



Foreword

Although large numbers of children in developing countries have been able to enter school over the past two decades, many young people – especially the disadvantaged, young girls, those living in rural areas and ethnic minorities – are still leaving school without the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in society and find decent livelihoods. This has led to a general consensus¹ that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal for education should include a focus on learning. That, in turn, makes reliable metrics on the quality of learning outcomes truly essential.

Every three years, some 80 countries and economies collaborate to compare how well their school systems prepare young people for life and work. The framework for these comparisons is an international assessment of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students known as PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment. PISA does not just examine whether students have learned what they were taught, but also assesses whether students can creatively and critically use what they know.

Of course, such international comparisons are never easy and they aren't perfect. But they show what is possible in education, they help governments to see themselves in comparison to the education opportunities and results delivered by other education systems, and they help governments to build effective policies and partnerships for improving learning outcomes.

But as the number of countries joining PISA kept rising, it became apparent that the design and implementation models for PISA needed to evolve to successfully cater for a larger and more diverse set of countries. This publication provides systematic analyses of these issues. Chapter 2 describes the pattern of country participation in PISA and other large-scale international assessments over time, as well as the broad determinants of PISA participation. Chapter 3 examines the financial, technical and contextual challenges for countries participating in PISA. Chapter 4 explores the capacity-building outcomes for countries participating in PISA. Chapter 5 examines how PISA results have informed international and national policy discussions. Finally, Chapter 6 explores PISA data from middle-income countries, particularly with respect to the quality and equity of education in these contexts.

In response to these challenges, the OECD and a number of partners have launched the PISA for Development initiative that aims to extend PISA to support evidence-based policy making in emerging and developing economies and to help them monitor progress towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

A first aim is to further develop and differentiate the PISA contextual questionnaires and data-collection instruments in order to better capture the diverse contexts in which students learn, teachers teach and schools and school systems operate in emerging and developing countries. This will allow for a deeper understanding of how certain factors – such as the socio-economic background of students or the learning environment in classrooms – are associated with learning outcomes in different contexts.

A second aim is to make the PISA assessment instruments more sensitive to a wider range of performance levels. While there are undoubtedly high performers in all countries, a number of 15-year-old students in developing countries can be expected to perform at lower levels of proficiency. The enhanced assessment instruments will better capture performance differences among these students and cater for more diverse cultural contexts, while maintaining the comparability of a country's results on the global PISA scales.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for PISA is to ensure that those children who still do not have access to schooling remain no longer beyond the reach of the metrics used to evaluate the success of education systems. Though much progress has been made in increasing access to education around the world, over 70 million children of lower-secondary-school age remain out of school. An innovative out-of-school assessment will allow future PISA assessments to provide data on learning outcomes for those children too.

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1. See UNESCO and UNICEF (2013), *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, www.worldwewant2015.org/node/389575.

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Together, these efforts will enable more countries to use PISA to set national learning targets, monitor progress towards them, and analyse the factors that affect student outcomes, particularly among poor and marginalised populations.

PISA is also putting a new partnership model into practice: a group of countries from the developing world is leading the development of these new methodologies and collaborating on finding ways for making the most effective use of the results for the design and implementation of policies. They will develop the enhanced survey instruments and methodologies and undertake field trials and surveys to test them. The results of their surveys will provide local policy makers with new evidence to diagnose shortcomings and inform new policies. In addition, these countries will benefit from opportunities for peer-to-peer exchanges with other members of the PISA global community.

Within each partner country, bilateral and multilateral development co-operation agencies will provide both financial and technical support for the initiative, including assistance in developing the survey instruments and methodologies. The results of the survey can be used to inform their own policies and practices.

Technical partnerships and networks of experts in such fields as learning assessments or out-of-school youth will be established to build on best practices. In addition to offering insights into learning metrics at global and national levels, these partnerships will also work to address the lack of data on out-of-school children.

The OECD remains committed to maintain and develop PISA as a global yardstick for educational success. It will continue to contribute its expertise and its platforms to support collaboration for developing and conducting PISA surveys and to assist policy-makers and practitioners throughout the world to use them most productively.



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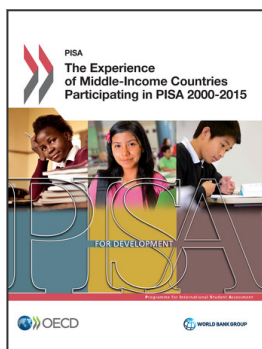
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This report was authored by Marlaine E. Lockheed, former World Bank official, with researchers Tijana Prokic-Breuer and Anna Shadrova as part of the PISA for Development project.

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