



## “Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills”

### KEY MESSAGE

Social and emotional skills are **powerful** drivers of well-being and social progress. Children can **learn** some of these skills which would help them achieve long-term goals, work better with others and manage their emotions. While international research has come up with some **measures** that can help to improve teaching and parenting practices, they can be better conceptualised and validated.

### SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The OECD’s longitudinal data analysis carried out in 9 OECD countries (See Box 3.1 of the report) confirms national research which suggests that social and emotional skills can help individuals improve their education, labour market and social outcomes.

This international result is broadly consistent with the mostly US-based research literature on the impact of social and emotional skills. Both cognitive and ‘social and emotional’ skills drive education and labour market outcomes. Social and emotional skills are particularly important drivers of social outcomes, such as health, civic engagement, and subjective well-being. Social and emotional skills do not shape outcomes in isolation: they complement cognitive skills in further enhancing children’s life prospects.

**Belgium:** The OECD’s analysis of the Longitudinal Research in Secondary Education (LOSO) data suggests that social and emotional skills – based on measures of extraversion, self-esteem and conscientiousness during grade 6 – have a positive impact on tertiary education attendance. Simulated increase in social and emotional skills leads to an increase in the probability of attending college of 13 percentage points.

**Canada:** The analysis of the Canadian Youth in Transition (YITS) data suggests that social and emotional skills – based on measures of self-efficacy, sense of mastery and self-esteem at age 15 – drive tertiary education completion and higher income at age 25. Simulated growth in social and emotional skills from the lowest to the highest decile results in an increase in tertiary completion by 20 percentage points and an increase in annual income by 7,900 CAD.

**Korea:** The analysis of the Korean Youth Panel Studies (KYPS) data suggests that a higher sense of responsibility at age 14 helps decreasing bullying and anti-social behaviours at age 15. For example, a simulated increase in self-reported responsibility from the lowest to the highest decile reduces the chances of bullying others by 13 percentage points. In contrast, a simulated increase in achievement test scores has practically no effect in reducing bullying behaviours.

**New Zealand:** The analysis of Competent Children (CC) data suggests that social and emotional skills have an impact on improving social outcomes. Simulated growth in social and emotional skills – based on measures of perseverance, responsibility and social skills at age 8 – from the lowest to the highest deciles reduces

engagement in behavioural problems (drinking, smoking, substance abuse, violence and fights) at age 16 by 15 percentage points. Similarly, the effects of a simulated increase in social and emotional skills at age 8 from the lowest to the highest skill decile increases the probability of being very happy at age 20 by 20 percentage points.

**Norway:** The analysis of Young in Norway (YiN) data suggests that social and emotional skills — based on measures of extraversion and self-confidence at age 15-19 — can help individuals to have better health-related outcomes and decreased chances of suffering from victimisation. A simulated increase in the level of self-confidence from the lowest to the highest decile is associated with a reduction in the chances of engaging in high alcohol disorder by 11 percentage points; and, it is linked with a decrease in self-reported obesity of 14 percentage points.

**Sweden:** The analysis of Evaluation through Follow-up (ETF) data suggest that social and emotional skills may have a positive influence on social outcomes by helping individuals benefit more from education. For example, a simulated increase in the levels of social and emotional skills increases the effects of going to university on income by 4 percentage points. That is, those with higher levels of social and emotional skills exhibit higher returns from tertiary education, which translates into higher overall returns on investing in social and emotional skills.

**Switzerland:** The analysis of Swiss Transition from Education to Employment (TREE) data suggests that self-esteem at the age of 16 helps decreasing depression and behavioural problems (i.e., having problems with the police or reporting school delinquencies) at the age of 25. A simulated increase in self-esteem from the lowest to the highest decile reduces the likelihood of experiencing depression by 26 percentage points and behavioural problems by 6 percentage points. Interestingly, the power of cognitive skills on reducing depression is considerably higher among those with high self-esteem.

**United Kingdom:** The analysis of the British Cohort Study (BCS) suggests that high levels of social and emotional skills – based on measures of self-esteem, locus of control and persistence at age 10 – help reducing obesity and depression at age 16. For example, simulated growth in social and emotional skills from the lowest to the highest decile reduces the chances of experiencing depression by 10 percentage points. In contrast, the corresponding effect of simulated growth in cognitive skills is associated with a decrease in self-reported depression by 7 percentage points.

**United States:** The analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) suggests that social and emotional skills – based on measures of children’s self-control, approaches to learning and internalising behaviours during kindergarten – drive college completion and happiness at Grade 8. For example, a simulated increase in the level of social and emotional skills of a kindergarten student from the lowest to the highest decile reduces the likelihood of being unhappy by 12 percentage points at Grade 8. In contrast, a simulated increase in the level of cognitive skills reduces the chances of being subsequently unhappy by 7 percentage points.

The OECD’s analyses were based on best available longitudinal studies from 9 countries, which have been implemented using high quality standards on the design and development of their instruments. While these longitudinal studies are well recognised and mobilised by the research community, the OECD is not responsible for the validity of the instruments they have used to assess social and emotional skills.

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**Schools, families and communities can play an active role in fostering children’s social and emotional skills.**

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Teachers can enhance children’s motivation, self-esteem and emotional stability by becoming effective mentors and learning facilitators. Parents, in turn, can provide warm, supportive and interactive environments through day-to-day home activities or routines. Local communities can complement teachers’ and parents’ efforts by providing informal learning opportunities for children to engage in a real-life, pro-social and interactive projects. Today there are numerous initiatives fostering social and emotional skills across OECD countries, but the focus varies widely across and within countries.

**Schools:** Evaluation studies in the United States suggest that schools can effectively mobilise a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities to foster children’s social and emotional skills. Schools that do not have the capacity to introduce new (and potentially resource intensive) social and emotional learning programmes, may consider adapting existing curricular and extra-curricular activities by introducing project-based work that involves dynamic and interactive problem solving based on real-life problems. **Teachers** can usefully introduce real-life issues in an interactive and reflective manner. A good example is the “service learning programme”, a popular programme in the United States and the United Kingdom, which combines community services (e.g., volunteering) and classroom instructions during which students reflect on their real-life experiences of pro-social activities.

**Parents:** The analysis of the Korean KYPs data suggests that parental engagement in their children’s studies and efforts to maintain harmony in the family play an important role in driving children’s social and emotional development during early adolescence. Supportive relationships that promote healthy attachments improve children’s understanding and regulation of emotions as well as their feelings of security and tastes for exploration and learning.

**Community:** Available resources and norms of communities can also help shape children’s social and emotional development. Evidence from the United States suggests that children who participate in performing arts and pro-social activities are more likely to have positive identities and higher self-esteem. Networks of parents can also affect the quality and intensity of children’s informal learning opportunities.

**Skills beget skills:** The analysis of KYPs suggests that “skills beget skills”: those with more social and emotional skills are likely to further accumulate not only social and emotional skills but also cognitive skills. One reason behind this is that those with higher levels of social and emotional skills benefit more from new learning investments to further develop cognitive as well as social and emotional skills. This implies that early investment is vital to children to accumulate skills before entering adulthood. This is consistent with the research evidence from the United States.

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**There are existing methods to measure social and emotional skills within particular cultural and linguistic settings. These methods can offer means for teachers and parents to identify strengths and weaknesses of children’s social and emotional capabilities, and motivate them to explore ways to improve them.**

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However, it is important to continue the efforts to better conceptualise social and emotional skills and improve the validity of their measurement instruments. The OECD is currently developing an international longitudinal study on skills which aims at identifying a set of cross-national, measurable and relevant social and emotional skills that could be learnt through adequate practices.

**Canada:** In British Columbia, Canada, “social responsibility” performance standards have been developed by the Ministry of Education for voluntary use in schools. The standards involve four assessment criteria: 1) contributing to the classroom and school community, 2) solving problems in peaceful ways, 3) valuing diversity

and defending human rights, and 4) exercising democratic rights and responsibilities. There are 4 measurement scales that can be applied to different grade groups (kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 4-5<sup>th</sup> grade, 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade and 8-10<sup>th</sup> grade). The assessment is based on accumulated observations over time, both in the classroom and in the playground.

**United States:** The State of Illinois became the first in the United States to require every school district to develop a plan for the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes in schools. Moreover, social and emotional skills have become part of the Illinois State Board of Education’s Learning standards, for students in kindergarten to Grade12 (K-12). The State of Illinois provides detailed benchmarks and performance descriptions for each of the pre-defined standards for the social and emotional learning goals. The performance descriptions help teachers design their curriculum and assessment for students’ social and emotional skills.

**Big Five Inventory (BFI):** The BFI measures 5 major domains of personality traits including: Openness to new experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. BFI is mainly used in the academic circles but sometimes adapted for use by educators. BFI has been translated into many languages and is used in numerous countries. However, BFI, in its current form, doesn't guarantee cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparability.

#### Follow-up

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