

Student performance and equity in education

The education system is responsible for equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and tools needed for their life-long development. Quality of education can be assessed by how effectively students incorporate the skills they need to thrive in society. The best-performing education systems across the OECD combine both quality and equity. Equity in this context means that personal circumstances are not an obstacle to achieving educational potential, and that all individuals reach at least a minimum level (OECD, 2012).

In 2018, students across the OECD reached an average of 487 points in reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), with students in Estonia (523 points), Canada, Finland (520 each) and Ireland (518 points) achieving the highest scores, and those in Colombia (412 points), Mexico (420 points) and Chile (452 points) the lowest (Figure 14.24). Students in Turkey showed the most improvement, scoring 37 points more than in 2015 (OECD, 2019).

However, these averages hide inequalities between students. On average across the OECD, 12% of the variance in performance can be attributed to students' socio-economic status. The influence of socio-economic background on performance is greater in Hungary (19%) and Luxembourg (18%) and, outside the OECD, in Romania (18%). In contrast, in top-performing Estonia (6%) and Canada (7%), as well as in Iceland (7%), socio-economic background plays a much less significant role (Figure 14.24).

In an increasingly complex context, students need to acquire competences that will allow them to navigate and thrive in an interconnected and changing world. PISA assessed students' global competence, which encompasses their ability to examine relevant local, global and cultural issues; understand others' worldviews; engage in open intercultural interactions; and take action for collective well-being and sustainable development.

Cognitive adaptability refers to students' ability to deal with new situations. During the COVID-19 crisis, students were forced to switch to remote learning, and many found themselves confined at home for long periods. In 2018, students in Spain (0.3 standard deviations from the OECD mean), Mexico and Turkey (0.2 sd each) reported a greater ability than the OECD average to deal with unusual situations and overcome difficulties, while students in Italy, Greece and the Slovak Republic (-0.3 sd each) reported more difficulties in doing so (Figure 14.25).

Being able to understand the reasons behind phenomena including climate change, refugee crises and pandemics, and engage in productive debate about them, is another relevant global competence. The PISA index of self-efficacy regarding global issues assesses students' ability to perform these tasks. In 2018, students in Germany, Korea and Colombia (0.2 sd away from the OECD mean) reported the highest self-efficacy, while students in the Slovak Republic (-0.4 sd), Scotland and Italy (-0.2 sd) reported the lowest (Figure 14.27).

Methodology and definitions

Data for all figures come from the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assessed the competences of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science in 79 economies. Typically, the sample was selected in 2 stages, first a representative sample of 150 schools were selected and, then roughly 42 students per school were randomly selected to sit the assessment. PISA computes students' socio-economic background from three family variables: parents' highest level of education, their highest occupational status, and their home possessions, which are aggregated into an index.

The index of cognitive ability refers to students' ability to adapt to new situations. Students were asked to assess six statements, such as "I can deal with unusual situations" and "I am capable of overcoming my difficulties in interacting with people from other cultures", on a five-point scale (from "very much like me" to "not at all like me"). The index of self-efficacy regarding global issues refers to whether students can achieve certain global competence-related tasks on their own. Students assessed five tasks, such as "Explain how carbon dioxide emissions affect global climate change" and "Discuss the different reasons why people become refugees" on a four-point scale (from "I could not do this" to "I could do this easily"). The average for these indexes is zero and the standard deviation is one across OECD countries. Positive values indicate that students have a greater ability than the average student across OECD countries.

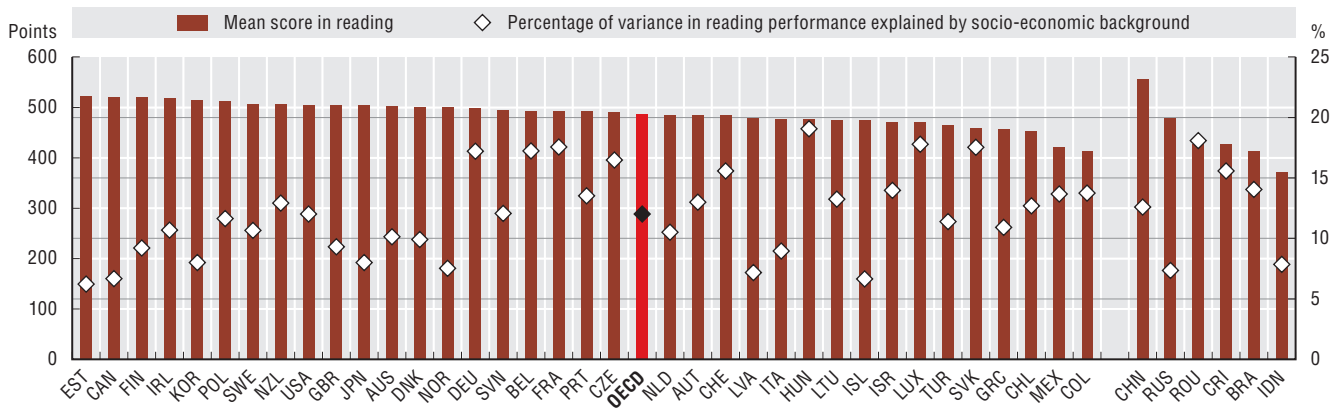
Further reading

- OECD (2020), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume VI): Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5f68679-en>.
- OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.
- OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en>.

Figure notes

- 14.24. Data for Spain are not available. Data for China cover Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang only.
- 14.25 and 14.26. Data for Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States are not available.

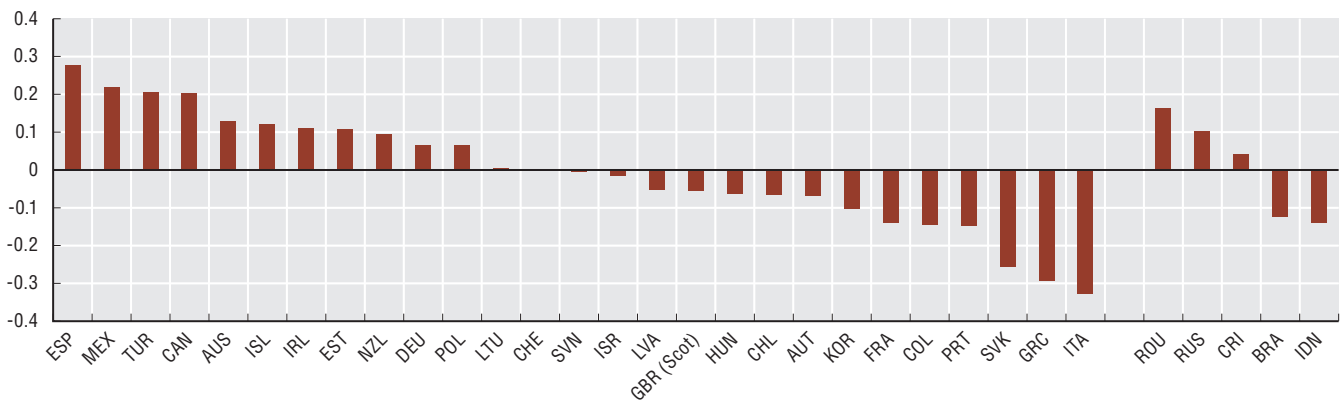
14.24. Mean score in reading and percentage of variance explained by socio-economic background, 2018



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

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934259845>

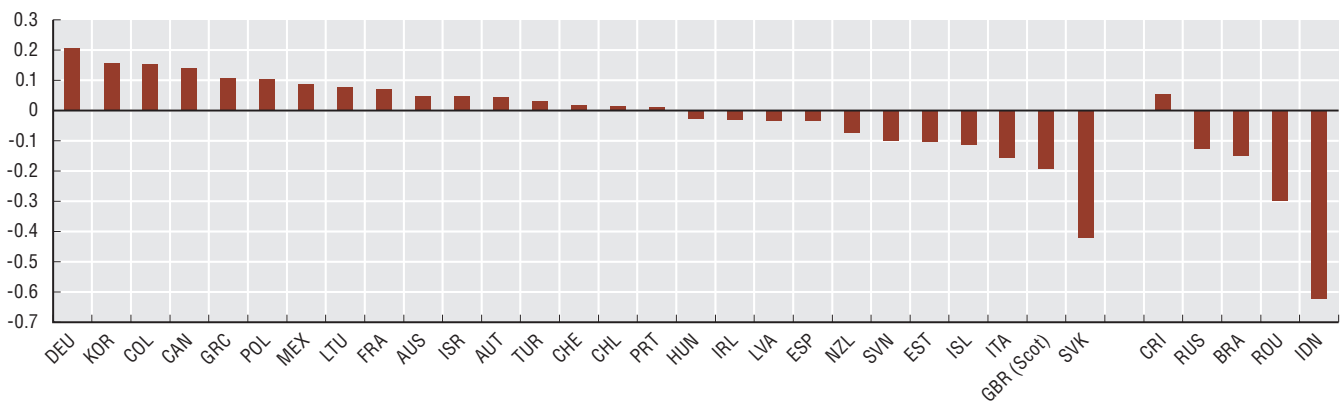
14.25. Index of cognitive adaptability, 2018



Source: OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results (Volume VI): Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?

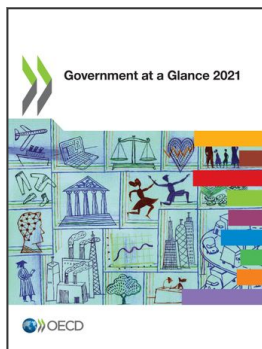
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934259864>

14.26. Index of self-efficacy regarding global issues, 2018



Source: OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results (Volume VI): Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934259883>



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