slightly below the OECD average. In PISA 2009, reading performance had improved, and mathematics and sciences scores were significantly higher than the OECD average. In Finland, teacher education focuses on pedagogical content knowledge. Cooperation between teacher education faculty and academic subject faculty results in the development of teaching methods adapted to each subject. Future teachers are trained in identifying students with learning difficulties. They have to write a research-based master's degree dissertation, and are encouraged to reflect on their professional practice throughout their career. They are positioned for a one-year practicum in a 'model school' associated with their university. These model schools also test innovative teaching practices and conduct research in pedagogy.³⁷

Teacher salaries are increasing in most countries. Between 2000 and 2010, in the OECD, salaries for teachers with 15 years of experience increased by 22% on average at primary level, 17% at lower secondary level, and 19% at upper secondary level. They doubled in Turkey at primary level. Teacher salaries were almost stable in the United States (increase of 3% at all levels). They decreased in only one country in Western Europe and North America: France, by 7% to 8%. Given that class size decreased in most countries, teacher salary costs per student increased even more, by one-third in primary education, and one-quarter in lower secondary education, on average across OECD countries. However, the ratio of teacher salaries on per capita income (GDP) was stable or decreased slightly, to 1.23 in 2010 at primary level, 1.26 at lower secondary and 1.33 at upper secondary level on average.³⁸

Teacher salaries remain lower than those of other professions with comparable education and training requirements. Across OECD countries, in 2010, primary school teachers earned 82% of average earnings for 25-64 year-olds with tertiary education; upper secondary school teachers earned 90%. Lower secondary education teachers earned 50% less than other persons with higher education in Iceland – as compared with 20% more in the Republic of Korea.³⁹ Lower salaries for teachers can compromise teacher recruitment and lead to teacher attrition. In recent years, France could not recruit as many secondary school teachers as planned in several fields, including mathematics and English (as a foreign language). In the United States, higher salaries in other occupations lead teachers with less than six years of experience to quitting the profession.⁴⁰

Poor teacher management affects disadvantaged students the most. Teachers seek transfer out of poor areas, violent neighbourhoods, remote rural areas, etc. Schools located there have higher pupil/teacher ratios and higher turnover, with less experienced teachers. They also suffer from higher teacher absenteeism. Existing financial incentives for teachers who accept being posted in disadvantaged schools are often too low or poorly targeted.

4 - Education finance, strategies and policies

Long-term investment in education is a key answer to the current crisis, yet short-term considerations are leading to severe cuts in education budgets, especially in poorer countries at the periphery of the European Union where learning outcomes were already the lowest. The capacity of education systems to deliver quality education to all students and to foster research and innovation is being undermined, which will affect Europe's potential for growth, and deepen its social crisis – contradicting the stated objectives of fiscal tightening. In that context, the ambitious strategy for 2020 put forward by the European Union may fail to achieve its goals. United States politics are limiting the ability of the federal government to mobilize funds for education, also questioning the country's strategy – though much actual decision-making in education is decentralized to state and local authorities.

Public expenditure on education⁴¹

Countries in Western Europe and North America devote a large share of their resources to education. The median share of total public expenditure on education in gross national product (GNP) is 6.0% – the international benchmark – and the median share of education in total government expenditure is 12.5% – lower than the international benchmark of 20%, but drawn from large budgets. Nordic countries spend the most, while the most populated countries spend the least – Germany, Italy and Spain spend 4.5% to 5.0% of their GNP and 9.1% to 10.9% of their government expenditure on education; the United Kingdom is also below both medians. Overall, resources devoted to education increased over the past decade, with a few striking exceptions. In Israel, the share of education in GNP went down from 7.5% to 6.1% in a context of sustained economic growth, and the United States cut education spending from 17.1% to 13.1% of government expenditure.

Within Western Europe, resources available per student vary dramatically across countries, mirroring variations in the quality of education.⁴² They are lowest in Israel and Southern Europe, close to the median in France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and highest in smaller countries of Northern Europe. Per student spending in Denmark is 2.2 times higher than in Portugal at pre-primary level, 1.8 times higher than in France at primary level, 1.6 times higher than in Spain at secondary level, and 2.9 times higher than in Italy at tertiary level.⁴³

Countries assign different priorities to levels of education. Secondary education, which combines almost universal enrolment with higher unit costs than primary education, receives the largest share of public current expenditure on education in 17 of 19 countries with data (all in Western Europe). The shares devoted to pre-primary and tertiary education are the most variable, reflecting distinct policy orientations:

- Nine countries including France, Italy and Spain spend around 25% on primary education, around 40% on secondary education and around 20% on tertiary education. Given its higher fertility rate, France spends noticeably little on primary education (20%).
- Eight Nordic and German-speaking countries spend more on tertiary education, from 25% in Germany to 33% in Finland, and less on primary education (14% in Germany, where the child population is declining). The share devoted to pre-primary education is highly variable within each of these groups, ranging from less than 5% to more than 11%.
- Israel's quickly growing child population results in higher spending on pre-primary (11%) and especially primary education (40%).

- The United Kingdom devotes only 15% of its public current expenditure to tertiary education. This is the result of a dramatic substitution of private for public funding, which took place over 15 years. In 1995, 80% of total expenditure on tertiary education in the United Kingdom was public. By 2010 the share had dwindled to 25%, lower even than in the United States (36%, stable since 1995), lower indeed than in any other OECD country except Chile. The closest figure in Western Europe was in Italy – 68%. Households now spend more than twice as much as the government on tertiary education in the United Kingdom.⁴⁴

In recent years, the financial crisis has led several governments in Western Europe to reduce education budgets.⁴⁵ Education budgets were higher in all countries of the European Union in 2010 than in 2000, as most countries had managed to preserve them after the financial crisis started in 2008, though reductions were already taking place in the worst-affected countries: Greece, Iceland, Portugal and Spain. Data for 2011 and 2012 paint a disturbing picture:

- In 2011, education budgets were cut by more than 5% in Greece, Iceland and Portugal, and by 1% to 5% in Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom (Scotland). The budget for pre-primary, primary and secondary education was cut by 17 % in Greece.
- In 2012, education budgets were cut by more than 5% in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom (Wales), and by 1% to 5% in Belgium (French community), Finland, France, Ireland and Spain. The budget for tertiary and adult education was cut by 31% in Cyprus, and 25% in Greece.

Turkey's education budget on the other hand increased by more than 5% in both years.

The long-term impact on the functioning of schools and on learning outcomes of measures recently taken to reduce education budgets will deserve careful scrutiny. Reducing or freezing teacher salaries has been the most common measure, and was drastic in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. For instance, in Ireland, salaries for new teachers appointed after January 1st, 2011 were reduced by 10%, a further 3.2% after December 4th, and a further 4.5% after January 31st, 2012; several allowances are not payable to newly appointed teachers. Other measures have included merging or closing schools (Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Portugal), postponing building renovation or reducing maintenance (Iceland, Ireland, United Kingdom), delaying equipment in ICT (Cyprus, Iceland and Spain), and downsizing support programmes for students with low achievement (Ireland).

Strategies and policies

The main strategy in the European Union is Europe 2020, 'A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' proposed by the European Commission in 2010, with five main targets for employment, research and development, greenhouse gas emission, education and poverty reduction. The education target is to 'reduce the share of early school leavers to 10% from the current 15% and increase the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education from 31% to at least 40%.' The research and development target complements it: "Achieve the target of investing 3% of GDP in R&D in particular by improving the conditions for R&D investment by the private sector, and develop a new indicator to track innovation." Achieving the education and R& D targets should indeed facilitate the achievement of the other three targets (i.e. employment, greenhouse gas emissions, and poverty reduction).⁴⁶

The United States Department of Education recently published a draft strategic plan for 2014-2018⁴⁷, structured around six goals, each of which includes three to five objectives and a list of indicators allowing measurement of success in reaching the goal:

- 'Goal 1: Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education. Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults
- Goal 2: Elementary and Secondary Education. Improve the elementary and secondary education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent instruction aligned with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and ensure all students graduate high school college- and career-ready

- Goal 3: Early Learning. Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready
- Goal 4: Equity. Increase educational opportunities for and reduce discrimination against underserved students so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.
- Goal 5: Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System. Enhance the education system's ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.
- Goal 6: U.S Department of Education Capacity. Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement this strategic plan.⁴⁸

The United States Department of Education further developed an international education strategy for the years 2012-2016, with four objectives:

- 'Objective 1: Increase the global competencies of all U.S. students, including those from traditionally disadvantaged groups.
- Objective 2: Enhance federal, state and local education policy and practice applying lessons learned from other countries to drive excellence and innovation in the U.S. and abroad.
- Objective 3: Advance U.S. international priorities in strategically important countries through active education diplomacy.
- Objective 4: Develop, monitor and continuously improve [the Department of Education's] international activities in an integrated and coordinated manner.'⁴⁹

Major national policies in the United States include:

- **Head Start**, an early childhood care and education programme started in 1965 targeted to young children (aged 0 to 5) from low-income families, which aims to promote school readiness by enhancing cognitive, social and emotional development. Head Start extends beyond education to provide health and nutrition services.⁵⁰
- **No Child Left Behind**, an act passed in 2001 that required all schools receiving federal funding to test all students annually, using tests standardized at the state level, with the aim of reducing gaps in achievement by identifying schools 'in need of improvement' and increasing their accountability to parents. Criticisms of the implementation of No Child Left Behind led to a policy change in 2011, as states were allowed 'flexibility regarding specific requirements' conditional on 'rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction.' Almost all states have now obtained 'flexibility'.⁵¹
- **Race to the Top**, one of the many education recovery plans under the broader American Recovery and Reinvestment Act adopted in 2009. Race to the Top awards federal granting to state governments, on a competitive basis, depending on how much their policies score on a complex formula.⁵² Race to the Top received much media attention, but the very principle of competitive funding based on quantitative criteria has attracted intense criticism.

5 - Relevance of the post-2015 education agenda to Western Europe and North America

Specific priorities emerge for education in Western Europe and North America post-2015. First, **universalising pre-primary education** as the foundation for further learning. Second, addressing stagnating or declining **learning outcomes in primary and secondary education**, focusing on reducing the share of students with insufficient achievement for access to further education and employment. Third, improving the **quality of TVET and higher education**, in terms of teaching, research, innovation and relevance to the

world of work; access to higher education should also be expanded in several countries. Fourth, ensuring **equitable participation in lifelong learning**, ranging from literacy and training programmes for the large share of adults with low skills levels to professional development for high-skilled workers. Five, ensuring enough **public resources** are invested in education, despite the ongoing trends towards reduced public spending. These priorities are reflected in the US strategic plan for 2014-2018, and to a lesser extent in Europe 2020: To be relevant to Western Europe and North America, a post-2015 global education agenda will need to be consistent with these strategies.

A large number of proposals have been put forward for a global education agenda post-2015, as outcomes of consultations held by the United Nations, governments, non-government organizations, etc. On 26 November 2013, the website of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* was listing no less than 63 related policy papers.⁵³ A consensus is building up on key statements including: reaffirming education as a fundamental right and as a public good central to global development; making education systems more equitable and inclusive; improving the quality of education. The new target year would be 2030. The Global Monitoring Report team have identified conditions for the new goals to be meaningful despite the world's failure to reach the Education for All goals that preceded them: The goals should be clearly defined, measurable - using data that can be collected within their timeframe, and include deadlines which enable the international community to be held accountable for its commitments. They should also be better integrated into the new broader development agenda, than the Education for All goals were within the Millennium Development Goals.⁵⁴

Proposals made hitherto will need to be complemented and adapted so that they are fully relevant to Western Europe and North America. With the shift from enrolment to learning and equity, the consensual statements in the post-2015 debate are obviously in line with some of the priorities for the region, but other priorities are ignored:

- **TVET, higher education and lifelong learning are crucial to the future of Western European and North American societies**, yet they are excluded because of the continuing focus on basic education. For instance, the overarching goals put forward by the Basic Education Coalition, the Global Coalition for Education, the Global Monitoring Report team and Save the Children mention 'the basics' or 'pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education', but not adults, advanced learning or higher levels of education.⁵⁵ Given the high demand for upper secondary education resulting from progress made at primary and lower secondary levels since 2000 in most developing countries, and massive investments in higher education by emerging countries, especially China, a major part of the global education scenario risks being missed. Besides, sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia will never ensure that all children learn the basics if they do not educate and train massive numbers of teachers in their higher education systems.
- **Countries of Western Europe and North America need to reform comprehensive education systems**, while the perspective of most proposals is the expansion of incomplete ones, in developing countries. Governments in the region may thus feel they have already achieved the goals for 2015-2030, while those years will be crucial for educational policy to address issues within the school system (e.g. declining student motivation, school violence and bullying) that bear on deeper societal issues (loss of economic competitiveness, rise in social inequality, decline in political participation, loss of cultural identity, environmental degradation). A goal on finance should also incline a target for developed countries to preserve their education systems during periods of fiscal tightening, and invest in education as a long-term response to their financial and economic crisis.

Conclusion

Educational policy should be a key concern for governments in Western Europe and North America over the 2015-2030 period. The region pioneered mass literacy and universal education systems, and was close to achieving the six goals of Education for All even before the World Education Forum met in Dakar. Yet its school systems are suffering from the financial, economic and social crisis that is affecting Europe in particular. Access to TVET, higher education and lifelong learning remains unequitable. While all children complete basic education, large shares of young people leave the school system with low skills levels that constrain their participation in the labour market, in politics and in society.

Educational policy priorities in Western Europe and North America are converging with those in other regions. Many emerging countries have reached nearly universal participation in basic education, and several countries in East Asia and the Pacific outperform most countries in Western Europe and North America in terms of learning outcomes. Turkey exemplifies the convergence: The country still has to resolve issues of limited access to basic education, particularly for girls, and youth and adult literacy, in its most disadvantaged regions, yet learning outcomes at age 15 are improving, and the higher education system has massively expanded to enrol more than half of its youth in 2011, up from less than a quarter in 1999.⁵⁶ The distinction between developed countries donating aid, and developing countries receiving it, is also eroding, as aid budgets of traditional donors are being cut and emerging countries become new donors to the poorest countries.

A global education agenda for 2015-2030 will need to reflect this convergence if it is to be relevant to Western Europe and North America. An exclusive focus on basic education in developing countries would be too narrow, even through an equity and quality lens. A broader perspective is necessary, which would take higher education and lifelong learning into account, as well as academic excellence, research and innovation.

Notes

All online references were accessed on 28 November 2013.

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- ¹ Turkey belongs to the EFA region of Central and Eastern Europe and to Group I of UNESCO's Executive Committee.
- ² Excluding Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, which are not taken into account in this paper.
- ³ UNESCO, 2013/14 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, Statistical appendix (online version), forthcoming, Paris: UNESCO. All published issues of the report are available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/>
- ⁴ Eurostat, 'À partir de 2015, les décès devraient dépasser les naissances dans l'UE27', press release, 26 August 2008, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-26082008-AP/FR/3-26082008-AP-FR.PDF,
- ⁵ Income and unemployment figures calculated from IMF, World Economic Outlook, October 2013, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2013/02/weodata/index.aspx>
- ⁶ World Top Incomes database, <http://topincomes.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/#Database>:
- ⁷ Thomas Piketty, *Le Capital au XXI^e siècle*, Paris: Seuil, 2013.
- ⁸ Eurostat, 'In 2011, 27% of children aged less than 18 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion', press release, 26 February 2013, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STAT-13-28_en.htm?locale=en
- ⁹ UNICEF France, *Écoutons ce que les enfants ont à nous dire. L'intégration sociale des enfants en France : de fortes inégalités. Consultation nationale des 6/18 ans*, Paris: UNICEF France, 2013.
- ¹⁰ Marie-Claude Blais, Marcel Gauchet and Dominique Ottavi, *Conditions de l'éducation*, Paris: Stock, 2008.
- ¹¹ Unless stated otherwise, indicators in this section are UNESCO Institute for Statistics data drawn from the 2013/14 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, Statistical appendix (online version), forthcoming, and they are for the school year ending in 2011.
- ¹² 2007 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ¹³ OECD, *PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background – Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes (Volume II)* and *What Makes a School Successful? – Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, Paris: OECD, 2010.
- ¹⁴ Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Pierre Foy and Kathleen T. Drucker, *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*, and Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Pierre Foy and Alka Arora, *TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics*, Chestnut Hill, MA and Amsterdam: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center and IEA, 2012.
- ¹⁵ 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ¹⁶ Henry M. Levin and Clive Belfield (eds.), *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2007.
- ¹⁷ Excluding Ireland, where public spending on pre-primary education is negligible.
- ¹⁸ 13.8 years in Turkey.
- ¹⁹ 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² 2011 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ²³ 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ²⁴ UNESCO was engaged in producing a general report on TVET.
- ²⁵ A large official and academic literature exists, though, on formal higher education and TVET systems in North America and Western Europe, extending to informal skill acquisition at the workplace.
- ²⁶ 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- ²⁸ 2010 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ²⁹ 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ³⁰ OECD, *OECD Skills Outlook 2013, First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, Paris: OECD, 2013.

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- ³¹ 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*.
- ³² OECD, *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I) and Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000 (Volume V)*, Paris: OECD, 2010.
- ³³ Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Pierre Foy and Kathleen T. Drucker, *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading* and Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Pierre Foy and Alka Arora, *TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics*, Chestnut Hill, MA and Amsterdam: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center and IEA, 2012.
- ³⁴ OECD, *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I), Overcoming Social Background – Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes (Volume II) and Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000 (Volume V)*, Paris: OECD, 2010.
- ³⁵ Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Pierre Foy and Alka Arora, *TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics*, Chestnut Hill, MA and Amsterdam: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center and IEA, 2012.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ OECD, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States*, Paris: OECD, 2011.
- ³⁸ OECD (ed.), *Education at a Glance 2012*, Paris: OECD, 2012.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Gregory A. Gilpin, ‘Reevaluating the effect of non-teaching wages on teacher attrition’, *Economics of Education Review*, 30 (4), pp. 598-616, 2011.
- ⁴¹ Unless stated otherwise, figures in this section are drawn from 2013/14 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, Statistical appendix (online version), forthcoming. The most recent data are for 2009 or 2010 depending on countries, as 2011 data are not yet available. Data for the beginning of the decade are for 1999, 2000 or 2001. Data for Turkey are not available.
- ⁴² Figures on spending at different levels of education are not available for Canada and the United States.
- ⁴³ Calculated from public current expenditure per pupil by level of education, expressed in 2010 constant purchasing power parity US dollars.
- ⁴⁴ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2013*, Paris: OECD, 2013.
- ⁴⁵ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Funding of Education in Europe 2000-2012: The Impact of the Economic Crisis. Eurydice Report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013.
- ⁴⁶ European Commission, *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Brussels, European Commission, 3 March 2010, p. 30.
- ⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Education, *Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2014-2018*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2013.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *Succeeding Globally Through International Education and Engagement: U.S. Department of Education International Strategy 2012–16*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2012.
- ⁵⁰ Office of Head Start, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs>
- ⁵¹ U.S. Department of Education, ‘ESEA Flexibility’, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html>
- ⁵² U.S. Department of Education, ‘Race to the Top Fund’, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>
- ⁵³ Education for All Global Monitoring Report team, ‘Education post-2015: Policy papers’, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/post-2015/papers/>
- ⁵⁴ Pauline Rose, ‘Education and development 2000-2012: Learning lessons for post-2015’, presented at UKFIET Dialogue on Education and Development to 2015 and Beyond, London, 11 December 2012, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/post-2015/>
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- ⁵⁶ 2013/14 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, Statistical appendix (online version), forthcoming.