Education is a top priority; focus is on quality of education, inclusiveness, and vocational training

South Korea is the seventh-largest donor country to global education, spending US$278 million on education official development assistance (ODA) in 2016 (the latest year for which complete data is available). Education is a top priority of South Korea’s development portfolio: In 2016, the country spent 11% of its total ODA on education, ranking sixth among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) donor countries in relative terms. This is well above the average spent on education by other donor countries (8%). If costs of scholarships and other costs of students from partner countries studying in South Korea are excluded, education ODA decreases to US$240 million in 2016. These costs are reportable as ODA but do not constitute cross-border financial flows.

South Korea considers education a key sector through which it can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education is one of five priorities of South Korea’s 2019 International Development Cooperation Plan of Action, with a focus on information and communication technology-based education systems. Education featured prominently in South Korea’s four flagship initiatives launched in 2016. Three of the four initiatives had a focus on education: ‘Better Life for Girls’ (US$200 million), focusing on girls’ education and health; ‘Science, Technology and Innovation for Better Life’ (US$200 million); and ‘Better Education for Africa’s Rise’ (US$100 million). Although the initiatives themselves were discontinued during the presidential impeachment in 2017 and the election of a new government, the education budget has been protected and much of the committed funding allocated to other government programs with an education focus. Gender equality, linked to girls’ education, remains a cross-cutting issue of South Korea’s development policy.

South Korea’s bilateral education focuses on support for post-secondary education

South Korea’s bilateral education ODA was US$221 million in 2017, slightly down from US$253 million in 2016. Looking ahead, education ODA, as one of South Korea’s priority sectors, could be expected to increase moderately in line with the overall expectations for a growing ODA budget.

Further information: ‘basic’ and ‘general’ education

In this profile, ‘basic education’ refers to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) sector code ‘basic education’ (112), which includes primary education, basic skills for youths and adults, and early childhood education. ‘General education’ refers to the OECD CRS sector code ‘education, level unspecified’, which includes education policy and administrative management, education facilities and training, teacher training, and educational research.

Most bilateral funding is allocated to ‘post-secondary education’, which accounted for 41% of bilateral ODA in 2017 and includes costs of hosting international students in South Korea (US$43 million in 2017). These costs are reported as ODA but do not constitute cross-border financial flows. The next largest area to receive funding in 2017 was vocational training, which accounted for 19% of bilateral ODA to education. Smaller shares were spent on ‘basic education’ (18%) and ‘secondary education’ (12%).

This funding pattern is in line with South Korea’s priorities for education as outlined in ‘KOICA’s education midterm strategy 2016-2020’. The strategy envisions “inclusive development through quality education”, and its mission is “to ensure rights to education for all by strengthening education systems in partner countries”. The strategy outlines three strategic objectives which are linked to the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’):

1. Quality education and learning achievement;
2. Inclusive education for disadvantaged groups;
3. Improving skills and technology for work by identifying skill shortages in local labor markets.

South Korea’s bilateral education ODA is focused on Asia: 37% of all bilateral ODA to education went to the region in 2017. 24% was invested in sub-Saharan Africa the same year. Education is a focus sector in 15 of the 24 priority countries of South Korea’s development assistance. Seven of these priority countries are in Africa; eight are in Asia.

Further information: ‘basic’ and ‘general’ education

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South Korea provides most multilateral education ODA to the World Bank

South Korea is not a major provider of multilateral ODA to education, spending only US$25 million in 2016 (the latest year for which complete data is available), representing 9% of its total education ODA that year. Most of this funding was channeled in the form of core contributions to the World Bank (69%) and the Asian Development Bank (19%). South Korea has increased its multilateral engagement in education since becoming a member of the OECD DAC. It joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in 2014. South Korea has budgeted to contribute KRW770 million (US$680,000) to GPE in 2019, and KRW824 million (US$730,000) in 2020. By the end of 2020, South Korea will have provided a total of KRW5.7 billion (US$5 million) to GPE.

South Korea held the 2015 World Education Forum in Incheon, South Korea, where stakeholders identified key elements of the ‘Education 2030: Framework for Action’, which laid out a vision for global education policy for the coming 15 years. A key outcome of the forum was that countries agreed on a goal of spending 4% to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) and/or 15% to 20% of total public expenditure on education in order to achieve the Education 2030 agenda.

MOFA’s Development Cooperation Bureau guides international education policy

MOFA drives the formulation of South Korea’s global education policy. Within MOFA, the Development Policy Bureau is responsible for developing policies (specifically the Development Policy Divisions within the Bureau). MOFA’s Multilateral Development Cooperation Division manages relations with multilateral education initiatives such as GPE. KOICA (overseen by MOFA) is responsible for the implementation of bilateral grants and other technical cooperation. The Korea Eximbank implements projects for the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MOEF), mainly in the form of ODA loans.
SOUTH KOREA’S ODA TO EDUCATION

US$ millions

KOREA’S BILATERAL ODA TO EDUCATION ACROSS SUB-SECTORS, 2017

Total: US$221 million

- General education: 9.9% (US$20m.)
- Secondary education: 12.2% (US$27m.)
- Basic education: 18.0% (US$40m.)
- Post-secondary education: 41.0% (US$91m.)
- Vocational training: 18.9% (US$42m.)
TOP 10 DAC DONORS TO EDUCATION, 2016
Total education ODA; US$ millions; in 2017 prices; incl. bilateral and multilateral funding

Germany: 2,294
United States: 1,900
United Kingdom: 1,871
France: 1,357
Japan: 737
Norway: 436
Korea: 278
Canada: 274
Australia: 273
Italy: 234

OECD CRS and imputed multilateral contributions to the education sector (DAC Secretariat estimates).

TOP 10 DAC DONORS TO EDUCATION, 2016
Education ODA as % of total ODA

New Zealand: 15.7
Portugal: 14.8
Luxembourg: 14.3
Hungary: 12.9
Slovenia: 12
Korea: 11.4
France: 11.2
Austria: 11
Poland: 9.3
Norway: 9.3

OECD CRS and imputed multilateral contributions to the education sector (DAC Secretariat estimates).