



## PISA for Development and the Sustainable Development Goals

- In 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved over the next 15 years, one of which is an education goal.
- The education SDG shifts the focus from the quantity of education (the number of children in school) to quality with equity – ensuring that all the world’s children and young people achieve at least minimum levels of proficiency in reading and mathematics.
- PISA is being used to monitor progress towards achieving the education SDG, and PISA for Development (PISA-D) is helping extend the coverage of the assessment to an increasing number of middle- and low-income countries.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015, are a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The fourth SDG aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. SDG 4 is to be achieved by meeting ten targets, which together represent the most comprehensive and ambitious agenda for global education ever formulated.

### *PISA’s role in monitoring SDG 4: Achieving quality with equity*

The SDG 4 agenda has rightly shifted the focus from the quantity (e.g. the number of children in school), which was a feature of the Millennium Development Goals that preceded the SDGs, to the quality and equity of education. Quality (i.e. achievement) and equity (i.e. fairness and inclusiveness) is harder to measure than simply the number of children in school; it requires reliable, relevant and useful learning data. Moreover, in order to serve the purpose of monitoring progress towards SDG 4, this learning data needs to be internationally comparable.

One of the global indicators selected for measuring progress towards the first of the SDG 4 targets is central to achieving quality education for all:

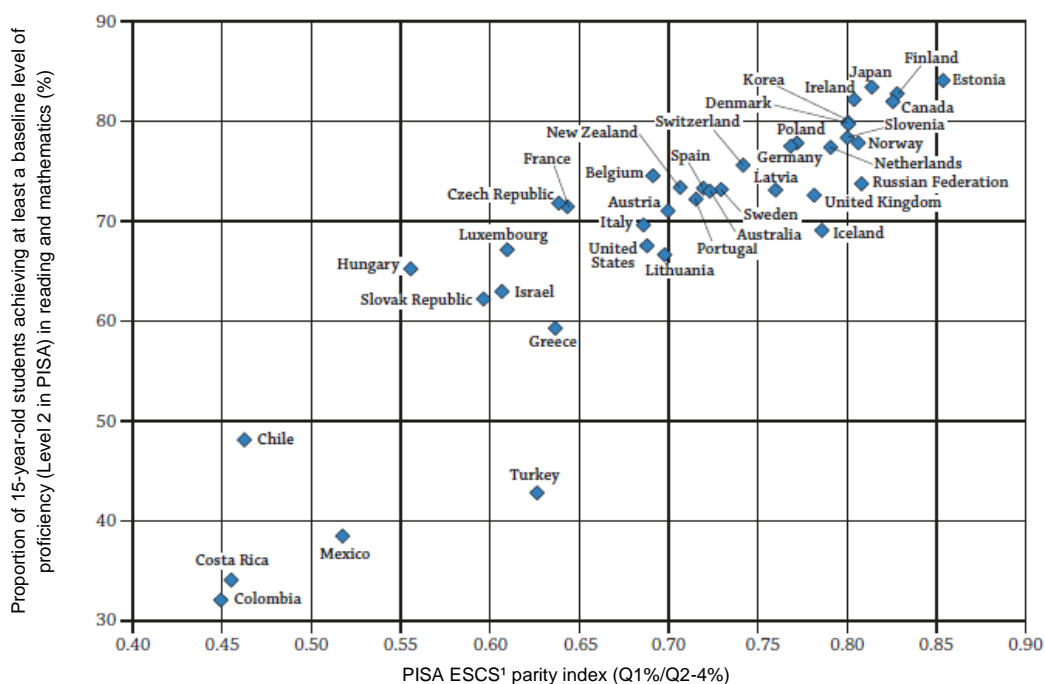
- the proportion of children and young people at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics.

PISA has been selected by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the UN Statistical Commission (the two bodies responsible for monitoring progress towards SDG 4) as an internationally comparable measure of this indicator. PISA’s baselines are considered as the minimum proficiency levels for reading and mathematics at the end of lower secondary education. PISA describes six proficiency levels, with Level 6 the highest and Level 1 and below the lowest. Level 2 marks the baseline level of proficiency at which students begin to demonstrate the competencies that will enable them to participate effectively and productively in life as continuing students, workers and citizens.

As the figure below shows, in Estonia, Finland and Japan, at least 83% of students attain Level 2 or above in both reading and mathematics, while in Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica, less than 35% of students attain these levels of proficiency.



**Excellence and equity: Student achievement in PISA 2015 and the socio-economic parity index**



1. ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (see *PISA 2015 Results [Volume I]* for more information). The parity is calculated as Q1%/Q2-4% where Q=Quartile of ESCS.

Source: OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>.

PISA shows that in many countries, no matter how well the education system performs as a whole, socio-economic status continues to predict students’ performance. However, PISA also consistently shows that high performance and greater equity are not mutually exclusive, as shown in the figure. Being able to improve the performance of all students, regardless of their background, is necessary for countries to become high-performers and to achieve the SDG 4 targets.

### Expanding the coverage of PISA to better monitor progress towards achieving SDG 4

PISA-D is making PISA more accessible and relevant to a wider range of countries. It is extending the PISA test instruments to measure a broader spectrum of performance, particularly at Level 2 and below. It is also developing contextual questionnaires and data-collection instruments to capture demographic information about participating middle- and low-income countries. The aim is to allow more countries to participate in PISA – and thus to be able to measure more widely global progress towards attaining SDG 4.

#### For more information

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