

2. OVERCOMING SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Can disadvantaged students defy the odds against them?

- Across OECD countries, nearly one-third of disadvantaged students are identified as “resilient”, meaning that they perform better in reading than would be predicted from their socio-economic backgrounds.
- The majority of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Korea and the partner economies Hong Kong, China; Macao, China and Shanghai, China are considered resilient.
- Only 23% of boys, but 40% of girls, from disadvantaged backgrounds are considered resilient in reading.

What it means

Despite a strong association between socio-economic background and reading performance, many students from disadvantaged backgrounds defy predictions and perform well. Thus educators should not assume that someone from a disadvantaged background is incapable of high achievement.

Findings

Students’ observed performance in reading can be compared to what would be expected of them, given their socio-economic background. When a disadvantaged student’s performance is ranked among the top quarter internationally, relative to expectation, he or she is classified as “resilient”. By this measure, 31% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in OECD countries are resilient.

In Korea and the partner economies Hong Kong, China; Macao, China and Shanghai, China; between one half and three-quarters of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are resilient. In these countries and economies, most students with modest backgrounds do far better in reading than would be expected. In contrast, in nine partner countries, fewer than one in ten disadvantaged students do so.

In all countries, girls from disadvantaged backgrounds are far more likely to show resilience in reading performance than boys. Across OECD countries 40% of girls, compared to 23% of boys, are considered

resilient. The majority of disadvantaged girls in this category are found in Finland, Korea, Poland, Portugal and the partner country and economies Hong Kong, China; Macao, China; Shanghai, China and Singapore.

Definitions

Based on the performance of students from different backgrounds across countries, PISA predicts how well a student will perform. Each student’s performance can be measured in terms of how much they exceed or fall below this prediction. The quarter of all students across countries who do best relative to those predictions can be seen as the group of students who most exceed expectations. A 15-year-old who is among the 25% most socio-economically disadvantaged students in his or her own country, and whose reading performance is ranked among the international group of students who most exceed expectations, is described as “resilient”. Such a student combines the characteristics of having the weakest prospects and doing the best given those prospects.

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

Going further

Further analysis is presented in Chapter 3 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume II, Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes*. Full data are shown in Table II.3.3 at the back of that volume.

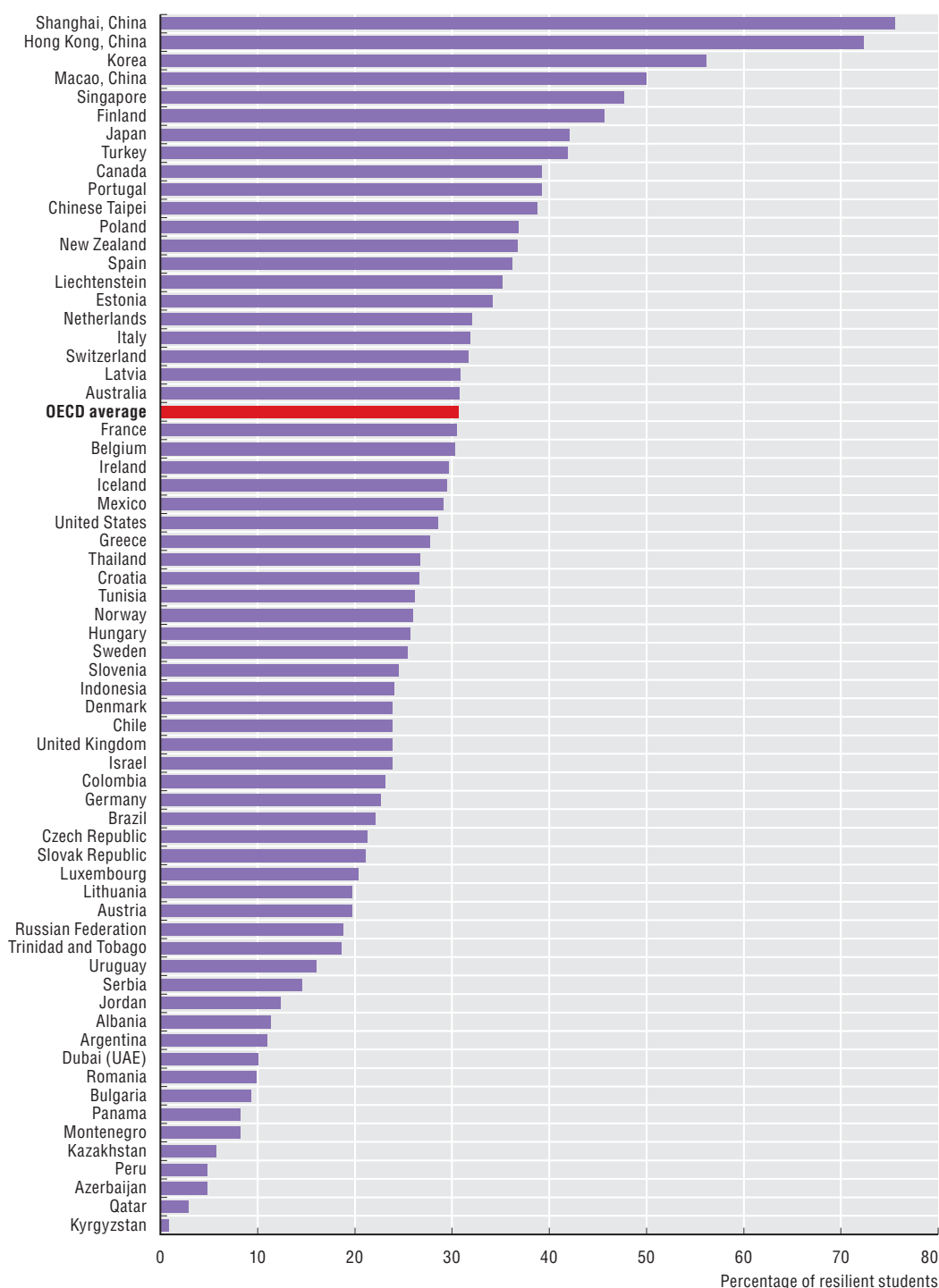
Further reading from the OECD

Against the Odds: Disadvantaged Students Who Succeed in School (forthcoming)

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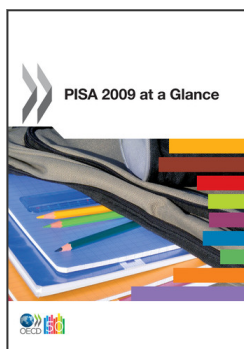
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Figure 2.2. Percentage of resilient students among disadvantaged students



Note: A student is classified as resilient if he or she is in the bottom quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status in the country of assessment and performs in the top quarter across students from all countries after accounting for socio-economic background. The share of resilient students among all students has been multiplied by 4 so that the percentage values presented here reflect the percentage of resilient students among disadvantaged students (those in the bottom quarter of the PISA index of social, economic and cultural status).

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume II, Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes, Figure II.3.6, 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), “Can disadvantaged students defy the odds against them?”, in *PISA 2009 at a Glance*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264095250-21-en>

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