

## *Executive summary*

Did you ever wonder whether education has a role to play in preparing our societies for an age of artificial intelligence? Or what the impact of climate change might be on our schools, families and communities?

*Trends Shaping Education 2019* explores major economic, political, social and technological trends affecting the future of education, from early childhood through to lifelong learning. It aims to inform strategic thinking and stimulate reflection on the challenges facing education, and conversely, the potential of education to influence these trends.

Examining the future of education in the context of global mega-trends is necessary to help education deliver on its mission of supporting individuals to develop as persons, citizens and professionals. In a complex and quickly changing world, this might require the reorganisation of formal and informal learning environments, and reimagining education content and delivery. In an ageing world, these changes are likely to apply not just to basic education but to lifelong learning as well.

But connecting education to mega-trends is not straightforward. The future is inherently unpredictable, because it is always in the making. Long-term strategic thinking in education thus needs to consider both the set of trends and the possible ways they might evolve in the future. This edition profiles “big picture”, system-level trends before homing in on the more “micro” level of individuals and families. Technology, once a specific section, has now become so intertwined with modern life that it appears in all chapters.

### ***Shifting global gravity***

The global balance of economic power is shifting towards Asia, with giant economies emerging in China and India. Globalisation facilitates the emergence of transnational networks and trade. Human mobility across borders has increased with more affordable transport and communications. The accompanying economic growth has lifted many people out of poverty, resulting in an expansion of the global middle class. Yet globalisation also brings new challenges: growing consumption, unsustainable use of resources and, for some, a feeling of being left behind.

All of these trends are projected to continue in the near- and medium-term. Education has an important role to play in equipping students with the skills needed to succeed in the global future. It can also play a role in combatting climate change and inequality, the most urgent issues of our time. But it cannot act alone, and more work must be done in order to help make the next phase of globalisation work for all.

### ***Public matters: Citizenship and democracy***

A well-functioning democracy relies on the civic knowledge and skills of its citizens, as well as their direct engagement in public matters. Yet in many countries, key measures of

civic participation such as voter turnout have fallen throughout the last half century. Rising inequality within countries and an increasing gap between rural and urban areas creates challenges in terms of life opportunities and access to services. And although digitalisation has increased our access to information, there is no guarantee that online search results are accurate. In fact, the ubiquity of social media platforms has made it easier to disseminate inaccuracies and outright lies, and there is a growing concern about the algorithms and echo chambers that only confirm prior beliefs.

These elements combine and connect with worries about declining trust and growing political and social unrest. There is an important role for education to play in improving civic and social participation and fostering democratic citizenship. However, difficult questions remain. Key questions for the future include how we strike a fair balance between all parties in a diverse society, and what this means for fostering social cohesion and trust.

### ***Security in a risky world***

Security of person is a basic right guaranteed by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although on average OECD countries have benefited from fewer armed conflicts on their soil, growing affluence, safer roads and more effective medicines, we are now facing ever more complex security challenges. Climate change brings rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events. In an increasingly connected world, networks of terrorists pose a threat in many countries, including cyber space. A great deal of sensitive and confidential data is stored on servers all around the world, and data theft and leaks have significant economic, social and political consequences. Who controls what data – individuals, firms or governments – is also a matter of debate.

Threats to our safety can be personal as well as societal. Many people feel less secure about their finances and their work. And despite safer streets and reductions in crime rates, reports of perceived risk are increasing. Families and communities are concerned about the safety of their children. Education can play a role in helping understand, prevent and mitigate security risks. It can also help students distinguish between perceived versus actual risks, build resilience and better prepare citizens to withstand adversity.

### ***Living longer, living better***

Our societies are ageing. The likelihood of living another decade or two after the conventional retirement age raises profound questions about the nature of this phase of our lives. Healthier seniors are living and working longer. They also tend to be relatively richer, on average, creating a “silver market” for products and services aimed at their specific needs. However, there are risks as well. Chronic diseases, such as diabetes and dementia, are becoming more prevalent, and shrinking social circles increase the potential for loneliness. Digitalisation can help address many of the risks linked to increased frailty and dependency, but it also opens up new threats of Internet fraud targeted specifically at the elderly.

These trends invite reflection about how education, so often seen as primarily for the young, can benefit older adults. What is the best way to promote a culture of learning throughout life? How can this be extended to not only be *lifelong*, but *lifewide*, touching on all aspects well-being more generally?

### ***Modern cultures***

We seem to live in a more individualistic world, with a declining sense of belonging to the traditional reference points of community, church or workplace. At the same time, the notion of a “network society” suggests that the sense of belonging is changing, not disappearing. Patterns of work and life are evolving as marriage rates decline, more women enter the workplace and more men play an active role in child-raising. Digital markets are making it easier for buyers and sellers to come together across time and space, as well as transforming what we mean by ownership, as we increasingly pay for access to goods (e.g. books, music) rather than buying them outright. We are also progressively looking at our consumption habits through the lens of sustainability and ethical choices, for example in the use of electric vehicles or other attempts to reduce our impact on the planet.

Education plays a crucial role in equipping people with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to thrive in their modern personal and professional lives. As the world becomes increasingly digitalised, the education system must adapt and evolve to take advantage of the tools and strengths of new technologies while simultaneously addressing concerns about potential misuse, such as fraud, identity theft or cyberbullying.

### ***Preparing for the future***

*Trends Shaping Education 2019* covers a rich array of topics related to globalisation, democracy and citizenship, security, ageing and modern cultures. Connecting these megatrends to education is a means of broadening our horizons and informing the base of decision-making.

While using trends is one good way to think about the future, other foresight methods are also important. In this edition, the final page of each chapter presents plausible but unexpected ways in which current trends may evolve. This book is meant to challenge, to inspire, and, most of all, to help provide answers to the questions: “What does this trend mean for the future of my education system? And what can I do?”



**From:**  
**Trends Shaping Education 2019**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
[https://doi.org/10.1787/trends\\_edu-2019-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/trends_edu-2019-en)

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2019), "Executive summary", in *Trends Shaping Education 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/trends\\_edu-2019-2-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/trends_edu-2019-2-en)

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

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

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