Slovakia - PISA and PIAAC: worrying skill survey results

Results of two important skills surveys have triggered very different reactions. While adults' test results attracted little attention, 15-year-olds' reading, maths and science skills shocked politicians and media, though not specialists.

PIAAC results

In the OECD PIAAC survey (programme for the international assessment of adult competencies) Slovakia scored significantly above the average in numeracy with 276 points and not significantly differently from the OECD average in literacy with 274 points. Weaknesses were identified in problem-solving in technology-rich environments with only 26% people at levels 2 or 3 (of 5 levels). With 22.2% Slovakia belongs to the five countries where more than 20% of people of working age have insufficient computer experience. This is a challenge that should be addressed by adult learning opportunities as Slovakia is among the countries with an extremely low share of people in lifelong learning (3.1% in 2012).

Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) - Comparison of results of OECD countries and Slovakia

	OECD	SK
Mean numeracy score	269	276
Mean literacy score	273	274
Adults scoring high* in problem solving in technology-rich environments (%)	34	25.6
Adults with no computer experience (%)	9.3	22

Source: OECD
NB: * at level 2 or 3

PISA results

For the first time in history Slovakia scored significantly below the OECD average in the programme for international student assessment. The result constitutes a dramatic decrease in performance compared to 2009 in all domains.

Domains	2009		2012	
	OECD	Slovakia	OECD	Slovakia
Mathematics	497	496	494	482
Reading	494	477	496	463
Science	501	490	501	471

Slovakia's results also dramatically deteriorated in two indicators related to quality of its education system: performance structure and socioeconomic index. Compared to 2009, the share of students belonging to the risk group (level 1 or below) significantly increased in all three domains and the share of best-performing students (levels 5 and 6) significantly decreased. This also applies to all upper secondary students, in particular to those in ISCED 3C programmes. Over 60% of young people in ISCED 3C programmes fell into the risk group in all three domains. This indicates a need to focus on key competence development to make up for shortcomings in primary and lower secondary education.

This is interrelated with another finding disclosing the Slovak education system as one of the weakest in balancing disadvantaged pupils coming from families with low socioeconomic status. In Slovakia, socioeconomic disadvantage translates into poor educational performance significantly more likely compared to other countries.

This PISA shock also shed light on PIAAC results which point to a serious education system failure: the difference between performance of older people (aged 55-65) and young people (aged 25-34) is among the lowest in countries participating in PIAAC.
This result, however, hides a serious rupture. Old people performed comparably well while young people performed poorly compared to peers in other countries. This deterioration, partly hidden as the aggregate PIAAC average figures are comparable with the OECD average, seems to confirm that long-term low investment in education and long-term extremely poor remuneration of teachers and trainers leads to decrease in quality of education.

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