

Education and skills

DEVELOPING SKILLS AND EDUCATION FOR GROWTH

- ▶ Brazil has combined strong progress in expanding access to education with dramatic improvements in learning outcomes and educational attainment.
- ▶ Bridging the remaining inequities in access and performance will require a sharper focus on narrowing proficiency gaps in the early years and expanding participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) for marginalised groups.
- ▶ Further efforts to upgrade vocational education and training (VET) and modernise teaching and learning will be important to ensure increasing levels of educational attainment result in better employment outcomes and higher productivity.
- ▶ Budget pressures heighten the importance of greater efficiency and effectiveness in resource use, and the need to rebalance public spending towards policies that widen the skills base and promote inclusive growth.

What's the issue?

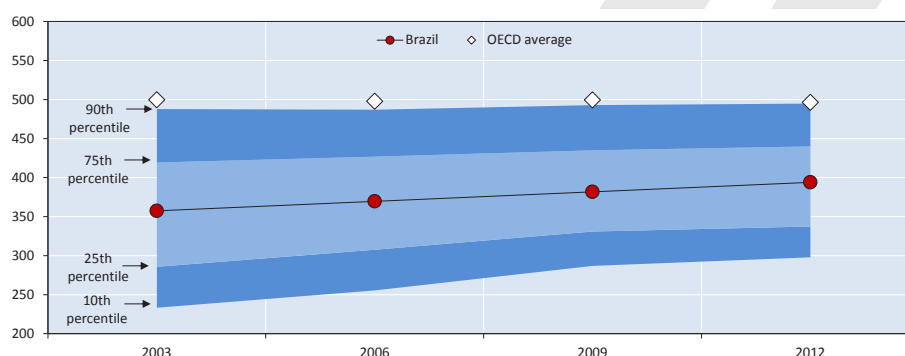
On a number of measures, Brazil's performance in recent years has been remarkable. Participation has increased at all levels and quality has improved substantially. Enrolment in school is close to universal for all children aged 6-14 and the proportion of individuals who attain upper secondary education has doubled in a generation. Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that, at the same time as bringing more children into school, Brazil has raised learning standards dramatically. Brazil has achieved the fastest rate of progress in student performance in mathematics of all participating countries, while

registering significant gains in reading and science as well. These achievements have been driven by a surge in public spending on education, and smart policies aimed at reducing equity gaps, improving teacher policies, and strengthening monitoring and accountability.

Still, Brazil has a long way to travel to close the gap with other OECD countries and to ensure all students leave school with the skills needed for life and work (see Figure). Some two-thirds of Brazilian secondary-school students have poor basic skills, weakening their employment prospects and constraining efforts to reduce

▶ Brazil has ample room to further improve student performance

Mean performance in mathematics 2003-2012



Note: The OECD average presented in this figure considers only the OECD countries that participated in all four PISA assessments since 2003.
 Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database, Tables I.2.3b and I.2.3d.

poverty and enhance productivity. Despite significant efforts to expand vocational education and training (VET) through the PRONATEC programme, participation and quality remain low, and limited work based-learning opportunities and employment services mean that many students struggle to make the transition from school to jobs. At around 30%, gross enrolment in tertiary education is below OECD standards, while the labour market returns to graduates are considerably higher than in most OECD countries, suggesting that the education system is not meeting the demand for advanced skills. The National Education Plan for 2014-2024 recognises these challenges, and includes ambitious targets to increase gross enrolment in tertiary education to 50% by 2024 and to transform the quality and availability of VET programmes.

Brazil has done much to improve education opportunities for disadvantaged students, yet deep inequalities remain. Wealth, geography, gender and race strongly influence school access and achievement, with important implications for individual employment outcomes and other development indicators. Breaking the cycle of inequality will require policies that expand access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) for marginalised groups and provide support to teachers and schools on how to detect and address learning gaps early on.

Progress on all these fronts calls for greater effectiveness and efficiency in resource use, especially in a context of slowing growth. Rebalancing the education budget towards greater spending on pre-school and basic education could reduce the need for heavy remedial investments later on. Financial incentives will have more impact on addressing poor school progression and high dropout rates if combined with measures to improve the relevance of the curriculum, upgrade teaching skills and reduce grade repetition.

Why is this important for Brazil

Brazil's demographic window is closing, and the next generation to graduate from school will need to achieve greater productivity to sustain economic growth. The recent collapse in commodities prices has further highlighted the need for Brazil to move towards higher value-added production. This requires higher levels of education attainment and skills. It also means widening the talent base and ensuring no-one is excluded from developing their skills on the grounds of geography, gender or socio-economic background.

An imperative for economic competitiveness, improving student participation and achievement in education is also an important social issue. Results from the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) show that higher skills bring benefits in terms of better employment outcomes, improved health, greater trust and more positive engagement in political processes. In Brazil, ensuring all children have a quality education would be one of the most effective strategies to reduce poverty, narrow inequalities and strengthen social cohesion.

What should policy makers do?

- ▶ Refocus funding and policies to expand access to early childhood education and care, prioritizing disadvantaged groups and regions;
- ▶ Strengthen the links between schools and the labour market through the expansion of VET programmes, increased access to work-based learning and better employment services;
- ▶ Review the funding of education to encourage greater equity and cost-efficiency and steer the expansion of the sector in a direction that improves employment and development outcomes.



Further reading

OECD (2015), *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/publications/education-policy-outlook-2015-9789264225442-en.htm>

OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-2014.pdf>

OECD (2014), *Investing in Youth: Brazil*, OECD Publishing. http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/investing-in-youth-brazil_9789264208988-en

