

THE 2nd CYCLE OF THE SURVEY OF ADULT SKILLS (PIAAC) A NEW ROUND OF DATA COLLECTION (2024-2029)

The Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (**PIAAC**), is an initiative of the OECD to assist governments in assessing, monitoring and analysing the level and distribution of information processing skills like literacy, numeracy and problem solving among the adult population. PIAAC also highlights the extent to which adults undertake activities involving these skills at work and in everyday life. Implemented in around 40 countries and economies during its 1st cycle (2012-18), PIAAC provides an unparalleled source of evidence for policy-makers on the skills of adults. The OECD is currently implementing a 2nd cycle of data collection for PIAAC in 31 countries, with a scheduled release of results in 2024.

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)

- is the largest and most comprehensive international survey of adult skills ever undertaken
- measures the skills and competencies needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper
- provides an accurate picture of the distribution of key information-processing skills among adults.

The 2nd Cycle of PIAAC continues to assess literacy and numeracy, so that countries can track how the skills of the adult population evolved. The assessment has been updated to better reflect tasks adults must engage with in modern societies, and it now provides more accurate information on low performers. Important innovations have been introduced: a new assessment of Adaptive Problem Solving, a new module of the Background Questionnaire assessing the social and emotional skills of respondents, and revised questions to collect richer information on education and training and on features of the working environment related to skills use and development, among others.

As part of the 2nd cycle of PIAAC, the OECD is now planning a **second round of data collection from 2024 to 2029**.

PIAAC is a household survey, carried out by:

- interviewing adults aged 16 to 65 in their homes – a representative sample of around 5,000 individuals is assessed in each participating country
- assessing their literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in their national languages, but being internationally comparable
- collecting a broad range of background information from the adults taking the survey concerning their social and educational background, their employment status and features of their jobs and activities involving reading, numeracy, problem solving and ICT skills as well as other skills used in the home and the community.

KEY ELEMENTS OF PIAAC:

| Cognitive Modules | Background Questionnaire (BQ) | Socio-Emotional Skills | Employer Survey |
|--|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and literacy components • Numeracy and numeracy components • Adaptive Problem Solving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic and demographic background • Education and training • Current labour force status and work history • Skills used at work and everyday life • Quality of the work environment (new module) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual traits that affect how people behave and interact with others, such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, open-mindedness. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills needs of enterprises, strategies to address skill gaps, business factors affecting demand for skills. |



SKILLS ASSESSED IN THE CORE COGNITIVE MODULE

| LITERACY | NUMERACY | ADAPTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Ability to access, understand, evaluate and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society.</p> <p>Components: the ability to understand the meaning of simple sentences, to read and understand passages fluently.</p> | <p>Ability to access, use, reason critically with mathematical content, information and ideas represented in multiple ways in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life.</p> <p>Components: the ability to understand basic notions of quantity and magnitude.</p> | <p>Ability to achieve one's goals in a dynamic situation, in which a method for solution is not immediately available. It requires engaging in cognitive and metacognitive processes to define the problem, search for information, and apply a solution in a variety of information environments and contexts.</p> |

HOW COUNTRIES BENEFIT FROM PARTICIPATING IN PIAAC

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)

- Constitutes a rich evidence base for policy-relevant analysis by providing data on:
 - the average level of information processing skills in the adult population, as well as differences across subgroups
 - factors associated with the acquisition, development, maintenance and loss of proficiency over time
 - how skills are rewarded in the labour market
 - the performance of education and training systems
 - educational and skills mismatch
 - equity in educational and labour market outcomes
 - life-long learning
 - socio-emotional skills.
- Enables a better understanding of the factors related to educational and labour market performance.
- Helps countries benchmark their progress over time, set national goals and measure progress towards those goals.

Key results from the 1st Cycle of PIAAC

- **In nearly all countries, a sizable proportion of adults has poor reading skills (19.8%), poor numeracy skills (23.5%), and lack the most elementary computer skills (at least 12% of adults).**

Higher levels of information processing skills are important and positively associated with participation in labour markets and political activities, higher wages, and better health. Adults lacking these basic skills can only read short and familiar texts, are unable to integrate, interpret or synthesize information, and can only complete tasks involving basic mathematical processes and everyday contexts. They have trouble using digital technology, communication tools and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others, and perform practical tasks.
- **Inequality in skills varies widely between and within countries.**

The gap between the proficiency of the top and bottom performers in literacy varies between countries. Importantly, inequality in the distribution of performance is generally lowest in countries in which average proficiency is highest. A concerning finding is that countries with higher skills inequality also tend to be countries in which the level of education attained by adults is most influenced by the educational levels of their parents. PIAAC also shows a wider dispersion of skills among individuals with low levels of education. This could indicate a failure of the educational system in helping talented individuals reach adequate levels of educational attainment.
- **In most countries, immigrants have significantly lower skill proficiency than native-born adults.**

Foreign-born individuals tend to have lower levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills than natives. Foreign-born individuals are also under-represented among highest-achievers. Insufficient proficiency in the language of the assessment and having pursued education in the country of origin explain part, but not all of the gaps in skills between foreign-born and native-born adults.
- **In addition to proficiency, how much one uses skills matters for employment, income and well-being.**

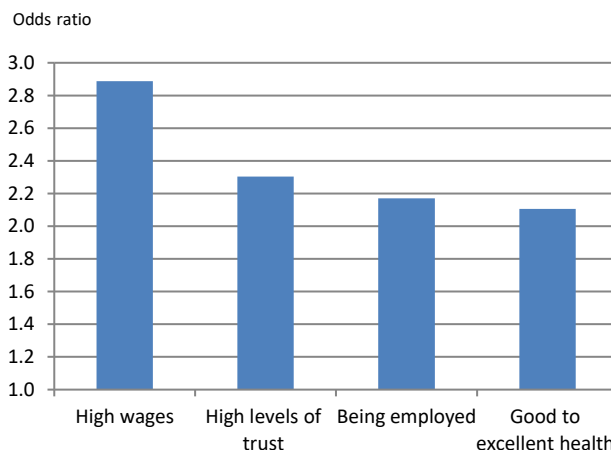
Workers who make greater use of their information-processing skills on the job enjoy higher wage. This holds after controlling for other factors such as education, skill proficiency and occupation. More effective skill use is associated with higher employee satisfaction and self-reported well-being.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SURVEY OF ADULT SKILLS (1st CYCLE)

The 1st Cycle of PIAAC provided numerous insights into how skills vary across countries and between different groups of adults, as well as on their relationship with employment or wages.

The Survey found that adults who are more proficient in literacy are more likely to be employed and to earn higher wages. This holds true even when accounting for educational attainment or work experience. In addition, highly literate adults report to be in better health, participate more in volunteering activities, report higher levels of trust in others and participate more in the political process.

Likelihood of positive social and economic outcomes among highly literate adults



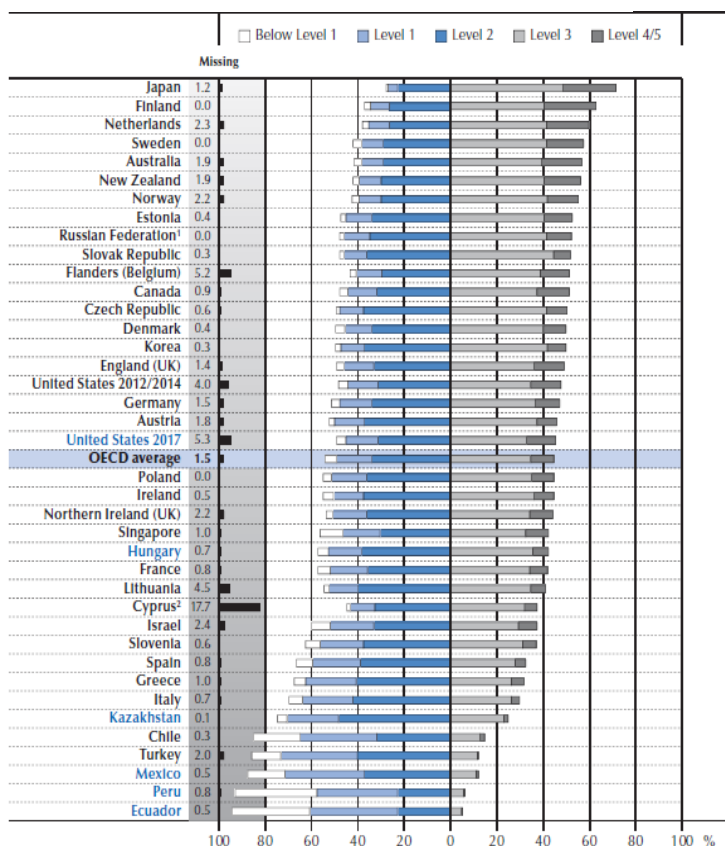
Note: Odds ratios are adjusted for age, gender, educational attainment, and immigrant and language background. High wages are defined as workers' hourly earnings that are above the country's median. Increased likelihood (odds ratio) of adults scoring at Level 4/5 in literacy reporting high earnings, high levels of trust and political efficacy, good health, participating in volunteer activities and being employed, compared with adults scoring at or below Level 1 in literacy (adjusted).

Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012)

Countries vary widely in the average proficiency of their populations. In Finland and Japan, about 1 in 5 adults reads at high levels (Level 4/5); in Italy and Greece, only 1 in 20 adults attain that level. Adults at Level 4/5 are able to perform multiple-step operations to integrate, interpret, or synthesise information from complex or lengthy texts that involve conditional and/or competing information.

A closer look at the survey results reveals however that most of the overall variation in literacy skills lies within, rather than between, countries: in all but one participating country, at least 1 in 10 adults are proficient only at or below Level 1 in literacy or numeracy. In other words, in every country a significant number of adults do not possess the most basic information-processing skills considered necessary to succeed in today's world.

Literacy proficiency among 16-65 years-olds



Notes:

- The sample for the Russian Federation does not include the population of the Moscow municipal area. More detailed information can be found in the [Technical Report of the Survey of Adult Skills, Third Edition](#).
- Note by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to "Cyprus" relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".
Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union: The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.
- Adults in the missing category were not able to provide enough background information to impute proficiency scores because of language difficulties, or learning or mental disabilities (referred to as literacy-related non-response).
- Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the combined percentages of adults scoring at Level 3 and at Levels 4/5.

Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012, 2015, 2018)



JOIN US!

Countries participating in PIAAC:

- Australia
- Austria
- Canada
- Chile
- Croatia*
- Czech Republic
- Cyprus*
- Denmark
- Ecuador*
- England (UK)
- Estonia
- Finland
- Flanders (Belgium)
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Japan
- Kazakhstan*
- Korea
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Northern Ireland (UK)
- Norway
- Peru*
- Poland
- Portugal
- Russian Federation*
- Singapore*
- Slovak Republic
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- United States

*OECD Partner Countries.
Countries displayed in **Blue** font
are Cycle 2 participants.

Webpage

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