

# EDITORIAL

## Education, learning and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The world of education has changed enormously over the past two decades. Around the globe, more children than ever can go to school and have the opportunity to acquire the skills needed for the workplace, for their community and for life. Since 1992, the first year that *Education at a Glance* was published, this publication has rigorously documented such transformation as the world moves closer to achieving the goal of providing education for all.

These changes have been accompanied by an expansion of internationally comparable data on education. Only 25 years ago, many people considered education to be too local, too tied to its specific context to be measured against comparative statistical metrics. But enormous progress in statistical techniques, data collection and processing procedures have enabled policy makers, researchers and the public at large to see how education has expanded around the world, and to benchmark performance and draw lessons from other countries. The OECD has been at the forefront of this movement by pushing the measurement agenda forward. Building on the progress in ensuring universal access to, participation in and completion of education, the OECD has developed reliable metrics on student learning outcomes and equity in education, including those used in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

This new edition of *Education at a Glance* is published only a few weeks after world leaders defined the global ambitions for the next 15 years by adopting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations Summit in New York. Education is a cornerstone of the sustainable development agenda, and the education-related goal aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. The goal is composed of ten targets that, together, represent an ambitious commitment to develop better skills for better lives. What is new about this *Education 2030* agenda is its focus on expanded access, inclusion and equity, quality and learning outcomes at all levels of education – and for people of all ages. Five of the ten targets are concerned with improving the quality of education for individual children, young people and adults, to ensure that they acquire better and more relevant knowledge and skills.

To achieve all of these targets, it is essential that every child has access to and completes a quality education of at least 12 years. Efforts to achieve universal access to education must go hand-in-hand with a renewed focus on education quality and equity. Data from PISA, the global metric used to measure the quality of learning outcomes, show why: many countries can boast that all of their children are enrolled in school, but not all of these children achieve even minimum levels of proficiency in the core subjects of reading, mathematics and science by the end of their lower secondary education. That is why the aim of achieving universal basic skills is at the heart of the SDG education agenda. This shift in focus towards quality in education for all means that the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets are universally relevant: no country, no region in the world can claim in 2015 that all of its youth have attained at least a minimum proficiency in foundation skills.

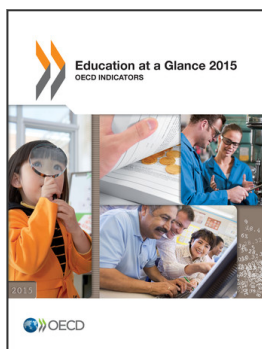
Now that the global community has defined its goal and targets for education, it needs to develop indicators on access, equity and quality that can be measured and tracked over time. These indicators will provide the basis for international accountability and for targeting policies and resources on where they can make the greatest difference. Together with other international organisations, such as UNESCO and its Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF and the World Bank, the OECD stands ready to move this agenda forward. The proposed global indicators for measuring progress towards the education SDG include adaptations of existing international large-scale assessments of

learning outcomes and skills, such as PISA and PIAAC. The indicators reported in *Education at a Glance* will continue to provide a strong evidence base for international comparisons of education systems. Indeed, more than two-thirds of the indicators proposed by the UN system for tracking the education SDG are already covered by existing OECD policy and data-collection instruments.

In the years to come, the education SDG targets and indicators will be fully integrated into OECD data-collection mechanisms, reporting and analyses, including *Education at a Glance*. By doing so, we will ensure that this flagship publication, used as a reference by many people all over the world, will continue to set the standard for measuring and monitoring global progress in education.



**Angel Gurría**  
OECD Secretary-General



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