For students who had not attended pre-primary education, the chances of being low performers are 3 times greater than for those who had attended for more than one year.

Between 2003 and 2012, Brazil, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Tunisia and Turkey managed to reduce the percentage of low performers in mathematics.

Involve parents and local communities and offer special programmes for immigrant, minority-language and rural students and single-parent families.

Distribute resources more equitably across schools and encourage social diversity.

Give schools more freedom to decide what to teach and how they assess students’ progress.

Help struggling students early. Provide assistance with homework and exam preparation, and offer attractive school activities.

Limit grade repetition and sorting students by ability.

Help motivate students by creating a nurturing environment. Teachers with high morale, who support and hold high expectations for all students, help low performers the most.

In OECD countries, more than 1 in 4 students do not reach the baseline proficiency level in at least one of the 3 PISA subjects: mathematics, reading & science. The share of low performers is almost 25% in mathematics compared to almost 20% in reading and science.

If by 2030, every 15-year-old in high-income OECD countries acquires at least basic literacy and numeracy skills, the long-term gains for their economies could be about 1.5 times their current GDP. For upper-middle income countries the gains could be about 7 times their GDP.

There are many risk factors associated with low performance at age 15:

- Students who have skipped school at least once in the two weeks prior to the PISA test are 3 times more likely to be low performers in mathematics.
- Girls are at greater risk of being low performers in mathematics than boys. Whereas boys are more commonly low performers in reading and science.
- Low performers in mathematics tend to have less perseverance, motivation and self-confidence and skip school more.
- Students who have repeated a grade are 7 times more likely to be low performers at age 15 than those who haven’t.

Actions countries can take to reduce their share of low performers include:

- Improve access to early education for everyone.
- Help struggling students early. Encourage parents to support students and schools to develop evidence-based approaches.
- Distribute resources more equitably and encourage social diversity.
- Give schools more freedom and help high-achieving students.
- Help motivate students by creating a nurturing environment.
- Involve parents.