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The activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2009-2010

Contribution[1]
Committee on Culture, Science and Education
Rapporteur: Mr Jan KAŹMIERCZAK, Poland, Group of the European People's Party

1. Introduction

1. The annual report on the activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2009-2010, prepared by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, focuses on the activities of the OECD in the economic field. The activities of this organisation certainly cover a much wider area than the purely economic, which is why other committees of the Parliamentary Assembly also contribute to the above-mentioned report in the form of contributions.

2. In particular, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education contributes by dealing with the activities of the OECD in the fields of education and science.

3. The contribution to the report from the Committee on Culture, Science and Education is based mainly on material published by the OECD over the last year.

2. Education

4. As the OECD Directorate for Education states in the 2010 report: "Both individuals and countries benefit from education. For individuals the potential benefits lie in the general quality of life and in the economic returns of sustained, satisfying employment. For countries, the potential benefits lie in economic growth and the development of shared values that underpin social cohesion". Education is thus a vital concern for the OECD.

5. Key OECD activities in this field focus on statistics and indicators on knowledge and competences, member states' policy reviews, thematic reviews and projections of future developments. In 2009-2010, education was a matter of special focus, as an ultimate antidote to the economical crisis. The areas of special focus in the field of education are set out below.

2.1. Education indicators

6. The OECD provides a wealth of statistics, analysis and policy advice for member countries on a wide range of education topics. The indicators published in the OECD's yearly reports "Education at a Glance" enable countries to see themselves in the light of other countries' performance. They provide a rich, comparable and up-to-date array of indicators on the performance of education systems and represents a consensus of professional thinking on how to measure the current state of education internationally. The indicators look at who participates in education, how much is spent on it, how education systems operate and

1. Reference to committee: standing mandate. Reporting committee: Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. See Doc. 12340. Contribution approved by the committee on 4 October 2010.

the results achieved. The latter includes indicators on a wide range of outcomes, from comparisons of students' performance in key subject areas to the impact of education on earnings and on adults' chances of employment.

7. The most widely recognised and one of the most long-standing OECD programmes concerning education indicators is the PISA project, which has carried out assessments of knowledge and competence in all member states over the last fifteen years. Now the OECD is extending its study to assess the competence of adults (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies – PIAAC), of which the first results are expected in 2013.

8. A key finding from the 2010 publication "The high cost of low educational performance" is the demonstration that small improvements to labour force skills can boost the future well-being of the nation. This is further developed in the report on "The long-run economic impact of improving PISA outcomes" report. The findings also support the theory that it is the quality of learning outcomes and not the length of education that is a decisive factor.

9. In addition, the first results from the study on teaching and learning effectiveness (TALIS) carried out in 2010 show that the quality of the learning environment, which can be influenced by policy intervention, is the most important factor for optimising student learning and outcomes. In the year 2010 the OECD is examining policies that contribute to social progress and sustainable economic growth by improving educational outcomes and fostering human capital and employment.

2.2. Fostering educational facilities and infrastructure

10. The OECD programme Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE, formerly the OECD Programme on Educational Building) promotes the exchange and analysis of policy, research and experience in all matters related to educational construction. The planning and design of educational facilities – schools, colleges and universities – has an impact on educational outcomes which is significant but hard to quantify.

11. Building and running those facilities accounts for a substantial part of public educational expenditure in OECD countries. While information and communication technologies have the potential to transform the way in which they are used, CELE has three objectives:

– to improve the quality and suitability of educational buildings;

– to ensure that the best use is made of the resources devoted to planning, building, running and maintaining educational buildings;

– to give early warning of the impact on educational construction of trends in education and in society as a whole.

2.3. Higher education

12. Matters of innovation, reform, access and regional competitiveness in higher education are becoming more and more important. This is explained by the increasing interest in quality, with regards to its impact on higher education. The key OECD publication in this field is "Higher education to 2030". The Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE), the OECD forum on higher education, brings together higher education institutions and governments to share best practices in facing these challenges through a network of relationships, studies and research.

13. Another important new initiative launched by the OECD is Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO). This will test what students in higher education **know and can do upon** graduation. More than a ranking, AHELO is a direct evaluation of student performance. It will provide data on the relevance and quality of teaching and learning in higher education. The test aims to be global and valid across diverse cultures, languages and different types of institutions. AHELO is designed as a tool to assist universities in assessing and improving teaching, students in making better choices in selecting educational institutions, policy makers in ensuring that the considerable amounts spent on higher education are spent well, and finally it will allow employers to know whether the skills of the graduates entering the job market match their needs.

14. The OECD's June 2010 publication *Assessing the effects of ICT in Education: Indicators, Criteria and Benchmarks for International Comparisons* shows the need to identify global indicators and existing data sources for assessing how so-called "21st century competencies" are integrated intocompulsory education in a knowledge economy driven by technology. The study identifies information and communication technologies as tools for improving the teaching process, enhancing the possibilities of customisation of education adapted

to individual students and for preparing students for adult life by giving them those skills necessary in a society where technology-related competencies are increasingly indispensable. It appears that a new form of "digital divide" is emerging, between students with an economic, cultural and social capital enabling them to gain the right competences and skills to benefit from computer use, and those who do not. The Committee on Culture, Science and Education could consider examining this phenomenon as a follow-up to its 2002 report on the digital divide and education (rapporteur: Mrs Isohookana-Asunmaa, Doc. 9616).

2.4. Education for migrants

15. Migrant education is high on the policy agenda in many OECD countries. While the integration of immigrants into the labour market has been extensively researched, focusing on outcomes for their children and reviewing education policies at the international level has rarely been done. In many OECD countries, immigrant students have more restricted access to quality education, leave school earlier and have lower academic achievement than their native peers. That makes improving the education of immigrant students a policy priority.

16. The OECD thematic review on migrant education focuses on the education outcomes of children of immigrants, with an emphasis on "schools" (pre-school, primary school and secondary school), while noting that the process of integration is multi-directional, interactive and non-linear. The main overarching policy question of the review is: "What policies will promote successful education outcomes for first and second generation migrants?" The research carried out provides an in-depth analysis since 2008 of successful approaches to migrant education in order to support policy development.

17. The OECD conducted policy reviews of migrant education in Austria, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden and examined the migrant education experience in many countries. In 2010 the results were presented in a book *OECD Reviews of Migrant Education – Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students: Policies, Practice and Performance*. This publication offers comparative data on access, participation and performance of immigrant students and their native peers and identifies a set of policy options based on solid evidence of what works. The report has been structured as a concise action-oriented handbook for policy makers as well as for teachers, school leaders, parents and those who are active in immigrant communities.

3. Science and innovation

18. The OECD assesses how science, technology, innovation and education policies can efficiently contribute to sustainable economic growth and employment creation. It provides policy advice on coping with the challenges arising from developments in new science-based industries, notably biotechnology. The OECD is a leader in the development of benchmarking for member countries' innovation performance.

3.1. The OECD Science, Technology and Industry (STI) Scoreboard

19. Published every two years in print and online, the OECD *Science, Technology and Industry (STI) Scoreboard* brings together internationally comparable indicators. Its last edition, issued in 2009, focuses on five key areas:

– *responding to the economic crisis*: venture capital, research and development expenditure, researchers, patents, trademarks, productivity and foreign direct investment statistics up to the second quarter of 2009;

– *targeting new growth areas*:research and development, patents and scientific publications in key research fields: health, biotechnology, nanotechnology and environmental sciences, access to telecommunication networks, government research and development budget, research and development tax subsidies, and co-operation with innovative firms;

– *competing in the world economy*: international trade by technological development, trade in information and communication technology goods and services, e-commerce and e-business penetration, activities of multinational firms, non-technological innovation and entrepreneurship;

– *connecting to global research*: international co-operation in research and development, patents and scientific publications among countries and sub-national regions; technological balance of payments; international flows in inventions and doctoral students;

– *investing in the knowledge economy*: new university graduates and doctorate holders by discipline and gender, human resources in science and technology, employment of graduates and doctorate holders, relative earnings by level of education and gender.

3.2. Innovation

20. Last year, special focus was put on fostering and the broad distribution of innovation. In May 2010, the OECD launched its long-awaited Innovation Strategy at its annual ministerial council meeting. The strategy stresses the key role of governments in boosting innovation. The current crisis makes it all the more urgent to push through necessary reforms to increase the innovative capacity of societies. Governments struggling to attain a sustainable growth path for their economies need to reduce administrative obstacles for new and existing companies and to make their tax policies more attractive to innovation and entrepreneurship. Innovation is considered not only a key factor of economic growth but also of social progress, and as such plays an essential role in economic recovery and job creation. While human capital is the source of innovation, empowering people to innovate does not only entail broad and relevant education and training, but also requires that opportunities be given to give leverage to these skills throughout the economy and society.

21. As the Innovation Strategy is a new venture, governments are encouraged to become familiar with it and communicate its ideas. The Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry has announced that further work in this field is under way, aimed to monitor developments in innovation processes through better collection and use of data and statistics and to support governments in the implementation of the strategy through the development of a handbook for innovation policy. New analyses will consider how to optimise the benefits of “intangible assets”, such as research and development, software, databases, patents and organisational know-how, through the expansion of markets and knowledge networks. The OECD is also working to bring forward common principles to underpin the governance of multilateral co-operation in the fields of science, technology and innovation to address global challenges.

22. Member states that are also members of the European Union ensure common standards and objectives in these areas (for instance through the Lisbon Strategy). However, some non-OECD countries such as China and India have become major platforms for scientific discovery and innovation. To keep pace with these developments, the OECD must further refine its analysis in the areas of science and innovation. Although not able to develop strategies for all member countries, the OECD does provide country-specific advice on innovation. By the end of 2008, reviews of Innovation Policy for Switzerland, Luxemburg, New Zealand, South Africa and Chile had been completed and several others are currently under way.

4. Conclusion

23. As stated in its 2009 contribution, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education regards the annual debate with the participation of the Secretary-General of the OECD as well as working meetings with OECD representatives as a worthwhile exercise that should be continued. (The rapporteur regrets not having had the opportunity to exchange views in 2010.) Moreover, bearing in mind the developing scope of the OECD’s work, for instance in the area of gender equality with respect to economic performance, it would be useful to review the selection of committees contributing to the annual overview of activities.

24. The rapporteur acknowledges and endorses the OECD’s vision of education as essential in fostering human capital and employment, and as such an antidote for the economic crisis, both for individuals and their employability and at the level of national economies. It is interesting to note that the studies reveal the considerable impact of the quality of the learning environment, in particular the design and construction of educational establishments, has a considerable positive influence on the effectiveness of learning programmes at all levels.

25. The rapporteur also welcomes the new student performance assessment tool, Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), which should allow all stakeholders, including students themselves, to better monitor the results of education courses and their suitability.

26. The publication *Assessing the Effects of ICT in Education: Indicators, Criteria and Benchmarks for International Comparisons* on the need to assess and avoid a new form of “digital divide” also provides food for thought on the need for benchmarks in the use of computer technologies in schools.

27. The OECD is also working to bring forward common principles to underpin the governance of multilateral co-operation in the fields of science, technology and innovation to address global challenges. The OECD’s Global Science Forum has organised debates and published conclusions on the relations between science and modern civil society, such as the Conference on Declining Interest in Science Studies among

Young People held in 2005 and on Improving the Dialogue with Society on Scientific Issues in 2008. These activities are highly relevant to the work of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education and will be followed with interest.

28. In the OECD Secretary-General's introduction to his 2010 report, it is interesting to note Angel Gurría's intention to propose an OECD-wide initiative on the role of women in the economy, identifying the main barriers to gender equality and assessing policies and good practices. The aim would be to produce a toolkit of policy measures countries could adopt to reduce the gender gap, in particular in the areas of education, employment and entrepreneurship. This proposal is inspired by the fact that in most parts of the world today, women do not achieve their full economic potential and that policies to correct this problem would boost both economic efficiency and equity. The Assembly should follow this development closely.

Proposed amendments to the provisional draft resolution

"The enlarged Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the OECD's development of a new student performance assessment tool, Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), a tool to assist universities in assessing and improving teaching, to help students in making better choices in selecting educational institutions, and policy makers in ensuring that the considerable amounts spent on higher education are spent well. In addition, this tool will allow employers to know whether the skills of the graduates entering the job market match their needs.

The enlarged Parliamentary Assembly draws the attention of member states to the need for more focused budget spending on education policies, bearing in mind the OECD's findings that the quality of education and training is more important than the length of education programmes, and that the learning (and teaching) environment must be improved in order to render education effective and optimise outcomes. The OECD programme Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE) promotes the exchange and analysis of policy, research and experience in all matters related to educational construction with the objectives of improving the quality and suitability of educational buildings, ensuring that the best use is made of the resources devoted to planning, building, running and maintaining educational buildings and giving early warning of the impact on educational construction of trends in education and in society as a whole.

Again with respect to the optimisation of resources, the enlarged Parliamentary Assembly notes the OECD's warning that a new form of "digital divide" has emerged with respect to information and communication technology, separating students with an economic, cultural and social capital enabling them to gain the right competences and skills to benefit from computer use, and those who do not. Studies show that although governments invest in computing equipment for schools, their use by teachers and students is not ensured as it should be. Global indicators are needed for assessing how so-called "21st century competencies" are integrated intocompulsory education to improve teaching processes, enhance individualised education programmes and prepare students for adult life by giving them those skills necessary in a society where technology-related competencies are increasingly indispensable.

The enlarged Parliamentary Assembly is concerned that figures for OECD member states still show that immigrant students often have more restricted access to quality education, leave school earlier and have lower academic achievement than their native peers. It encourages Council of Europe member states to step up efforts to ensure that first and second generation migrants have early and equal access to education and to the appropriate assistance in integrating national systems, and that educational structures are designed to suit pupils from different cultural backgrounds."