Foreword

Governments are paying increasing attention to international comparisons as they search for effective policies that enhance individuals' social and economic prospects, provide incentives for greater efficiency in schooling, and help to mobilise resources to meet rising demands. As part of its response, the OECD Directorate for Education devotes a major effort to the development and analysis of the quantitative, internationally comparable indicators that it publishes annually in *Education at a Glance*. These indicators enable educational policy makers and practitioners alike to see their education systems in the light of other countries' performances and, together with OECD's country policy reviews, are designed to support and review the efforts that governments are making towards policy reform.

Education at a Glance addresses the needs of a range of users, from governments seeking to learn policy lessons to academics requiring data for further analysis to the general public wanting to monitor how its nation's schools are progressing in producing world-class students. The publication examines the quality of learning outcomes, the policy levers and contextual factors that shape these outcomes, and the broader private and social returns that accrue to investments in education.

Education at a Glance is the product of a long-standing, collaborative effort between OECD governments, the experts and institutions working within the framework of the OECD's indicators of education systems (INES) programme and the OECD Secretariat. The preparation of the publication was co-ordinated by the Indicators and Analysis Division of the OECD Directorate for Education with input from the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, under the responsibility of Andreas Schleicher, in co-operation with Etienne Albiser, Tracey Burns, Eric Charbonnier, Michael Davidson, Bo Hansson, Corinne Heckmann, David Istance, Karinne Logez, Koji Miyamoto, Sophie Vayssettes, Patrick Werquin, and Jean Yip. Administrative support was provided by Sandrine Meireles, and additional advice as well as analytical and editorial support were provided by Pedro Lenin García de León, Niccolina Clements, Diana Toledo Figueroa, Elisabeth Villoutreix and Alexandra Wise. The development of the publication was steered by member countries through the INES Working Party and facilitated by the INES Networks. The members of the various bodies as well as the individual experts who have contributed to this publication and to OECD INES more generally are listed at the end of the book.

While much progress has been accomplished in recent years, member countries and the OECD continue to strive to strengthen the link between policy needs and the best available internationally comparable data. In doing so, various challenges and trade-offs are faced. First, the indicators need to respond to educational issues that are high on national policy agendas, and where the international comparative perspective can offer important added value to what can be accomplished through national analysis and evaluation. Second, while the indicators need to be as comparable as possible, they also need to be as country-specific as is necessary to allow for historical, systemic and cultural differences between countries. Third, the indicators need to be

presented in as straightforward a manner as possible, while remaining sufficiently complex to reflect multi-faceted educational realities. Fourth, there is a general desire to keep the indicator set as small as possible, but it needs to be large enough to be useful to policy makers across countries that face different educational challenges.

The OECD will continue to address these challenges vigorously and to pursue not just the development of indicators in areas where it is feasible and promising to develop data, but also to advance in areas where a considerable investment still needs to be made in conceptual work. The further development of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and its extension through the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), as well as OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) are major efforts to this end.

The report is published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD.

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