

Foreword

Over the last decade, the number of students in higher education in Mexico has doubled, and more than half a million graduates enter the labour market every year. Finding adequate employment is difficult and too many young graduates work in occupations for which they are overqualified, or end up in jobs without social security or pension coverage.

Mexico is not alone in this situation. In many OECD countries, weaker-than-expected outcomes of higher education are a disappointment for graduates and their families, who expect good quality and well-paying jobs as a return on their investment in education. Weak returns are also a concern for governments, who invest in the development of skills to boost national and regional productivity and innovation.

In responding to these concerns, the OECD is undertaking an in-depth analysis of the labour market relevance and outcomes of higher education systems. The aim is to help countries improve policies and institutional practices through a better understanding of enablers and barriers, and through recommendations that help close gaps. Mexico was one of the first countries to join this exercise, together with Norway and the United States.

Three aspects stand out from the analysis and make this report a relevant read for policy makers and higher education stakeholders. First, Mexico's higher education system is large and complex, but it lacks diversity of fields and levels of study to match labour market needs. Quality assurance has developed in the last decade but is still voluntary, fragmented, unclear and overlapping.

Second, students need better support to succeed. Pockets of innovative approaches to learning and teaching exist, but are not common practice. Smaller institutions lack the resources and connections to organise effective engagement with employers and work-based learning. Social service, which every undergraduate needs to complete before graduating, is a commendable practice of giving back to society, and potentially a very effective way to develop transversal skills. However, as this analysis shows, initiatives such as these need to be well regulated and managed. Students, who in many cases need to combine work and studies, need more flexibility and the ability to exit and return to higher education at a later stage in life to complete or continue studies at an advanced level.

Finally, in Mexico, as in other OECD countries, strengthening the connections between higher education and the labour market calls for a whole-of-government approach and the involvement of all higher education stakeholders. Mexico needs better connected, up-to-date information and projections of future labour market needs to allow institutions, students and employers make better choices and plan ahead.

Promising steps in all of these areas have been made, and the OECD is ready to support Mexico in going forward.

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The work was carried out in close collaboration with the companion report, *The Future of Mexican Higher Education: Promoting Quality and Equity* (OECD, 2019^[1]), which focuses on broader issues in higher education, including governance, funding, quality and equity, as well as two key sectors of higher education: teacher education colleges and professional and technical institutions.

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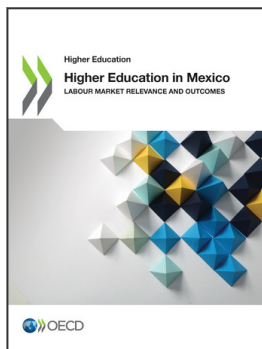
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