

## 2. OVERCOMING SOCIAL BACKGROUND

### How do students with an immigrant background perform in reading?

- Even after accounting for socio-economic background, students with an immigrant background score, on average, 27 points below students without an immigrant background. However, this varies greatly across countries.
- Students with an immigrant background who speak a language at home that is different from the one used in the PISA assessment scored, on average, 35 points lower than students without an immigrant background, after accounting for socio-economic background.

#### What it means

Students with an immigrant background who speak a different language at home than the one in which the PISA assessment was conducted face considerable challenges in reading and other aspects of education. In general, they tend to show lower levels of performance even after their socio-economic background is taken into account. However, the gaps in performance vary greatly and, in some countries, students from an immigrant background perform just as well as their non-immigrant peers.

#### Findings

In most countries, students without an immigrant background outperform immigrant students whose home language is different from the one in which they were assessed. On average across OECD countries, students from an immigrant background scored 57 points below their non-immigrant peers in reading. While this gap shrunk to 35 score points after socio-economic background was taken into account, the difference still amounts to nearly half a proficiency level in reading.

In some countries, large gaps in performance remain, even after accounting for socio-economic background. In Spain, Belgium and Sweden, where students with an

immigrant background constitute 9%, 15% and 12% of the student population, respectively, the differences between students with and without an immigrant background are all above 40 score points; in Italy, where 5% of students have an immigrant background, the difference is as high as 53 score points, even after accounting for socio-economic background. The diverse linguistic, cultural, economic and social backgrounds of immigrant students in different countries help explain why their performance varies considerably. However, given the PISA results, such variation in performance cannot simply be attributed to the students' individual characteristics or the fact that they are more socio-economically disadvantaged.

#### Definitions

This analysis defines students with an immigrant background as those who were born in the country of assessment but whose parents are foreign-born (second-generation) and those who are foreign-born whose parents are also foreign-born (first-generation). Students were asked if they speak the language of assessment at home to determine whether they are at a linguistic disadvantage.

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

#### Going further

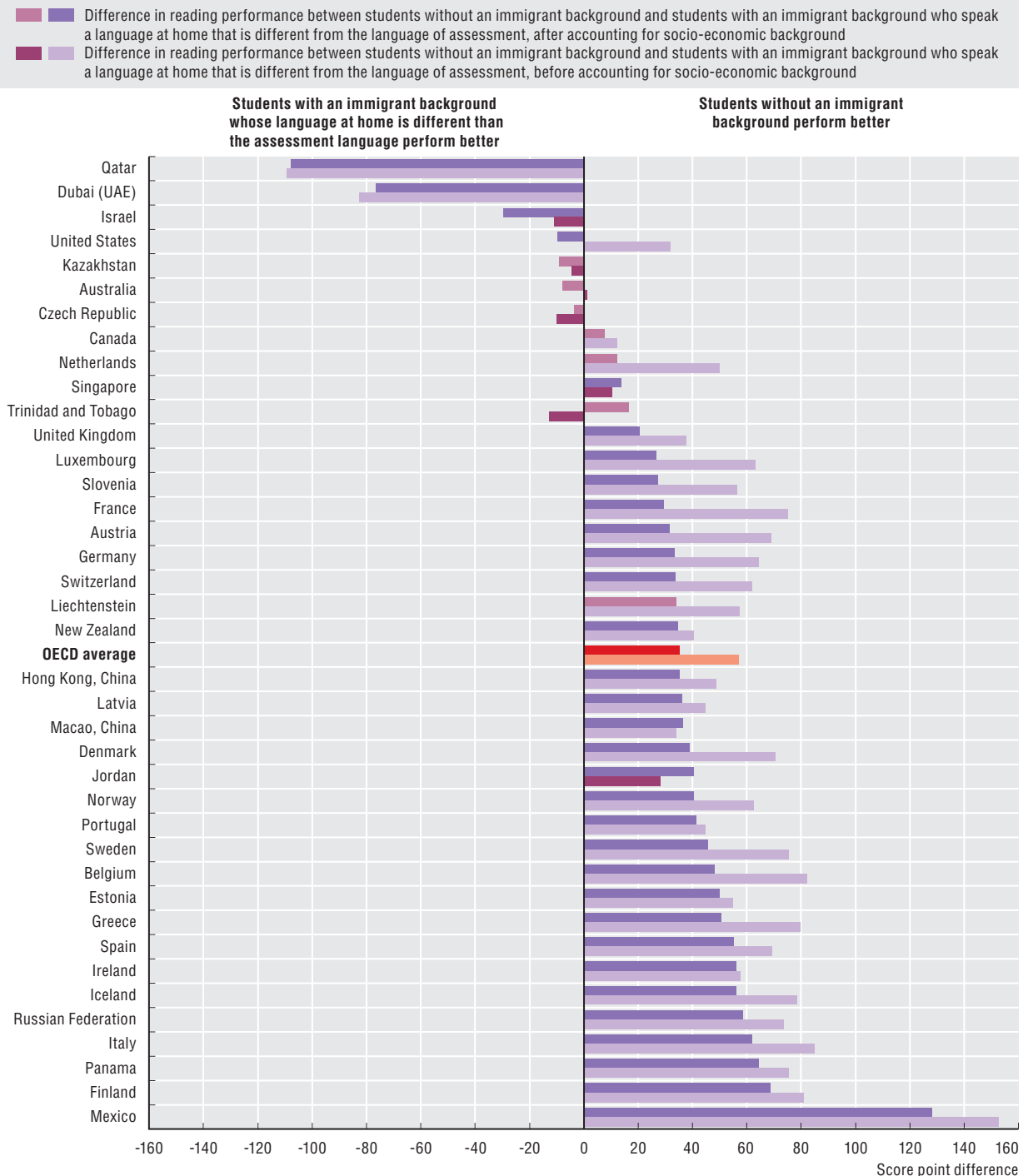
Further analysis is presented in Chapter 4 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume II, Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes*. Full data are shown in Tables II.4.1 and II.4.4 at the back of that volume.

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Figure 2.4. Immigrant status, language spoken at home and reading performance

Performance differences between students with an immigrant background whose language at home is different from the language of assessment and students without an immigrant background



Note: Score point differences that are statistically significant are marked in a darker tone. Countries are ranked in ascending order of score point differences between students without an immigrant background and students with an immigrant background who speak a language at home that is different from the language of a assessment, after accounting for the economic, social and cultural status of students.

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume II, Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes, Figure II.4.10, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932343608>.



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