

Education at a Glance 2011

OECD Indicators

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en>

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Under embargo until 13 September at 11:00 Paris time

Country note - Greece

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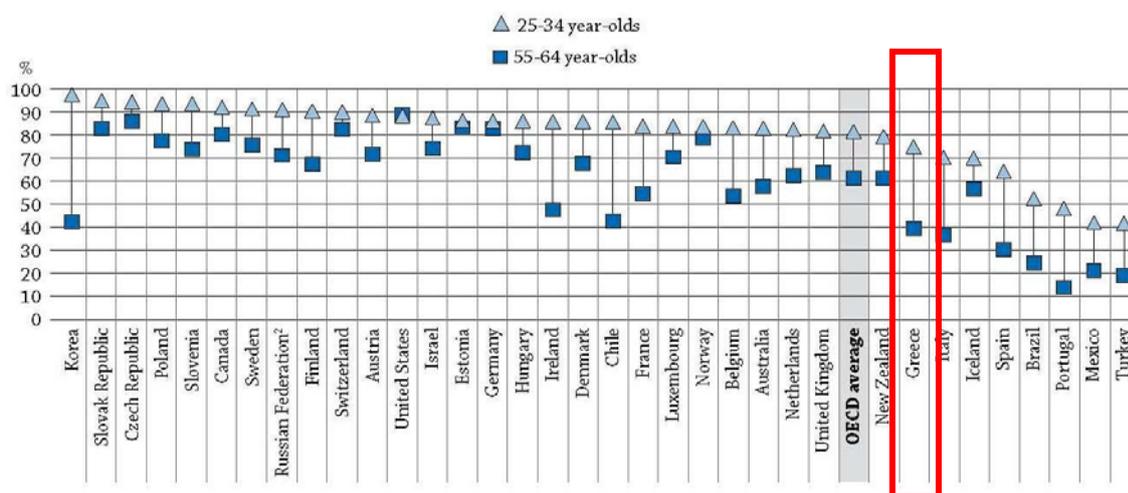
Greece has made significant efforts to raise educational attainment levels...

In 1997, 56% of 25-64 year-olds had not completed upper secondary education, 29% had completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, and 16% had completed tertiary education. Twelve years later, the numbers looked very different: 39% of 25-64 year-olds had not completed upper secondary education, while 38% had completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, and 24% had completed tertiary education (Table A1.4).

A comparison of educational attainment between 25-34 year-olds and 55-64 year-olds shows that Greece has seen a 35 percentage-point increase in the proportion of those who have attained at least an upper secondary education – from 40% among the older cohort to 75% among younger Greeks (Chart A1.2). Overall, in 2009, 61% of 25-64 year-olds had attained at least an upper secondary education. In addition,

more young adults are enrolling in post-secondary studies: the proportion of 20-24 year-olds in education rose from 31.9% in 1997 to 47.2% in 2009 (Table C4.4).

Chart A1.2. Percentage of population that has attained at least upper secondary education,¹ by age group (2009)



1. Excluding ISCED 3C short programmes.

2. Year of reference 2002.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of 25-34 year-olds who have attained at least upper secondary education.

Source: OECD, Table A1.2a. See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/edu/eag2011).

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...but more work is needed.

Despite these improvements, Greece continues to lag behind the OECD average by six percentage points in upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary, and tertiary attainment (Table A1.4).

Results from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also show the urgent need for improvements in the quality of education in Greece. Almost half (46.9%) of 15-year-old students did not attain proficiency Level 3 (out of 7 such levels) on the PISA reading test in 2009 – over 4 percentage points more than the OECD average and one of the highest percentages among EU21 countries (Table D6.3).

In the long-term, a tertiary degree offers better employment prospects and higher wages...

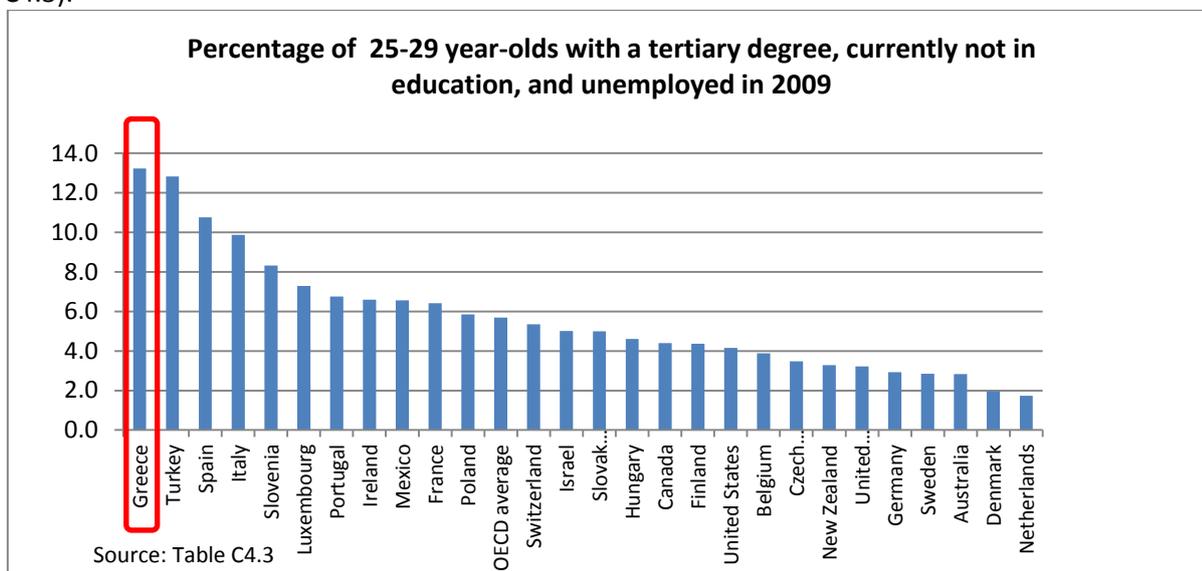
Employment rates among 25-64 year-olds with tertiary degrees stand at 82.2%, which is slightly lower than the OECD average. In 2009, 6.7% of tertiary-educated adults were unemployed compared to 9.2% of those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, and compared to 8.8% of those without an upper secondary education. The reason why unemployment rates differ so little between individuals with different levels of education is because the economic behaviour of those with low levels of skills is hard to track: it is not clear what proportion of them is not actively looking for work and what proportion is doing undeclared work. Previous studies have suggested that undeclared work may account for a large part of economic activity in sectors requiring medium to low levels of skills. Employment rates among low-skilled individuals stand at 59.7%, more than 20 percentage points below tertiary graduates' employment rates (Tables A7.4a and A7.4a).

The earnings advantage that accrues to adults with higher education is substantial and close to the OECD average. An individual with a tertiary degree earns, on average, 75% more than an individual without an upper secondary education. More specifically, a man with a degree from a university or an advanced research programme earns at least 80% more than a man with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education.

Greece is among those countries where women earn significantly less than men. However, as educational attainment and age increase, the disparity tends to shrink: 55-64 year-old women with a tertiary degree earn 92% of their male counterparts' income. At the other end of the educational spectrum, 55-54 year-old women who do not have an upper secondary education earn 51% of their male counterparts' income (Table A8.2b).

...although the transition from university to the labour market is one of the most difficult among OECD countries.

Even in the best of times, the transition from education to work is a complex process, affected by such variables as the length and quality of the schooling received, national traditions, the state of the labour market, economic conditions and demography. Greece has the highest rate of unemployment among 25-29 year-olds with a tertiary degree (13.2%) compared to all other OECD countries (the OECD average is 5.7%). In general, the higher the education level among 15-29 year-olds, the higher the unemployment rate. In this broader age group, 14.6% of tertiary graduates are unemployed compared to 9.2% of those with upper secondary education and 6.1% of those without upper secondary education. Such counter-intuitive results could be explained by the fact that the Greek economy has not yet shifted towards a knowledge-based model. An important share of the economic output still comes from the agricultural and industrial sectors, both of which largely require medium- to low-skilled individuals (Tables C4.2d and C4.3).



Young tertiary graduates are also more likely to remain unemployed for more than six months: 3.5% of those without an upper secondary education are unemployed for more than six months, while 7.5% of tertiary graduates (compared to the OECD average of 3%) are in that situation.

Despite the fact that labour costs are significantly below the OECD average, employers are prepared to pay more for qualified labour.

Labour costs in Greece are significantly lower than the OECD average (Chart A10.2), largely because living standards are lower in Greece than in some of the more developed OECD countries. The deviation from the OECD mean labour costs becomes more pronounced as educational attainment increases. Labour costs in Greece amount to USD 21 000 for a 25-64 year-old worker without an upper secondary qualification, USD 27 000 for a worker with an upper secondary qualification, and USD 40 000 for a worker with a tertiary degree (Table A10.1).

A Greek employer can expect to pay an additional USD 15 000 for a 45-54 year-old tertiary graduate with work experience compared to a 25-34 year-old recent tertiary graduate (Tables A10.2 and A10.4).

Greece offers limited school accountability and very little school autonomy.

Students in Greece advance from grade to grade as they are assessed by their teachers; external examinations in upper secondary education are only used once, to regulate admission to tertiary education and grant Graduation Certificates to students who complete upper secondary education. There are no other national examinations or assessments that offer data-sharing on performance and progress of students. While 23 of 35 countries account for performance using national examinations at the upper secondary level, 22 of 34 countries also use national assessments at the lower secondary level. Some 30 of 35 countries reported using national assessments in at least one subject at the primary level.

According to the 2009 PISA database, individual schools in Greece were among the least autonomous with respect to resource allocation, curriculum and assessment. Selecting/dismissing teachers, determining teachers' salary increases and formulating the school budget were mostly decided at the regional/national level, as were choosing textbooks, determining course content and deciding which courses are offered. In this respect, Greece is the most centrally planned educational system among OECD countries.

Despite low teachers' salaries, the salary cost per student is higher in Greece than in most OECD countries.

Salary cost per student stands at USD 3 170, USD 862 higher than the OECD average. This signals underlying problems in the effective allocation of resources. While salaries and instruction time, which remain below the OECD average, tend to reduce the salary cost per student, the inefficient allocation of teaching time and average class size, which is far below the OECD average, tend to inflate it.

Although smaller class size may be seen as a condition for a better educational environment and – some might argue – better results, PISA results suggest that high-performing education systems generally prioritise the quality of teachers over the size of classes.

Some further policy recommendations for the Greek education system

Following the publication of the series *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Education Policy Advice for Greece*, the Greek government voted for a new law reforming higher education that followed some of the OECD's recommendations. Among the reforms that were introduced: new and more efficient rules were established for university transfers; the number of years one can spend enrolled as a student was reduced, in response to the high numbers of students who remained enrolled but did not graduate on time; and students with financial constraints were given the opportunity to apply for loans.

The OECD recommends the implementation of additional reforms that would further improve the quality of education in Greece. On the school level, the educational system should aim to:

- Optimise teachers' workloads, how teachers are allocated to schools, how they are selected and their professional development.
- Increase schools' individual authority over teacher selection, curriculum development and budget management. School leaders must be given the legitimacy and authority to actually lead their schools.
- Make the rationalisation of the school network a central priority of the Ministry of Education. Aim to optimise the number of schools by setting clear targets for a minimum number of pupils, including developing school clusters when these minimums cannot be attained because of geography or other circumstances.
- Establish a culture of school and teacher evaluation to monitor progress.

Greek higher education could be improved and become more competitive by:

- Initiating a debate to help clarify whether heavy reliance on public money is sustainable for higher education. In the short term, higher education should aim to increase cost-sharing by students in a manner consistent with the Constitutional requirement for free education.
- Developing different criteria and methodologies for allocations of the general (recurring) operating budget of higher education, including funding for salaries, drawing on best practices in EU and OECD countries.
- Consolidating or merging small university departments with low student enrolment and low graduation rates.