Accessibility, responsiveness and quality of education

Early childhood education is critical for children's cognitive and emotional development, learning and well-being (OECD, 2022). Children who participate in high-quality organised learning at a young age are more likely to have better education outcomes (OECD, 2022). Early enrolment is thus increasingly considered a core measure of access to education. On average across the OECD in 2020, 88.7% of 4-year-olds and 74.3% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in education. France (where it has been compulsory from 3 years since 2019), Ireland, Israel (compulsory from 3 years since 1949), Japan and the United Kingdom have reached 100% enrolment for 3-4 year-olds. The lowest enrolment rates for 4-year-olds are in Türkiye (34%), Switzerland (49%) and the United States (64%) (Figure 3.13). Besides these, all other OECD countries are within 10 percentage points (p.p.) of the average.

The share of 15-29 year-olds who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is a measure of the responsiveness of the education system. High NEET rates represent a failure to deliver the same opportunities to every citizen, regardless of socio-economic context. Reducing them is an important challenge for OECD countries, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, on average, 15.0% of 15-19 year-olds across the OECD were NEET, a 1 p.p. increase since 2017 (14.1%). The Netherlands (7.4%), Luxembourg (7.8%) and Norway (8.4%) had the lowest NEET rates in 2021, while Türkiye (28.7%), Colombia (27.1%), Italy (26.0%) and Costa Rica (26%) had the highest. The most significant reductions across the OECD were in Belgium, Denmark and the Slovak Republic (-2 p.p. each since 2017) (Figure 3.14).

Quality of education can be assessed by how effectively students acquire the skills they need to thrive in society. Equity is an important aspect of quality: personal circumstances should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential and all individuals should reach at least a minimum level (OECD, 2012). In 2018, students across the OECD scored an average of 487 points in mathematics in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), The highest average scores were in Japan (527 points), Korea (526 points) and Estonia (523 points). Students in Colombia (391 points), Costa Rica (402 points) and Mexico (409 points) had the lowest average scores (Figure 3.15).

However, these averages hide inequalities. On average across the OECD, 12.1% of the variance in mathematics performance can be attributed to students' socio-economic status. The influence of background on performance is most significant in Hungary (19.1%) followed by Luxembourg (17.8%), and France and the Slovak Republic (17.5% each). In contrast, in Estonia (6%), Canada (6.7%) and Iceland (6.6%), socio-economic background plays a much smaller role (Figure 3.15).

Methodology and definitions

Enrolment data come from the UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat (UOE) on education statistics. Rates are expressed as net enrolment rates, which are calculated by dividing the number of students of a particular age group enrolled in all levels of education by the total population of that age group. Figures are based on head counts and do not distinguish between full- and part-time study.

The data on NEET rates come from data collection by the OECD. NEET rates are the share of 15-29 year-olds who are not in employment, formal education or training, as a percentage of the total population of 15-29 year-olds. Being in education includes attending part- or full-time formal education but excludes those in non-formal education or short educational activities. Employment covers all those who have been paid for at least one hour in the reference week of the survey or were temporarily absent from such work.

PISA 2018 skills of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science in 79 economies. Students' socio-economic background was based on three variables: parents' highest level of education and highest occupational status, and home possessions, which are aggregated into an index.

Further reading

OECD (2022), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, *https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en*.

Schleicher, A. (2020), *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Insights from Education at a Glance 2020*, OECD, Paris, *www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf*.

OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, *https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en*.

Carcillo, S. et al. (2015), "NEET youth in the aftermath of the crisis: Challenges and policies", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 164, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js6363503f6-en*.

Figure notes

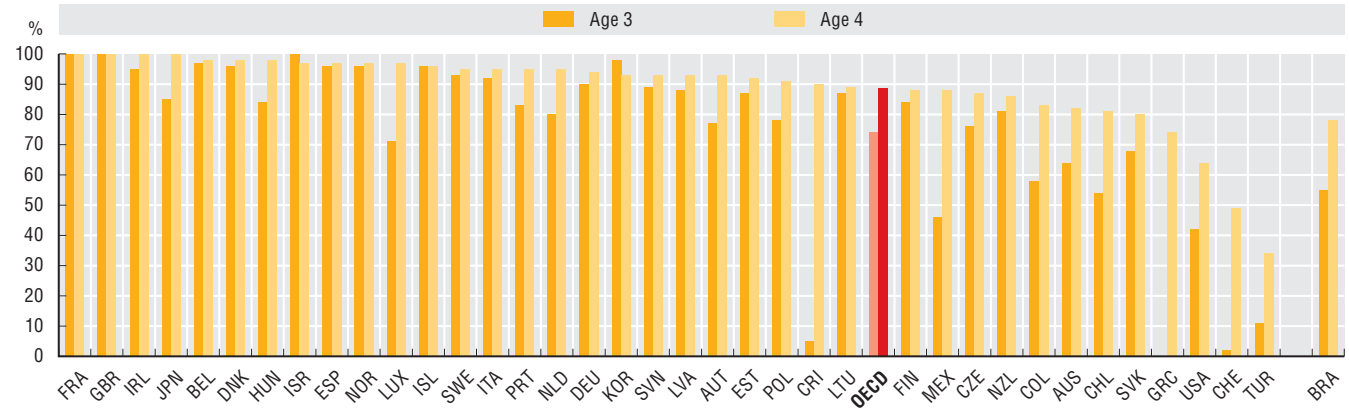
"OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.

3.13. Data for Canada are not available. Data for Greece for age 3 are missing. Data for the United States exclude ISCED 01 programmes. Countries are ranked in descending order of enrolment rate by age 4.

3.14. Data for Japan and Korea are not available. Data for Chile are for 2019 rather than 2021. Data for Brazil and South Africa are for 2018 rather than 2021.

3.15. Data for Spain are not available. Data for China cover Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang only.

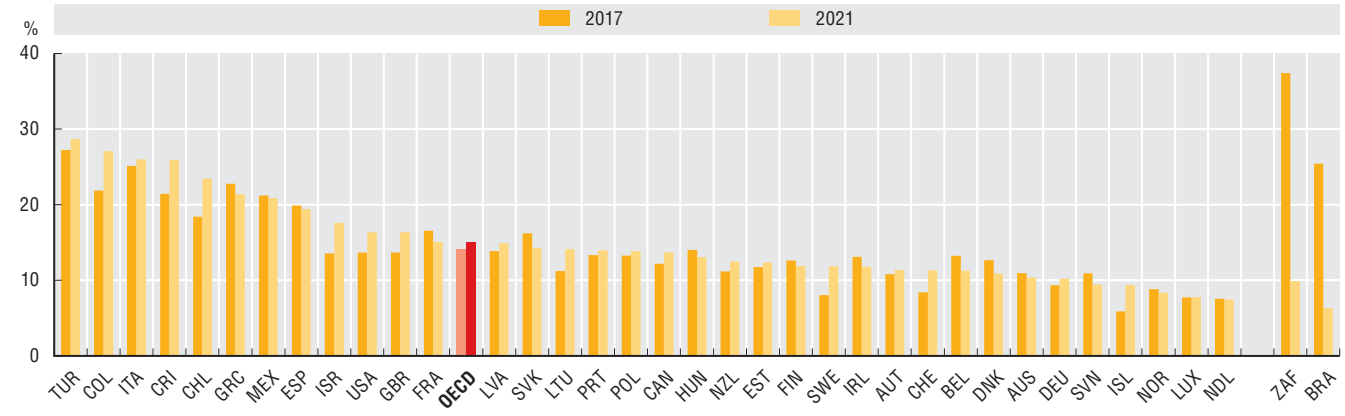
3.13. Enrolment rate at age 3 and 4 in early childhood and pre-primary education, 2020



Source: OECD (2022), OECD.Stat Education (database).

StatLink https://stat.link/q9jrb8

3.14. Percentage of young adults (15–29-year-olds) not in education, employment or training, 2017 and 2021

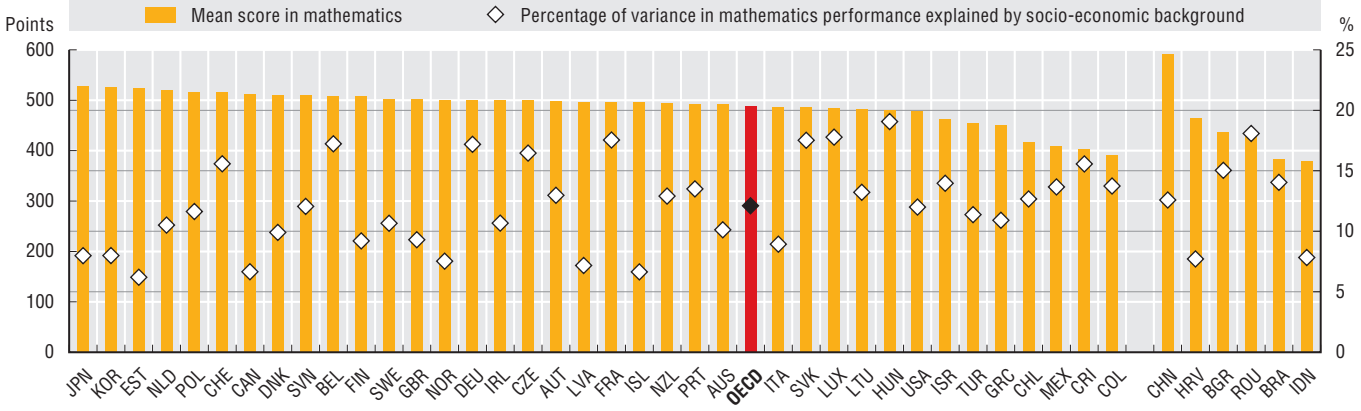


Source: OECD (2020), *Education at a Glance*; OECD (2022), *Education at a Glance*.

StatLink https://stat.link/5w8c0l

3.15. Mean score in mathematics and percentage of variance explained by socio-economic background, 2018

Left axis is the score on PISA test, right axis the variance due to socio-economic characteristics



Source: OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed.*

StatLink https://stat.link/eqo4zw