

Education and skills

IMPROVING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR MORE EQUITY AND GROWTH

- ▶ A retirement wave among highly-skilled migrants risks substantially exacerbating Israel's skill shortages.
- ▶ Raising activity rates among Arab Israeli and Haredi populations can help avoid skills shortages.
- ▶ This can be achieved through enhanced vocational education, which is guided by partnership with industry, puts strong emphasis on work-based learning and provides clear pathways to general education and tertiary vocational programmes.

What's the issue?

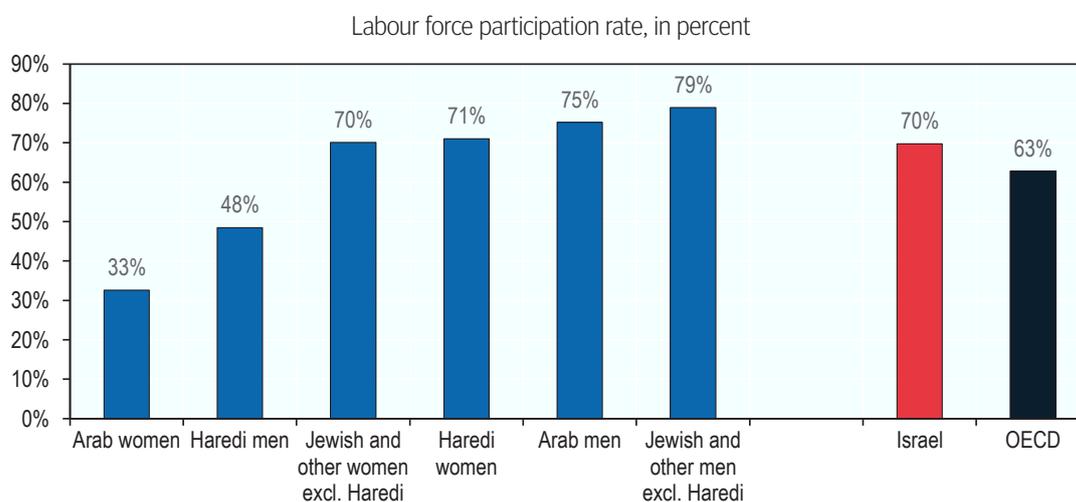
The 2014 OECD Skills beyond School review highlighted that Israel's economy is threatened by a series of serious skills challenges arising from a wave of retirements among highly-skilled migrants from the former Soviet Union, an increasingly youthful workforce, and low skill and economic activity rates among the fastest growing segments of the population, the Arab Israeli and Haredi communities.

To address this issue the authorities have, since 2008, increased the resources of the education system and engaged in a serious reform process. Additional resources have been targeted at the underprivileged; for example, class sizes in Arab schools were reduced. PISA results improved between 2006 and 2012, with

national tests showing that Arab-speaking students are now progressing faster than their Hebrew-speaking counterparts. By contrast, the level of formal education of young Haredi has not increased and is now lower than that of their elders. Moreover, despite the increase in education spending, average public spending per student remains low by OECD standards.

The country's skills challenges could be addressed through high quality vocational education and training (VET) programmes – those that put a strong emphasis on work-based learning, such as apprenticeships, and permit learners in vocational programmes to follow clear pathways to general education programmes and tertiary vocational programmes. On average in the OECD, the employment rate among 25-34 year-olds with

Labour force participation varies considerably between population sub-groups



Source: Adapted from CBS (2012), Social Survey, <http://surveys.cbs.gov.il/Survey/surveyE.htm> and OECD (2013a), OECD.Stat website, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

a vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary qualification is 11 percentage points higher than that among individuals with a general upper secondary education as their highest qualification (78% compared with 67%).

In Israel, there is currently less vocational provision than in many other OECD countries. Funding in the sector is low, and student take-up of vocational programmes is, while comparable to the OECD average, lower than in several countries with strong VET systems. Different parts of the VET system are subject to uncoordinated governance systems, making the system difficult to navigate for students and inhibiting social partner engagement. And work-based learning is little used within Israel's vocational system, despite all its benefits. Moreover, graduates of vocational tracks at the upper secondary level often face obstacles in entering postsecondary programmes: when entering university, many graduates of practical engineering programmes fail to receive adequate recognition for their practical qualifications. This both damages the status of these vocational tracks and reduces the proportion of those with tertiary qualifications in the workforce.

Haredi schools currently offer far fewer technological courses than other schools (5% of government-religious schools were in vocational or technological tracks in 2010) and anecdotal evidence seems to show that their participation in VET provision is very limited. The Arab Israeli population has only limited access to postsecondary education, including vocational programmes. While 40% of students in those upper secondary VET programmes administered by the Ministry of Economy are Arab, only 7% of students in practical engineering and technician programmes are Arab Israelis.

Why is this important for Israel?

Haredi and Arab Israelis face a particularly high risk of poverty because of their lower educational attainment as well as the particularly weak labour market participation of Haredi men and Arab Israeli women (see Figure). The Haredi and Arab-Israeli communities are together projected to account for half the population by 2060, and their integration into society and the workplace will therefore become increasingly important. Apart from strengthening equity and social inclusion, improving the educational outcomes of these population groups is important for Israel to maintain its competitive edge.

What should policy makers do?

- ▶ Strengthen the links between schools and the labour market through the expansion of VET programmes, increased access to work-based learning and better employment services.
- ▶ Make VET more attractive by developing more pathways between vocational and general education.
- ▶ Facilitate upper secondary VET graduates' access to further learning opportunities, including tertiary VET.
- ▶ Enhance access to university courses for graduates of practical engineering programmes.
- ▶ Promote VET programmes amongst the Haredi and Arab Israeli populations.



Further reading

OECD (2015), *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/publications/education-policy-outlook-2015-9789264225442-en.htm>

OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>

OECD (2014), *OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training: A Skills beyond School Review of Israel*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/israel/ASkillsBeyondSchoolReviewOfIsrael.pdf>