

Foreword

Economic success crucially relies on human capital – the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes that allow people to contribute to their personal and social well-being, as well as that of their countries.

Education is the key factor in forming human capital. People with better education tend to enjoy higher incomes – a benefit that is also reflected in improved economic growth. But the impact of human capital goes beyond economics. Raising human capital raises health levels, community involvement and employment prospects. Indeed, as globalisation increases the need for technological skills and adaptation, the importance of human capital will only grow in the years to come.

Sadly, too many people today are not being given the opportunity to fully develop their abilities. Even in developed countries, as many as one-fifth of young people fail to finish secondary school, which severely limits their subsequent employment prospects. Such failure is frequently concentrated in particular communities, leading to their marginalisation from the economic and social mainstream.

Given its significance for economic and social development, human capital has long been a priority subject for the OECD, which is heavily involved in education; working to develop understandings of how teaching and learning can be improved in the classroom and helping education systems in member countries to learn from each other's successes and failures. Best known, perhaps, is the OECD's PISA programme, which measures the competencies of

15-year-old students in more than 40 countries around the world. But the OECD also deals with issues such as schooling for tomorrow, childcare, education, lifelong learning and higher education.

The OECD is also looking at health issues, trying to understand how this sector performs and how it can deliver the best service to our societies.

The OECD's research and findings often feature in newspapers, television reports and other media. But for some time we have felt that we should deliver our analysis and research to a wider audience. That is why we created this new series of books: OECD Insights.

Our aim is to generate an informed debate on some of the key issues that affect our societies and economies today. All too often, such debate generates more heat than light. For a truly meaningful dialogue, we need to go beyond exchanging opinions – no matter how fiercely they are held – and look at the facts and figures. With a long record of research and analysis, we feel that few bodies are better placed than the OECD to report on these realities.

We hope that this new series of books will provide readers with the information and insights they need to understand the changes and challenges that will shape our economies, our societies, and ultimately, our lives, in the future.

Angel Gurría
Secretary-General of the OECD

