

5. SPECIAL SECTION: EQUITY

What is equity in education?

- About a quarter of children in OECD countries miss out on pre-primary education, although it leads to better school performance overall.
- About one in five youngsters (19%) across OECD countries lacks basic literacy skills.
- Students with an immigrant background tend to do less well in school, with a performance gap of up to 1.5 years in some countries.
- Across OECD countries, 50% of 25-34 year-olds, but only 27% of 55-64 year-olds participate in formal and/or non-formal education.

Introduction

A well-educated population is essential to a country's economic and social development – a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health and a longer life. So it is in society's interest to ensure that all children and adults have access to a wide variety of educational opportunities.

Are you less likely to complete secondary school or gain a university place if you live in a disadvantaged part of town? Will children lose out if they do not go to kindergarten, or if their parents are immigrants? Is it harder to top up your skills or retrain as an adult if you are above a certain age, or if you are a woman? And what can governments do to help level the playing field? This section looks at equity in education and how it can help overcome social and economic inequalities.

Key features of equity in education

Students' background has an impact on their academic achievement – those whose parents have a low level of education, who have low socio-economic status, or come from an immigrant background, as well as boys, have a higher risk of low performance at age 15. Some 19% of people at this age in OECD countries lack basic literacy skills, making it more likely that they will drop out of school with no qualifications. Indeed, some 20% of 25-34-year-olds across OECD countries have not attained upper secondary education. Students with an immigrant background are more likely to leave school earlier than their classmates, and when they stay in school many of them are behind their peers – a difference that in some countries is equivalent to 1.5 years of schooling.

When it comes to improving equity in educational results, the key is to start early. When children attend pre-primary

education, they are more likely to be successful at school when they get to 15 and in the years beyond.

Catching up later in life is possible but not always easy. On average in OECD countries, 8% of adults aged 25-64 are in formal education, but far more of them (17%) are in the 25-34 age group than in the 55-64 age group, where the rate is just 2%.

And there is also the question of equity of expectation – there has been much progress in reducing the gender gap in terms of educational attainment, but girls are still less likely to choose studies or careers in fields such as maths or computer science, at least partly because of their vision of the right career for them.

Definitions

Items in this section are taken from *OECD Education at a Glance 2012* and from *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools* (OECD, 2012). The information in both publications is drawn from the results of the PISA 2009 assessment of students' competence in reading, mathematics and science.

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 *PISA 2009 Results: Volume I*, "What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science" (Chapter 2), and *PISA 2009 Results: Volume II*, "Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes".

For additional material on adult learning, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2012* (Indicator C6).

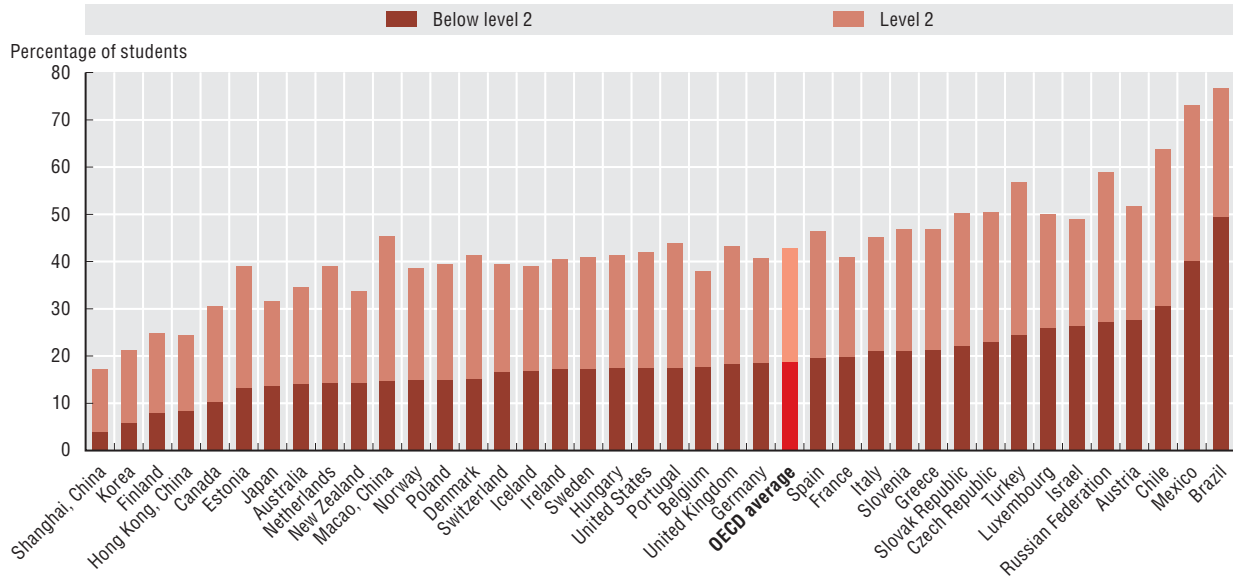
Further reading from OECD

OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*.

Figure 5.1. **A significant number of students do not master basic skills**

15-year-old students' attainment at or below Level 2 of the PISA reading scale, 2009

Students below proficiency Level 2 are at risk of dropping out, while those below Level 1 can be regarded as having an educational level that puts them at a serious disadvantage for full participation in society and the economy.

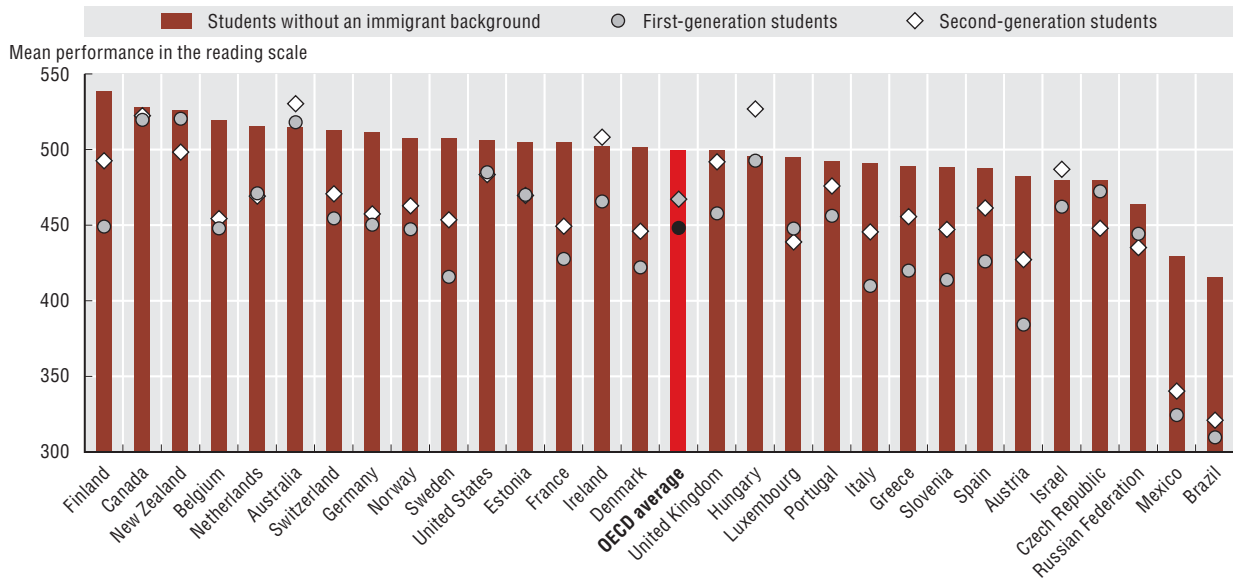


Source: OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, Figure 1.2, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932560835>.

Figure 5.2. **A considerable reading gap exists between immigrant students and natives**

Reading performance by immigrant status in PISA, 2009

This figure shows performance differences between natives (bars), first-generation students (blobs) and second-generation students (diamonds). For example, in Italy students without an immigrant background performed 45 points higher than those who were born in the country but whose parents are foreign-born (second-generation) students, which is equivalent to one school year. Non-OECD member economies are included for comparison.



Source: OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, Figure 1.7, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932560911>.



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