

Preface

At a time where the kinds of things that are easy to teach and test have also become easy to digitise and automate, and where a multitude of disruptions require individuals to constantly learn, unlearn and relearn to find and adjust their place in life and work, individuals need skills that go beyond academic knowledge. These are skills like cooperation, empathy, and creativity to find solutions, or the persistence to get things done despite challenges. Such social and emotional skills underpin our ability to interact with other people and manage our own emotions and behaviour in healthy and productive ways.

Comparative evidence of these skills has been limited. This report seeks to fill that gap: it presents findings on the state of these skills in 15- and 10-year-old students across 23 sites. The report is based on the second round of the world's first system-level survey of such skills, the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES).

Social and emotional skills have become established concepts in education systems and research—and rightly so. A large body of work shows that they support academic learning, help predict labour market and employment outcomes, affect individual's health and well-being, and support healthy democracies. Consequently, they now appear in the curricula of many countries. Yet they appear in many different ways and assessing—never mind comparing—their development within or across systems has proven difficult. They are particularly complex. They develop across social contexts, not only school; they manifest themselves differently across individuals; and their expression and value vary across cultures. Additionally, most education systems do not have specifically designed tools or measures to assess these skills. Numerous tools exist, but they assess a fragmented range of skills or are not valid for the many systems who wish to use them. However, as these skills are integrated into more systems, determining what practices and policies are effective, for which skills and age groups, becomes only more urgent.

The OECD has addressed this gap through the SSES, turning a challenge into an opportunity for international collaboration, learning and policy exchange. In the past decades, the OECD has made itself a world leader in comparative education data and the innovation of education metrics. This role also gives it influence to shape the dialogue and use of these measures. It takes this role seriously. The aim of SSES is not to create another layer of top-down accountability, but rather to create a shared space, terminology and repository of evidence for understanding and promoting these skills and thus, human flourishing. It aims, first, to give educational practitioners and policymakers a lens—ideally one of many—to see the landscape of these skills in their own countries. For many, that land is still obscured, with no comprehensive data or information. Second, it aims to help us look outward to each other, to the next city, region or country that may have the idea, policy or programme we need.

This collaborative approach is embedded in the design of SSES. Its inception mobilised experts from around the world. It draws on frameworks that have been validated in multiple countries and cultures. Participating sites helped revise and finalise the instruments, including the themes of the contextual questionnaires. It thus strikes a balance between universal measures and cultural adaptation.

Following the successful inaugural round of SSES in 2019, SSES 2023 extended the work and coverage. Six countries participated nationwide along with another 10 subnational entities from diverse areas.

Ukraine joined amid its ongoing conflict and two sites from SSES 2019 rejoined in 2023. Thus, with findings from 23 sites involved in either or both SSES 2019 and 2023, this offers a unique opportunity to examine the impact of the pandemic and war on students' social and emotional skills and well-being.

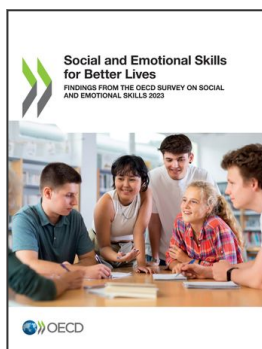
The results from SSES 2023 show that students' social and emotional skills are linked to their academic success, aspirations for the future and well-being. In other words, skills such as persistence, empathy, curiosity, and emotional control can help students lead a healthy, happy, and purposeful life. We see that students with high levels of social and emotional skills achieve better grades and have higher aspirations for their future, demonstrating that building these skills can go hand-in-hand with supporting students to reach their potential as learners. We also see that, like cognitive skills, social and emotional skills are not equitably distributed among students, with gaps between boys and girls and by socio-economic background larger in some sites than others. Participating sites can use these data to identify skills to target and inequalities to address as part of their education policy agendas. SSES demonstrates the value of social and emotional skills for developing well-rounded citizens who are equipped to tackle 21st century challenges. While the importance of these skills is increasingly recognised by policy makers, employers, education professionals, and the wider public, the task for governments is to ensure that their value is reflected in their policies, including which outcomes and skills are measured.



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