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Further education reforms needed to improve performance and equity in Slovak Republic, says OECD

The Slovak Republic has undertaken a series of reforms to improve its education system, and the country now needs to use resources more efficiently and improve equity and inclusion in schools, according to a new OECD report.

“**OECD Reviews of School Resources: Slovak Republic**”, presented today in Bratislava by OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría and Slovak Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport Juraj Draxler, says that the country has improved how its schools are funded, established outcome-based standards and assessments and responded to sharply decreasing student numbers by encouraging the consolidation of public schools.

The OECD is also today releasing a **Review of Vocational Education**. This report shows the government has worked with social partners to implement much-needed vocational education reform, adopting legislation to create a high quality “dual system” of secondary education in the classroom coupled with work-based learning.

Looking ahead, the OECD says that, given declining school age populations and fiscal constraints, more should be done to rationalise the school network. The Slovak Republic also has to engage in the difficult task of consolidating the teaching force. This requires better planning capacity, co-ordination and inter-municipal collaboration.

“The Slovak Republic can get better outcomes from its education system, which is essential for future growth and competitiveness, and for becoming a truly inclusive society,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “The country must keep the ambition to spend more on education, both in real terms and as a percentage of GDP, as the economy improves and fiscal consolidation efforts are completed. The priority should be to expand pre-primary education and to provide teachers and school leaders with more competitive salaries.”

Declining school age populations have produced large inefficiencies in basic education. Between 2003 and 2013 student numbers dropped by 26%, but the number of schools was only reduced by 10% and the number of teachers by 7%. As a result, in the average basic school classroom in a small municipality there are just 13 students – compared to the OECD average of 21.

There are also persistent challenges of equity and inclusion in Slovak schooling, with performance in school more highly influenced by students’ socio-economic background than in most OECD countries. Roma students are still only weakly integrated into mainstream education, with many assigned to separate special schools. Most of the Slovak Republic’s adult Roma population have never completed upper secondary education. Recognising learning acquired in work, expanding second-chance education opportunities, and reducing reliance of segregation into special schools would help.

In the current fiscal context greater efficiencies will be required, says the OECD. More co-ordination and collaboration is needed between all 2900 municipalities which are responsible for basic schooling. They should consider a range of strategies: consolidating small schools; sharing resources across schools; and clustering small schools under a single leadership team and budget.

To improve vocational education, the OECD makes a series of recommendations, including: making some work-based learning mandatory for all vocational programmes and public funding linked to minimum length of work placement; establishing a full apprenticeship system with a legal framework identifying who is responsible for apprentices; and encouraging the growth of post-secondary vocational training by developing more attractive higher level vocational programmes.

OECD Reviews of School Resources: Slovak Republic and **OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training: A Skills beyond School Review of the Slovak Republic** are available at: www.oecd.org/education/oecd-reviews-of-school-resources-slovak-republic-2015-9789264247567-en.htm and www.oecd.org/education/a-skills-beyond-school-review-of-the-slovak-republic-9789264233348-en.htm.

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