

DEVELOPING COMPARATIVE BENCHMARKS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN A CHANGING WORLD - THE OECD EDUCATION INDICATORS

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ABSTRACT

Since the late 1980s, the OECD has developed and published a broad range of comparative indicators that provide insight into the functioning of education systems. The indicators provide information on what are widely agreed to be important features of the functioning, development and impact of education - from early childhood through formal education to learning and training throughout life. They are the product of an ongoing process of conceptual development and data collection, the objective of which is to link a broad range of policy needs with the best available international data.

The development of valid comparative education indicators must, however, address significant challenges: These relate to the choice of relevant domains in which international comparisons can add important new insights; the construction of valid and meaningful benchmarks for educational performance; and the communication of the results in a form that is as simple as possible but as complex as necessary to avoid oversimplification in the messages conveyed to policy-makers, and as comparable as possible but as country-specific as necessary for the results to be interpretable in national contexts.

Even if data are reasonably accurate and adequate for the needs of national analysis they may not be comparable at an international level, for example, because of differences in national definitions and classifications. Further complications arise from the fact that education systems cannot be held to a fixed position and it is thus difficult to ensure the validity of comparisons where the framework of the education systems and the policy priorities change over time.

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