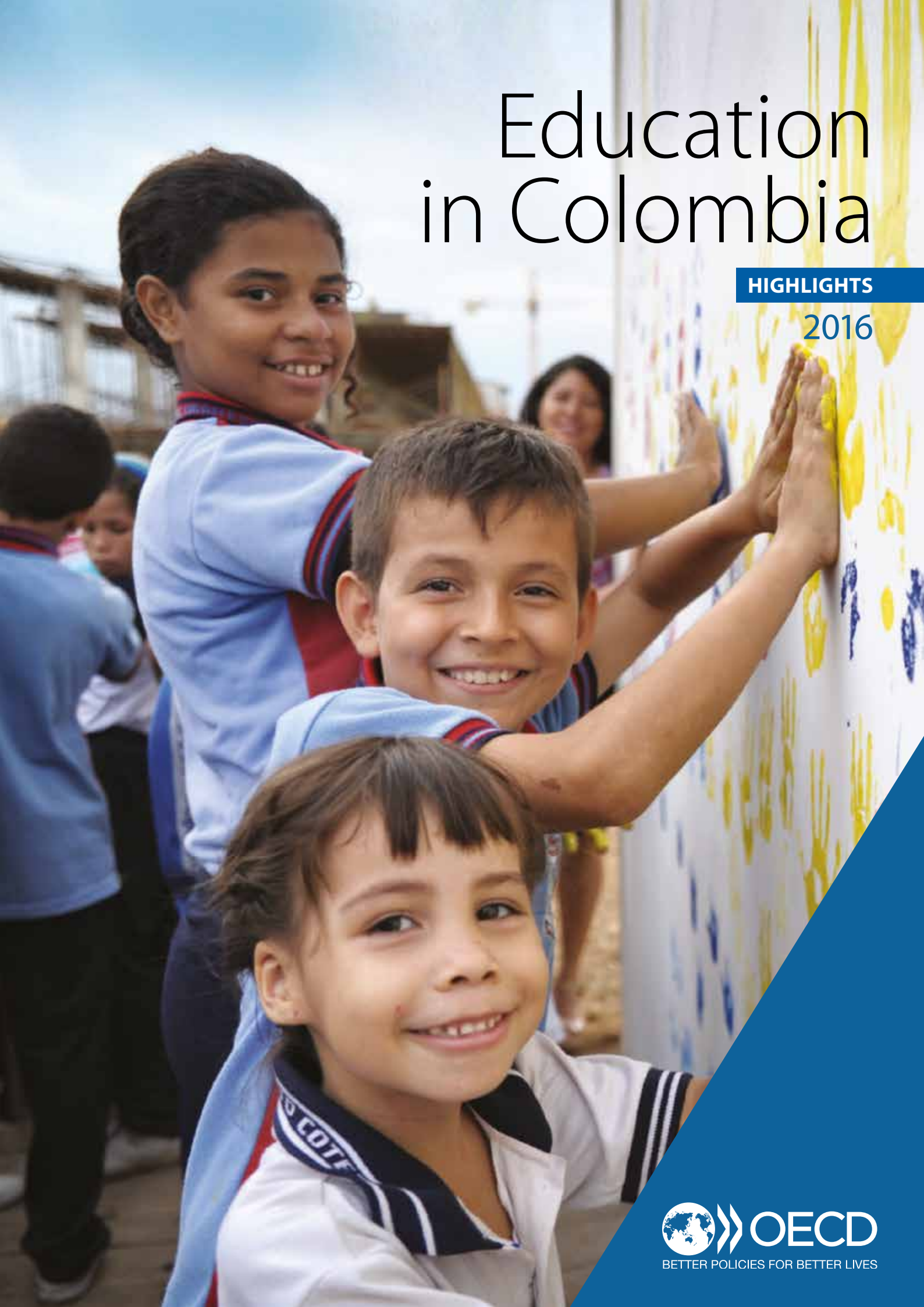


# Education in Colombia

HIGHLIGHTS

2016





# Colombia

## WHAT ARE REVIEWS OF NATIONAL POLICIES FOR EDUCATION?

OECD Education Policy Reviews provide tailored advice to governments to develop policies that improve the skills of all members of society, and ensure that those skills are used effectively, to promote inclusive growth for better jobs and better lives. The OECD works with countries to identify and understand the factors behind successful reform and provide direct support to them in designing, adopting and implementing reforms in education and skills policies.

## WHY A REVIEW OF EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA?

In 2013, the OECD opened discussions for the accession of Colombia to the OECD Convention. As part of this process, Colombia has undergone in-depth reviews in all the relevant areas of the Organisation's work including a comprehensive review of the education system, from early childhood education and care to tertiary education.

The report *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Education in Colombia* evaluates Colombia's policies and practices as compared to OECD best policies and practices in the area of education and skills. It does so according to five principles that are essential to strong education systems: a strong focus on improving learning outcomes; equity

in educational opportunity; the ability to collect and use data to inform policy; the effective use of funding to steer reform; and the extent of multistakeholder engagement in policy design and implementation.

The Review both underlines the many strengths of Colombia's education system and provides recommendations on how to address the challenges it faces. These Highlights summarise the main findings of the Review:

- **Giving all children a strong start in education**
- **Improving learning outcomes in all schools**
- **Expanding and upgrading upper secondary education**
- **Creating an integrated tertiary education system**



***“In recent years, the Colombian economy has grown at rates that many OECD countries can only aspire to. Poverty has reduced significantly and the big reform initiatives of the government have contributed to improve the economic and social environment. The accession process to the OECD aims to support the reform agenda of Colombia and be a catalyst for new thinking and reforms in the path left to achieve more inclusive growth.”***

Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General, Paris, 7 November 2014

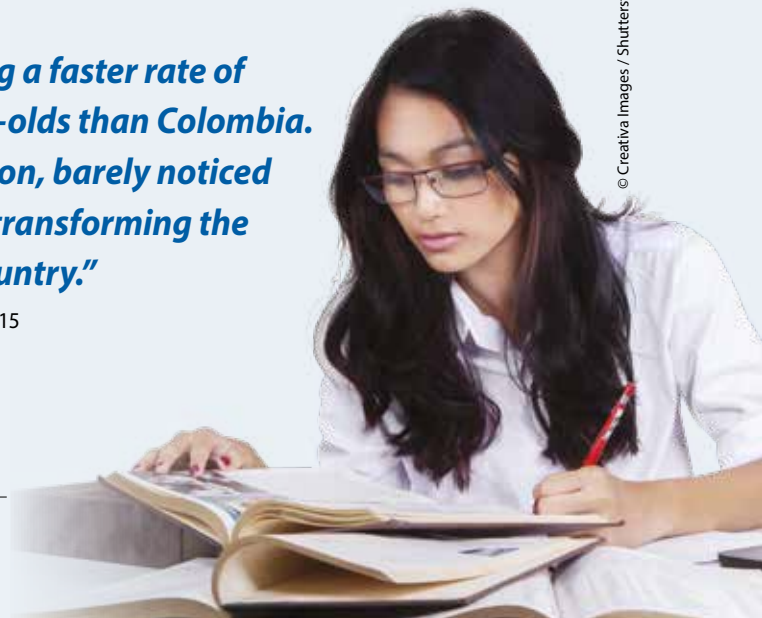
Basic indicators (2012 or latest year available)	Colombia	OECD
Population aged less than 15 as a percentage of total population	28%	19%
GDP per capita (USD PPP)	10 303	37 010
Gini coefficient	0.53	0.31
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	4.5%	5.6%
Age range at which over 90% of the school age population is enrolled	7-13	4-16
PISA mean performance in mathematics	376	494
Share of low achievers in PISA	74	23
Share of top performers in PISA	0.3	13
Percentage of 25-34 year-olds who have attained tertiary education	26%	41%

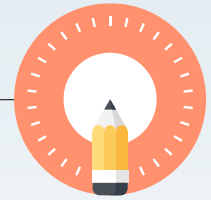
Above: Official visit of President of Colombia, **Juan Manuel Santos** at the OECD, 7 November 2014.  
© OECD

Opposite page above: Students in a technical education program in Antioquia, Colombia.  
© Charlotte Kesl / World Bank

***“There are just three OECD countries showing a faster rate of improvement in the reading skills of 15-year-olds than Colombia. Education has gone through a silent revolution, barely noticed by the international community, but deeply transforming the lives of people in this once conflict-ridden country.”***

Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, Paris, 29 April 2015





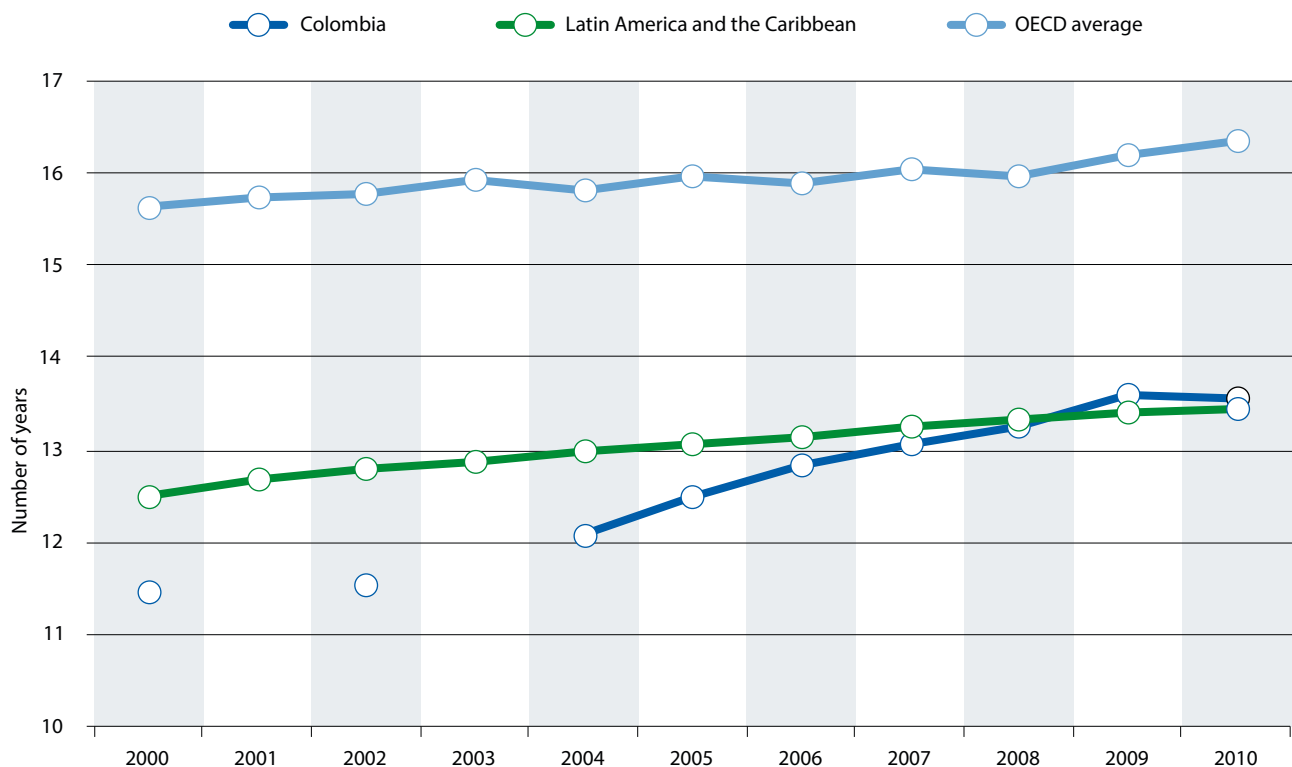
# An education system on the move

**Over the past two decades the Colombian education system has undergone a fundamental transformation. The most visible outcome is the impressive expansion of access at all levels as a result of ambitious policies to tackle barriers to enrolment and bring education services to every corner of the country. An increasing focus on learning outcomes has resulted in important reforms to professionalise the teaching workforce and introduce measures of performance across the system. Further efforts to improve quality and equity are essential if Colombia is to reach its goal of being the “most educated” country in Latin America by 2025.**

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- Enrolment has risen sharply at all levels. In just a decade, the time students spend in education has increased by two years and participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and tertiary education has more than doubled, to 40% and 50% respectively.
- Strategies to modernise ECEC, upper secondary education and tertiary education have been introduced to set clear goals, a common framework, and standards for education services.
- Reforms of the teaching profession have sought to professionalise the workforce by raising standards for entry and investing in skills development.
- New governance and funding arrangements have laid the foundations for a system that is more efficient and meets the needs of a highly diverse country.
- The development of strong information systems and multiple performance assessments have enabled a more evidence-based approach to policy-making.

**THE TIME SPENT IN FORMAL EDUCATION HAS INCREASED TWO YEARS IN JUST A DECADE**



Source: UNESCO-UIS (2015), “Browse by theme: Education”, Data Centre, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/BrowseEducation.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/BrowseEducation.aspx).

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Developing a vision of the education system as a continuum with clear learning expectations at each stage. A national curriculum framework would ease students' transitions, help teachers in the classroom, and enable the country to raise standards and respond better to national social and economic goals.
- Addressing inequities across socio-economic groups and regions. School life expectancy for students from the poorest backgrounds is just 6 years, compared with 12 years for the richest. More structured support in the early years would make a difference for disadvantaged students.
- Improving teaching practices at all levels. Heightened expectations for the profession should go alongside adequate training opportunities and remuneration.
- Supporting local governments and school leaders to foster educational change and mobilise the large number and variety of education stakeholders.

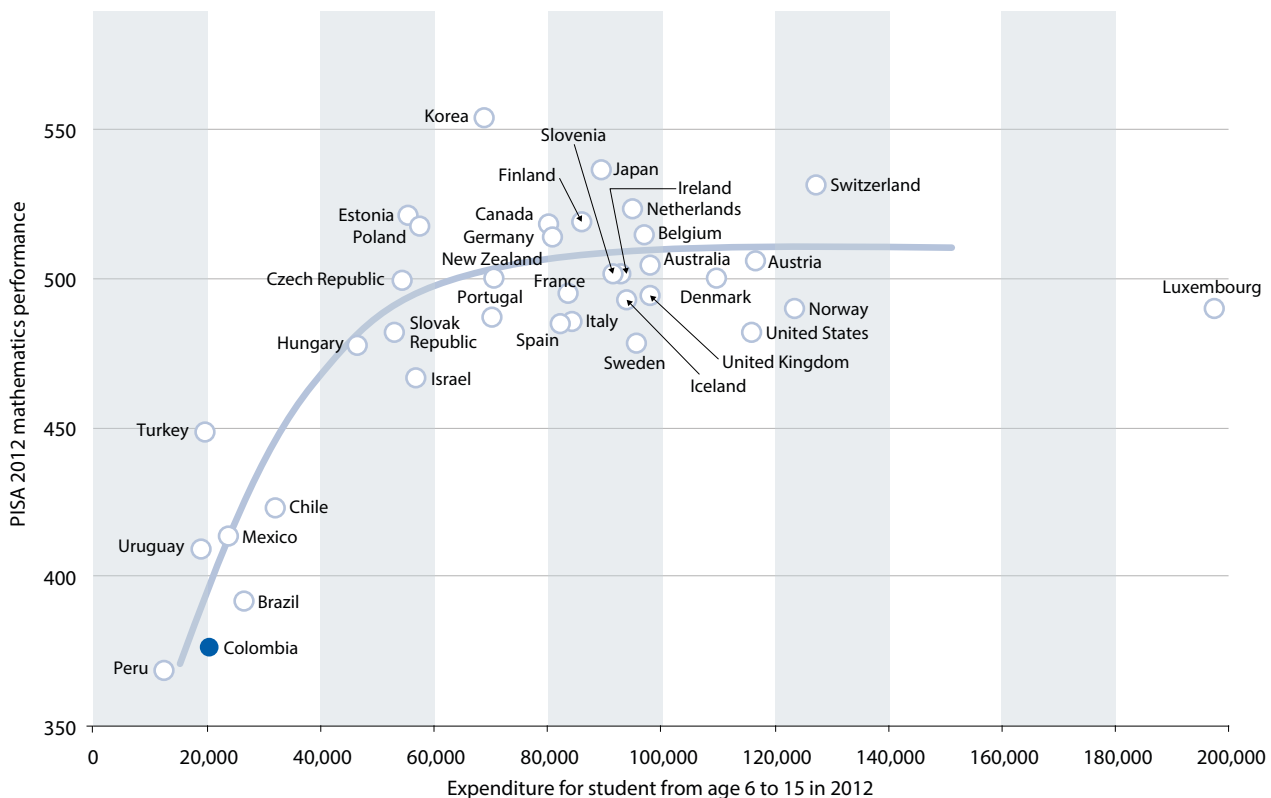
- Investing more resources in the foundational stages. The public spending per each student in school is about half of that for tertiary students and a fourth of that invested by the average OECD country. More resources should be allocated to ECEC and schooling to raise education outcomes and ensure that all students have a fair chance of success.

## EDUCATION: THE KEY TO LASTING PEACE

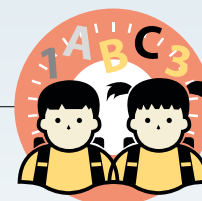
The nearly five-decade long internal conflict has had a defining impact on all aspects of social and economic development in Colombia, including education.

Colombia's transition towards peace and higher levels of development depends on many factors, but none will be more important to the country's future than its ability to build a strong and inclusive education system. Closing the large disparities between urban and rural areas should be a priority for a lasting peace.

## MORE RESOURCES WOULD LIFT EDUCATION OUTCOMES



Source: OECD (2013b), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful? (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practice*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>



## Giving all children a strong start in education

**Attendance in ECEC is now a right and ECEC services have expanded remarkably across the country giving children a stronger start in the education system. The landmark Zero to Forever Strategy has created a holistic approach to children’s development and a common framework to coordinate the numerous providers in this sector. Colombian 15 year-olds who have attended at least one year of ECEC outperform their peers who have not done so by the equivalent of a year. However, other countries show larger performance gains from ECEC, suggesting scope to improve the quality of Colombian ECEC services, especially the educational component. Stronger political and financial support for ECEC is one of the most effective and efficient steps Colombia could take to improve overall education outcomes and enhance social equity.**

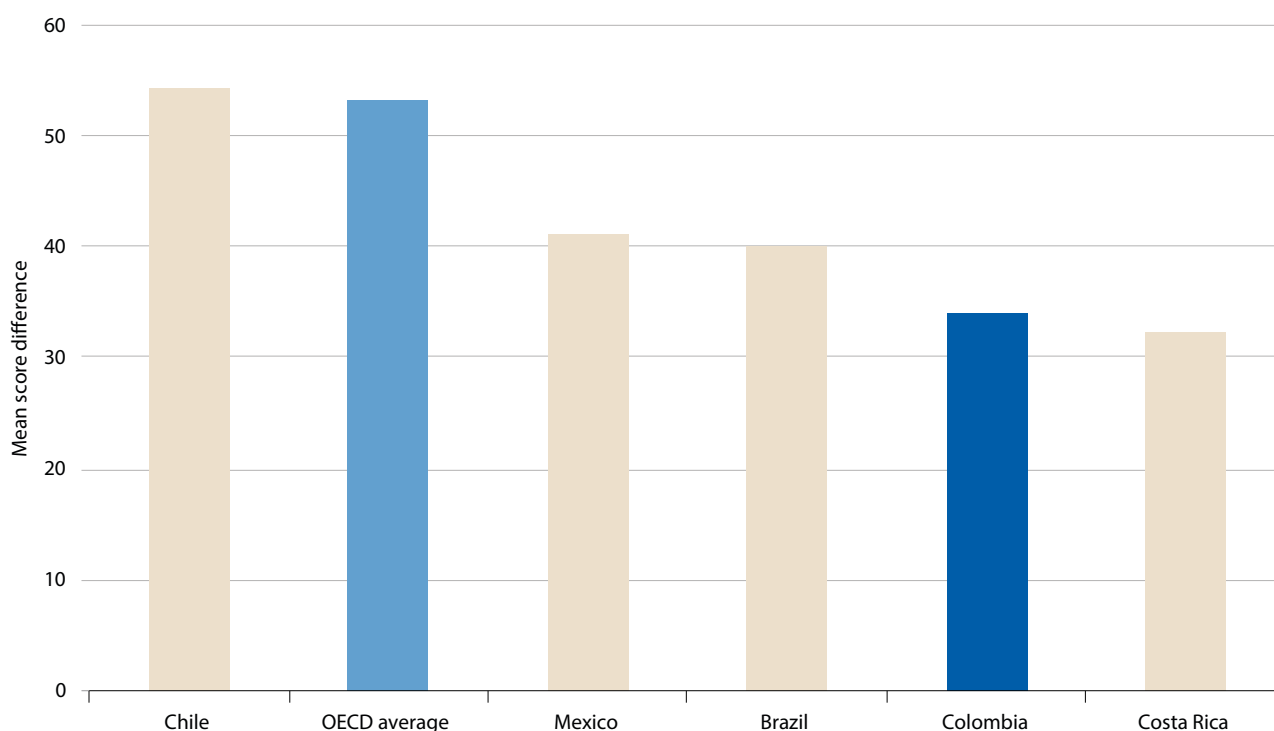
### MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- Enrolment of 0-to-5 year-olds more than doubled between 2007 and 2013, from 16% to 41%.
- The Zero to Forever Strategy, which was the result of a nationwide consultation process, provides a holistic framework for children’s well-being and development, and sets clear standards for the provision of education services.
- Considerable efforts have focussed on setting higher standards for the profession and upgrading the skills of ECEC staff, many of whom are community mothers.

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Many children do not participate in ECEC. In 2013, only 48% of 3-year-olds and 75% of 4-year-olds were enrolled, compared to the OECD average of 70% and 82% respectively.
- Only 63% of children transition to schools at the right age. Late enrolment is both detrimental to learning and more costly for the system.
- Young children from disadvantaged families are likely to attend low quality modalities or not to have access to ECEC at all. Together with poor home

### ECEC ATTENDANCE PROVIDES MORE THAN A YEAR OF ADVANTAGE IN PISA PERFORMANCE



Source: OECD (2013), *PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity (Volume II): Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201132-en>.



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learning environments, this hampers their chances of progressing adequately through the education system and breaking out of the cycle of poverty.

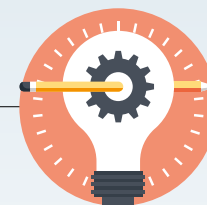
- The lack of common standards for children’s learning and development hinders the potential educational impact of ECEC. This is further hampered by the limited pedagogical skills of staff.
- Weak system leadership and local engagement translate into large differences in the quality of services children receive across providers and regions.

### OECD RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Prioritise the expansion of services to the most disadvantaged children and rural communities, who could benefit the most from ECEC.**
- **Ensure that all children are in school at the age of 5 so that they learn what is appropriate for their age.**
- **Improve the educational benefits of ECEC by setting clear expectations for the cognitive, social and emotional development of children.**
- **Raise the quality of staff by further improving their initial education and providing them with more opportunities for professional development.**
- **Encourage and support parents in engaging in the education of their children.**
- **Establish strong national leadership and more effective local co-ordination mechanisms to accelerate progress of the sector, including in mobilising additional funding and monitoring the quality of provision.**



© Alamy Stock Photo



## Improving learning outcomes in all schools

**Colombia has made impressive progress towards universal enrolment in basic education through ambitious policies to bring all children into schools. Equally remarkable is that the country has at the same time raised learning outcomes. Colombia was one of the fastest improvers in reading in PISA 2012. However, further efforts are needed to raise the quality of schooling for all. If students are learning in school, they are more likely to continue with their education and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in life.**

### MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- The expansion of flexible models such as the “New School”, the abolition of school fees, and conditional cash transfers have helped to bring education to disadvantaged areas and make schooling affordable.
- A new teacher statute placed merit at the centre of the criteria for entry into the profession, promotion and retention.
- School performance is measured through the SABER standardised assessments, which has focused attention on learning outcomes in schools.
- Decentralisation has empowered departments and municipalities to meet the needs of their communities. At the same time, per student financing schemes have enabled more effective targeting of education spending.

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

- The lack of common curricula and low teaching quality hamper student learning in schools. Those who remain in the system at age 15 perform about three years below their peers in OECD countries in PISA.
- Too many students struggle to make adequate progress, repeat grades or drop out altogether. With 41% of 15-year-olds having repeated at least a year, Colombia makes much greater use than most countries of this ineffective and costly practice.
- Limited and poor quality learning resources, from basic infrastructure to teachers, hamper learning opportunities in schools located in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas.

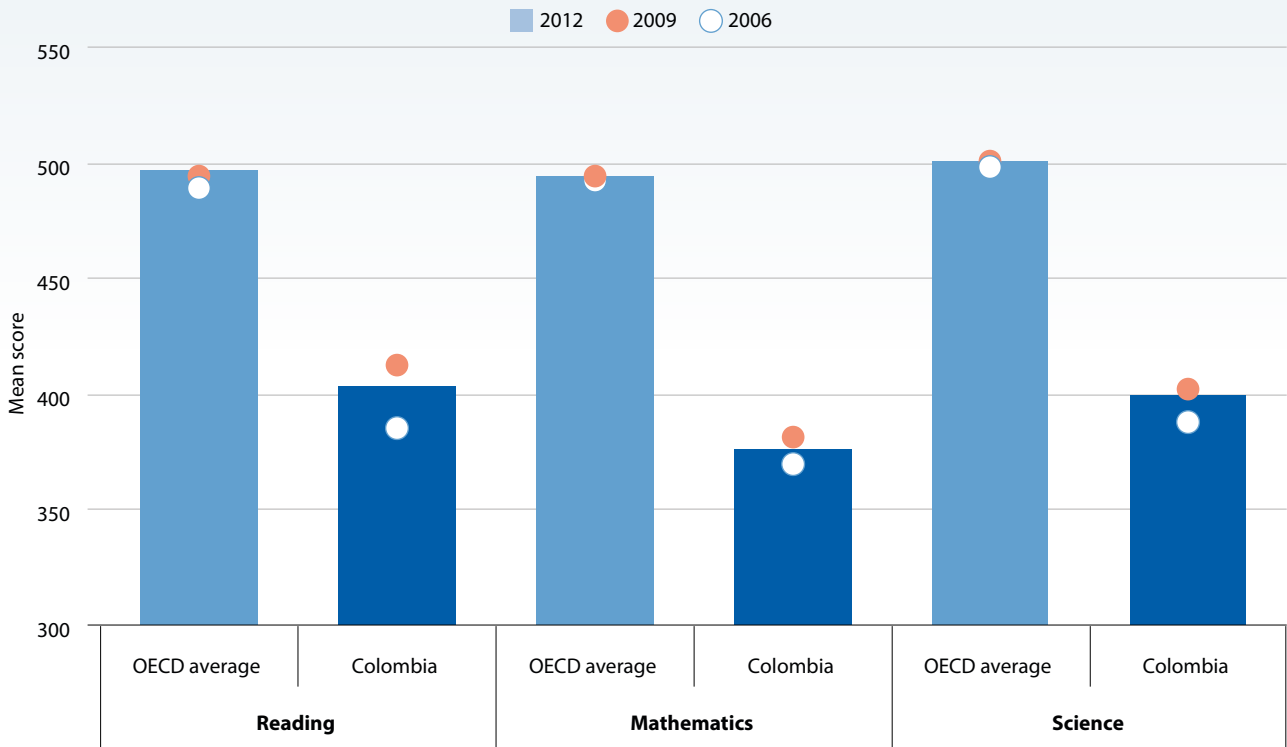
### OECD RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a national curriculum framework to help set equally high expectations for all students and provide guidance to teachers on what students should learn at each stage.
- Prioritise additional resources –infrastructure, teachers, the Jornada Única- to schools in the most challenging contexts, where they can have the greatest impact.
- Develop professional standards to define what good teaching is, and align relevant training opportunities, effective evaluations, and adequate career and remuneration structures with them.
- Empower school leaders to play a greater role in improving teaching and learning processes in schools.
- Draw up an ambitious and well-resourced plan to transform education in rural areas and ensure that all students make the transition to lower secondary education.
- Build capacity at all levels to make greater use of the wealth of data available to trigger and sustain improvement.



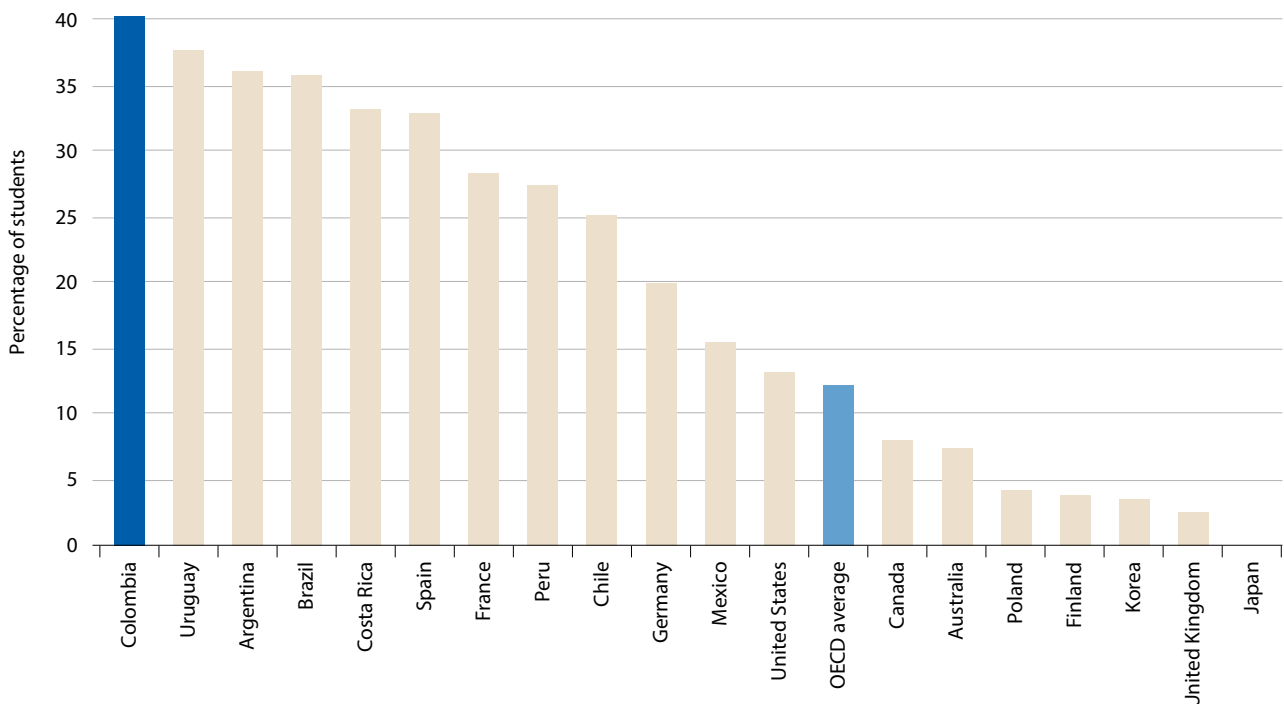


**OVERALL PERFORMANCE IN PISA IS LOW, DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS SINCE 2006**



Source: OECD (2014b), *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en>.

**COLOMBIA HAS THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF GRADE REPEATERS AMONGST PISA PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES**



Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>.



## Expanding and upgrading upper secondary education

**Upper secondary education does not yet serve as an effective bridge between basic education and further educational or labour market opportunities. Both the increasing number of basic education graduates, who have more diverse skills and aspirations, and the need for a more highly skilled workforce to sustain economic growth, have made reform urgent. Upper secondary education needs to consolidate core basic skills whilst also preparing students for work or further learning. PISA suggests that over 70% of 15 year-olds in Colombia lack basic literacy and numeracy. Comprehensive reform is needed to expand access to upper secondary education and ensure this provides Colombian youth with a pathway to employment or further education.**

### MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- By making upper secondary education compulsory by 2030, the sector is now in the spotlight and has a clear goal ahead.
- A national consultation has gathered evidence and stakeholders' views, helping to pave the way for a comprehensive reform.
- Policies to make attendance affordable and expand provision through flexible models have already increased gross enrolment from 57% in 2002 to 76% in 2012.

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

- The lack of distinct learning objectives for upper secondary education hampers the relevance of what students learn and the transition to further education and the labour market.
- An overloaded and fragmented curricula combined with top-down teaching practices are obstacles to student engagement. This is compounded by the difficult climate in many schools.
- The involvement of tertiary education institutions has raised concerns, from what vocational programmes are offered in schools to how the skills acquired are certified.
- Limited career guidance and weak linkages to the world of work hamper student choices and the prospects of the most disadvantaged.
- Net enrolment levels vary widely across the country, from 26% in rural areas to 48% in urban ones. The current capacity of the system is insufficient to accommodate full enrolment.
- Dropout and inadequate progress in lower secondary education remains a bottleneck for enrolment. Of students aged 15 and 16, about 46% are still enrolled in lower secondary education.



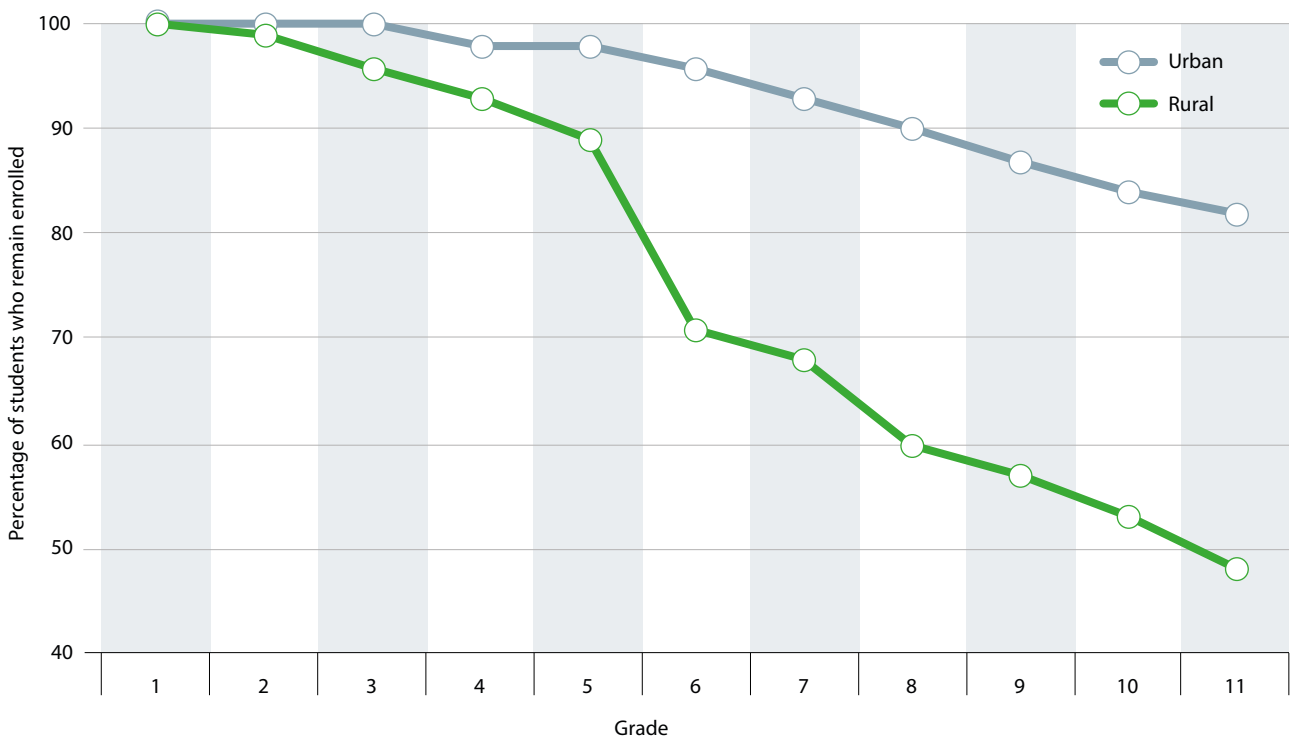
© Colombian Ministry of Education

**OECD RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Reinforce a comprehensive approach which focuses on the consolidation of basic skills and provides opportunities for deeper academic or vocational learning.
- Improve the quality of flexible models and work-related training (ETDH) to support the transition into the formal economy of the large number of students who are over-age, drop out or combine study with work.
- Improve teacher preparation to favour the adoption of more effective teaching practices to engage adolescents in learning.
- Make tertiary and labour-market information more accessible and prioritise career guidance services to the most disadvantaged students to help them make the right choices about their future.
- Design national and local strategies to make universal enrolment happen. This expansion should be prioritised where enrolment levels are the lowest.
- Build local capacity to connect schools with tertiary institutions and employers in order to facilitate transitions and foster the skills needed for employment and growth.



**TOO MANY STUDENTS STRUGGLE TO MAKE ADEQUATE PROGRESS**



Source: MEN (n.d.), "La deserción escolar", unpublished document, Ministerio de Educación Nacional (Ministry of National Education), Bogotá, [www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-293659\\_archivo\\_pdf\\_abc.pdf](http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-293659_archivo_pdf_abc.pdf).



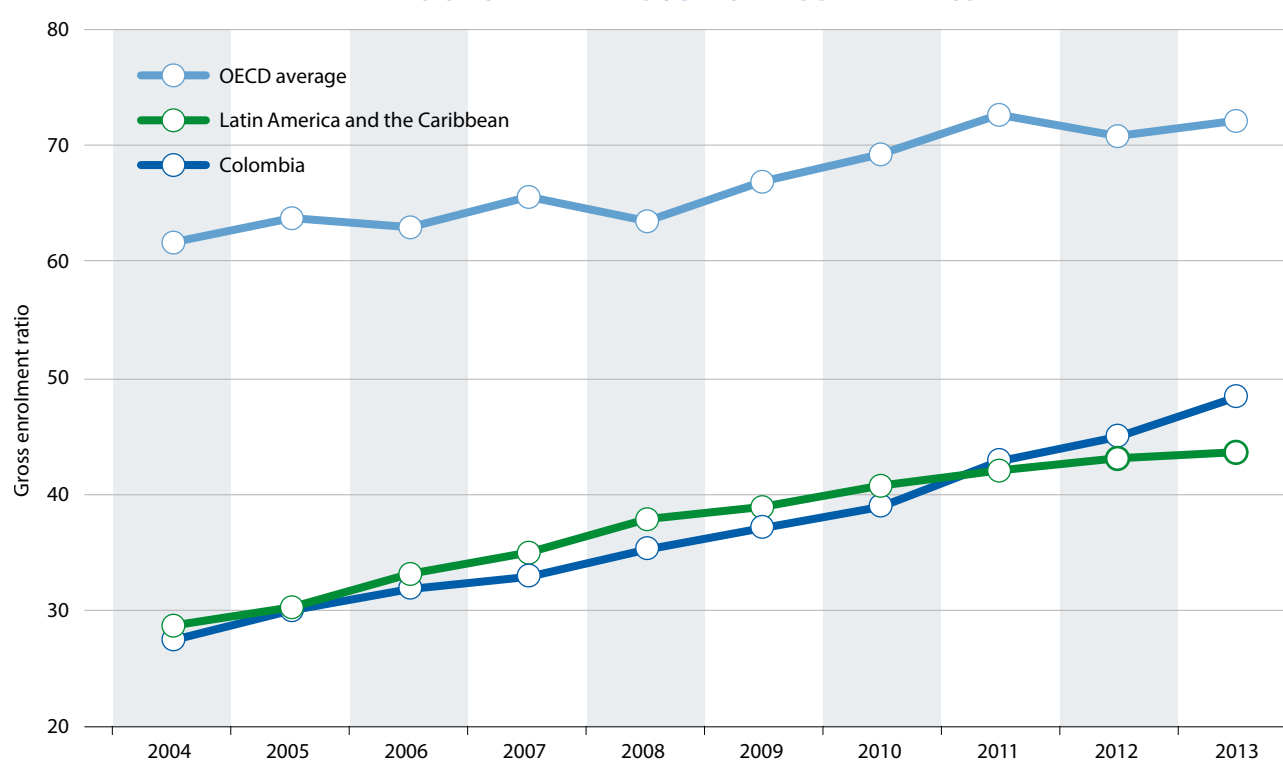
## Moving towards a more integrated tertiary education system

**In the last two decades, the number of tertiary education students has quadrupled and that of programmes and institutions has also boomed. This extraordinary expansion has opened new opportunities for students to gain higher knowledge and skills to contribute to Colombia's economic emergence. However, the individual and socio-economic returns to tertiary education will not be realised without reform on several fronts. The expansion has raised the need for stronger mechanisms for quality assurance and evaluation, a more effective and equitable allocation of resources, and closer linkages between tertiary providers and labour market needs. The quality and relevance of technical and technological education, in particular, demands increased attention, along with the stark differences in enrolment between regions and socio-economic groups.**

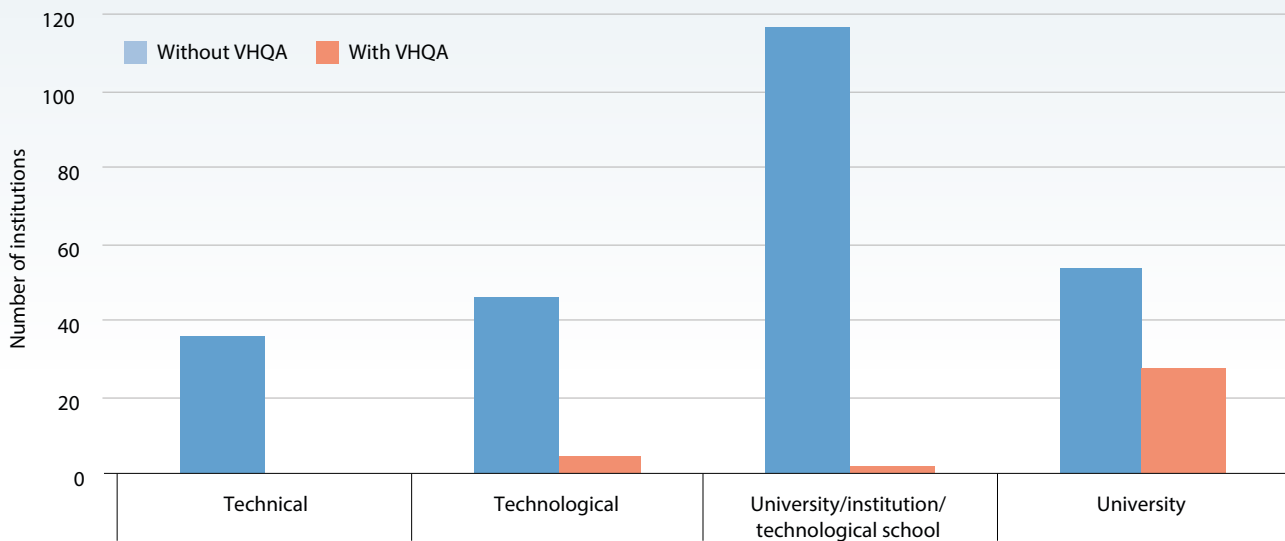
### MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- The *Commitment for Excellence 2034*, which was the result of a national consultation process, provides a clear long-term vision for the system, and the fundamental values and principles that should guide its transformation.
- The number of students, programmes and institutions has increased extraordinarily. The gross enrolment rate is now close to 50%, double that of a decade ago.
- Disadvantaged students now have a greater chance to obtain a tertiary diploma through a well-established student loan scheme and recent scholarship initiatives for the talented such as Hard Work Pays Off.
- Well-developed information systems are in place and Colombia is a pioneer of standardised student assessments and value-added measures.

### THE EXPANSION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION HAS BEEN IMPRESSIVE



Source: UNESCO-UIS (2015), "Browse by theme: Education", Data Centre, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/BrowseEducation.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/BrowseEducation.aspx) (assessed 10 July 2015).

**ONLY A MINORITY OF INSTITUTIONS HOLD THE VOLUNTARY HIGH QUALITY ACCREDITATION** (December 2013)

Source: CESU (2014), *Acuerdo por lo Superior 2034: Propuesta de Política Pública para la Excelencia de la Educación Superior en Colombia en el Escenario de la Paz*, Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior (National Council of Higher Education), [www.dialogoeducacionsuperior.edu.co/1750/articles-319917\\_recurso\\_1.pdf](http://www.dialogoeducacionsuperior.edu.co/1750/articles-319917_recurso_1.pdf).

**CHALLENGES AHEAD**

- Currently half of a student cohort drops out due to range of factors, including limited career guidance and insufficient academic support to make up for weak learning foundations.
- Socio-economic and geographic differences are stark. Only 9% of students from the poorest families enrol in tertiary education, compared with 53% from the wealthiest ones. Five departments account for two-thirds of all undergraduate students in the country.
- Quality requirements to operate are minimal and few institutions seek the High Quality Accreditation. Without a strong quality assurance system, institutions of poor quality have mushroomed.
- The absence of clear pathways and qualifications makes it difficult for student and employers to understand the value tertiary programmes.
- Technical and Technological programmes are under-resourced and often of poor quality and relevance. They are also hampered by the fragmentation of the VET sector, with SENA programmes following different regulations and standards.
- Public resources are not allocated in a way that promotes efficiency, equity or the established goals of excellence for the sector.

**OECD RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Prioritise career guidance and academic support to the most disadvantaged students.**
- **Entrust a single agency with all quality assurance functions to strengthen the processes and outcomes. More stringent requirements to operate and VET-specific standards would help raise the quality of the system.**
- **Promote a more balanced distribution of institutions across the country to foster local development.**
- **Create stronger and clearer pathways for students to move between institutions and progress from one level to the next. Accelerate the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework and credit transfer system to facilitate such system integration.**
- **Reform the funding system, including that of SENA, to allocate resources on the basis of student numbers. Provide greater incentives for institutional improvement and contribution to national goals such as narrowing equity gaps.**
- **Strengthen the links between local governments, tertiary institutions, and employers to enhance the social and economic relevance of tertiary education.**

## About the Directorate for Education and Skills

The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills helps individuals and nations to identify and develop the knowledge and skills that drive better jobs and better lives, generate prosperity and promote social inclusion. We encourage countries to compare their experiences and learn from each other, and we accompany them in the difficult process of policy implementation.

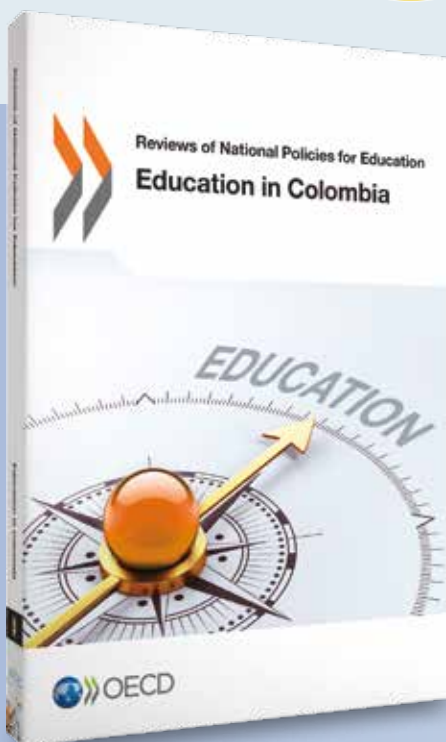
Our global metrics help countries to see what is possible in education and to set meaningful aspirations in terms of measurable goals achieved by the world's education leaders. Our PISA surveys show how much school systems vary in their progress towards equipping learners with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills that are so crucial at a time when the kinds of things that are easy to teach and easy to test are also easiest to digitise, automate and outsource. Through TALIS, we seek to strengthen the teaching profession and to devise more innovative learning environments with the 21st-century pedagogies that will shape 21st-century learners.

Our aspiration is to help every learner, every parent, every teacher and every policy maker see that only the sky is the limit to improving education – and that improving education is the key to a better and fairer society.

**Andreas Schleicher**

Director for Education and Skills, and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General





To access the full version of the report **Education in Colombia**, published as part of the *Reviews of National Policies for Education* series please visit:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264250604-en>



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