

2. OVERCOMING SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Does socio-economic background affect reading performance?

- The average association between socio-economic background and reading performance is strong, particularly in France, New Zealand, the partner country Bulgaria and the partner economy Dubai (UAE).
- More than 20% of the variation in reading scores among students in Hungary and the partner countries Bulgaria, Peru and Uruguay is explained by differences in socio-economic background.
- The four top-performing countries in reading show a below-average impact of socio-economic background on students' reading performance.

What it means

In trying to provide students with equitable learning opportunities, education systems aim to reduce the extent to which a student's socio-economic background affects his or her performance in school. Performance differences that are related to student background are evident in every country. But PISA results show that some countries have been more successful than others in mitigating the impact of socio-economic background on students' performance in reading.

Findings

There are two main ways of measuring how closely reading performance is linked to social background. One considers the average gap in performance between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. This gap is greatest in France, New Zealand, the partner country Bulgaria and the partner economy Dubai (UAE), where it is at least 30% wider than the OECD average. In these countries, a student's predicted score is most heavily influenced by his or her socio-economic background.

While this measure can be used to predict differences in reading scores among students from different backgrounds, many students defy these predictions. Socio-economically advantaged students perform better on average, but a number perform poorly, just as a number of disadvantaged students perform well. To show the extent to which levels of student performance conform to a pattern predicted by socio-economic status, PISA also measures the *percentage of variation* in reading performance than can be explained by a student's background.

On average across OECD countries, 14% of variation in students' reading performance can be explained by their socio-economic backgrounds. In Hungary and the partner countries Bulgaria, Peru and Uruguay, more than 20% of the variation is so explained. In contrast, in Iceland and the partner country and economies Hong Kong, China; Qatar and Macao, China, less than 7% of the variation in student performance is explained by socio-economic background.

This analysis shows that a student's socio-economic background is associated with his or her reading performance to some extent in all countries. However, in the four countries and economies with the highest reading performance, namely Shanghai, China; Korea; Finland and Hong Kong, China, the link between student background and performance is weaker than on average. This shows that it is possible to achieve the highest levels of performance while providing students with relatively equitable learning opportunities.

Definitions

Socio-economic background is measured according to the *PISA index of social, cultural and economic status*, which is based on information, provided by students, about their parents' education and occupations and their home possessions, such as a desk to use for studying and the number of books in the home. On this index, one "unit" is equivalent to one standard deviation across all OECD students meaning that across all OECD countries, about two-thirds of students are from a socio-economic background that is between one unit above and one unit below the average.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

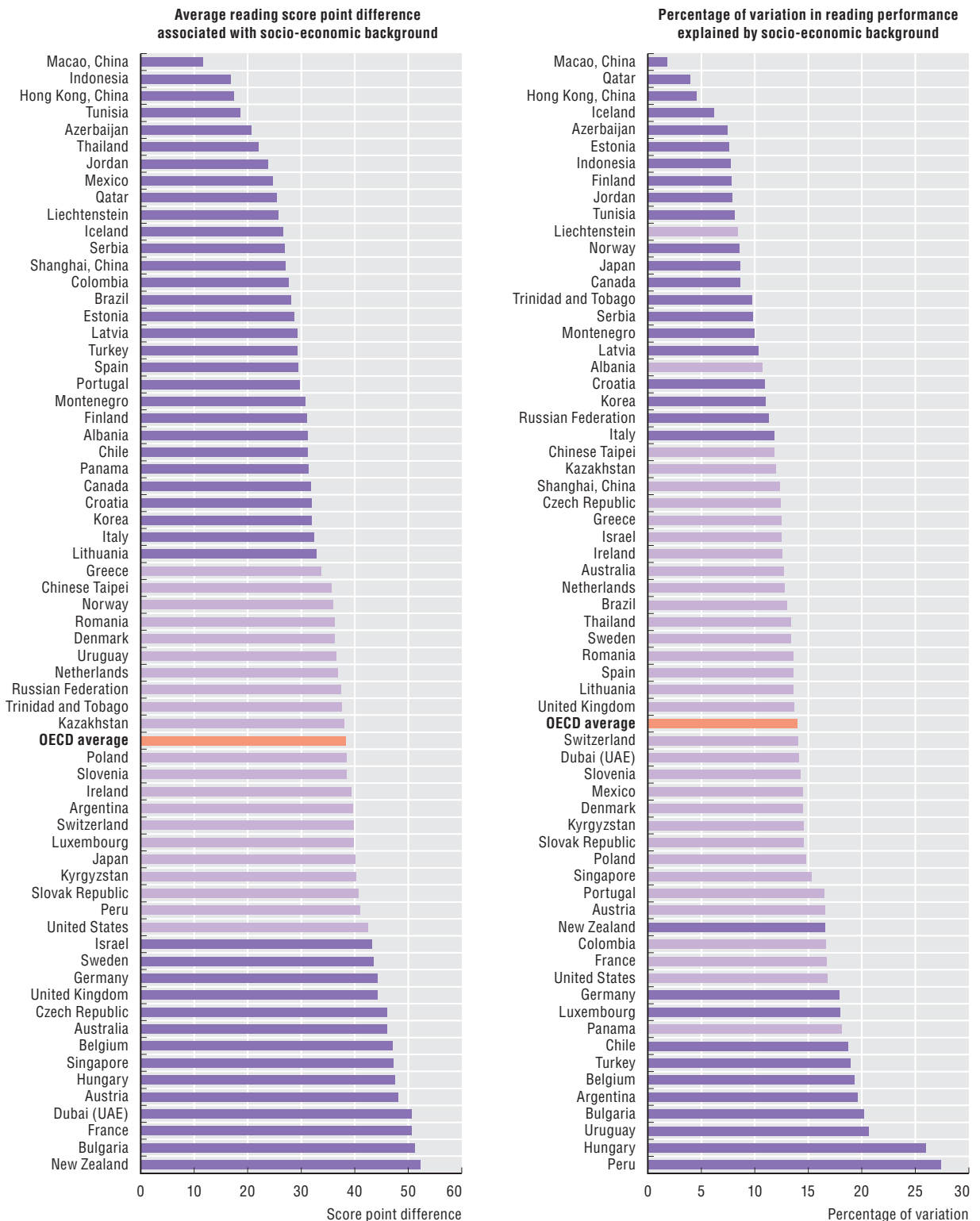
Going further

Further analysis is presented in Chapter 2 of *PISA 2009 Volume II, Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes*. Full data are shown in Table II.3.2 at the back of that volume.

2. OVERCOMING SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Does socio-economic background affect reading performance?

Figure 2.1. Socio-economic background and reading performance



Note: Values that are statistically different from the OECD average are marked in dark violet.

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume II, Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes, Figures II.3.3 and II.3.4, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932343589>.



From:
PISA 2009 at a Glance

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264095298-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2011), "Does socio-economic background affect reading performance?", in *PISA 2009 at a Glance*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264095250-20-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.