

ABOUT THE SURVEY OF ADULTS SKILLS

Design and methods

The Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), assessed the proficiency of adults from the ages of 16-65 in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. These skills are key information-processing competencies that are relevant to adults in many social contexts and work situations, and necessary for fully integrating and participating in the labour market, education and training, and social and civic life.

Information was also collected on the background of respondents, their education and labour market experience and some other outcomes, such as their health. In addition, the survey collected a range of information on the reading- and numeracy-related activities of respondents, the use of information and communication technologies at work and in everyday life, and on a range of generic skills, such as collaborating with others and organising one's time, required of individuals in their work. Respondents were also asked whether their skills and qualifications match their work requirements and whether they have autonomy over key aspects of their work.

The Survey of Adult Skills was designed primarily as a computer-based assessment. Most respondents completed the assessment in this format. Respondents who had no prior experience with computers or very limited computer skills took the assessment in a pencil-and-paper format. Respondents took the assessment in the national language or languages of their country of residence, or in some cases, a widely used minority language.

Twenty-four countries¹ took part in the first round of the assessment.² Data collection took place between August 2011 and March 2012 in most countries. All participating countries administered the literacy and numeracy assessments. Four countries (Cyprus³, France, Italy and Spain) did not administer the assessment of problem solving in technology-rich environments.

Readers should note that the sample for the Russian Federation does not include the population of the Moscow municipal area. The data published, therefore, do not represent the entire resident population aged 16-65 in Russia but rather the population of Russia excluding the population residing in the Moscow municipal area. More detailed information regarding the data from the Russian Federation as well as that of other countries can be found in the *Technical Report of the Survey of Adult Skills* (OECD, 2013, forthcoming).

More information on the design and methods of the survey can be found in:

OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>.

OECD (2013), *The Survey of Adult Skills: Reader's Companion*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204027-en>.

The Survey of Adult Skills uses the following definitions of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments:

Literacy

Literacy is defined as “understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential”. It does not involve either the comprehension or production of spoken language or the production of text (writing). Literacy is conceived as a skill that involves constructing meaning, and evaluating and using texts to achieve a range of possible goals in a variety of contexts. It thus extends well beyond the skills of decoding or comprehending texts to encompass the capacity to respond to texts in a manner that is appropriate to the context.

Numeracy

Numeracy is defined as the ability to access, use, interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life. A numerate adult is one who responds appropriately to mathematical content, information, and ideas represented in various ways in order to manage situations and solve problems in a real-life context. While performance on numeracy tasks is, in part, dependent on the ability to read and understand text, numeracy involves more than applying arithmetical skills to information embedded in text.

Problem solving in technology-rich environments

Problem solving in technology-rich environments is defined as “using digital technology, communication tools and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others and perform practical tasks”. It focuses on “the abilities to solve problems for personal, work and civic purposes by setting up appropriate goals and plans, and accessing and making use of information through computers and computer networks” (*OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>).

Problem solving in technology-rich environments represents the intersection of what are sometimes described as “computer literacy” skills (i.e. the capacity to use information and communication technologies [ICT] tools and applications) and the cognitive skills required to solve problems. However, the objective was not to test proficiency in the use of ICT tools and applications in isolation, but rather to assess the capacity of adults to use these tools to access, process, evaluate and analyse information effectively in a goal-oriented way.

Reporting the results

In each of the three domains assessed, proficiency is considered as a continuum of ability involving the mastery of information-processing tasks of increasing complexity. The results are represented on a 500-point scale.

To help interpret the results, the reporting scales have been divided into “proficiency levels” defined by particular score-point ranges. Six proficiency levels are defined for literacy and numeracy (Levels 1 through 5 plus below Level 1) and four for problem solving in technology-rich environments (Levels 1 through 3 plus below Level 1). Each proficiency level is described in terms of the characteristics of the types of tasks that can be successfully completed by adults with proficiency scores in the range of scores that defines a level. Descriptions of the types of tasks related to each level on the literacy scale are provided below.

Proficiency at Level 5 (scores equal to or higher than 376 points)

Level 5 is the highest proficiency level on the skills scale. Adults reaching this level can perform tasks that involve searching for and integrating information across multiple, dense texts; constructing syntheses of similar and contrasting ideas or points of view, or evaluating evidence and arguments. They can apply and evaluate logical and conceptual models, and evaluate the reliability of evidentiary sources and select key information. They are aware of subtle, rhetorical cues and are able to make high-level inferences or use specialised background knowledge.

Proficiency at Level 4 (scores from 326 points to less than 376 points)

At Level 4, adults can perform multiple-step operations to integrate, interpret, or synthesise information from complex or lengthy continuous, non-continuous, mixed, or multiple-type texts that involve conditional and/or competing information.

Proficiency at Level 3 (scores from 276 points to less than 326 points)

Adults performing at Level 3 can understand and respond appropriately to dense or lengthy texts, including continuous, non-continuous, mixed, or multiple pages. They understand text structures and rhetorical devices and can identify, interpret, or evaluate one or more pieces of information and make appropriate inferences. They can also perform multistep operations and select relevant data from competing information in order to identify and formulate responses.

Proficiency at Level 2 (scores from 226 points to less than 276 points)

At Level 2, adults can integrate two or more pieces of information based on criteria, compare and contrast or reason about information and make low-level inferences. They can navigate within digital texts to access and identify information from various parts of a document.

Proficiency at Level 1 (scores from 176 points to less than 226 points)

At Level 1, adults can read relatively short digital or print continuous, non-continuous, or mixed texts to locate a single piece of information, which is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive. These texts contain little competing information. Adults performing at this level can complete simple forms, understand basic vocabulary, determine the meaning of sentences, and read continuous texts with a degree of fluency.

Proficiency below Level 1 (scores below 176 points)

Individuals at this level can read brief texts on familiar topics and locate a single piece of specific information identical in form to information in the question or directive. They are not required to understand the structure of sentences or paragraphs and only basic vocabulary knowledge is required. Tasks below Level 1 do not make use of any features specific to digital texts.

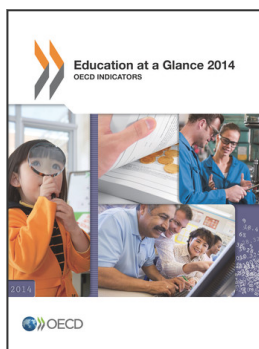
For more information on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), please consult <http://skills.oecd.org> and <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac>.

Notes

1. Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom (England and Northern Ireland), and the United States.
2. A further nine countries will collect data in 2014.
3. Readers should note the following information provided by Turkey and by the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union regarding the status of Cyprus:

Note by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”.

Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union: The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.



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