

## 5. SPECIAL SECTION: INTRODUCING PISA

### What is PISA?

- PISA assessments are held every three years, with each round assessing student performance in reading, mathematics and science.
- Around 70 countries have taken part in PISA since it began in 2000, accounting for more than 90% of the world economy.
- Around 470 000 students participated in PISA 2009, representing about 26 million 15-year-olds.

#### Introduction

PISA, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, evaluates the quality, equity and efficiency of school systems throughout the world. The programme represents a commitment made by governments to regularly monitor the outcomes of education systems within an internationally agreed framework.

PISA assesses the extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society. Every three years, hundreds of thousands of 15-year-old students are assessed on their reading, mathematics and science performance. Factors influencing their performance and potential for lifelong learning, including their social background, are also explored in separate questionnaires. The organisation of schools is also taken into account through a questionnaire filled out by school principals. The resulting data provides a basis for international co-operation in defining and implementing educational goals in innovative ways.

#### Key features of PISA

**Policy orientation:** PISA is designed to provide governments with the data they need to draw policy lessons.

**“Literacy” concept:** PISA is concerned with the capacity of students to apply knowledge and skills in key subject areas and to analyse, reason and communicate effectively as they pose, solve and interpret problems in a variety of situations.

**Relevance to lifelong learning:** PISA goes beyond assessing students' curricular competencies to report on their motivation to learn, their beliefs about themselves and their learning strategies.

**Regularity:** PISA's triennial cycle allows countries to monitor their progress in meeting key learning objectives.

**Breadth:** PISA assessments cover all 34 OECD countries and a large number of other partner countries and economies.

#### Definitions

Results reported in this section are based on student assessments administered as part of the PISA 2009 round undertaken by the OECD. The term “students” refers to 15-year-olds enrolled in an educational institution at secondary level, regardless of the grade level, type of institution or whether they attended school full-time or part-time.

Once students have completed the assessments, their results are processed to produce a score point average and ranking for their country. Note, however, that because the students who take part in PISA represent only a sample of 15-year-olds in each country, each ranking can be determined only with a 95% likelihood.

The score-point scale is divided into six proficiency levels. Attaining a certain level indicates that a student has certain proficiencies. For example, students attaining Level 6 in reading were described as being able to conduct fine-grained analysis of texts, which requires detailed comprehension of both explicit information and unstated implications; and reflect on and evaluate what they read at a more general level. By contrast, students at Level 1 were described as having such a limited reading literacy that they can only find explicitly-stated information and make low-level inferences.

The discussion in this special section on PISA in *Education at a Glance 2011: Highlights* covers the 34 OECD member countries and the following five G20 partner countries or economies only: Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, the Russian Federation and Shanghai-China. Full data coverage for all the countries that took part in the latest PISA round can be found in *PISA at a Glance 2009*.

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

#### Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*.

Table S.1. Country and economy coverage for PISA 2009

This table lists the countries and economies that took part in PISA 2009 assessments.

OECD countries	Partner countries and economies
Australia	Albania
Austria	Argentina
Belgium	Azerbaijan
Canada	Brazil
Chile	Bulgaria
Czech Republic	Colombia
Denmark	Costa Rica <sup>1</sup>
Estonia	Croatia
Finland	Georgia <sup>1</sup>
France	Himachal Pradesh-India <sup>1</sup>
Germany	Hong Kong-China
Greece	Indonesia
Hungary	Jordan
Iceland	Kazakhstan
Ireland	Kyrgyzstan
Israel	Latvia
Italy	Liechtenstein
Japan	Lithuania
Korea	Macao, China
Luxembourg	Malaysia <sup>1</sup>
Mexico	Malta <sup>1</sup>
Netherlands	Mauritius <sup>1</sup>
New Zealand	Miranda-Venezuela <sup>1</sup>
Norway	Moldova
Poland	Montenegro
Portugal	Netherlands-Antilles <sup>1</sup>
Slovak Republic	Panama
Slovenia	Peru
Spain	Qatar
Sweden	Romania
Switzerland	Russian Federation
Turkey	Serbia
United Kingdom	Shanghai-China
United States	Singapore
	Tamil Nadu-India <sup>1</sup>
	Chinese Taipei
	Thailand
	Trinidad and Tobago
	Tunisia
	Uruguay
	United Arab Emirates <sup>1</sup>
	Viet Nam <sup>1</sup>

1. These partner countries and economies carried out the assessment in 2010 instead of 2009.



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