

Skills and education for society

- Highly literate tertiary graduates in OECD countries are more likely to believe they have a say in their government.
- Adults who are highly literate or have a tertiary education are more likely to think they are in good health than adults with low literacy levels or education.
- By improving skills women are likely to benefit more, in terms of health and trusting others, than men.

Significance

This section examines the relationship between education and skills, and social outcomes including self-reported health status, volunteering, interpersonal trust and political efficacy. Improving health, and social and civic engagement are key policy objectives for all OECD countries. Although the significant resources spent on healthcare have generally helped people live longer, the nature of health problems has changed, with recent increases in chronic debilitating conditions such as heart disease and depression. Efforts to combat these trends depend in part on altering individuals' lifestyle choices by improving their cognitive and socio-emotional skills through education. Education may also play an important role in ensuring social cohesion by fostering the skills and resilience that underlie social and civic engagement.

Findings

Both educational attainment and literacy are strongly associated with higher levels of social outcomes. In health, people who are highly literate or have a tertiary education are, on average, 23 percentage points more likely to think they are in good health than people with low literacy levels or education, in 22 OECD countries. In Poland, how healthy people think they are seems to be more related to their level of education, with 38 points separating adults with high and low levels of education. Women are likely to gain more health benefits from improving their educational attainment than men. The gap between women with high and low levels of education who think they are in good health is 25 percentage points, compared to 22 points for men.

Education and skills are also associated with whether or not people volunteer. Although it is still unclear why this is, one reason could be that such skills motivate people to volunteer by instilling a sense that they have something to offer. Highly literate people are 11 percentage points more likely to volunteer than people with a low literacy level, on average among countries. There is particularly strong relationship between literacy and volunteering among adults without upper secondary education, as people with low levels of literacy are 8 percentage points less likely to volunteer than those with high levels of literacy, on average in 21 OECD countries.

On average, highly literate adults are 17 percentage points more likely to trust others than those with a low literacy level. This figure reaches 29 points in Norway and 33 in Denmark. Improving skills is also likely to foster more trust among women than among men. There is a 19 percentage point gap between highly and poorly skilled women who believe they can trust others, whereas for men the gap is 15 points.

The link between skills and people's belief that they have a say in their government might be similar to that for volunteering. Certain skills may make people feel more powerful by instilling a sense of control and making people feel that they can make a difference. In addition, skills are needed to understand the political issues facing a country. There is particularly strong relationship between literacy and the belief you have a say in government among people with tertiary education. Tertiary graduates with low levels of literacy are, on average, 21 percentage points less likely to believe they have a say than those with high levels of literacy, among 20 OECD countries.

Definitions

All data are based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012.

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 *Education at a Glance 2014* (Indicator A8) and *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*.

Areas covered include:

- Social outcomes by educational attainment and literacy levels.
- Self-reported health and interpersonal trust by skill levels and gender.

Further reading from OECD

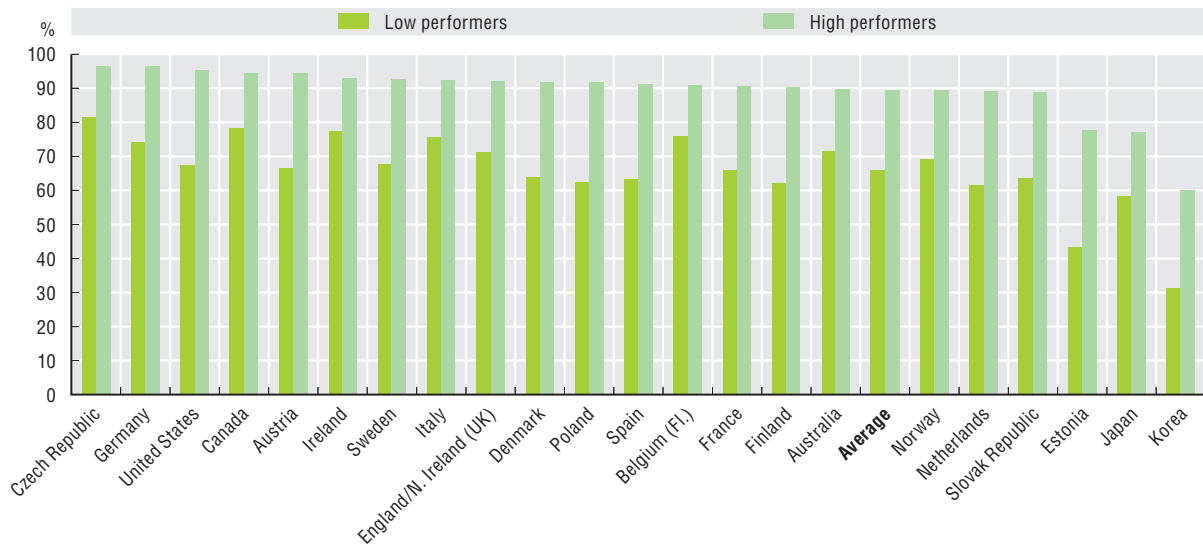
OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>.

OECD (2010), *Improving Health and Social Cohesion through Education*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264086319-en>.

OECD Skills Studies (series).

Figure 6.5. **Self-reported health by literacy level, 2012**

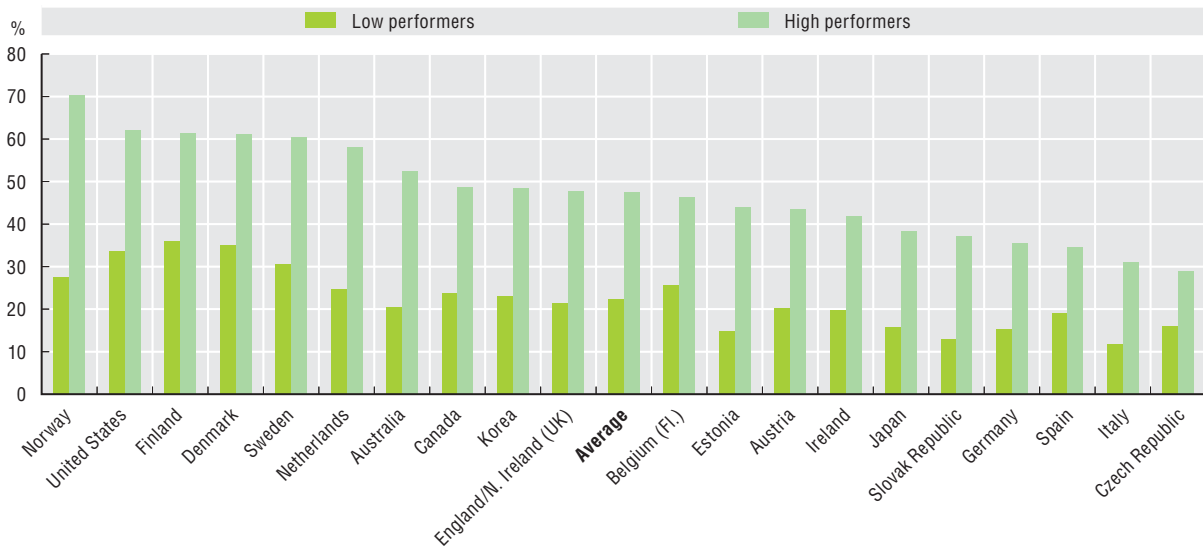
This figure shows the percentage of highly-literate 25-64 year-olds who said they are in good health compared to those with low levels of literacy.



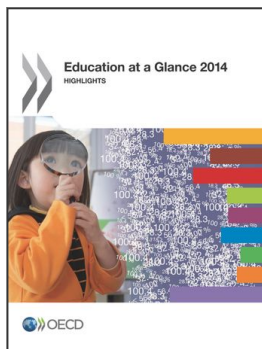
Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart A8.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933116661>.

Figure 6.6. **Self-reported political influence by literacy level, 2012**

This figure shows the percentage of highly-literate 25-64 year-olds who believe they have a say in government compared to those with low levels of literacy.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart A8.5, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933116718>.



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