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Trends in freedom of education worldwide: analysis of its enablers and relationship with social mobility and equity

EDUCATION AND FAMILY STUDIES | REPORT 04

January 2025

Authors

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Educational Projects Director CEU-CEFAS

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Executive summary

Freedom of education must be understood as an effective plurality of educational offerings and a system of public funding that allows access to non-governmental schools (NGS)¹ by families, regardless of their income level. It is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed in every country to respect human rights. This study outlines the trends in educational freedom across different countries, analyzes its potential drivers, and quantifies the relationship between educational freedom and various economic, social, and educational indicators. This report includes a total of 156 countries, which is 74 more than the first report prepared in 2023 by CEU-CEFAS and OIDEL (Sanz-Magallón & Zuruga, 2023).

Typology of countries according to their degree of freedom of education

The second analysis of this report consisted of grouping the 156 countries of the OIDEL Freedom of Education Index (FEI) into four categories with homogeneous values of this metric and attempting to characterize each of the clusters. Although presenting different features, the degree of educational freedom within the group increases as the value of variables such as per capita income, human development, income distribution, economic freedom, life satisfaction, and social mobility increases.

There is also a higher performance in characteristics of the educational system as educational freedom increases, both in terms of the indicators representing the overall learning level of students in the PISA tests, as well as the indicators representing equality of opportunities (equity) and social segregation in schools.

¹ Non-governmental schools (NGS) are educational institutions that are not directly administered by the State. These may include:

- Private schools: Primarily funded by private resources, such as student tuition fees or donations.
- Charter or grant-aided schools: Partially funded by the government but managed by private entities.
- Faith-based schools: Administered by religious institutions.
- Community or independent schools: Established and managed by civil organizations or local communities.

Evolution of educational freedom in the 21st century

The degree of educational freedom tended to increase since the beginning of the 21st century in all regions. Between 2002 and 2023, the overall FEI score has increased of 6.7%, with notably an important increase in Africa (21.2%). A process of convergence can be seen, as the countries that initially had a lower level are those that to a greater extent have increased their FEI score in the 21 years between 2002 and 2023. However, during the 2016-2023 period, the increase has been less strong, and some regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific have seen a decrease in the FEI score.

Freedom of education and its relation to other basic freedoms

A high correlation can be observed when comparing educational freedom with other basic freedoms in all countries and regions. Generally, the states of most freedoms in the world are at an acceptable level. However, when it comes to freedom of education, no regions show desirable values. In those regions where educational freedom is most established (Europe and North America), the average levels are far from what would be optimal, considering as such the value of Group 4, made up of Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Chile. Consequently, in terms of freedom of education, there is a notorious potential for improvement in all regions of the world, and especially in Arab States and Africa, even though Africa presented a strong improvement in the last twenty years.

Correlations can also be distinguished between basic freedoms and individual indicators of the FEI. For instance, FEI Indicator 1 (legal possibility to establish and manage NGS) and religious freedom and freedom to form political parties presented a strong correlation. Indicator 3 (primary school enrollment rate) is also strongly linked with economic freedom and the functioning of the rule of law. Indicator 2 (public funding of NGS) is equally closely related to all basic freedoms while Indicator 4 (share of NGS) shows no association with the other freedom variables.

Freedom of education, performance of the education system, and equity

Some FEI indicators, especially Indicator 2, show a positive association with the school performance of countries in the PISA-2022 tests, although this relationship is lost when including certain control variables, such as the average economic level of the country, or the geographic region to which it belongs. Previous studies showed a better performance of the educational system associated with private and charter schools, using techniques that allow establishing causal relationships, which is manifested not only in the PISA competencies (mathematics, reading, science) but also in various aspects, including better foreign language learning.

Similarly, an association between FEI's Indicator 1, 2 and 4, and certain variables representative of social segregation in schools is initially apparent but disappears when the per capita income level or geographic region is added to the equation. We thus must reject the hypothesis that freedom of education, as defined by the FEI, leads to greater segregation.

Finally, regarding equity, Indicator 2 shows relevant results when associated with income distribution and social mobility. This relationship remains, even after including control variables, such as per capita income and the geographic region to which the country belongs. In this sense, the idea that freedom of education increases inequalities must not only be rejected but the inverse association must be established. On immigration, we find that FEI is negatively associated with a performance gap between students with an immigrant background and those without, therefore meaning that a greater FEI does not create inequality between students from different backgrounds.

Conclusions

Based on this report and the extensive literature on the superior performance of non-state schools in most countries, we can conclude that there are advantages to moving towards greater educational freedom. Freedom of education respects the right of parents to choose the type of education for their children. Moreover, it achieves greater equity and reduces economic inequalities, boosting the performance of the education system and improving its efficiency.

The state of freedom of education in the world

1.1. What do we mean by freedom of education?

In this study, the Freedom of Education Index (FEI), provided by OIDEI in its 2002 and 2016 editions, represents a measurement of educational freedom. Four indicators construct this Index. First, **Indicator 1** shows the legal possibility of creating and managing non-governmental schools (NGS). For 2002, it only considered the legality of this right, being a variable with values of 100 (legal recognition) or 0 (otherwise). For the following edition, this indicator had 3 different sub-indicators: legal possibility of creating and managing NGS (80 points out of 100); constitutional recognition of freedom of education (10 out of 100); and legal recognition of homeschooling (10 out of 100).

Indicator 2 reflects the public funding NGSs receive. This indicator is relevant since the lack of government funding for NGSs makes it difficult for lower-income families to access non-state institutions. Comparing both editions, only the scoring system has changed, while the categories remained the same. **Indicator 3** corresponds to the Net Enrollment Rate in primary education. Finally, **Indicator 4** captures the percentage of students enrolled in NGS.

This report analyses the trends and relationships of the overall FEI and each of its four indicators with other variables since each one describes hugely different circumstances. While Indicator 1 is the legal basis for the existence of a non-governmental educational offer, Indicator 2 measures the population's access to these schools, which should be reflected in the values of Indicator 4.

1.2. Typology of countries according to the OIDEI Freedom of Education Index.

The hierarchical clustering technique classified the countries into relatively homogeneous groups according to their level of educational freedom. Four clusters were obtained, as shown in Table 1, with the following characteristics:

- **Group 1** consists of the seven countries with the least educational freedom, whose average FEI value for 2023 is only 20.3. Two are African (Eritrea and Somalia), two are from Asia (Afghanistan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), one Arab (Saudi Arabia), one from Latin America and the Caribbean (Cuba) and one from Europe (North Macedonia).

- **Group 2** is the largest group, with 99 countries, concentrated in Africa (34% of the total), Asia and the Pacific (22%) Latin America and the Caribbean (28.6% of the total), and the rest of the countries shared between Europe and North America, Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean (app. 15% each). The average OIDEI index is 51.1. The country with the lowest FEI value in this group is Liberia (38.4), and the highest is Portugal (58.6).
- **Group 3** mostly comprises European and North American countries (62.2%), including Spain, with an average FEI value of 70.2. Ecuador is the country in the group with the lowest index value (59.0) and Finland with the highest (75.3). The main difference between this cluster and group 2 is still indicator 2 (public funding of NGS), with an average of 68.2, compared to 21.8 in group 2.
- Finally, the **Group 4** is mainly composed of European countries (Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Still, one country of Latin America and the Caribbean (Chile) is also included. Indicator 2 is significantly higher in this group than in group 3 with an average of 94, compared to 68.2 in the previous group.

Group	N° countries	Countries	FEI 2023							
			Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4
1	7	<p>Asia and the Pacific: Afghanistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,</p> <p>Latin America and the Caribbean: Cuba,</p> <p>Africa: Eritrea, Somalia</p> <p>Europe and North America: North Macedonia,</p> <p>Arab States: Saudi Arabia,</p>	20.3	7.4	6.8	26.1	12.86	0	68.4	0.04
2	99	<p>Europe and North America: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine.</p> <p>Africa: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Arab States: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.</p> <p>Asia and the Pacific: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.</p> <p>Latin America and the Caribbean: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela.</p>	51.1	4.8	38.4	58.6	90.2	21.8	88.4	0.2
3	45	<p>Europe and North America: Andorra, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United States.</p> <p>Africa: Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, Uganda.</p> <p>Arab States: Lebanon.</p> <p>Asia and the Pacific: Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand.</p> <p>Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru.</p>	66.6	3.6	59.0	75.3	92.2	68.2	96.9	0.1
4	5	<p>Europe and North America: Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Latin America and the Caribbean: Chile.</p>	88.6	8.3	78.6	99.9	100	94	99.2	0.1
Total	156		55.4	12.7	6.8	99.9	87.6	36.5	90.3	0.2

Table 1: Cluster based on Freedom of Education Index 2023 and countries that compose them. Mean, minimum, and maximum values.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

Group level of educational freedom		Region					Total
		Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe and North America	Latin America and the Caribbean	
1	Number of countries	2	1	2	1	1	7
	%	28.6	14.3	28.6	14.3	14.3	100.0
2	Number of countries	34	14	22	15	15	99
	%	34.3	14.1	22.2	15.2	15.2	100.0
3	Number of countries	5	1	6	28	5	45
	%	11.1	2.2	13.3	62.2	11.1	100.0
4	Number of countries	0	0	0	4	1	4
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	100.0
Total	Number of countries	41	16	30	48	21	156
	%	26.3	10.2	19.2	30.8	13.5	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of clusters by region.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

The following tables show the characteristics of each group in different variables representative of their level of economic development (per capita income and human development index), degree of economic freedom, personal income distribution, the level of satisfaction declared by the population and the social mobility². A remarkably close relationship can be distinguished between the level of educational freedom and the above indicators representing the level of progress, material well-being, and performance of the educational system. Countries with higher educational freedom also display more equity in education.

The biggest difference between the first and the last cluster is found in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which is 533.2% higher in cluster 4. In the human development index, the difference is 50%, in the Gini index -5.7%, and -12.7% regarding the Percentage of income corresponding to the highest 10% of the population. We can observe a notable difference of 57.3% in the degree of economic freedom. The satisfaction with their lives declared by the population is also higher as the group has a higher level of educational freedom, and the same happens with the social mobility indicator.

² Social mobility refers to a person's ability to move between social groups and statuses in a society. The World's Economic Forum's index measures five key metrics (education, access to technology, healthcare, social protection and employment opportunities) and ranges from 0 to 100, with 100 being the best score.

Variable	Group according to educational freedom	Average	Difference between group 1 and 4	Variable	Group according to educational freedom	Average	Difference between group 1 and 4
GDP per capita	1	11,639.4	533.2%	Gini Index	1	33.5	-5.7%
	2	17,008.4			2	37.2	
	3	48,782.5			3	33.5	
	4	73,697			4	31.6	
	Total	27750			Total	35.5	
H.D.I.	1	0.62	50%	Percentage of income corresponding to the highest 10% of the population	1	n.a.(a)	-12.7% (b)
	2	0.67			2	29.1	
	3	0.84			3	25.9	
	4	0.93			4	25.4	
	Total	0.72			Total	27.7	
Economic freedom	1	6.45	20.8%	Satisfaction with life	1	39.78	88.6%
	2	6.31			2	43.76	
	3	7.3			3	63.81	
	4	7.79			4	75.01	
	Total	6.66			Total	50.75	
Social Mobility	1	n.a.(a)	45.6%				
	2	51.5					
	3	71.3					
	4	75					
	Total	61.9					

Table 3: Average values of economic and social variables for each cluster and differences of the extremes.

(a) Data is not available.

(b) Comparison is made between Group 4 and Group 2.

Source: Own elaboration with different sources..

Looking at some features of the educational system, such as its results and relation with wealth, we see that the clusters improve and become more equitable as the level of educational freedom increases. This is the case with the index of social segregation of students in schools, which decreases as the level of educational freedom increases (the social segregation index average of group 4 is 2.4% lower than that of group 2). Regarding test results, the average math, reading, and science tests of PISA 2022 are better among countries with greater educational freedom (+25.78% difference between group 4 and group 1). Lastly, the immigration gap³ is declining as the degree of educational freedom increases, with a decrease of 55.13% between group 2 and group 4.

³ The immigration gap variable measures the difference in the PISA scores between students with an immigrant background and those without. The difference was then put in absolute value, as the ideal value for this variable is 0.

Variable	Group according to educational freedom	Average	Difference between group 2 and group 4
Social segregation index (a)	1	n.a. (b)	-2.4% (c)
	2	0.163	
	3	0.148	
	4	0.159	
	Total	0.154	
PISA 2022 results (math, reading, science)	1	381.45	25.78%
	2	408.47	
	3	467.4	
	4	479.79	
	Total	438.84	
Immigration Gap	1	n.a. (b)	-55.13% (c)
	2	24.16	
	3	14.64	
	4	10.84	
	Total	16.92	

Table 4: Values of education system indicators for each cluster and differences of the extremes.

(a) The social segregation index measures whether the diversity of students within schools reflects the diversity of students at the country/economy level. The index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 corresponds to no segregation and 1 to total segregation.

(b) Data is not available.

(c) Comparison is made between Group 4 and Group 2.

Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

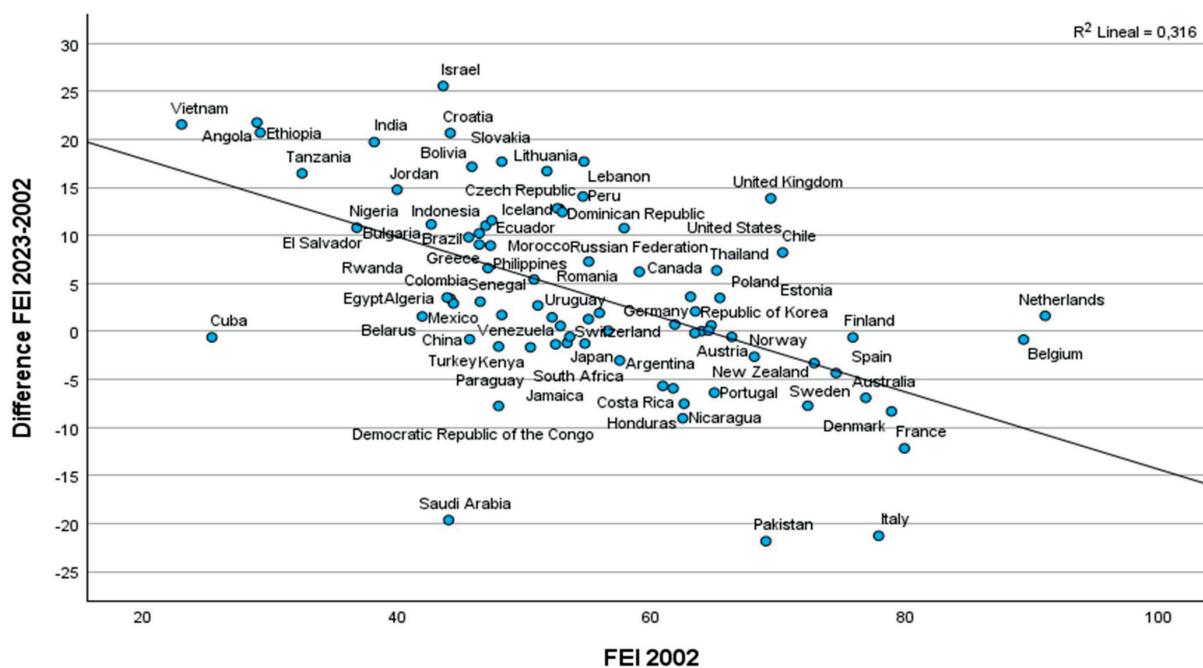
1.3. Evolution of the educational freedom since 2002

Attending to the values of the OIDEL freedom of education index, we observe a moderate advance in educational freedom in the world in recent years, going from a level of 55.2 in 2002 to 58.9 in 2016 –see Table 5–. All regions advanced. The region with the highest increase was Africa, with a growth of 21.2%, followed by North America (+11.9%). Europe only slightly increased (+0.9%), but remains one of the best-performing regions. Despite its remarkable progress, it should be noted that Africa is still far behind Europe and North America, and slightly behind Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean in 2023.

Region	2002					2023					Var. FEI 2023/02 (%)
	FEI	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4	FEI	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4	
Africa	41.9	84.4	13.3	66.7	23.07	49.3	88.9	30	74.7	19.17	17.66
Arab States	45.7	83.3	15	77.8	15.27	50.5	76.7	20	95.6	10	4.8
Asia and the Pacific	54.9	80	41.3	88.7	12.1	56.9	89.3	36.7	95.3	8.93	3.6
Europe	62.6	91.3	53.7	94.7	17.62	65.8	94	61.3	97.5	14.79	5.11
North America	60.5	95	45	95	14.54	67.7	100	70	94.8	11	11.9
Ibero-America and the Caribbean	55.2	85.8	26.8	89.3	7.35	58.9	87.4	34.7	93.4	8	5.3
World	55.2	86.7	37.5	88	11	58.9	89.9	44.2	93.4	14.54	6.7
Standard dis.	13.58	15.57	34.26	14.73	13.81	7.45	5.38	20.99	6.56	6.14	7.44

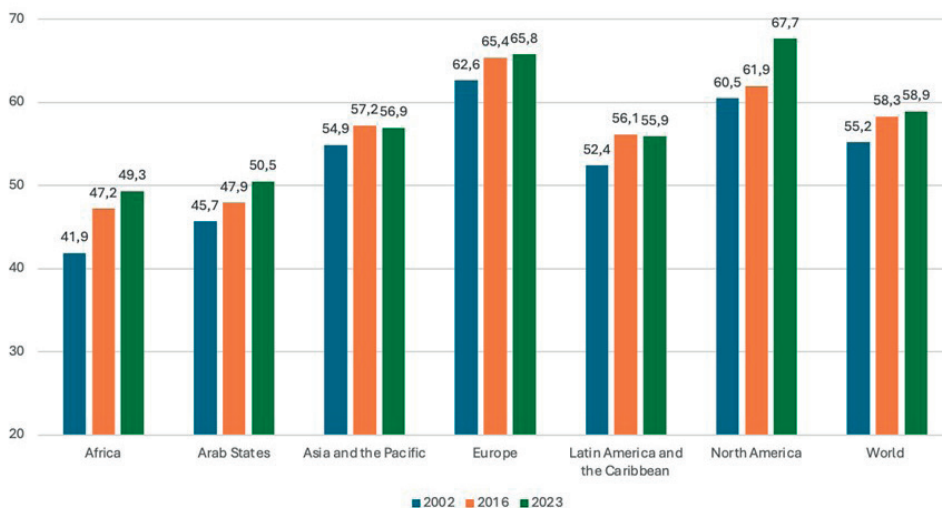
Table 5: Evolution of the average Freedom of Education Index and its indicators (2002-2023).
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

Many of the countries that have made the greatest progress in educational freedom, such as Vietnam, Angola, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and India, are those that had lower FEI values in 2002 compared to the rest of the countries. However, there are exceptions. Countries such as Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Paraguay, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, have not progressed and have even reduced their degree of educational freedom, despite the low starting level.



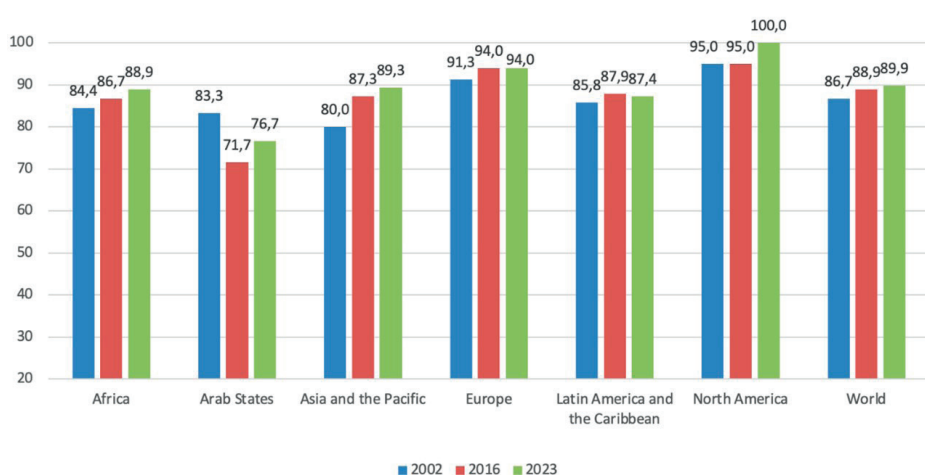
Graph 1: Change in Freedom of Education Index between 2002 and 2023 and the level of the indicator in 2002.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

It is worth studying the evolution of the Freedom of Education Index and each of its component indicators. Graph 2 shows the evolution of the overall Freedom of Education Index for the different regions. From 2002 to 2023, we can observe a positive trend in the scores of Freedom of Education, with an increase in all the areas in the world. Africa shows the largest gradual improvement, from 41.9 in 2002 to 49.3 in 2023. Europe only slightly improved. Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean's scores, while improving between 2002 and 2016, have decreased between 2016 and 2023.



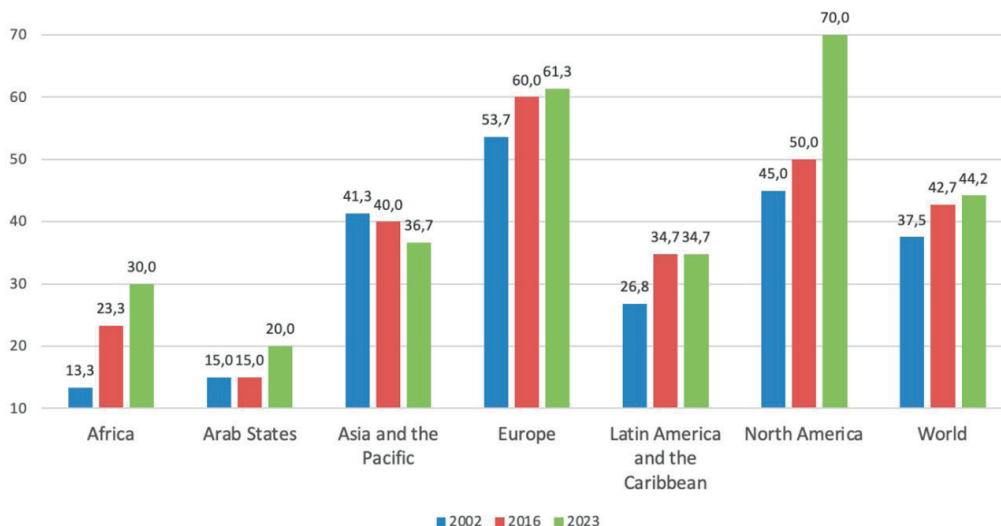
Graph 2: Evolution of Freedom of Education Index from 2002 to 2023.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

Graph 3 displays the evolution of Indicator 1 (legal possibility of creating and managing NGS) through the years. The mean for indicator 1 has overall increased, except for the Arab States, which went from 83.3 in 2002 to 76.7 in 2023. However, it is worth noticing that the mean for Indicator 1 in the Arab States has increased from 2016 to 2023. In 2023, North America obtained the perfect score of 100 for Indicator 1.



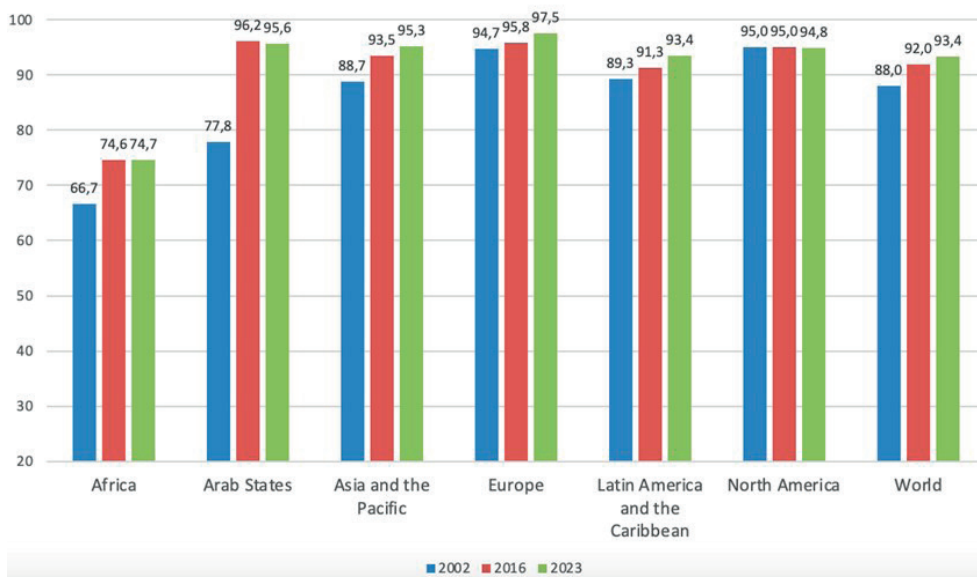
Graph 3: Evolution of Indicator 1 (legal possibility of creating and managing NGS) from 2002 to 2023.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

Graph 4 below presents the evolution of Indicator 2 (public funding for NGS) from 2002 to 2023. Asia and the Pacific have seen their overall scores decrease gradually from 2002 to 2023, while all other regions have improved or at least stayed the same. North America shows an impressive improvement, from 45 in 2002 to 70 in 2023.



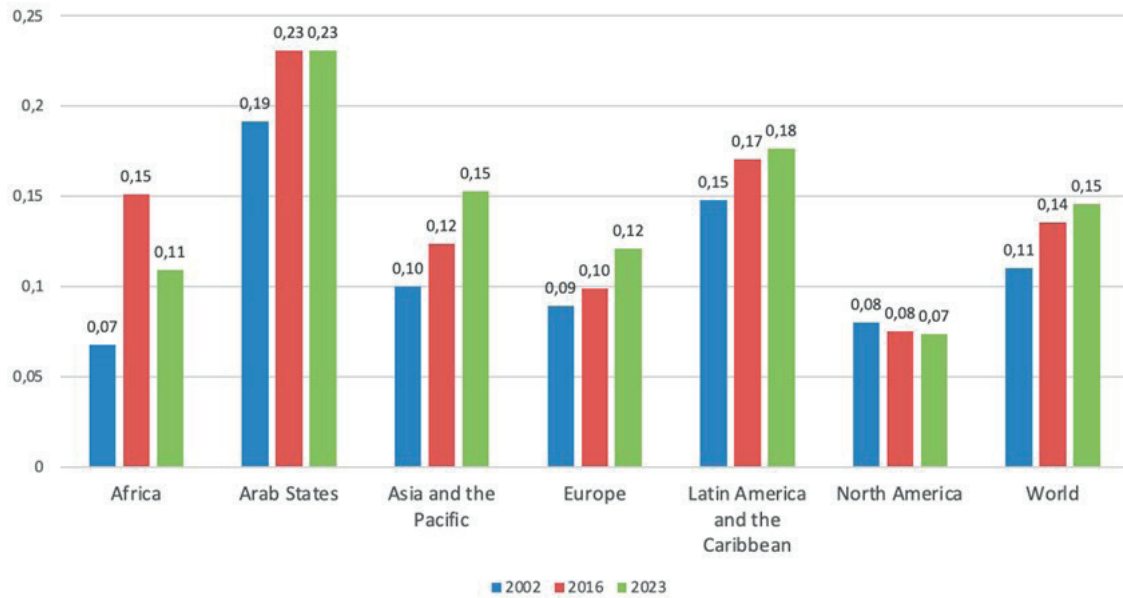
Graph 4: Evolution of Indicator 2 (public funding for NGS) from 2002 to 2023.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

Graph 5 shows the evolution of Indicator 3 (net enrollment in primary education). Since 2002, the values have tended to increase, rising from 88 in 2002 to 93.4 in 2023, with notable increases in Africa, Asia, and the Arab States.



Graph 5: Evolution of Indicator 3 from 2002 to 2023.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

Finally, Graph 6 displays the evolution of Indicator 4 (percentage of students enrolled in NGS). From 2002, all regions have improved for this Indicator, except North America, which has slightly deteriorated. The biggest increase is seen in Asia and the Pacific. Africa, which has improved a lot between 2002 and 2016, has however decreased a lot between 2016 and 2022.



Graph 6: Evolution of Indicator 4 (percentage of students enrolled in NGS) from 2002 to 2023.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL data.

1.4 The state of the different freedoms according to regions of the world

This section analyzes the levels of the diverse types of liberties (economic, political, and educational) in the different regions of the world, which will make it possible to identify the extent to which some geographical areas have a greater or lesser level of freedom, and according to which liberty is considered.

Economic freedom can be extracted from The Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, which measures on scales from 0 to 100, obtaining an average of the numerous variables grouped into four sections:

- Rule of law (property rights, governmental integrity, judicial effectiveness)
- Size of government (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health)
- Regulatory efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom)
- Open markets (freedom of trade, freedom of investment, financial freedom)

The Human Freedom Index, published by the Fraser Institute, takes into consideration religious freedom, freedom to form political parties, and freedom of expression and communication. This composite index is a measure of freedom understood as the absence of coercive constraint and uses different qualitative options to quantify each aspect of fundamental freedoms.

Regarding religious freedom, the Fraser Institute looks at two aspects. One, the right to practice and choose a religion and to convert peacefully, changing religion, also analyzing the extent to which individuals or groups have freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Two, the repression of religious organizations by the government.

The analysis of freedom to form and participate in political parties considers barriers to parties, bans on organizations, and the autonomy of opposition parties. Concerning freedom of expression and communication, the Fraser Institute assesses direct attacks on the press, press prisoners, freedom of cultural and academic expression, harassment of journalists, government and internet censorship efforts, and self-censorship.

North America and Europe have the highest freedom average values, while the Arab countries are at the opposite extreme. If we look at the world average level of each type of liberty, freedom of education has the second least satisfactory general levels, after the rule of law, with no region reaching a high value. Religious freedom and freedom to form political parties are on the contrary pole since they are well established in most regions.

	Freedom of education	Economic Freedom	Rule of Law	Religious Freedom	Freedom of expression and information	Freedom to form political parties	Mean
Africa	✘ 5.08	✘ 5.95	✘ 4.2	⚠ 7.86	✘ 5.56	✔ 8.22	⚠ 6.15
Arab States	✘ 4.79	✘ 5.91	✘ 4.15	✘ 4.15	✘ 3.35	✘ 5.1	✘ 4.59
Asia and the Pacific	✘ 5.31	⚠ 6.69	✘ 4.74	⚠ 6.33	✘ 5.26	⚠ 7.15	✘ 5.92
Europe	⚠ 6.32	⚠ 7.43	⚠ 6.59	✔ 8.31	⚠ 7.57	✔ 9.2	⚠ 7.82
North America	⚠ 6.77	✔ 8.06	⚠ 7.29	✔ 9.77	✔ 9.36	✔ 9.72	✔ 8.84
Latin America and the Caribbean	✘ 5.52	⚠ 6.7	✘ 4.24	✔ 8.81	⚠ 6.92	✔ 9.01	⚠ 6.87
World	✘ 5.54	⚠ 6.66	✘ 5.07	⚠ 7.48	⚠ 6.12	✔ 8.12	⚠ 6.5

Table 6: The state of freedom in its different dimensions around the world.
Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and Fraser Institute (Human Freedom Index).

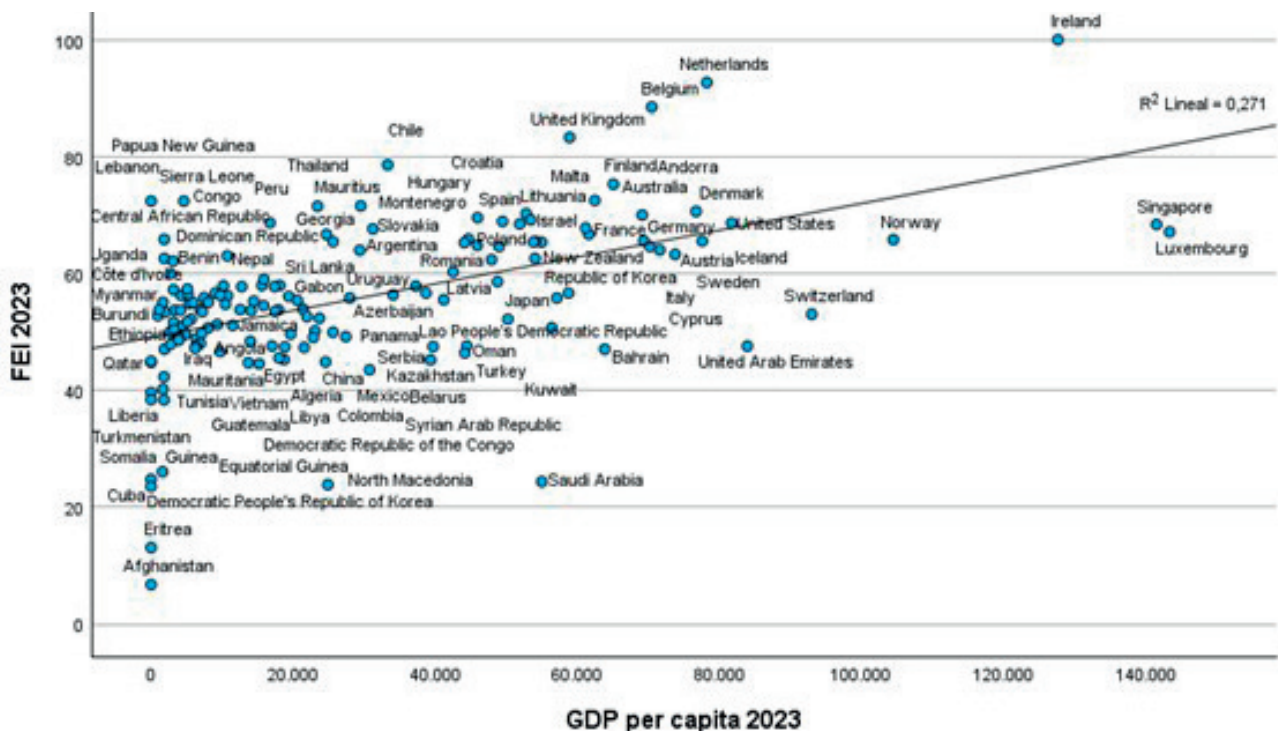
Explaining the different levels of freedom of education by country

2.1 Relationship between FEI and various indicators

This section studies the relationship between educational freedom and the different elements that can influence it. The analysis of the main representative indicators of political, economic, and religious freedom aims to understand which characteristics are associated with the highest or lowest level of educational freedom among countries worldwide.

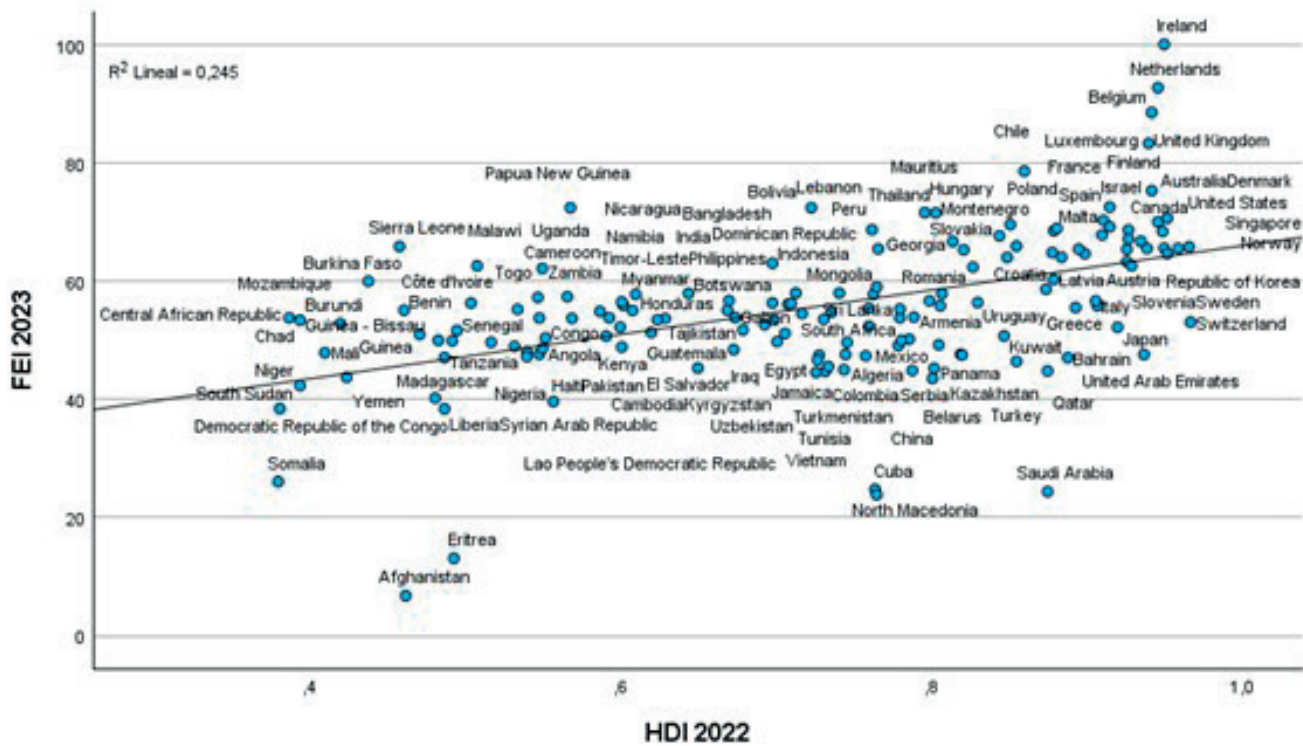
a) Level of development: GDP p.c., HDI

As can be seen in Graph 7, the positive trend between this indicator and the FEI is clear, with a lot of countries located on the regression line. However, countries are also widely scattered, and in particular countries with a low GDP per capita.



Graph 7: Ratio of Freedom of Education Index to GDP per capita.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and World Bank data.

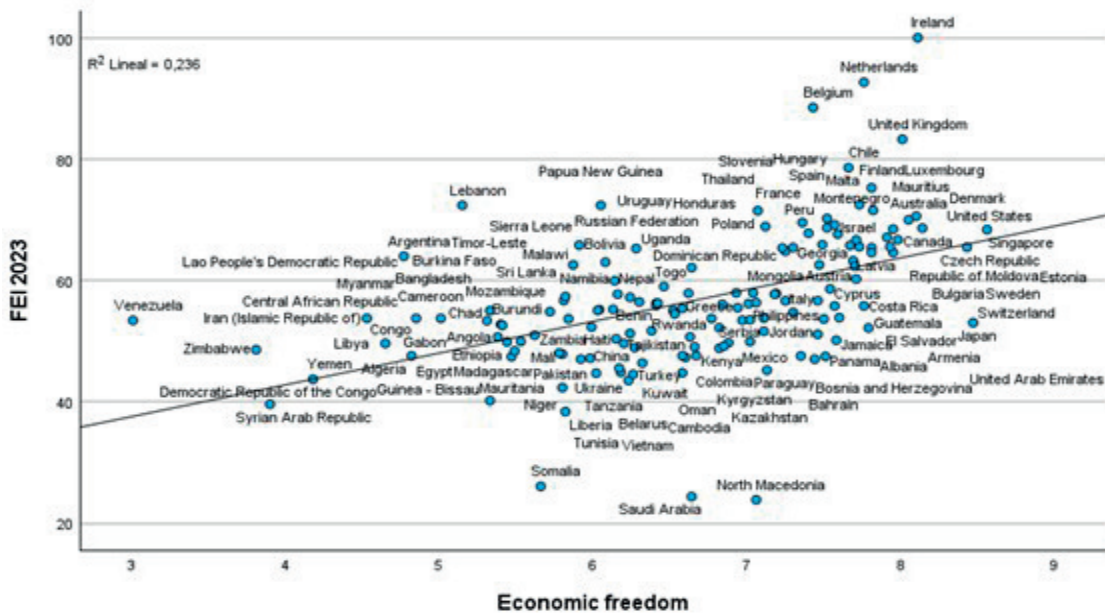
Concerning the relationship between the Human Development Index (HDI) and the FEI, in the initial stages of human development it shows a tendency to grow. However, it suffers a stagnation between 0.6 and 0.8 HDI values, with a decrease in freedom of education for numerous countries between 0.7 and 0.8 this being an element with no major impact on the index value. However, for the highest levels of HDI, starting around 0.9, freedom of education increases. Overall, Graph 8 shows the positive relationship between HDI and freedom of education.



Graph 8: Relationship between the Freedom of Education Index and the Human Development Index. Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and the United Nations.

b) Economic freedom

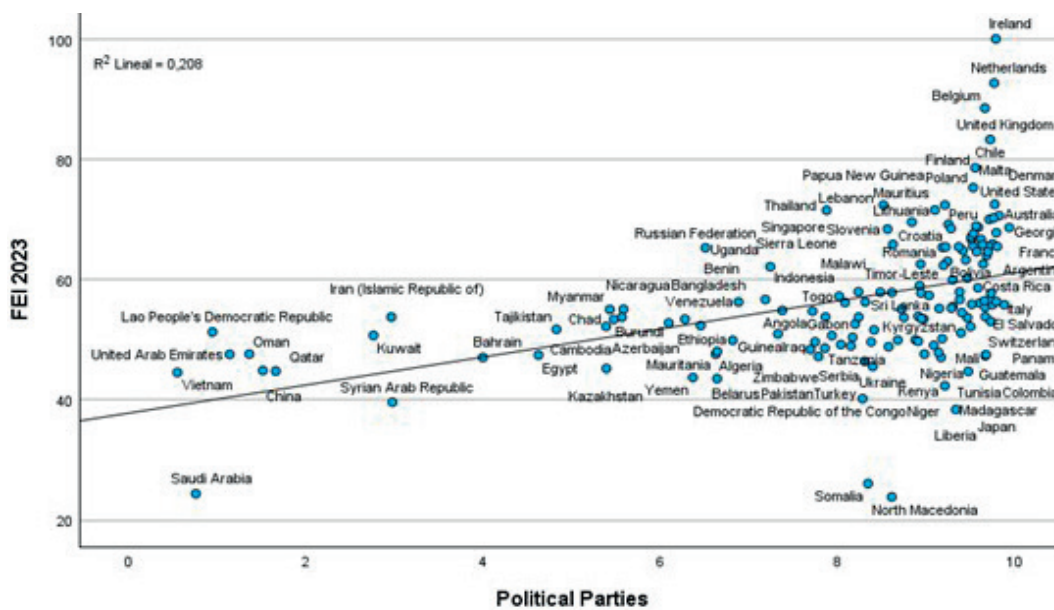
The relationship between economic and educational freedom is positive, with however a decline in educational freedom for countries displaying an economic freedom score between 5 and 8. Saudi Arabia, Somalia or North Macedonia are indeed much under the regression line. On the other hand, freedom of education tends to increase for countries with higher economic freedom, as showed by Ireland, Netherlands or Belgium.



Graph 9: Relationship between the Freedom of Education Index and Economic Freedom.
 Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and The Heritage Foundation.

c) Freedom to Create Political Parties

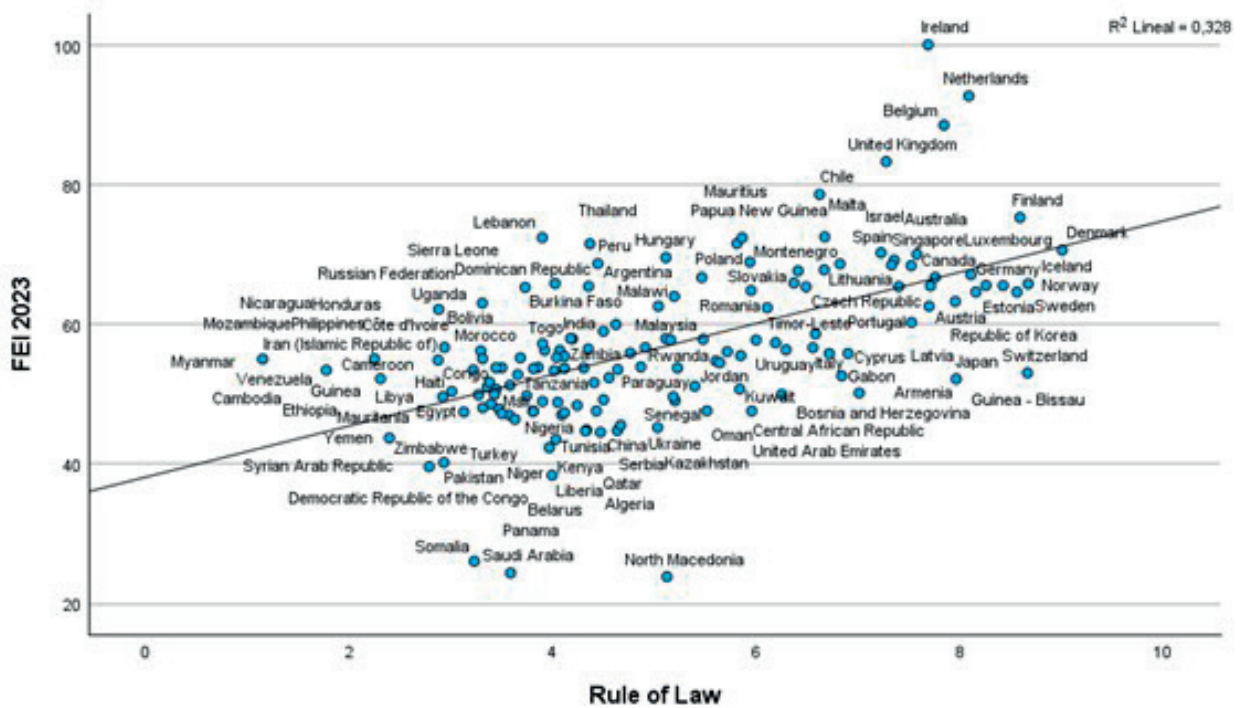
The relationship between educational freedom and the freedom to create political parties is overall positive. The political one is mostly spread throughout the world, with most countries being concentrated on the right side of the graph. Still, some countries show a high score for the freedom to create political parties but a poor score in freedom of education, like Somalia or North Macedonia. In contrast, less democratic countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, or Saudi Arabia, are outside the regression line and much further behind concerning this freedom.



Graph 10: Relationship between the Freedom of Education Index and the Freedom to Create Political Parties.
 Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and Fraser Institute.

d) Rule of Law

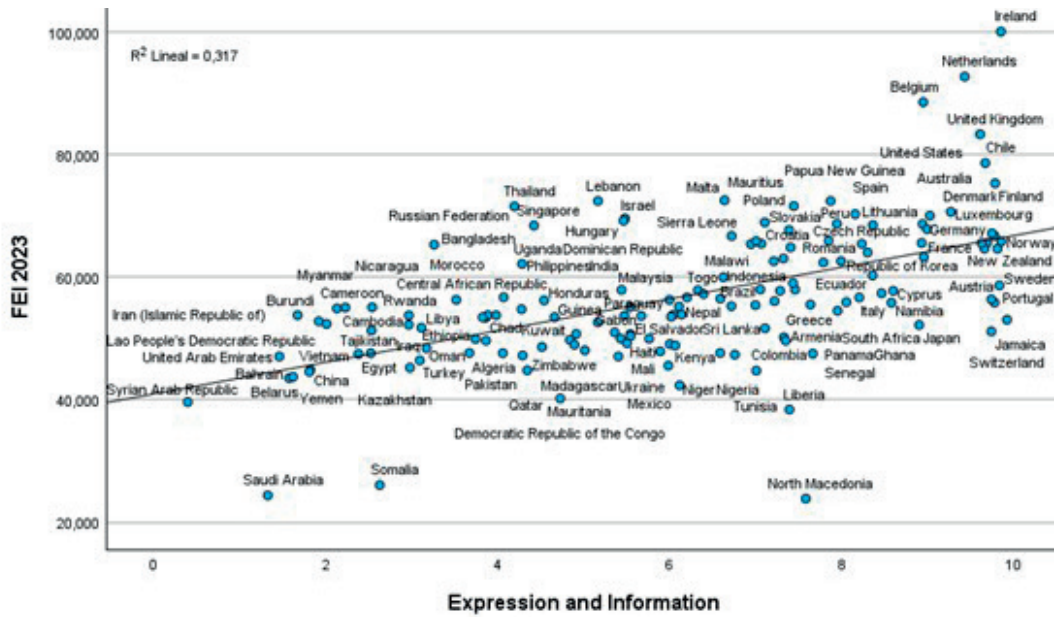
As for the rule of law, it is found to be better distributed and adjusted to the regression line ($R^2=0.328$). This shows that the freedom of education and the rule of law present a significant correlation coefficient and that both freedoms share a positive relationship. We have clear examples that fall out of the estimation, such as Ireland and the Netherlands, given their exceptional results on the freedom of education index. On the contrary, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and North Macedonia are well below their corresponding freedom of education score, considering their performance on the “Rule of Law” metric.



Graph 11: Relationship between the Freedom of Education Index and Rule of Law.
Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and Fraser Institute.

e) Freedom of Information and Expression

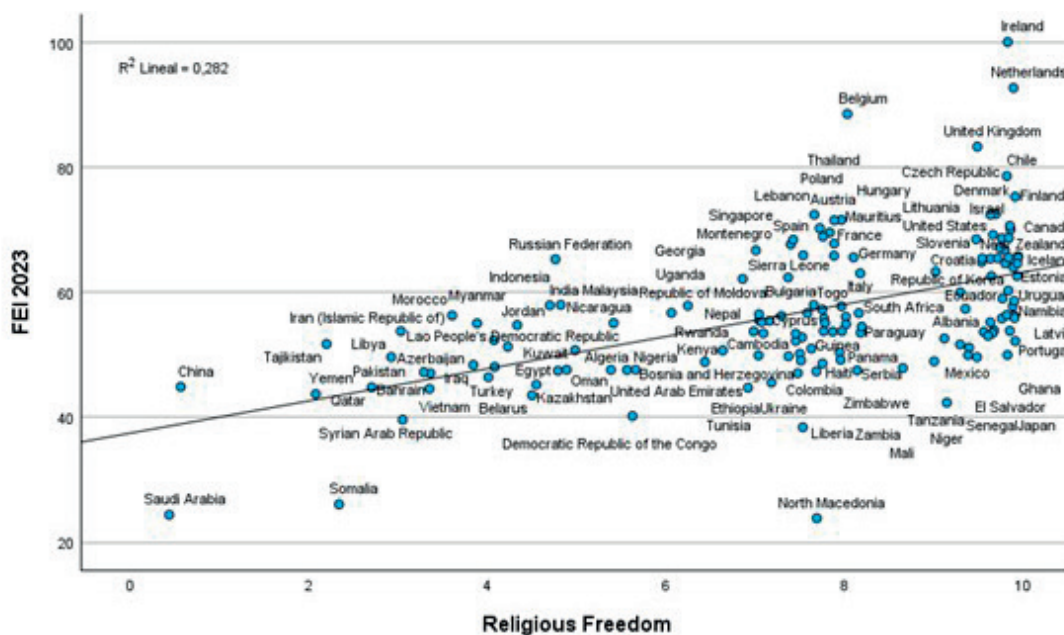
The positive relationship between freedom of education and freedom of expression and information can be seen in Graph 12. Countries such as Germany, Togo, Paraguay, and Tajikistan fit the regression line perfectly. However, other countries deviate considerably from their expected value, such as Ireland and the Netherlands, contrasting with Somalia, North Macedonia, and Saudi Arabia. These are the countries of greatest particularity in most of the joint analyses of freedoms, given their atypical performance on these indicators.



Graph 12: Relationship between the Freedom of Education Index and freedom of Expression and Information
 Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and Fraser Institute.

f) Religious Freedom

A positive relationship is also shown between religious and educational freedom. However, for countries with high religious freedom, freedom of education scores are quite diverse, with numerous cases well above or below the regression line. Saudi Arabia, as has been observed throughout this study, has inferior results for all freedoms, ranking last in most of them.



Graph 13: Relationship between Freedom of Education Index and Religious Freedom.
 Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and Fraser Institute.

2.2 Correlations between variables representative of Freedoms

The results of the bivariate correlations of the values of the above variables and the GDP p.c. of each country with the FEI and its components are shown in Table 7. The main conclusions we can draw are:

- The FEI is strongly correlated in the set of variables representative of the different forms of freedom, as well as with the level of economic development.
- The strongest association of FEI Indicator 1 (legal possibility to create and manage non-governmental schools) is observed with the proxy variable for the freedom to create political parties.
- The variable most strongly associated with Indicator 2 (public financing of NGS) is that representing the proper functioning of the rule of law, closely followed by the freedom of expression and information.
- Indicator 3, which describes the Net Enrollment Rate in primary education, is strongly associated with the level of GDP per capita in the country.
- Finally, Indicator 4 (quota corresponding to the NGS) does not show any significant association with the variables studied.

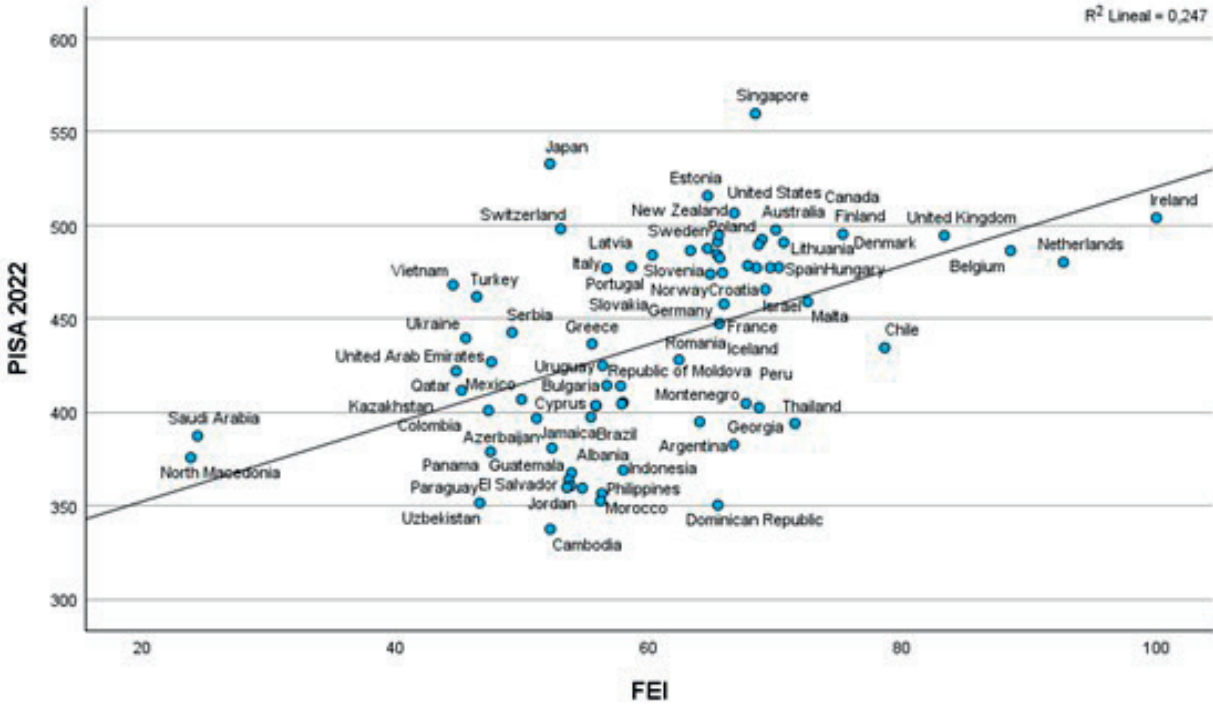
	FEI 2023	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4	GDP per capita	Economic freedom	Rule of law	Religious freedom	Freedom of expression and information
FEI 2023	1									
Indicator 1	.646**	1								
Indicator 2	.857**	.317**	1							
Indicator 3	.529**	.226**	.260**	1						
Indicator 4	.281**	.105	.166*	-.102	1					
GDP per capita	.521**	.174*	.508**	.383**	.080	1				
Economic freedom	.485**	.094	.498**	.361**	.007	.691**	1			
Rule of law	.573**	.121	.602**	.358**	.021	.765**	.723**	1		
Religious freedom	.531**	.252**	.551**	.193*	.061	.256**	.433**	.535**	1	
Freedom of expression and information	.563**	.166*	.594**	.264*	.058	.447**	.613**	.738**	.766**	1
Freedom to form political parties	.456**	.303**	.481**	.060	-.061	.184*	.387**	.423**	.724**	.760**

Table 7: Bivariate correlations: Freedom of Education Index indicators, GDP per capita, and political and religious freedoms.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from OIDEL, The Heritage Foundation, and Fraser Institute (Human Freedom Index).

Relationships between Educational Freedom, Performance, and Equality of Opportunity

3.1 Performance

In a previous section of this study, it was found that freedom of education is positively associated with better student results in international tests that measure the quality of education systems, such as PISA. In this sense, it is possible to explain the average scores in the PISA tests from the FEI value, obtaining a coefficient corresponding to the FEI of 1.941, and significant at 99%, given the p-value of 0.004. The relationship between both variables is shown in Graph 17.



Graph 14: Relationship between average PISA test scores and the Freedom of Education Index. Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and OECD data.

To analyze the possible relationship between performance in the PISA tests and the individual indicators of the index of educational freedom that could influence it (indicator 1, indicator 2 and indicator 4), four equations have been estimated, including three of them as control variables the average economic, cultural, and educational level (ESCS) of each country and the geographic region.

	Model 1 R ² = 0.28 N 74	Model 2 R ² = 0.66 N 73	Model 3 R ² = 0.43 N 74	Model 4 R ² = 0.69 N 73
	B coefficient values			
Constant	392.042***	337.7***	369.671***	323.321***
Indicator 1	0.048	0.321	0.079	0.242
Indicator 2	0.958**	0.353**	0.573***	0.218
Indicator 4	-20.781	-63.88**	20.291	-35.535
GDP per capita		0.001***		0.001***
Asia and Pacific			29.914	30.295
Europe and North America			48.431*	37.306*
Latin America and the Caribbean			-9.467	14.521

Table 8: Equation of results obtained in PISA tests (mathematics, reading, science).

* p > 0.1; ** p > 0.05; *** p > 0.01

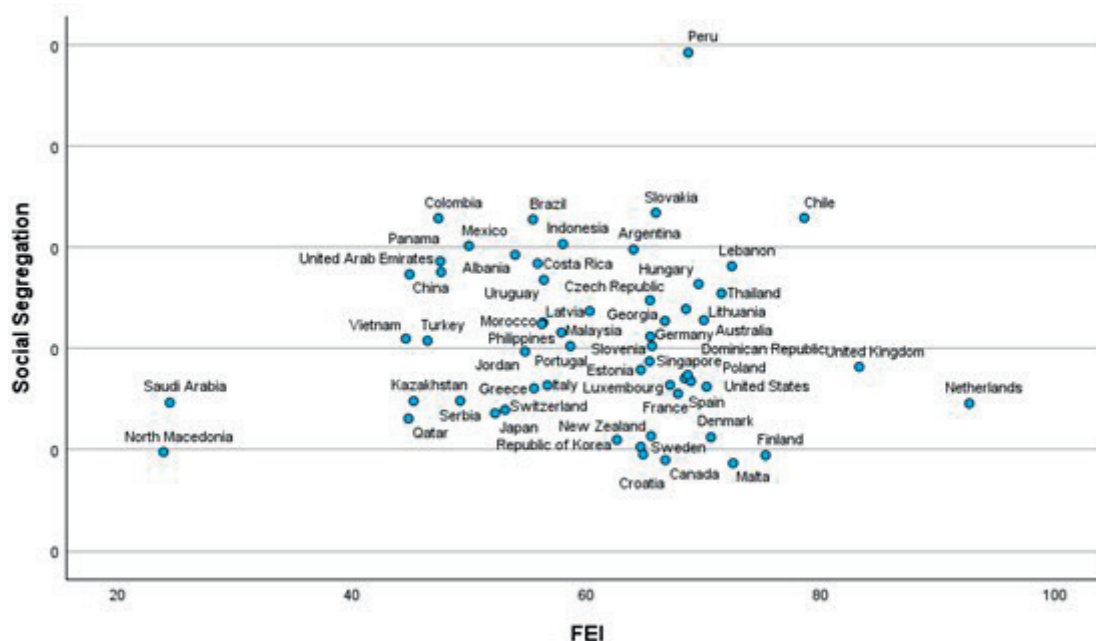
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and OECD data.

In the first three models, indicator 2 (public financing of NGS) significantly positively correlates with PISA results. However, this relationship loses its consistency in Model 4 when all the control variables are included. Indicator 4 is only significant in Model 2, while indicator 1 never displays a significant association with PISA results.

3.2 Social segregation in schools

The first aspect analyzed has been the possible relationship between freedom of education and social segregation⁴ existing in the schools of each country, according to PISA 2018, given that it is common to consider that private education tends to generate greater segregation. As shown by Graph 15, there is no visible association between those two variables.

⁴ The social segregation index measures whether the diversity of students observed within schools reflects the diversity of students observed at the country level. The index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 corresponds to no segregation and 1 to total segregation (OECD, 2019).



Graph 15: Social segregation and Freedom of Education Index
 Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and OECD data.

To analyze the possible relationship between social segregation in schools and the individual indicators of the freedom of education index that could influence it (indicator 1, indicator 2 and indicator 4), four equations were estimated, including per capita income and geographic region as control variables in three of them. Results are shown in Table 10. Model 1 shows significant results, with a positive association for indicators 1 and 4 and a negative association for indicator 2. However, for models 2 to 4, in which we added control variables, the relationships between indicators and social segregation lose their significance. A strong negative association was found between segregation in schools and GDP per capita.

	Model 1 R ² = 0.26 N 42	Model 2 R ² = 0.58 N 42	Model 3 R ² = 0.49 N 41	Model 4 R ² = 0.65 N 41
	B coefficient values			
Constant	0.119***	0.111***	0.187***	0.162***
Indicator 1	0.001***	0.001	0.00	-4,30E-05
Indicator 2	-0.001***	0.00	0.00	-9,62E-05
Indicator 4	0.101**	0.047	0.069	0,052
Africa and Arab States				
Asia and Pacific		-0.001		0,029
Europe and North America		-0.02		0,03
Latin America and the Caribbean		0.047		0,066
GDP per capita			-1,13E-06***	-9,28E-07**

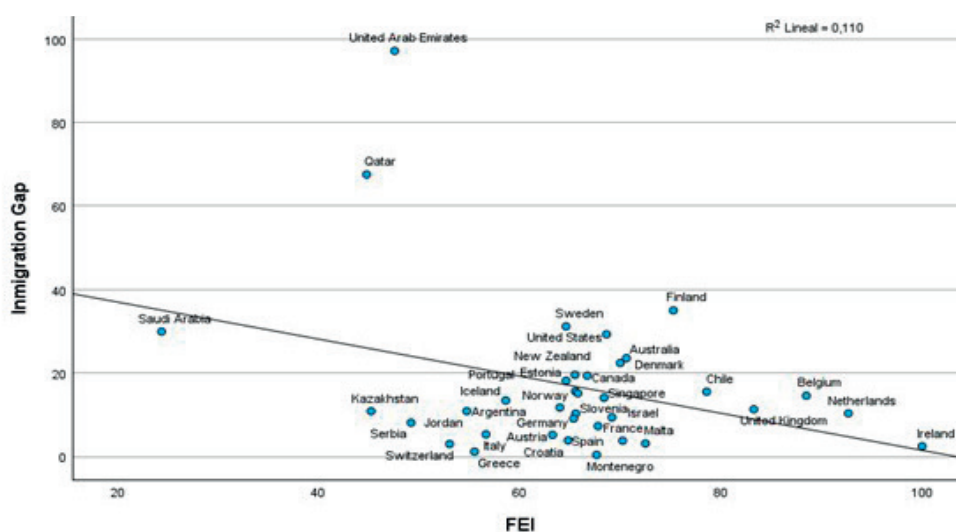
Table 9. Equations of Social Segregation in schools.

* p > 0.1; ** p > 0.05; *** p > 0.01

Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and OECD data.

3.3 Immigration Gap

To study if the educational freedom is beneficial to only a part of the society, the immigration gap variable has been added to the analysis. The variable was transformed in absolute value, as, depending on the context, both students with an immigrant background and those without an immigrant background can be privileged. Therefore, the closer the immigration gap is to 0, the more equal the society is. Graph 16 below shows the relationship between the immigration gap and the freedom of education. This graph shows that a high freedom of education is linked with a low immigration gap, and therefore a better equality of chances in the society. Arab states such as United Arab Emirates or Qatar display the worst immigration gap scores and are outliers.



Graph 16: Relationship between Immigration Gap and the Freedom of Education Index.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and OECD data.

Table 10 below shows the equations for immigration gap. The relationship between freedom of education and the immigration gap is robust in model 1, but it loses its significance when accounting for the geographical regions.

	Model 1 R ² = 0.11 N 36	Model 2 R ² = 0.14 N 35	Model 3 R ² = 0.45 N 36	Model 4 R ² = 0.40 N 36
	B coefficient values			
Constant	45.866***	32.044**	46.108***	38.312**
Freedom of Education	-0.444**	-0.428*	0.123	-0.047
GDP per capita		0		0*
Asia and Pacific			-37.015***	-33.385***
Europe and North America			-42.63***	-35.824***
Latin America and the Caribbean			-41.221***	-27.41*

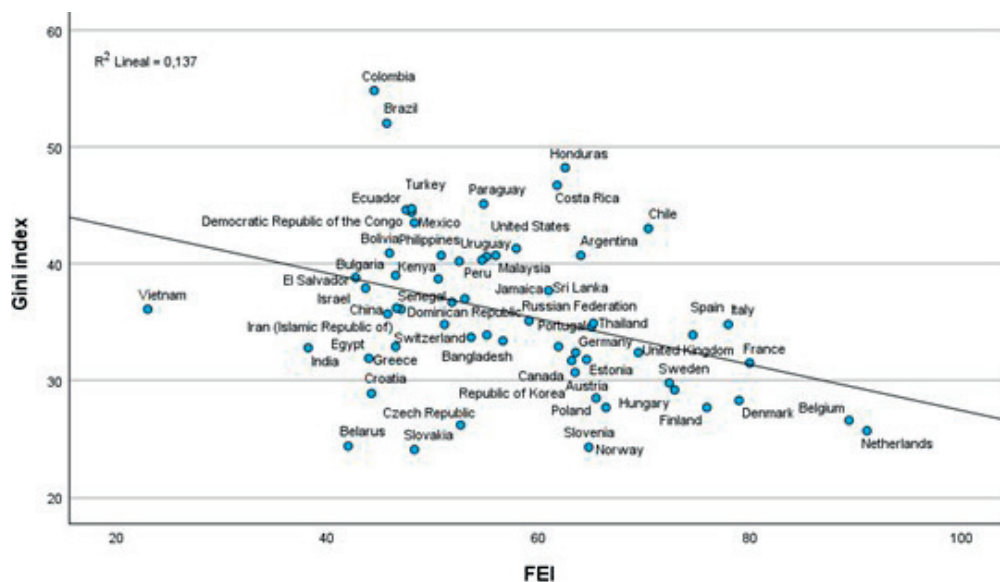
Table 10: Equations of the immigration gap in PISA scores 2022.

* p > 0.1; ** p > 0.05; *** p > 0.01

Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and OECD data.

3.4 Income distribution

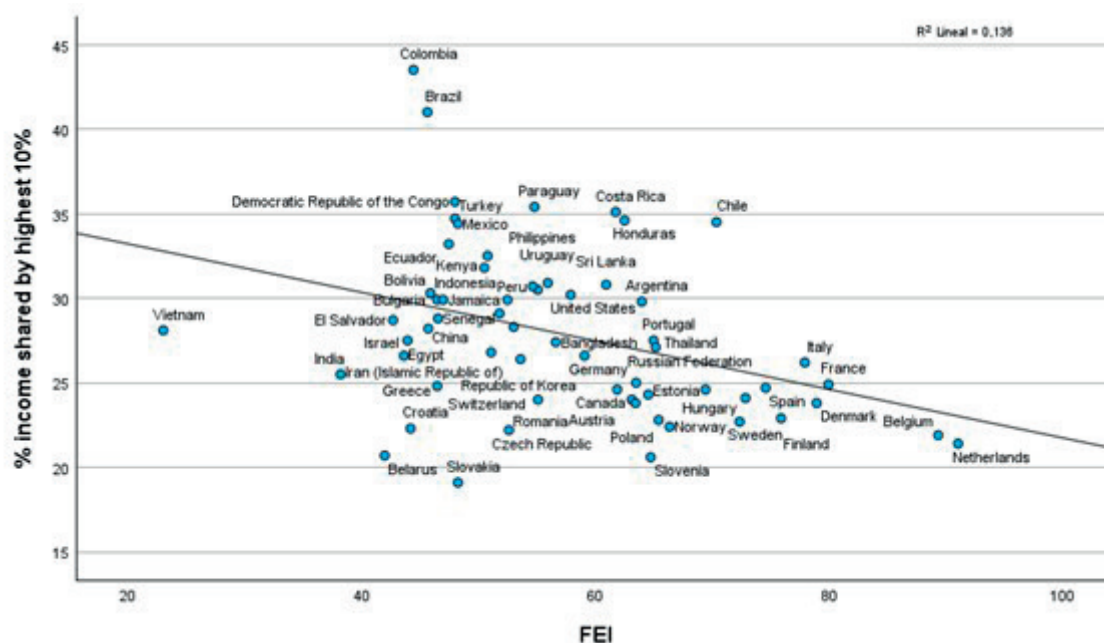
The next aspect analyzed is the possible relationship between educational freedom and income distribution, as the greater or lesser equity of the education system will translate into income levels in the medium term. The next graph, which relates educational freedom in 2002 to present income inequality, measured by the Gini index⁵, shows that as higher is the educational freedom, the income distribution tends to become more egalitarian.



Graph 17: Relationship between the Freedom of Education Index and the Gini Index.
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and World Bank data.

The positive relationship between income distribution and freedom of education can be verified if another representative indicator of the first variable is used, such as the percentage of income held by the richest 10% of the population -see Graph 18.

5 This index takes a value between 0 and 100. The closer the Gini coefficient is to 100, the more unequal the distribution.



Graph 18: Relationship between the percentage of income earned by the top 10% of the population and the Freedom of Education Index.
Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and World Bank.

To empirically test the relationship between each FEI indicator and personal income distribution, four equations have been estimated. In these, the dependent variable is the value of the Equity factor, calculated from the Gini index, and the percentage of income accumulated by the 10% of the population with the highest income. As independent variables, together with Indicators 1, 2 and 4 of the FEI (2002), per capita income and geographic region have been included.

	Model 1 R ² = 0.21 N 61	Model 2 R ² = 0.35 N 61	Model 3 R ² = 0.589 N 61	Model 4 R ² = 0.59 N 61
	B coefficient values			
Constant	35.93***	36.53***	35.00***	34.98**
Indicator 1	0.031	0.063	0.044	0.044
Indicator 2	-0.093***	-0.045*	-0.04**	-0,041*
Indicator 4	7.681	5.132	-3.061	-3.097
GDP pc		0.000***		3.71E-06
Africa and Arab States				
Asia and Pacific			-1.145	-1.186
Europe and North America			-5.005*	-5.169***
Latin America and the Caribbean			6.341**	6.302**

Table 11. Personal income distribution equations.

* p > 0.1; ** p > 0.05; *** p > 0.01

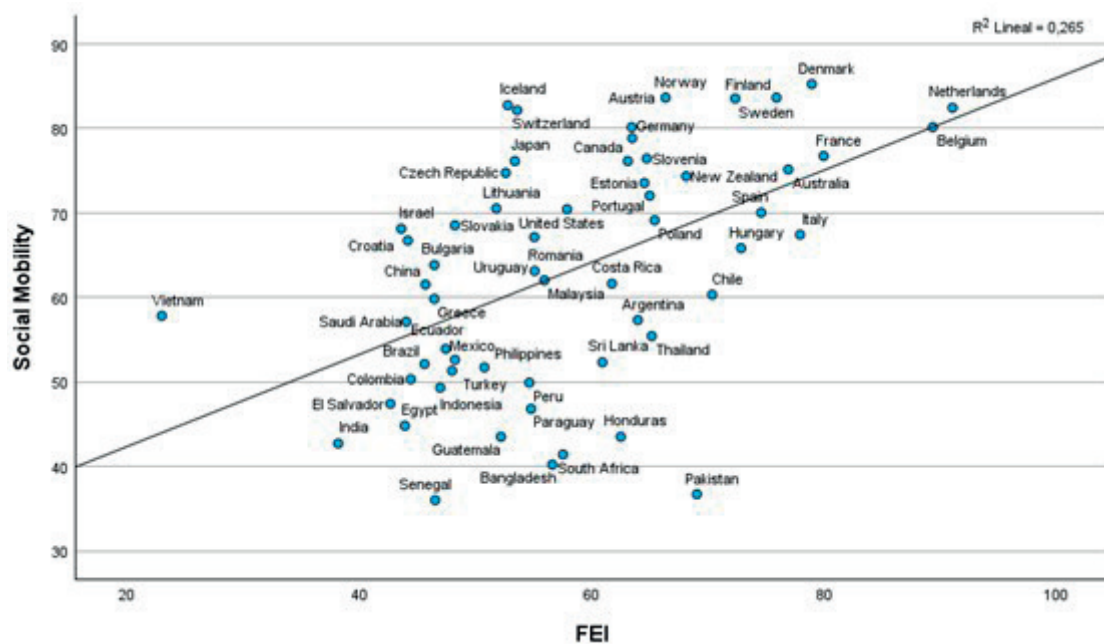
Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and World Bank data.

On the one hand, Indicator 1 and Indicator 4 (share of NGS) appears irrelevant in all equations, so empirically it is proven that there is no association between the presence of non-state schools and income inequality. Regarding Indicator 2 (NGS Funding), it remains significant even when control variables (GDP per capita and geographic area) are included. Therefore, we can conclude that there is evidence suggesting that public funding of non-governmental schools may help reduce income disparities in the medium term.

On the other hand, the higher income distribution in Europe and North America is significant.

3.5 Social mobility

Graph 19 below shows the positive association between social mobility and freedom of education. Many countries are under the regression line for low scores of freedom of education, while this phenomenon reverts for higher scores.



Graph 19: Relationship between Social Mobility and the Freedom of Education Index.
 Source: Own elaboration with data from OIDEL and World Economic Forum (2020).

Table 12 below displays the equations for social mobility and freedom of education indicators. Indicator 2 shows significant results in all models, even when adding GDP per capita or geographical regions, which once again allows us to conclude that there is evidence suggesting that social mobility can be enhanced through educational freedom

	Model 1 R ² = 0.25 N 59	Model 2 R ² = 0.86 N 59	Model 3 R ² = 0.65 N 59	Model 4 R ² = 0.88 N 59
	B coefficient values			
Constant	57.081***	33.993***	56.19***	31.843***
Indicator 1	-0.006	0.078	-0.186*	0.024
Indicator 2	0.206***	0.064*	0.166***	0.057*
Indicator 4	-19.969	-7.235	-9.223	-7.96
GDP pc		0.000***		0.000***
Africa and Arab States				
Asia and Pacific			12.097**	9.257***
Europe and North America			25.667***	-7.944**
Latin America and the Carribean			9.336*	7.942**

Table 12. Social Mobility equations

* p > 0.1; ** p > 0.05; *** p > 0.01

Source: Own elaboration with OIDEL and World Bank data.

In conclusion: reasons to move towards greater educational freedom

The report concludes that moving towards greater educational freedom is beneficial for several reasons:

Respect for Parental Rights:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms parents' prior right to choose their children's education. Educational freedom respects this right, while government monopolies on education undermine it.

Equity and Reduced Inequality:

Educational freedom enhances equity by providing low-income families access to non-state schools, which are linked to better labor market outcomes and higher wages. Public funding of non-state education fosters social mobility and income equality, creating a virtuous cycle between equity and efficiency in educational outcomes (Green et al. 2017; Moulin, 2023; Sass et al. 2016; Freeman, Machin, and Viarengo, 2010).

Higher Academic Achievement:

Research shows a positive link between educational freedom and academic results. Competition between non-state and public schools drives improvements in test scores and overall educational performance, leading to greater economic growth and societal benefits (West and Woessmann, 2010; Agasisti, 2011 & 2013; Sanz-Magallón et al. 2012; Muralidharan and Sundararamanan, 2013; Tooley et al. 2009; Hannusek and Woessmann, 2012; Cheng et al. 2017; Randolph, J. et al., 2023).

Improved Economic Efficiency:

Non-state schools are often more cost-effective than public schools, as they exhibit fewer inefficiencies and achieve better academic outcomes (Sanz-Magallón et al., 2020; 2022; Doncel et al. 2012; Mancebon et al. 2019; Tooley et al. 2009). It should be noted that, nevertheless, in the case of certain European countries, some

studies have attributed better management to public schools (Bryson and Green, 2020), which shows that they can significantly improve their performance if certain conditions are met, such as having good teachers, high autonomy and adequate incentives (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2011).

The evidence suggests that fostering educational freedom through public support for non-state schools can enhance equity, efficiency, and academic performance, benefiting both individuals and society.

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