

# 1. WHAT STUDENTS KNOW AND CAN DO – TRENDS

## Girls' and boys' reading performance since 2000

- Girls still outperform boys in reading; indeed the gender gap widened by more than one-fifth between PISA 2000 and PISA 2009.
- The gender gap widened greatly in nine countries; in no country did it narrow.
- In six of these countries, girls' reading performance improved considerably; but in France, Sweden and the partner country Romania, a decline in performance among boys was the main reason that the gender gap widened.

### What it means

With boys lagging behind in reading performance, one way to improve overall results is to get boys more interested and engaged in reading. In the short term, this may require paying more attention to the reading preferences of boys who, for example, show relatively strong interest in reading newspapers and reading on line, rather than aiming for a single model of reading engagement. In the long run, tackling the gender gap in reading performance will require the concerted effort of parents, teachers and society at large to change the stereotypical notions of what boys and girls excel in and what they enjoy doing.

### Findings

The gender gap in reading performance did not narrow in any country between 2000 and 2009. On average in OECD countries, girls scored 39 points higher than boys in 2009 compared to 32 points in 2000. This represents a widening of the gender gap of more than 20%.

In Israel, Korea and the partner country Romania, girls outperformed boys by a wider margin – more than 20 score points – in 2009 than they did in 2000. But the reasons behind these changes varied. In Israel and Korea, girls' reading levels rose (by over half a proficiency level in Israel), while boys' reading performance did not improve. In contrast, in Romania, boys' reading performance declined, while girls' performance was similar to that in 2000. In three

of the other countries with widening gender gaps, Portugal, the partner country Brazil and the partner economy Hong Kong, China, girls' performance improved while that of boys did not. In the partner countries Indonesia and Peru, both boys and girls improved, but girls did so to a greater extent. In France and Sweden, boys' reading performance declined, but girls' performance either remained the same (France) or also declined (Sweden), although by a lesser degree.

The gender gap is particularly wide in the proportion of low-performing students. In 2009, twice as many boys (24%) as girls (12%) did not attain the baseline reading proficiency Level 2. Across OECD countries, this gap widened since 2000 because of a two percentage point drop in the proportion of girls at this level and no change in the proportion of boys at this level.

The proportion of low-performing boys increased by the largest amount in Ireland, where the proportion rose from one boy in seven (13%) in 2000 to nearly one in four (23%) in 2009.

### Definitions

The gender gap is defined as the difference in score points between the average scores of boys and girls. Differences over time are noted only when they are statistically significant.

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

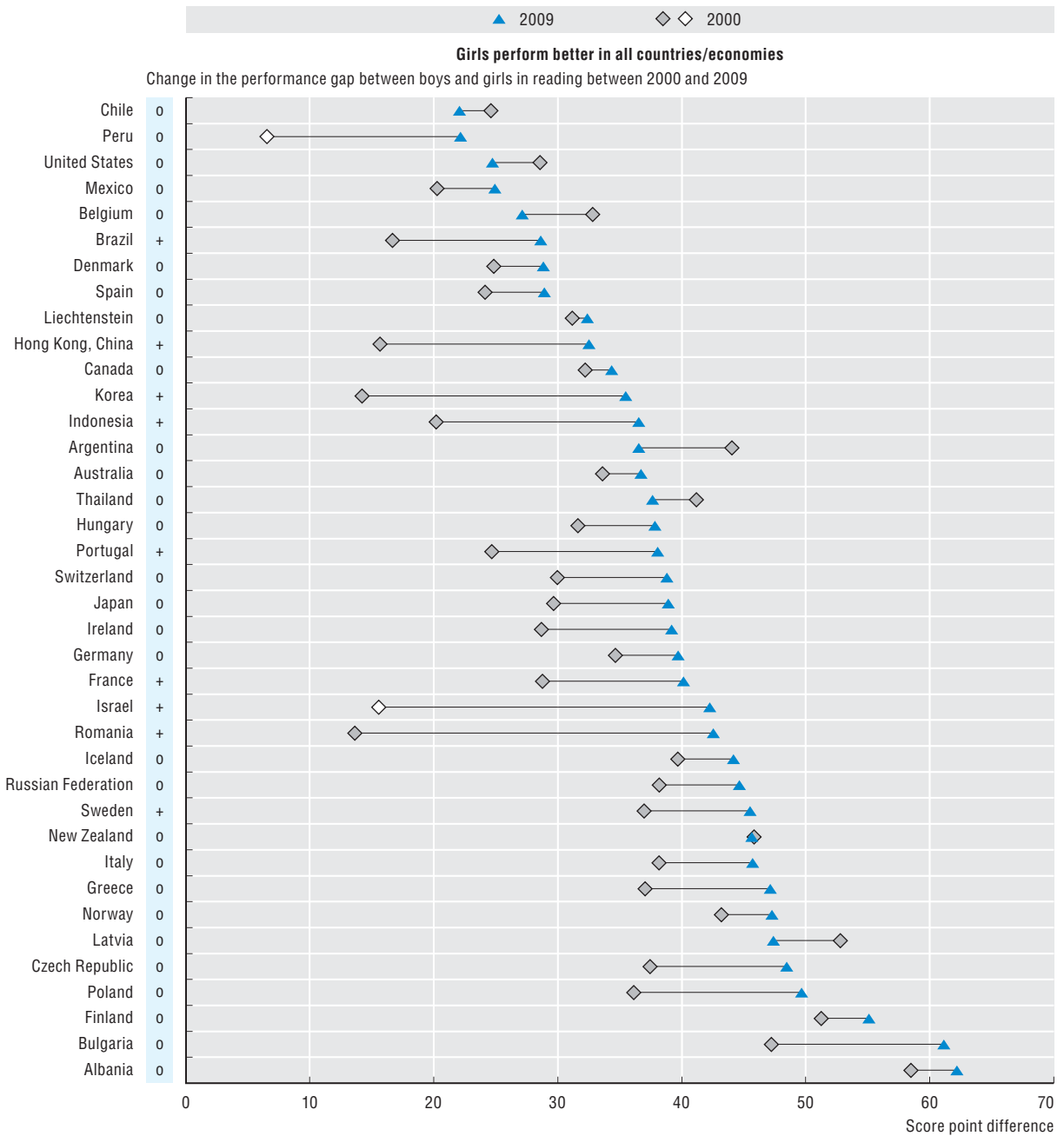
### Going further

Further analysis of changes in the gender gap between 2000 and 2009 is presented in Chapter 2 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume V, Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000*. Full data are shown in Tables V.2.4, V.2.5 and V.2.6 at the back of that volume.

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Figure 1.15. Comparison of gender differences in performance between 2000 and 2009



	2009 higher than 2000	No statistically significant difference
95% confidence level	+	0

Note: All gender differences in PISA 2009 are significant. Gender differences in 2000 that are statistically significant are marked in a darker tone. Countries are ranked in ascending order of gender differences (girls – boys) in 2009.

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume V, Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000, Figure V.2.7, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932359967>.



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