

# 1. WHAT STUDENTS KNOW AND CAN DO

## How do countries/economies perform in reading overall?

- The partner economy Shanghai, China shows the highest average reading performance in PISA 2009, followed by the OECD countries Korea and Finland, the partner economy Hong Kong, China and the partner country Singapore.
- In most OECD countries, average reading performance is at proficiency Level 3. In the partner countries and economies, the average ranges widely, from Level 1a to Level 4.

### What it means

The mean PISA reading score for each country/economy summarises the performance of students overall. These scores show that reading standards vary greatly among countries and economies in ways that cannot simply be attributed to the countries' different stages of economic development. A nation's wealth influences educational success; but GDP per capita now explains only 6% of the differences between countries' average student performance. The other 94% of differences reflect the fact that two countries of similar prosperity can produce very different educational results.

### Findings

The OECD countries Finland and Korea and the partner economies Hong Kong, China and Shanghai, China show mean reading scores well above any other participants in PISA 2009. Of these, Shanghai, China's score is much higher than that of the other three, whose mean reading scores are not significantly different from each other.

Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the partner country Singapore also score well above the OECD average, by at least 22 score points, or nearly one-third of a proficiency level.

Another seven OECD countries – Belgium, Estonia, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Switzerland – and the partner country Liechtenstein also perform significantly above the OECD average.

Overall, the range in country scores is wide, representing large differences in how well students in different countries can read. On average, students in Shanghai, China are proficient to near the bottom of Level 4. At this level, students can identify, interpret and reflect on

information in relatively complex written material. In the lowest-performing OECD country, Mexico, students are, on average, proficient to the bottom of Level 2, and in 11 partner countries, average proficiency is at Level 1a or 1b. At these lowest levels, students are only capable of locating and interpreting explicit information in simple written texts.

### Definitions

In the original PISA survey in 2000, the mean reading score was set at 500 points for participating OECD countries. In 2009, with a slightly wider range of OECD countries, the average score was 493 points. The original PISA scale was set such that approximately two-thirds of students across OECD countries score between 400 and 600 points. A gap of 72 points in reading scores is equivalent to one proficiency level in reading.

The country averages shown here are estimates based on the PISA sample. In many cases, differences between countries/economies are too close to be statistically significant. In such cases, it cannot be said which of a pair of countries/economies has students with higher average performance.

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

### Going further

A full set of comparisons across countries and economies, showing in which cases differences between mean performances are statistically significant, are presented in Chapter 2 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume I, What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science*.

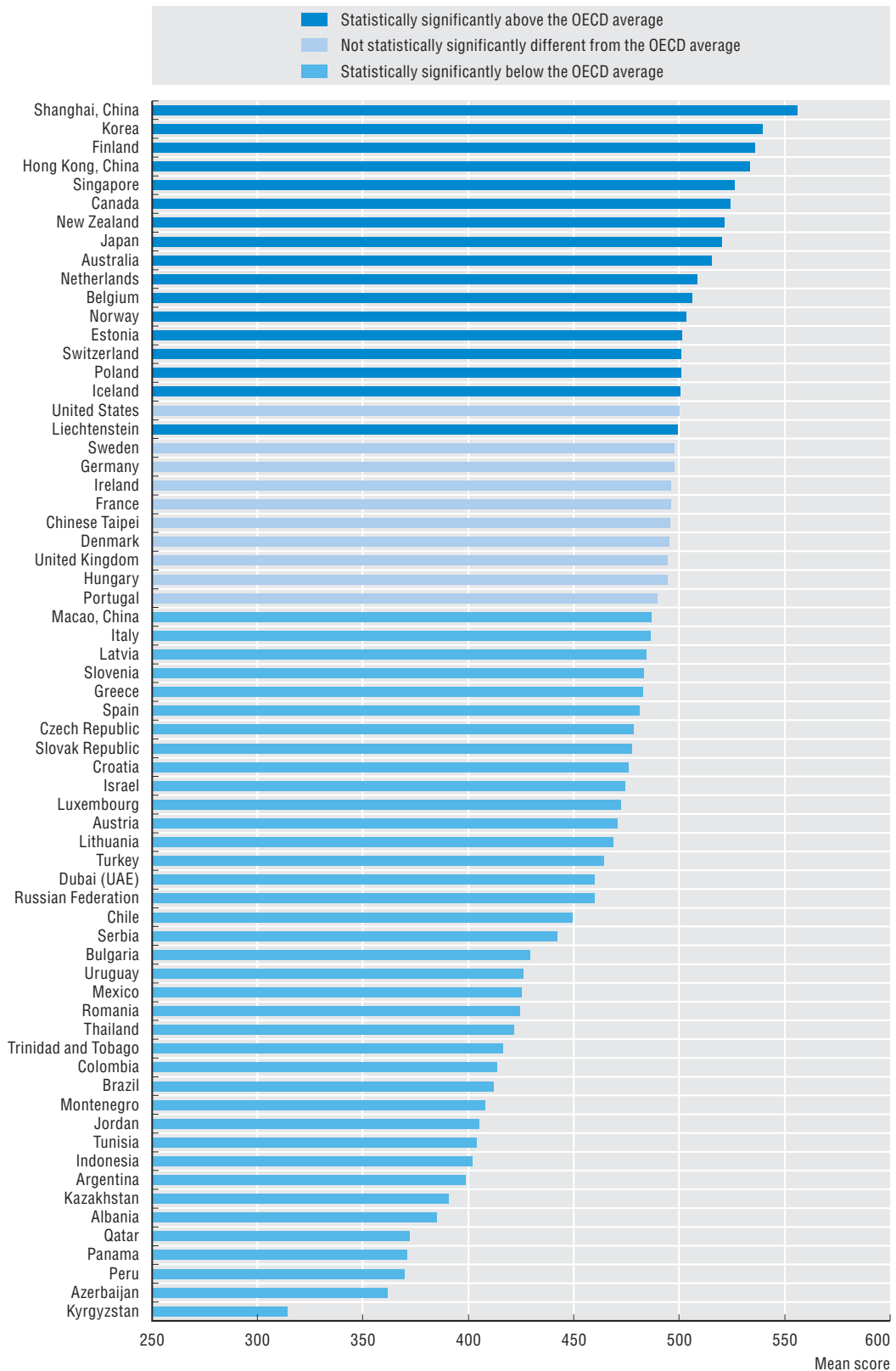
### Further reading from the OECD

*PISA 2009 Assessment Framework (2009)*.

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Figure 1.2. Comparing performance in reading



Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume I, What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science, Figure I.2.15, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932343133>.



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