

1. WHAT STUDENTS KNOW AND CAN DO

How do girls compare to boys in reading skills?

- In every one of the 65 countries and economies that participated in PISA 2009, girls have significantly higher average reading scores than boys.
- The gender gap in reading varies from more than 50 score points in 14 countries and economies to less than 25 points in 7 countries.
- In some high-performing countries, the gender gap is large; but in some East Asian countries and economies, boys score well above the OECD average.

What it means

Lower reading proficiency among boys has become a major concern in many education systems. Closing the gender gap will help to improve reading performance overall.

Findings

Girls outperform boys in reading in every PISA country. In OECD countries, the average gender gap is 39 score points, or over half a proficiency level.

The widest gender gaps, seen in Albania, Bulgaria and Lithuania, are well over twice the size of the smallest gaps, seen in the OECD country Chile and the partner countries Colombia and Peru.

Wide gender gaps are seen in Nordic countries, including the highest-scoring OECD country, Finland, and in some other high-performing countries, such as New Zealand. In Finland, boys score one-fifth of a proficiency level above the OECD average whereas girls score close to one proficiency level higher. In Korea and the partner economies Hong Kong, China and Shanghai, China, all high-scoring countries with gender gaps close to the average, boys perform better than they do in other countries, scoring well above the OECD average for both genders by 24 to 43 points.

Gender differences are most stark when comparing the proportion of boys and girls who perform at the lowest reading proficiency levels. In 18 countries that score below the OECD average, boys perform below

the baseline Level 2, on average, while girls perform below that level, on average, in only 5 countries.

But the extent of underperformance among boys is a crucial issue nearly everywhere. On average in OECD countries, only one in eight girls, but one in four boys, fails to reach Level 2. In some countries, the great majority of underperformers are boys. In Finland, only 3% of girls but 13% of boys do not attain Level 2, while in the partner country Latvia, 9% of girls and 27% of boys do not attain that level.

Definitions

The gender gap measures the difference between the mean performance of boys and girls in reading. On the PISA reading scale, the mean score for OECD countries was originally set at 500 points, and around two-thirds of students in OECD countries score between 400 and 600 points. One proficiency level is equivalent to 72 score points.

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

Going further

A full set of comparisons across countries, showing details of gender differences in reading skills, is presented in Chapter 2 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume I, What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science*. Full data are shown in Tables I.2.3 (mean scores) and I.2.2 (proficiency levels) at the back of that volume.

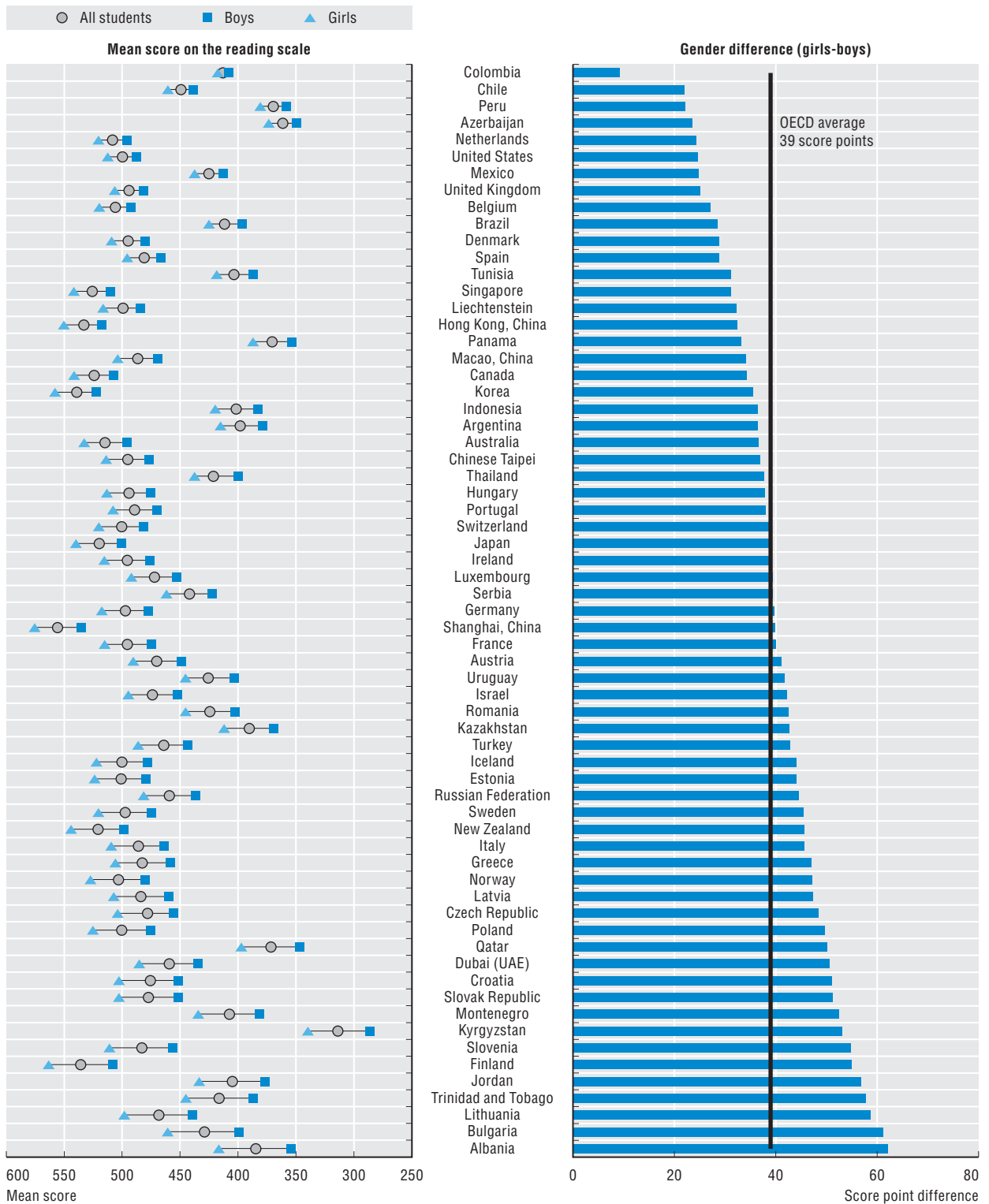
Further reading from the OECD

Equally Prepared for Life? How 15-year-old Boys and Girls Perform in School (2009).

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Figure 1.3. Gender differences in reading performance



Note: All gender differences are significant (see Annex AX). Countries are ranked in ascending order of the gender score point difference (girls-boys).

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume I, What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science, Figure I.2.17, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932343133>.



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