

## 1. Trust

**Definition and measurement**

Trust data is based on the question: “Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?”. Data come from two different surveys: the *European Social Survey* (ESS) (2008 wave 4) for OECD-Europe and the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) (2007 wave) for non-OECD Europe. For the ESS, interviewees answer using a 10-point scale with the lowest category being “You can’t be too careful” and the highest “Most people can be trusted”. The ISSP has four categories: “People can almost always be trusted”, “People can usually be trusted”, “You usually can’t be too careful in dealing with people”, and “You almost always can’t be too careful in dealing with people”. The trust measure aggregates the top five categories for the ESS and the top two categories for the ISSP to give a percentage of people expressing high levels of trust. When data for a country was available from different sources, ESS data was preferred over ISSP data, because of larger sample sizes and a more nuanced question. Weights provided by the surveys were applied. Data comparability across countries may be affected by sample sizes and variation in response rates. Further comparability issues arise because of differences in survey frames and questions. For assessing trends in trust, annual average changes were calculated using the 2002 ESS (wave 1), and the 1998 ISSP wave as starting points.

The Gini coefficient is a measure of income inequality. Values range between 0 – perfect equality – and 1 – all income goes to one person.

**Trust reflects people’s perception of others’ reliability.**

Trust may affect economic and social development by facilitating market exchange, enabling better functioning of public institutions and increasing capacity for collective action (Morrone et al., 2009).

**The share of people expressing high levels of trust varied greatly across countries (Panel A, CO1.1).** In OECD coun-

tries almost 60% of the interviewees expressed high level of interpersonal trust. In Chile, fewer than 15% of the interviewees expressed trust in others and in Mexico and Turkey less than 30% were trusting, compared to more than 80% in Nordic countries.

**Recent levels of trust have increased modestly on average (Panel B, CO1.1).** In Japan, the level of trust increased on average by 3 percentage points per year over a nine year period. Solid annual increases were also posted in the Slovak Republic, New Zealand and Israel. Of the six countries that experienced a decline in trust, most changes were fairly minor, with the exception of Portugal.

**High country trust was strongly associated with high household income levels (CO1.2).** The relationship was strong. United States had lower than expected trust given its income level and eastern European countries had higher degrees of trust than expected on the basis of their household income. Trust may promote gainful economic activity, or trust may be a luxury affordable only by richer countries.

**Higher levels of trust were strongly associated with lower levels of income inequality (CO1.3).** In countries with high inequality, people trust less than in the more egalitarian Nordic countries. The reasons for the association are unclear. Income inequality may make it more difficult for people in different strata to share a sense of common purpose and to trust each other (Morrone et al., 2009). Or low levels of trust may impede positive social bonds developing, which in turn contributes to high inequality.

**Further reading**

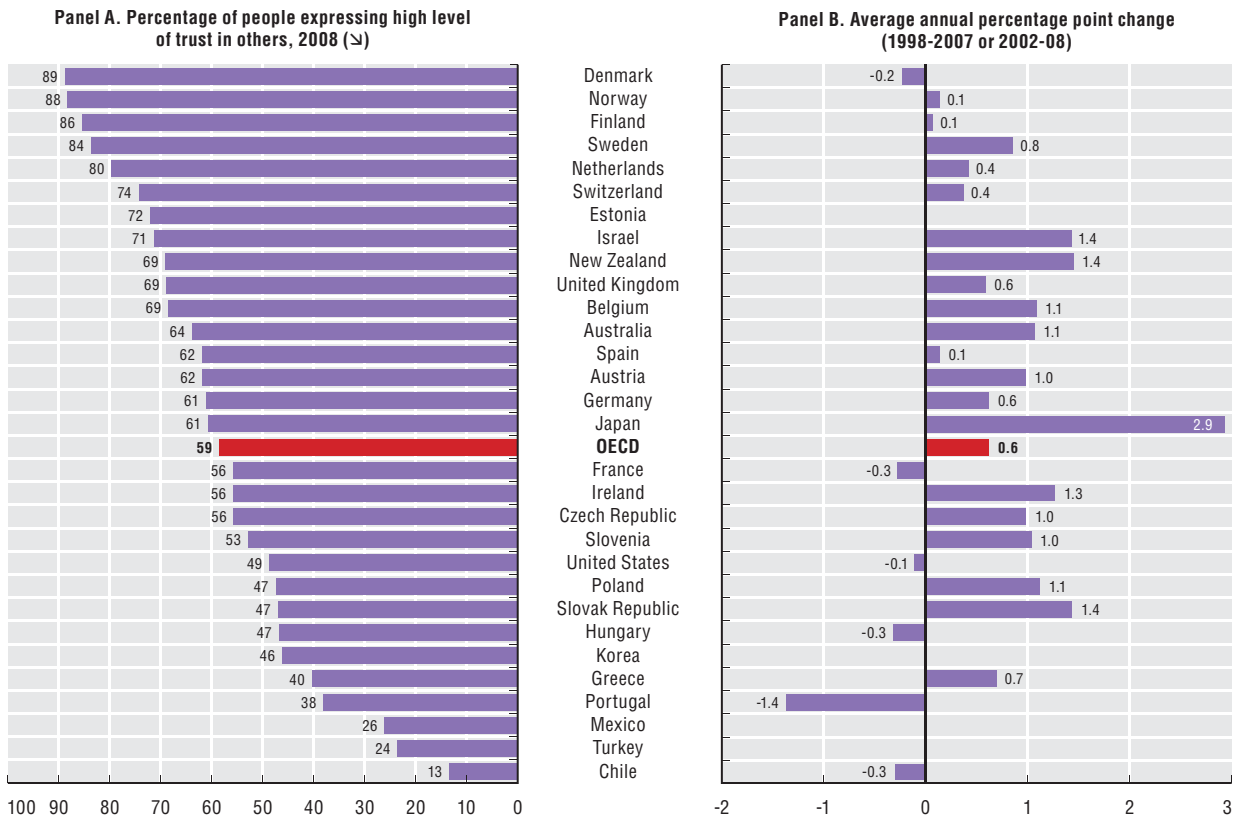
Morrone, A., N. Tontoranelli and G. Ranuzzi (2009), “How Good is Trust? Measuring Trust and its Role for the Progress of Societies”, *OECD Statistics Working Paper*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

**Figure note**

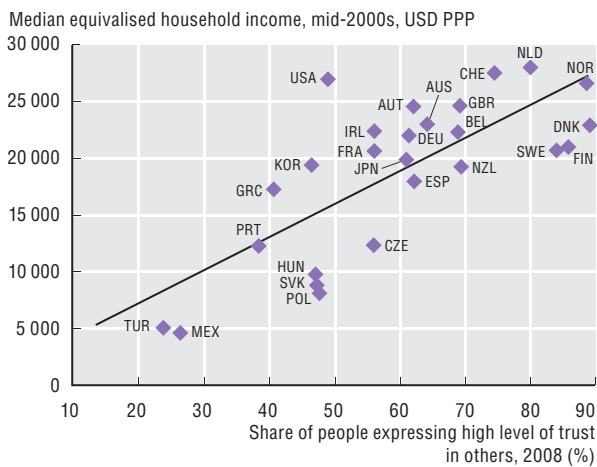
Figure CO1.1, Panel A: 2007 for New Zealand, Mexico, Australia, Austria, Japan, Korea, Ireland, the United States and Chile. Figure CO1.1, Panel B: Change refers to 1998/2007: the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, New Zealand, Australia, Austria, Japan, Ireland, the United States and Chile; 2002/08 for the other countries.

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

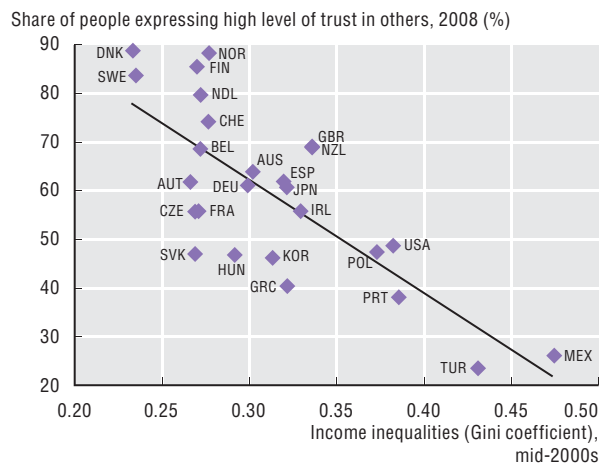
**CO1.1. Nordic countries have the highest levels of trust and Mexico, Turkey and Chile the lowest**



**CO1.2. Richer countries trust more**



**CO1.3. Trust is higher when income is more equally distributed**



Source: ESS (European Social Survey); ISSP (International Social Survey Programme); OECD (2008), *Growing Unequal? Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries* ([www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality)).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932382064>



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