

## Key data on education in Europe: Longer schooling, fewer pupils and teachers

*The European Commission today presented a report identifying both major positive trends and serious challenges for education systems across Europe. Positive news include: the increasing enrolment of 4-year olds in pre-school education, a significant rise in the numbers of students in higher education and a general trend towards longer periods of compulsory schooling. Among the important future challenges to be addressed will be demographic change, which means both fewer children of school age in Europe and teacher retirement on a very large scale in many countries in the near future. The report also states a universal trend to greater autonomy of schools in Europe.*

Produced by the Eurydice Network, the 2009 edition of *Key Data on Education in Europe* gives a comprehensive picture of the latest trends regarding the organisation and functioning of the education systems of 31 European countries (EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey), based on 121 indicators.

The European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Ján Figel', said: "*Our Key Data report reveals the good news that we're enrolling ever-increasing numbers of pre-primary school children, and we've got more and more university students than before. This shows that we are making progress towards making lifelong learning a reality for everyone, something that is important for the EU's social cohesion and long-term sustainability of the economic recovery. But there are also some challenges for us to work on: we expect shortages of teachers in some areas, and fewer children in compulsory education.*"

### Key messages:

#### **1) Demographic change: fewer pupils in compulsory education and widespread retirement of teachers**

Population projections in the EU point to a general decline in the population of school-age pupils, yet the need for all citizens to possess up to date skills and knowledge is increasing. At the same time, since the age group of teachers closest to retirement is over-represented, many countries will experience teacher retirement on a very large scale in the near future and possible shortages, especially in certain areas. These demographic changes pose challenges for education systems, however, they are also an opportunity to update, modernise and make them more effective and quality oriented..

#### **2) Longer compulsory schooling and significant rise in participation in higher education**

In the vast majority of European countries compulsory schooling lasts for nine or ten years but a 5-year old today can expect to spend on average 17 years in education and the overall trend is clearly upward. Some countries have introduced reforms aimed at reducing school-leaving rates. In Italy and the Netherlands, for example, all pupils up to the age of 18 must continue in school until they obtain a certificate of basic education. The number of students in higher

education has risen continuously since 1998 to reach over 18 million (a 25 % increase in eight years). A third of all 20-22-year olds now participate in a higher education course. Women's participation in higher education is higher than men's overall (123 women enrolled for 100 men) but significant imbalances depending on the field of study remain.

### **3) Increased autonomy for schools combined with a rise in external evaluations, but varied policies on publications of results**

A near universal trend towards increased school autonomy has been accompanied by a parallel development of measures to implement regular and systematic evaluation of education systems, institutions and staff. It is possible to speak of a culture change in European education with regard to quality assurance since 2000, with many countries having introduced standardised evaluations for example. However, policies on the publication of results vary greatly, with only a minority routinely publishing.

The study provides answers, based on 2006 and 2007 data, to several other questions, such as:

- To what extent can parents in different European countries decide which school their children may attend?
- Which countries spend most per pupil?
- Which countries pay their teachers best relative to GDP per capita?
- How many hours per week are teachers required to teach?
- Which countries charge university tuition fees and how much do they charge?
- How do schools deal with pupils who are not native speakers of the language of instruction?

The Eurydice Network ([www.Eurydice.org](http://www.Eurydice.org)) provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (EU Member States, EEA countries and Turkey) and is co-ordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

#### **To know more:**

The study:

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/105EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/105EN.pdf)

European Commission: [2008 Report on Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training - Indicators and benchmarks](#)

European Commission: [Education and training](#)

#### **Contacts :**

John Macdonald : +32 2 295 52 67; Sophie Andersson: +32 2 295 02 08

Mirella Rossi, Eurydice Communications officer: +32 2 299 49 87

Stanislav Ranguelov, coordinating author, Eurydice: +32 2 295 33 13