

Foreword

Higher education plays a crucial role in countries around the world. It equips learners with the skills to lead productive working lives and sparks the knowledge creation and innovation that fosters economic growth and social progress. Moreover, long-term trends such as globalisation, digitalisation and demographic change, as well as shocks such as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, transform economies and societies, putting pressure on higher education systems to evolve and respond to emerging needs.

In the Slovak Republic, fast growth in higher education participation from the early 1990s has led to a rising share of young adults with a higher education qualification. However, student enrolment has declined significantly in the past decade, and the country has found it difficult to make its higher education system attractive to domestic and international students. While Slovak graduates do better in the labour market than their counterparts without a higher education qualification, they often experience a mismatch between their qualifications and labour market needs. Research performance remains low compared to neighbouring countries, and many institutions are weakly connected to their external environment.

Slovak policy makers have outlined ambitious goals for higher education and initiated policy reforms in recent years, most notably in quality assurance. Nonetheless, Slovak higher education stakeholders have not reached broad agreement on the problems their higher education system faces, its causes, and the actions that should be taken to improve its performance. As a result, work remains to be done to carefully identify, design and implement reforms that can significantly change higher education practices and outcomes, such as governance and funding reforms.

The project “Improving Higher Education in the Slovak Republic” offers an international perspective on the performance of the Slovak higher education system and provides an action plan focused on governance and funding reforms, placing special emphasis on implementation planning. The project unfolded in parallel with new policy plans for higher education – a proposed reform of the Act on Higher Education that would make changes to institutional governance and new funding proposed in the national recovery and resilience plan submitted to the European Commission – and seeks to provide actionable input that can inform these plans.

The project builds on detailed comparative analysis, recent studies of higher education in the Slovak Republic conducted by national and international organisations, and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Engagement included interviews and group discussions with higher education stakeholders and an international peer-learning webinar on higher education governance and funding. Regular meetings were also held with a working group of policy makers, including, in particular, representatives from the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, the Institute for Educational Policies and the Research Agency.

The project is a collaboration between the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, the Institute for Strategies and Analysis in the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic and the OECD’s Directorate for Education and Skills.



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