
Governments around the world face a dual challenge in educational policy, of meeting rising demands for education while at the same time ensuring that different types of learning respond to economic and social needs in a cost-effective manner. The next few decades will provide many developing countries with a unique opportunity to improve the quality of their education systems. How they respond could make a significant difference to their performance in other areas of social and economic activity.

A new report published jointly by the OECD and Unesco, Teachers for Tomorrow’s Schools, argues that educational policy-makers need to ensure that the investment made in teachers is sufficient and proportionate to the demands placed upon them. In particular, it states, the qualifications of the teaching force must be adequate and the salaries and working conditions must be sufficiently competitive to attract qualified people into the teaching profession.

The report surveys teaching and learning conditions in 18 mainly developing countries - Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Uruguay, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia and Zimbabwe – and provides corresponding data for developed countries in the OECD area. It highlights a number of disparities in such areas as teacher training and remuneration, and makes some recommendations as to how these can be addressed.

As an example of the challenges some governments face, the report notes that between 58 and 78 per cent of active primary teachers in Indonesia and Brazil and more than 40 per cent of lower secondary teachers in Malaysia have not completed the tertiary-level education required of prospective teachers today. These countries have recently made a decision to upgrade teachers’ qualifications, but this will require substantial in-service training.

Statutory salary levels also vary widely, reflecting differences in national income but also in the social and economic importance attached to teachers. While uniform salary scales are transparent and simple to administer, the report observes, they do not help to motivate teachers to perform at their best or to solve problems of shortages of teachers in certain subjects or in rural areas.
Among the policy options that many countries have not yet fully exploited are additional bonuses as a means of adjusting the remuneration of teachers without altering the basic government scales. All of this costs money, and the level of public spending is one way of measuring a government’s commitment to education, the report notes. But private sources of funding for education are also significant in some countries, and could perhaps be used to a greater extent. In Chile, the Philippines and Thailand, for example, private funding accounts for more than 40 per cent, well above the OECD mean of 19 per cent.

Journalists may obtain a copy of the report from the OECD Media Relations Division (request by fax: 33 1 45 24 80 03 or news.contact@oecd.org).

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