



# Introduction

This companion volume to the international reports presenting results for the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (OECD, 2013 and 2016) offers an overview of the “what” and “how” of the Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, or PIAAC. Its primary objective is to help readers to understand and interpret the results from the survey. To this end, it explains, in a non-technical way, the methodologies underpinning the design of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) and operational aspects of the survey, such as sampling, data collection and response rates, and how results are reported.

To date, two ‘rounds’ of the survey have been undertaken. The first, which collected data in 2011-12 involved 24 countries/economies. The second, which collected data in 2014-15 involved a further nine countries/economies. The countries participating in Round 1 were: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Cyprus,<sup>1</sup> Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. In Belgium, data was collected in the Flanders region only. In the United Kingdom, two of the four devolved administrations participated in the survey: England and Northern Ireland. In Round 2 of the survey, the participating countries were: Chile, Greece, Indonesia, Israel, Lithuania, New Zealand, Singapore, Slovenia and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> In Indonesia, data was collected only in the Jakarta municipal area.

A more detailed and technically oriented presentation of the survey, the methodologies used, and the quality of the data output can be found in the *Technical Report of the Survey of Adult Skills, Second Edition* (OECD, forthcoming).

The report addresses four topics:

- what is measured by the Survey of Adult Skills
- how the survey was designed and implemented
- how the results from the survey are reported
- how the survey is related to previous adult skills surveys, to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and to work on measuring key competencies and human capital.

## WHAT IS MEASURED?

Chapter 1 describes the survey’s approach to assessing key information-processing skills. In particular, it presents the main elements of the conceptual frameworks defining the constructs of literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments measured by the survey. The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) is designed not only to provide valid and reliable estimates of the competency of the adult population in key information-processing skills, but also to identify differences in proficiency between population sub-groups, to better understand how such skills are developed, maintained and used, and to determine the impact of different levels of proficiency on life chances. Chapter 2 describes the content of the background questionnaire and the rationale behind its design.

## ASPECTS OF THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURVEY

In order to interpret the results from the Survey of Adult Skills, it is essential to understand not only what was measured but how the survey was designed and implemented. Chapter 3 presents the key aspects of the survey’s design, describes how the survey was implemented, and provides an overview of the quality of the resulting data.

## HOW RESULTS ARE REPORTED

What does it mean to have a particular proficiency score or to be described as having a particular level of proficiency in literacy, numeracy or problem solving in technology-rich environments? Chapter 4 describes how the results from the survey are reported, with an emphasis on the meaning of the scores and proficiency levels.

## HOW THE SURVEY RELATES TO OTHER WORK ON MEASURING AND ASSESSING SKILLS AND HUMAN CAPITAL

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) does not exist in isolation; understanding how the survey relates to other international surveys of adult literacy and how it relates to the OECD assessment of 15-year-old students (the Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA) is important for interpreting its results. To what extent do these surveys assess the same skills? How should similarities and differences in results be interpreted? Similarly, it is important to understand how the survey relates to the concept of “competency” and to the evolution of the definition of “key” or “essential” skills and competencies that has occurred since the 1980s, as well as to debates about measuring human capital. Chapter 5 describes the links between the Survey of Adult Skills and other international adult skills surveys. The relationship between the survey and PISA is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 explores the relationship between the survey and competency frameworks. The extent to which direct measures of skills should be seen as an alternative or complement to traditional indicators of human capital is addressed in Chapter 8.

### Notes

1. *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.

2. The names of the countries participating in Round 2 of the Survey of Adult Skills are presented in blue in all figures and tables.

### References

OECD (forthcoming), *Technical Report of the Survey of Adult Skills, Second Edition*.

OECD (2016), *Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264258051-en>.

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>.



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