

### Socio-economic background and reading performance

- The performance gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds narrowed in nine countries between 2000 and 2009, most markedly in the Czech Republic and the partner countries Albania and Latvia.
- The gap widened in five countries, most markedly in Korea, Sweden and the partner country Romania.
- In the other 22 countries with comparable results in both PISA 2000 and 2009, the relationship between socio-economic background and reading performance was unchanged.

#### What it means

A major priority of education systems is to offer equitable learning opportunities, and ultimately realise equitable learning outcomes, regardless of students' socio-economic backgrounds. Nine years may be considered a relatively short time in which to weaken the relationship between student background and reading performance, yet PISA results show that some countries have succeeded in doing just that.

#### Findings

In nine countries, the predicted difference in reading scores between students from different social backgrounds narrowed between 2000 and 2009. In these countries, students' socio-economic background had less of an impact on their reading performance in 2009. For example, in 2000, the Czech Republic showed the largest gap in reading performance among students from different backgrounds, but by 2009 this gap had narrowed to a greater extent than in any other country. In Germany and the United States, two other countries with wide disparities in students' socio-economic backgrounds, these gaps also narrowed over the period. But the performance gaps in all three countries remain larger than or close to the OECD average.

In Canada, Chile and the partner countries Albania and Latvia, the impact of social background was closer to average in 2000, but also weakened over the period. In Mexico and the partner economy Hong Kong, China; the relationship between socio-economic background and reading performance was already relatively weak in 2000 and had weakened further by 2009. As a result, Hong Kong, China, which scored among the top five countries and economies in

reading in 2009, now has one of the narrowest gaps in reading performance between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Even the most disadvantaged quarter of students in Hong Kong, China have reading scores above the OECD average.

In contrast, the performance gap between these groups of students widened in five countries during the same period. In Finland, Iceland and Korea, three of the countries with the narrowest performance gaps between students from different backgrounds in 2000, these gaps had widened significantly by 2009 but remain well below average. The partner country Romania no longer shows relatively small social differences in reading performance between advantaged and disadvantaged students as it did in 2000; it is now close to the OECD average. And in Sweden, the gap widened from close to average to above average.

#### Definitions

Socio-economic background is measured on an international index of social, cultural and economic status, using students' reports of their parents' education and occupations and their home possessions, such as whether they have a desk for doing school work and how many books they have in the house. On this index, one "unit" is equivalent to one standard deviation across OECD countries meaning that, in these countries, about two-thirds of students come from backgrounds that are between one unit above and one unit below average.

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

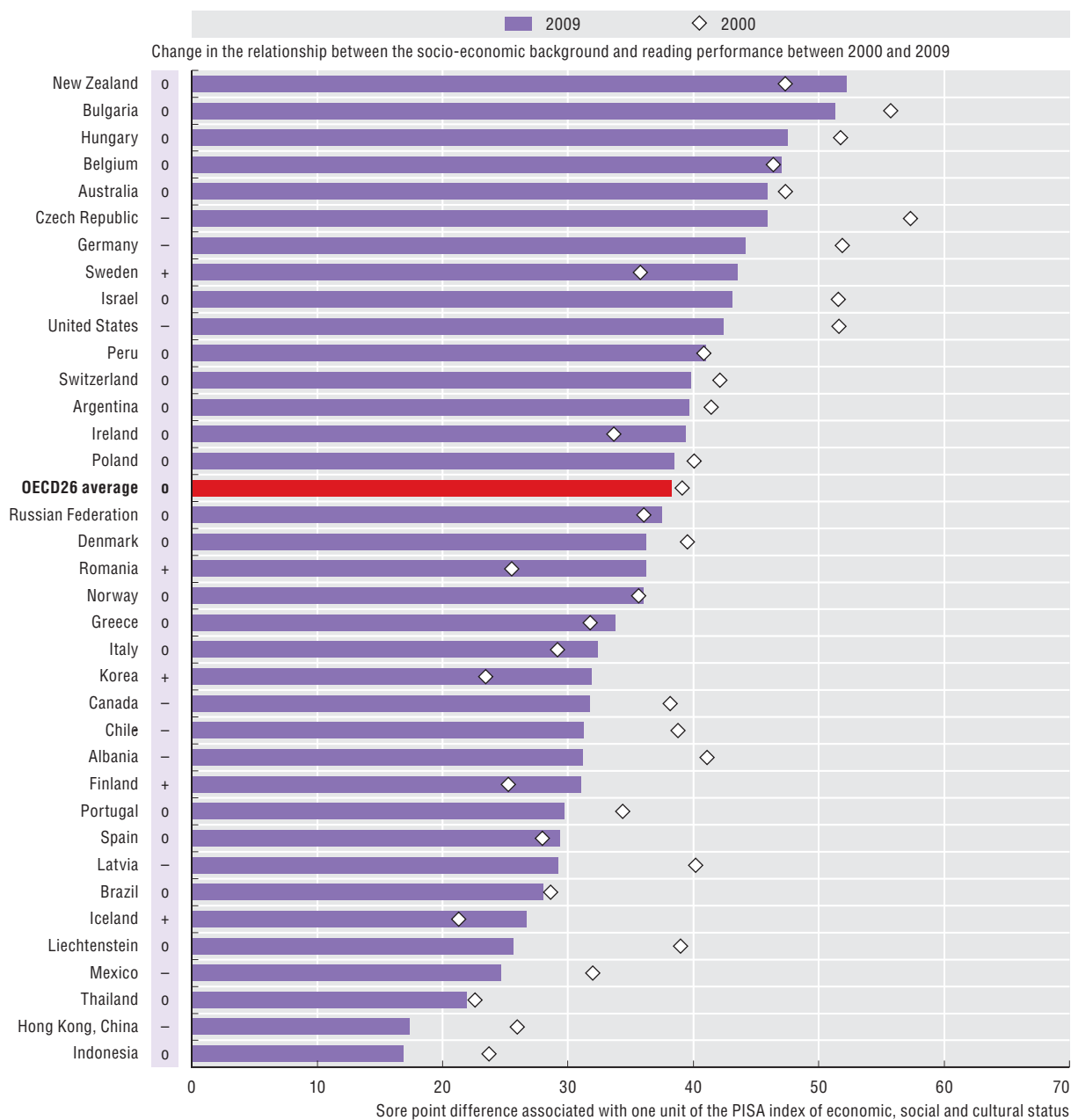
#### Going further

Further analysis of changes in the relationship between reading performance and socio-economic background between 2000 and 2009 is presented in Chapter 4 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume V, Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000*. Full data are shown in Table V.4.3 at the back of that volume.

## 2. OVERCOMING SOCIAL BACKGROUND – TRENDS

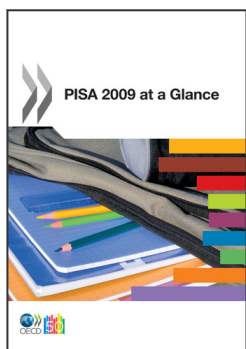
### Socio-economic background and reading performance

Figure 2.6. Relationship between students' socio-economic background and their reading performance in 2000 and 2009



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the overall association of the socio-economic background in 2009.

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume V, Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000, Figure V.4.4, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932360005>.



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