

1. WHAT STUDENTS KNOW AND CAN DO – TRENDS

Reading scores among low-performing students

- In four countries that showed low levels of performance in 2000, the proportion of low-performing students had fallen sharply by 2009.
- During this period, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland and the partner countries Latvia and Liechtenstein reduced the proportion of low-performing students to below or close to the OECD average.
- In the Czech Republic, France and Spain, the number of low-performing students rose between 2000 and 2009 to close to or above the OECD average.

What it means

Particularly in countries where only a minority of students is able to read beyond a basic level, improving performance among low achievers contributes significantly to raising the overall standard. In OECD countries, where the great majority of students reaches at least proficiency Level 2, the challenge is to limit the number of students who do not. In some of these countries, immigration and other changes that affect the socio-economic profile of the student population can make the task more difficult.

Findings

The proportion of students who do not attain the baseline proficiency Level 2 fell significantly in 14 countries and rose in 7 between 2000 and 2009.

The biggest improvements were seen in those countries where underperformance had been the most pervasive. Most notably, in nine years, the proportion of students who did not attain Level 2 fell from 80% to 65% in Peru; from 70% to 57% in Albania; from 69% to 53% in Indonesia; and from 48% to 31% in Chile.

The only other country that showed a drop of at least 10 percentage points in the proportion of low-performing students was the partner country Latvia, where the proportion fell from 30% to 18%, close to the

OECD average. There, and in five other below-average performers in 2000 – Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal and the partner country Liechtenstein – a reduction in the proportion of low-performing students helped to raise the average score.

In only one country where the percentage of low performers was below average in 2000 – Denmark – did that percentage fall further. In contrast, in the Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Ireland, Spain and Sweden, where fewer students than average or close to average were low performers in reading in 2000, their numbers had risen by 2009.

Definitions

Students are defined as low performers if they do not attain reading proficiency Level 2. The countries involved in this comparison are only those that participated in both PISA 2000 and 2009. Changes in the percentage of low-performing students are only reported if they are statistically significant. They are expressed as “percentage point changes”, such that a rise from 5% to 10% is a five percentage point change, even though the proportion has doubled.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

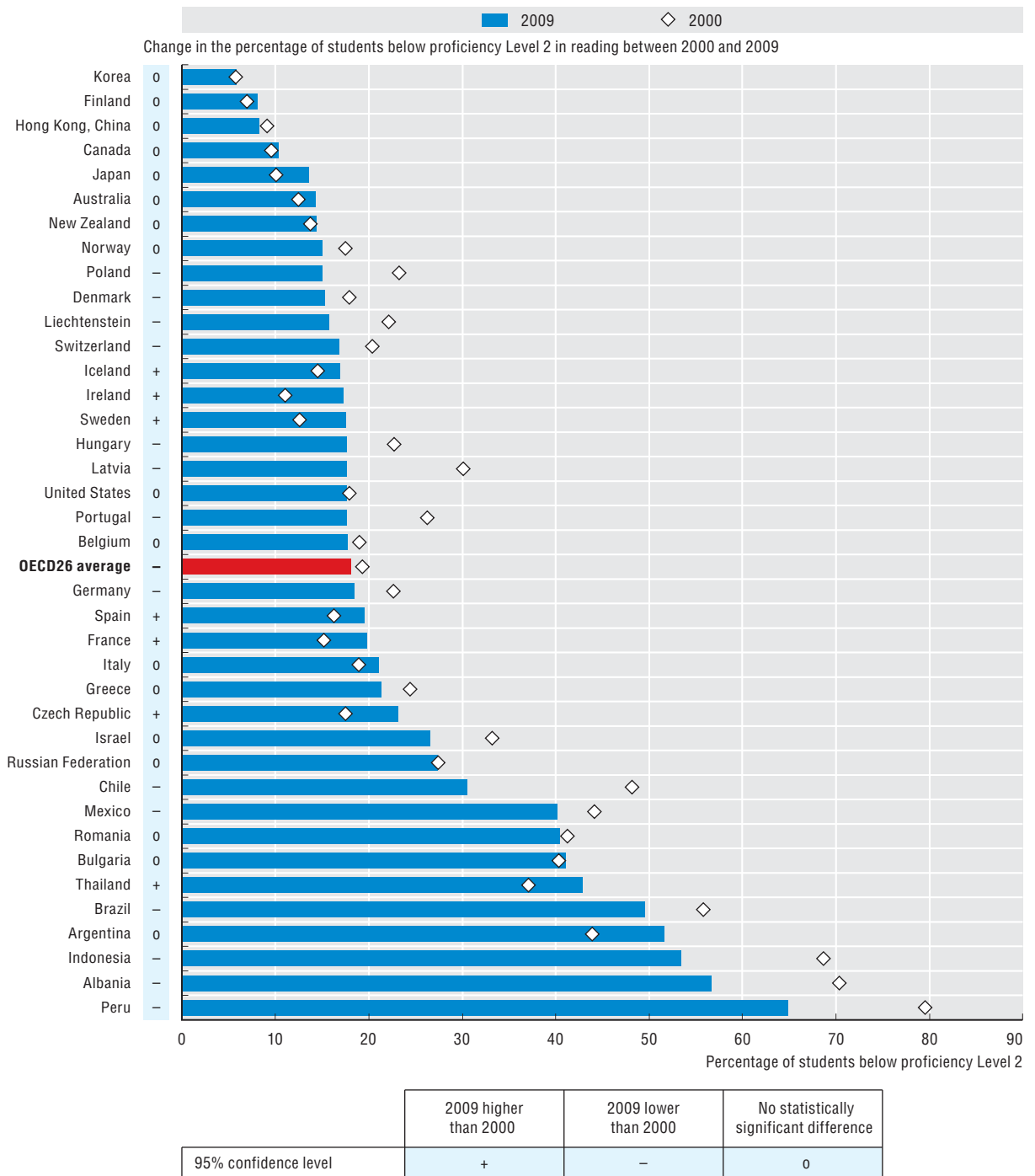
Going further

Further analysis of changes in reading performance among low-performing students is presented in Chapter 2 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume V, Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000*. Full data are shown in Table V.2.2 at the back of that volume.

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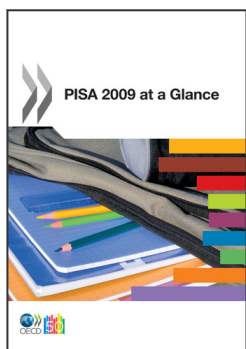
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Figure 1.13. Percentage of students below proficiency Level 2 in reading in 2000 and 2009



Note: Countries are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of students below proficiency Level 2 in reading in 2009.

Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results, Volume V, Learning Trends: Changes in Student Performance Since 2000, Figure V.2.4, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932359967>.



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