Helping immigrant students to succeed at school – and beyond

OECD

How school systems respond to migration has an enormous impact on the economic and social well-being of all members of the communities they serve, whether they have an immigrant background or not. Some systems need to integrate large numbers of school-age migrants and asylum seekers quickly; some need to accommodate students whose mother tongue is different from the language spoken in the host community or whose families are socio-economically disadvantaged; some systems are confronted with all three challenges at once.

The following pages reveal some of the difficulties immigrant students encounter – and some of the contributions they offer – while settling into their new communities and new schools. They also summarise some of the policies governments can implement to help immigrant students integrate into their host societies. The material is taken from a forthcoming report drafted by Francesca Borgonovi, Rowena Phair and Mario Piacentini.

The fact that the educational, social and emotional success of immigrant students differs so widely across countries, and that countries pursue such different policies and practices in leveraging the potential of immigrant children, underlines that there is much that countries can learn from each other.

Andreas Schleicher

Director, OECD Directorate for Education and Skills

Immigrant students' performance in school

In most countries, first-generation immigrant students (students born outside the destination country whose parents were also born outside that country) perform worse than students without an immigrant background, and second-generation immigrant students (those born in the destination country to parents who were born outside of the country) perform somewhere between the two. As shown in **Figure 1**, although many immigrant students perform relatively poorly compared to non-immigrant students, they can perform at high levels by international standards. As the figure also shows, the performance of immigrant students differs widely across countries.

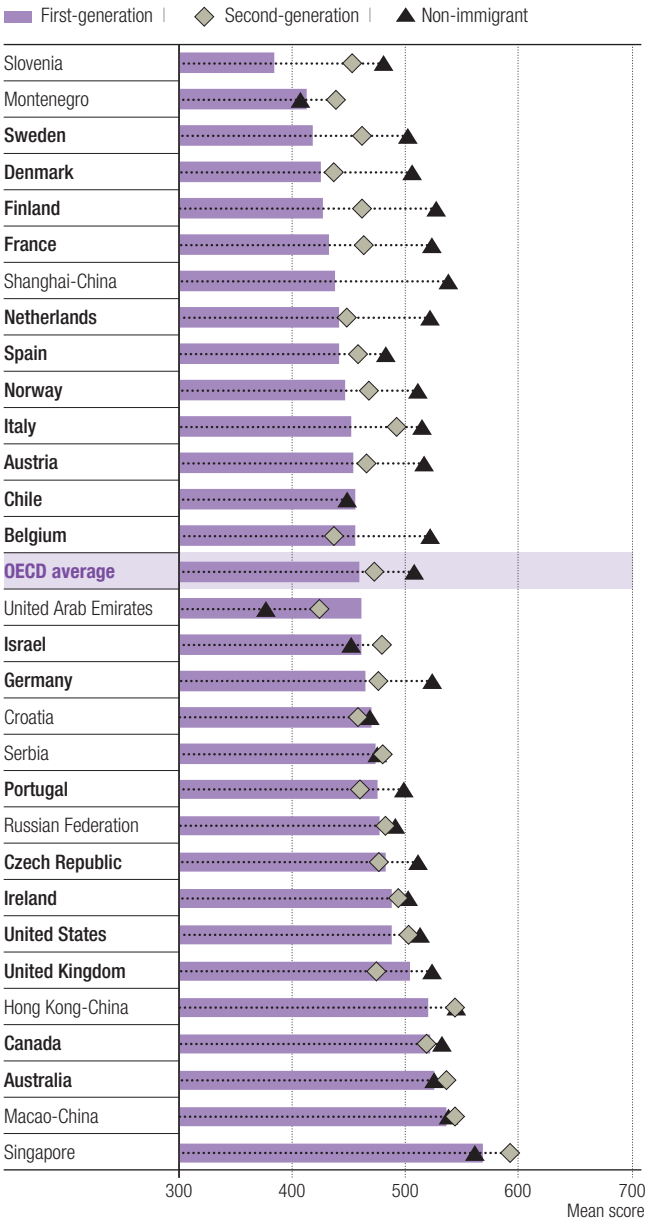
The performance gap between first-generation immigrant students and students without an immigrant background tends to be wider in reading than in mathematics or problem solving. This suggests that language barriers to text comprehension may be key in explaining performance differences between these two groups of students.

Where do immigrant students fare better?

Immigrant students tend to perform better in PISA in countries with highly selective immigration policies. But while the culture and education students had acquired before migrating have a profound impact on students' achievement at school, the performance of immigrant students is even more strongly related to the characteristics of the school systems in their host country.

Figure 1: Immigrant students' performance in problem solving, mathematics and reading

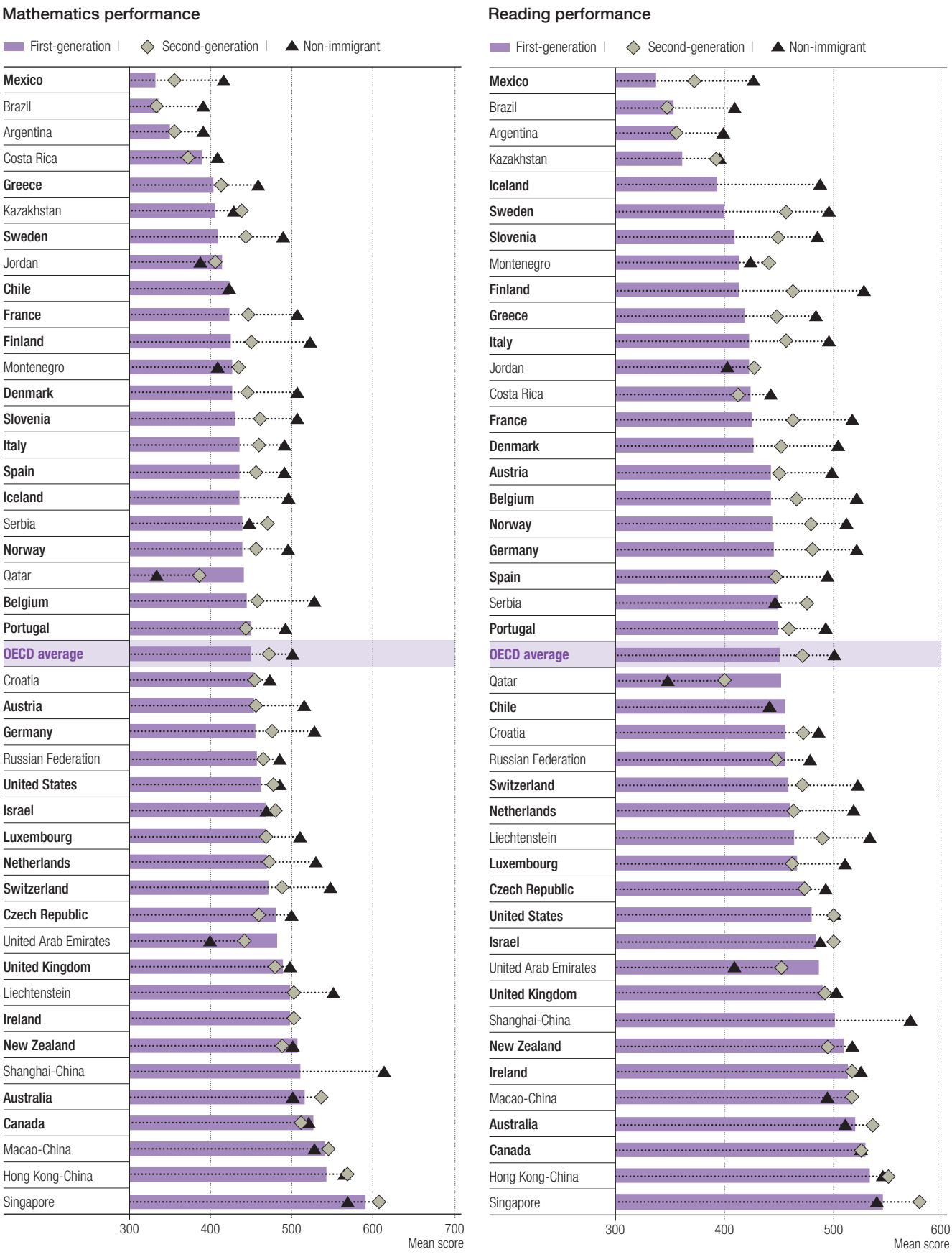
Performance in computer-based problem solving



For each chart, countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the mean score of first-generation immigrant students.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Figure 1: Immigrant students' performance in problem solving, mathematics and reading (continued)



For each chart, countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the mean score of first-generation immigrant students.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

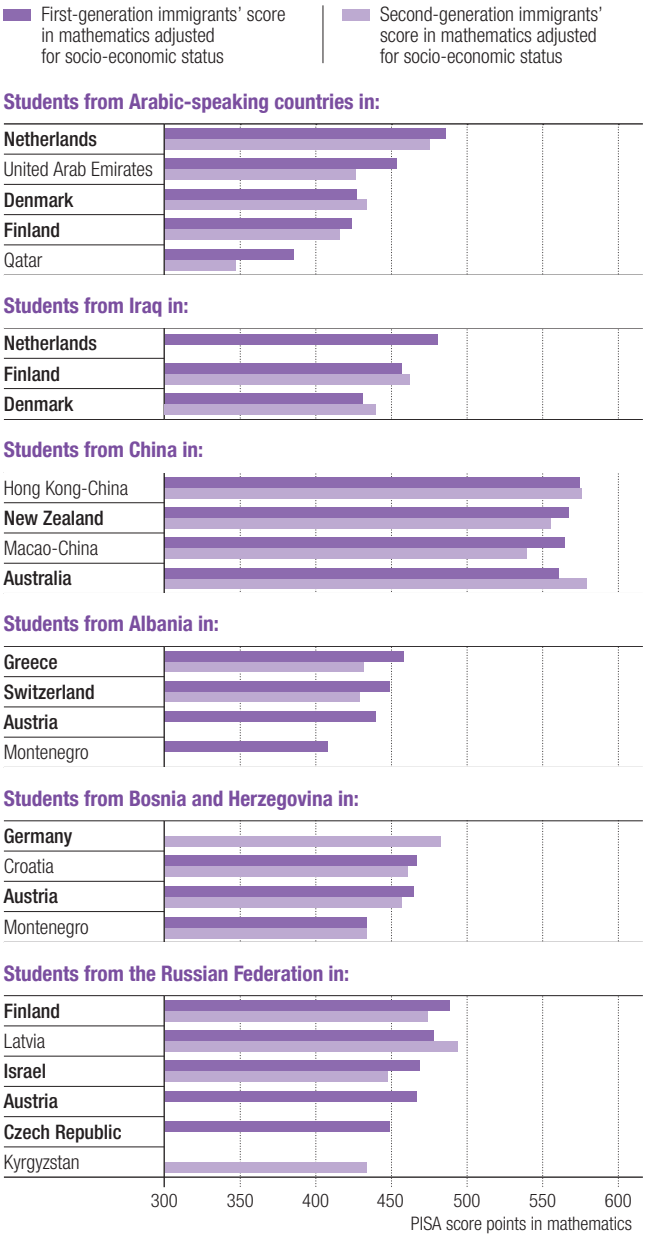
Figure 2 shows how, for a selected group of countries with available information, immigrant students from the same country of origin and of similar socio-economic status perform across different destination countries.
On average, students from Arabic-speaking countries who settled in the Netherlands score 100 points higher in mathematics than students from the same countries of origin who settled in Qatar, after accounting for socio-economic status. Albanian students in Greece score 50 points higher in mathematics than Albanian students who settled in Montenegro – a difference that is very close to the average performance difference between Greece and Montenegro. Students born in mainland China score above the OECD average in several destination countries/economies, but they tend to perform better in Hong Kong-China than in Macao-China.

Of course, it is not only socio-economic status that contributes to differences in performance of immigrant students from the same country of origin who settle in different destination countries; other factors also play a role, including students' own motivation or the level of support they receive from their parents. But these findings suggest that school systems play a large role in integrating immigrant students – and that some destination countries are better than others at nurturing the talents and abilities of students with different intellectual and cultural backgrounds.

Has performance improved over time?

When examining trends in performance differences between immigrant students and students without an immigrant background, it is important to consider them in the context of changes in the socio-economic profile of students. Education outcomes have improved in many countries of origin, and migration policies have become increasingly skill-selective.

Figure 2: Immigrant students' performance in mathematics, by country of origin and destination



The average performance by immigrant group and destination country accounts for differences in socio-economic status. It corresponds to the predicted performance of the group if all the immigrant students who migrated from that country of origin and all the non-immigrant students across all the destination countries shared the same socio-economic status of the average student.

Only destination countries with data on at least 20 immigrant students are shown.

Sources: OECD, PISA 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 Databases.

Figure 3: Change between 2003 and 2012 in immigrant students' mathematics performance

Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the score-point difference between students with and without an immigrant background.

Notes: Differences in mathematics performance between students without and with an immigrant background in 2003 and 2012 that are statistically significant are marked in a darker tone.

Only countries and economies with comparable data from PISA 2003 and PISA 2012 are shown.

The change in the score-point difference in mathematics between students without and with an immigrant background between 2012 and 2003 is shown next to the country's/economy's name when statistically significant.

OECD average 2003 compares only OECD countries with comparable mathematics scores since 2003.

Source: OECD, PISA Database 2012, Table II.3.4b.

Still, changes in the performance of immigrant students over time also suggest that education policies can complement social policies in fostering integration. The difference in mathematics performance between students with and without an immigrant background shrank by around 10 score points, on average, between 2003 and 2012 (**Figure 3**). This reduction is still observed even when comparing students of similar socio-economic status.

Among those countries and economies where at least 5% of the student population were immigrants in both 2003 and 2012, in Belgium, Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States the difference in mathematics performance between students with an immigrant background and those without narrowed during the period. In Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, the narrowing is the result of greater performance improvements among students with an immigrant background than among students without an immigrant background. In Germany, the performance disadvantage among immigrant students shrank: in 2003, non-immigrant students outscored students with an immigrant background by 81 points in mathematics; by 2012 this difference had decreased to 54 score points.

By contrast, in Italy, the difference in mathematics performance between students with and students without an immigrant background widened by 26 score points – from a 22-point difference, which was not statistically significant, in 2003 to 48 score points in 2012. This change reflected an improvement among students without an immigrant background between 2003 and 2012, but no concurrent improvement among immigrant students. In Canada, France and Sweden, the performance of both second-generation students and students without an immigrant background deteriorated between 2003 and 2012, but the decline among second-generation immigrant students was particularly steep.

Immigrant students' sense of belonging at school

Beyond performance in school, an indication of how well immigrant students are integrating into their new community is whether, and to what extent, they feel they belong to their new surroundings – and, for 15-year-olds, one of the most important social environments is school. In 2003 and 2012, PISA asked students whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they feel like they belong at school. The results varied widely, not only overall, but also in the extent to which first- and second-generation immigrant students were more or less likely than students without an immigrant background to feel that they belong at school (**Figure 4**).

Countries can be divided into three groups, based on students' responses in 2012. In a first group, which includes the United Kingdom and the United States, first-generation immigrant students expressed a stronger sense of belonging at school than other students, while students without an immigrant background and second-generation immigrant students expressed a similar sense of belonging.

In a second group of countries, which includes Argentina, Denmark, France and Mexico, second-generation immigrant students feel most alienated in their schools and have less of a sense of belonging than students without an immigrant background and first-generation immigrant students.

In a third group of countries, which includes Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, integration appears to be progressive, with second-generation immigrant students reporting a similar or almost similar sense of belonging at school as students without an immigrant background, and first-generation students reporting less of a sense of belonging.

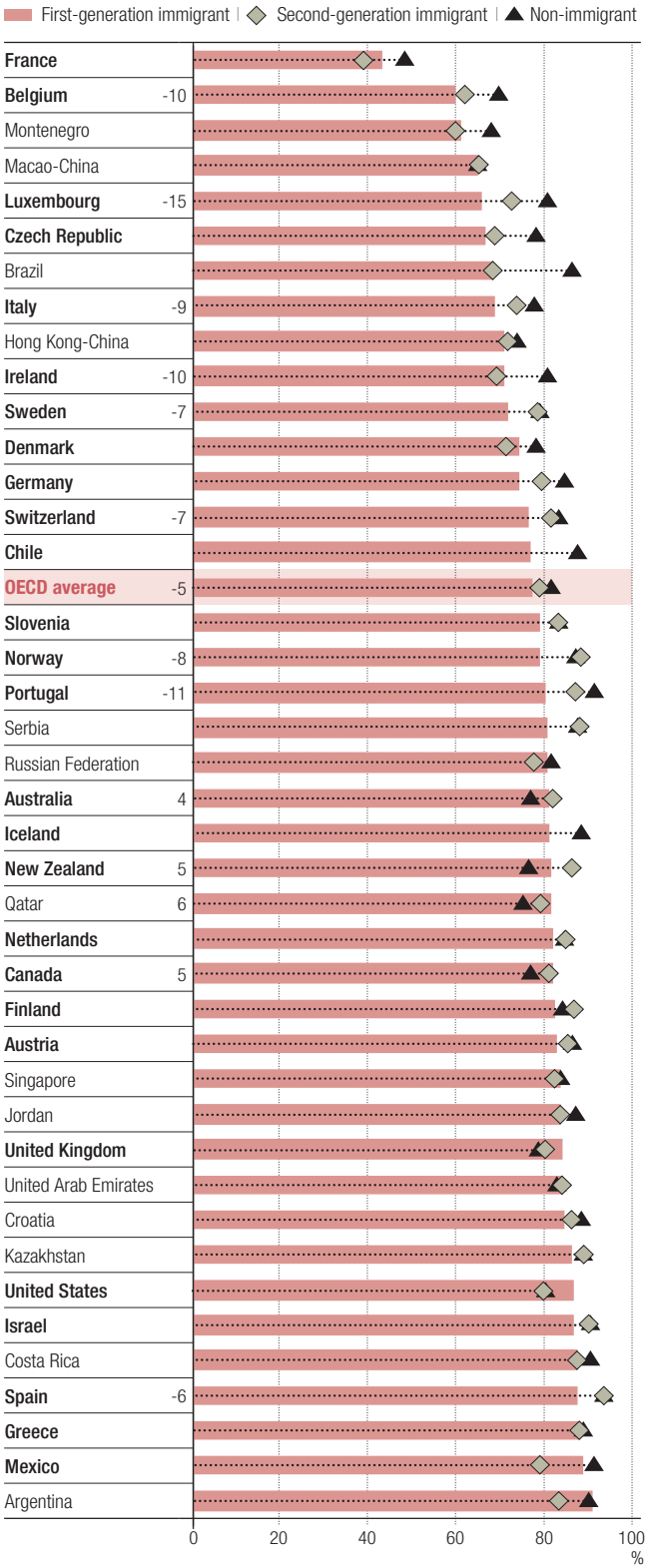
Where do immigrant students feel like they belong at school?

Figure 5 takes these results one step further and shows the percentage of immigrant students who reported that they feel like they belong at school by country of origin and country of destination. As the figure shows, almost 90% of students from Iraq who settled in Finland reported that they feel like they belong at school, but only 69% of students from Iraq who settled in Denmark reported the same. Similarly, only 64% of students who migrated to Denmark from Turkey reported feeling like they belong at school while 93% of those who migrated to Finland so reported. And while 73% of students who migrated from Arabic-speaking countries to Denmark reported that they feel like they belong at school, 90% of those who migrated to Finland so reported.

These results suggest that the psychological well-being of immigrant students is affected not only by differences between their country of origin and country of destination, but also by how well the schools and local communities in their country of destination help them to overcome the myriad obstacles they face in succeeding at school and building a new life.

Figure 4: Sense of belonging at school, by immigrant background

Percentage of students who reported that they feel like they belong at school



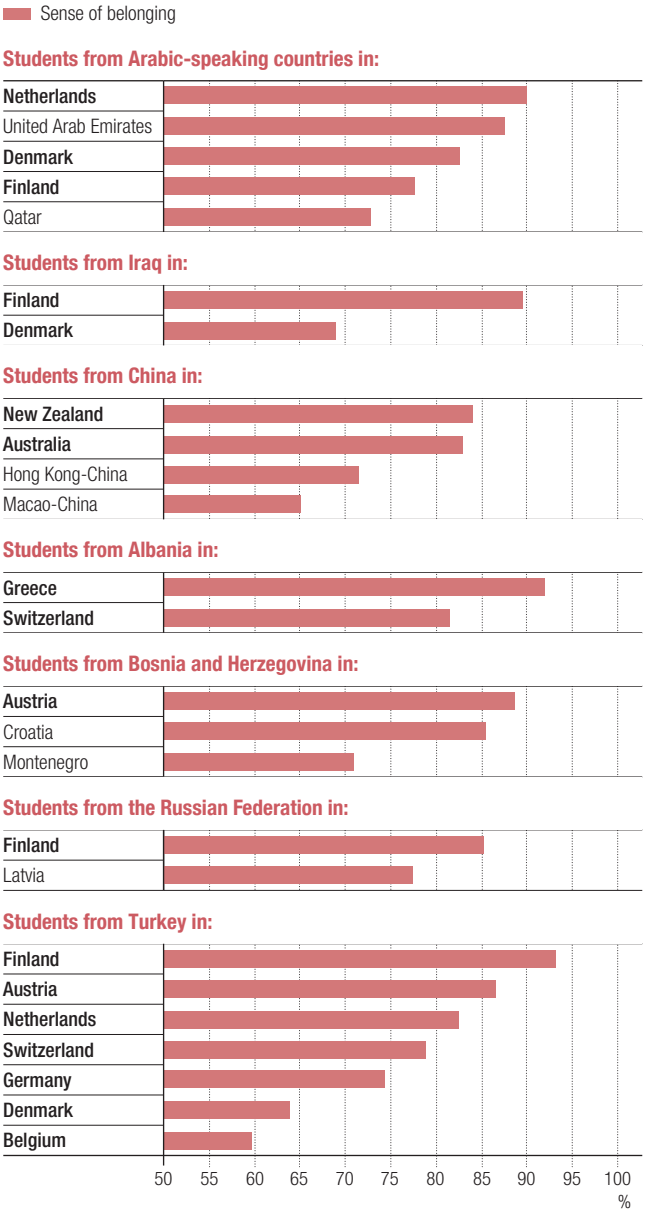
Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of first-generation immigrant students who reported that they feel like they belong at school.

Note: Statistically significant percentage-point differences between first-generation immigrant students and non-immigrant students who reported that they feel like they belong at school are shown next to the country/economy name.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Figure 5: Sense of belonging of immigrant students in different destination countries

Percentage of students with an immigrant background who reported that they feel like they belong at school



The coverage of destination countries is limited by the fact that only some countries collect detailed information on the country of birth of immigrants.Only destination countries with data on at least 20 immigrant students are shown.

Sources: OECD, PISA 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 Databases.

The concentration of disadvantage in schools hosting immigrant students

When they move to a new country, many immigrants tend to settle in neighbourhoods with other immigrants, often from the same country of origin and of the same socio-economic status. They may decide to do this as a way to build a network of people who share their culture or their experience as migrants and who also may be able to help newly arrived migrants make their way through administrative procedures and perhaps even find work. But they may also move to these areas because of socio-economic deprivation, which limits the range of areas where they can relocate.

Similarly, immigrant students tend to be concentrated in the same schools, sometimes because they live in the same neighbourhoods, but sometimes because school systems group them together, whether or not they are neighbours, or because they show similar performance patterns. **Figure 6** shows that many students with an immigrant background attend schools where the proportion of other immigrant students is large; in other words, in many countries, immigrant students tend to be concentrated in the same schools.

What hinders student achievement?

The concentration of immigrant students in schools does not, in itself, have to have adverse effects on student performance or on integration efforts. PISA reveals that it is not the concentration of immigrant students in a school but, rather, the concentration of socio-economic disadvantage in a school that hinders student achievement.

Figure 7 shows that, across OECD countries, 15-year-old students who attend schools where the concentration of immigrants is high (i.e. where more than one in four students are immigrants) tend to do worse in school than students who attend schools where there are no immigrant students. But this difference reflects the fact that many immigrant students are socio-economically disadvantaged. The OECD average difference in mathematics performance between students who attend schools where more than 25% of students are immigrants compared to students who attend schools with no immigrant students is 18 score points – the equivalent of around 6 months of schooling. But after accounting for the socio-economic status of the students and schools, that difference is more than halved – to 5 score points. Indeed, in 14 out of 35 countries/economies with comparable data, students in schools with high concentrations of immigrant students underperform in mathematics, before accounting for socio-economic disparities. After taking those disparities into account, the number of countries/economies where these students underperform drops to 7; and in most of them, the performance differences are so narrow that they are practically insignificant.

WHAT CAN COUNTRIES DO?

- **Provide information to immigrant parents on the schooling options available for their children** and help parents to overcome financial and/or logistical barriers to access the school of their choice.
- **Limit the extent to which advantaged schools can select students based on socio-economic status.** This can be done by providing financial incentives for over-subscribed schools to enrol migrant students.
- **Retain and attract more advantaged students in schools that also host immigrant students.** For example, schools in disadvantaged areas can make their curricula more appealing to students from across the socio-economic spectrum by offering special mathematics, science and/or art courses.

Figure 6: Concentration of immigrant students in schools

Percentage of immigrant students in schools where at least half of the students are immigrants

Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the the percentage of students with an immigrant background in schools where at least half of the students have an immigrant background.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Figure 7: Concentration of disadvantage and its effects on student performance

Score-point difference in mathematics between schools with a high concentration of immigrant students and those without immigrant students

Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the score-point difference in mathematics between schools with a high concentration of immigrant students and schools without immigrant students, before accounting for student and school socio-economic status.

Notes: Statistically significant differences are marked in a darker tone.

Schools with a high concentration of immigrants are defined as those where more than a quarter of students are immigrants.

Source: PISA 2012 Database, Table II.3.9.

Language barriers and performance penalties for late arrivals

Many newly arrived immigrant students cannot yet read or speak well – if at all – the predominant language of their host countries. On average, 63% of first-generation immigrant students and 38% of second-generation immigrant students speak a language at home that is different from the language in which the PISA test was conducted. In the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Israel, Slovenia and Sweden, more than 8 in 10 first-generation students speak a different language at home from the language of assessment, while in Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Montenegro and Serbia, fewer than one in ten first-generation immigrant students speaks a different language.

Not surprisingly, students who do not speak or read the language of assessment perform worse on the PISA reading test than students who do – so much so that, as **Figure 8** shows, the performance gap in reading between first-generation immigrant students and non-immigrant students shrinks considerably once the language students speak at home is taken into account. These results show the importance of offering language training to recently arrived immigrants students of all ages.

Why does age at arrival matter?

In most OECD countries, immigrant students who arrived at the age of 12 or older – and have spent at most four years in their new country – lag farther behind students in the same grade in reading proficiency than immigrants who arrived at younger ages. Countries and economies vary markedly in the magnitude of this "late-arrival penalty" for immigrant students; and these differences tend to reflect the profile of the immigrant populations.

Take, for example, the cases of Australia and Switzerland (**Figure 9**). Students who were born in China and immigrate to Australia suffer a steep late-arrival penalty. The same pattern is seen in European countries. The age at arrival seems to make no difference to the reading performance of German students who immigrate to Switzerland; but 15-year-old students from Portugal and the former Yugoslavia who had immigrated within the previous few years did much worse in reading than immigrant students from the same countries who had spent all their school years in Switzerland.

For recent immigrants, a lack of familiarity with their new country's language and institutions, as well as insecure living conditions, can result in lower reading performance. But age at arrival has its own effect on reading proficiency: learning a second (or third) language is more difficult for older children, and the school curriculum tends to be freighted with many more competing demands as students progress from primary to lower secondary school.

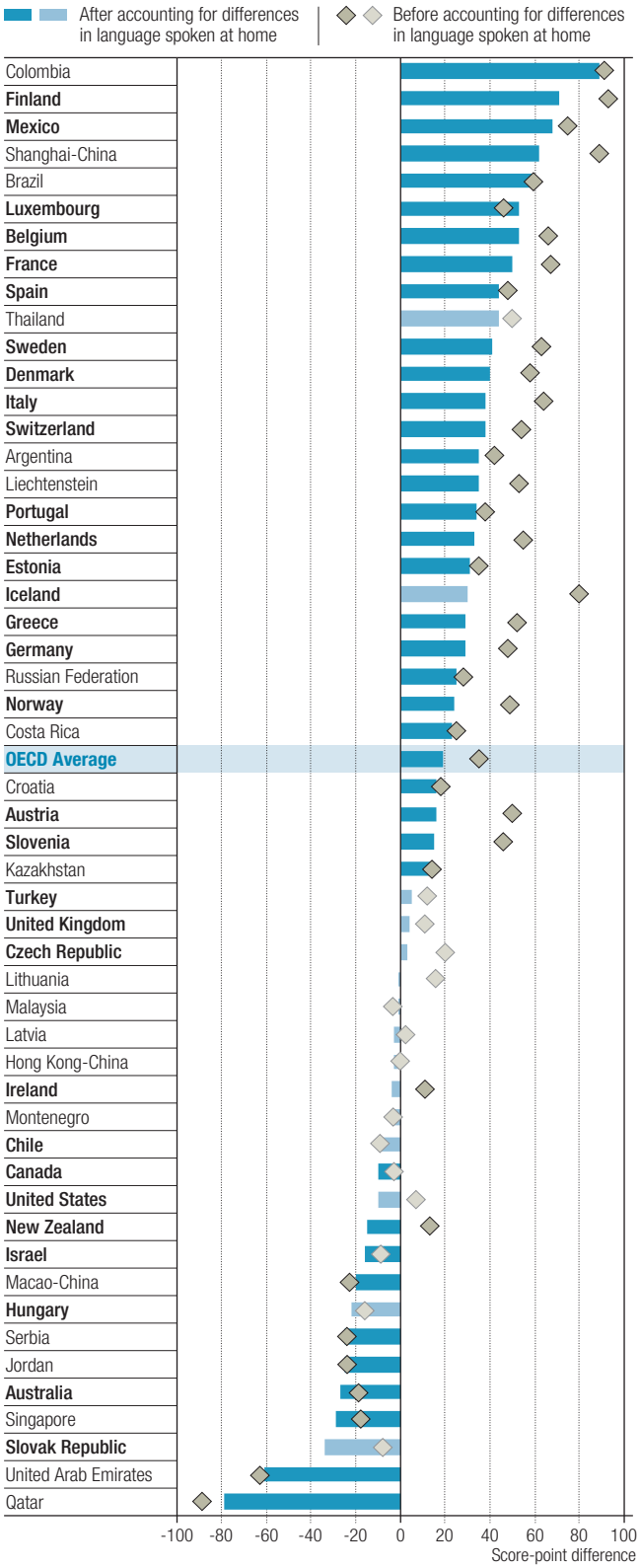
WHAT CAN COUNTRIES DO?

- **Integrate language and subject learning from the earliest grades.**
Integrating migrant children into mainstream classes from the beginning of their schooling is associated with better outcomes than enrolling them first in preparatory language classes and delaying entry into mainstream courses. While language training is essential, it should be offered in addition to, not instead of, regular course work.

- **Help teachers to identify students who need language training.**
Some countries, including Denmark and Germany, systematically assess children of pre-school age in their language abilities. Strategies and pedagogies for developing second-language skills should be covered in both initial and in-service training for teachers who work with immigrant students.

Figure 8: Performance gap in reading and language spoken at home

Difference in reading performance between non-immigrant and immigrant students before and after accounting for the language spoken at home



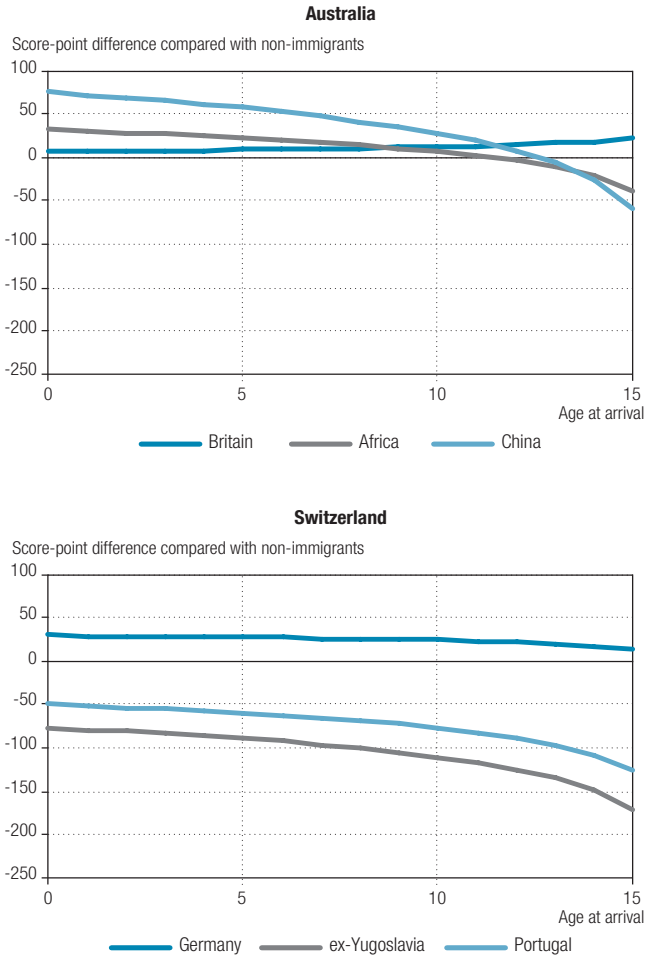
Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in reading performance after accounting for the language spoken at home.

Note: Statistically significant differences are marked in a darker tone.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Figure 9: The language barrier is higher when immigrant students arrive later

Relationship between PISA reading score and age at arrival in selected destination countries, by immigrants' origin



Note: All estimates control for PISA year, gender and student's grade.

Source: OECD (2012), *Untapped Skills: Realising the Potential of Immigrant Students*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264172470-en, Figure 4.3, based on analysis of PISA pooled data 2003, 2006, 2009 by Heath and Kilpi-Jakonen (2012). Only immigrant groups with more than 100 observations are shown.

The advantages of early learning programmes

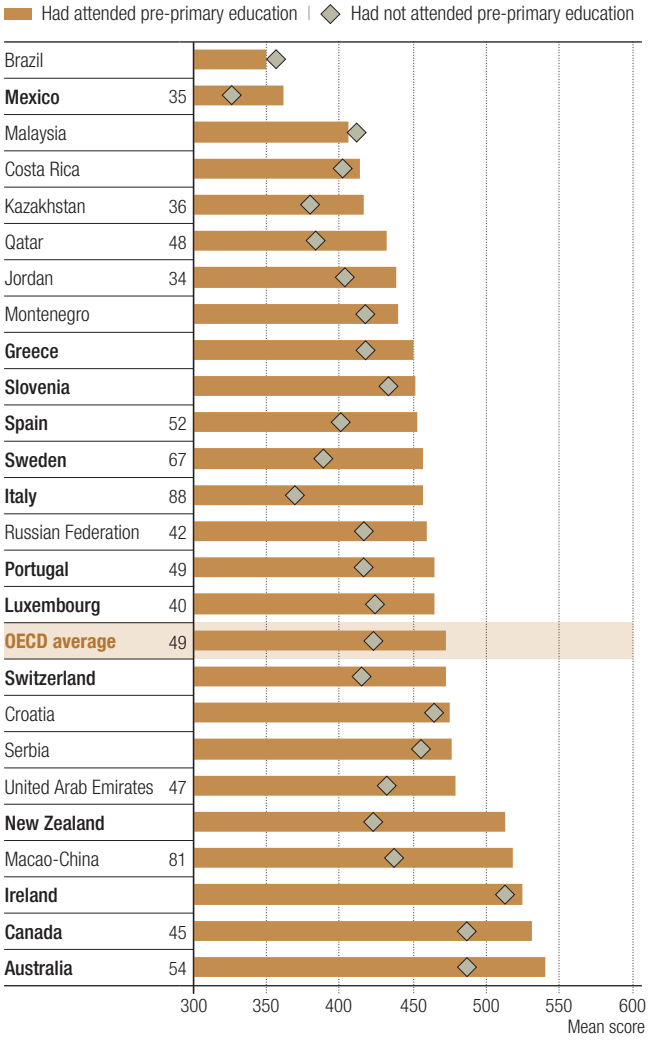
While it is important to offer older immigrant students the assistance they need, particularly language support, absorbing the youngest immigrant children into the school system is certainly the most effective way of integrating them – linguistically and culturally – into their new communities. As **Figure 10** shows, 15-year-old immigrant students who reported that they had attended pre-primary education programmes score 49 points higher in the PISA reading assessment, on average, than immigrant students who reported that they had not participated in such programmes.

But in most countries, participation in pre-primary education programmes among immigrant students is considerably lower than it is among students without an immigrant background (**Figure 11**). On average, immigrant students are 21% less likely than students with no immigrant background to have attended pre-primary education. In some countries, this may be due to a resistance to these types of programmes among immigrant parents, possibly because they had little or no experience with them in their country of origin. In other countries, this difference in participation rates is strongly linked to differences in socio-economic status between the two groups. Still, there are large differences across countries. For example, in Italy, children of immigrants are 3.4 times less likely than children with no immigrant background to attend pre-primary schooling, after accounting for socio-economic status.

WHAT CAN COUNTRIES DO?

- **Expand access to high-quality early childhood education and care programmes** to encourage entry at the youngest possible age.
- **Tailor programmes to the needs of pre-school migrant children,** particularly by offering language-development activities.
- **Reach out to migrant parents** to raise their awareness of the learning programmes available for their children and how they can enrol their children in these programmes.
- **Monitor the quality of early childhood education and care programmes.** The quality of these programmes is not only measured by whether or not they comply with regulations, but by whether instructors are well-trained in working with young children and by whether the children's individual needs have been identified and are being met.

Figure 10: Reading performance of immigrant students, by attendance at pre-primary education



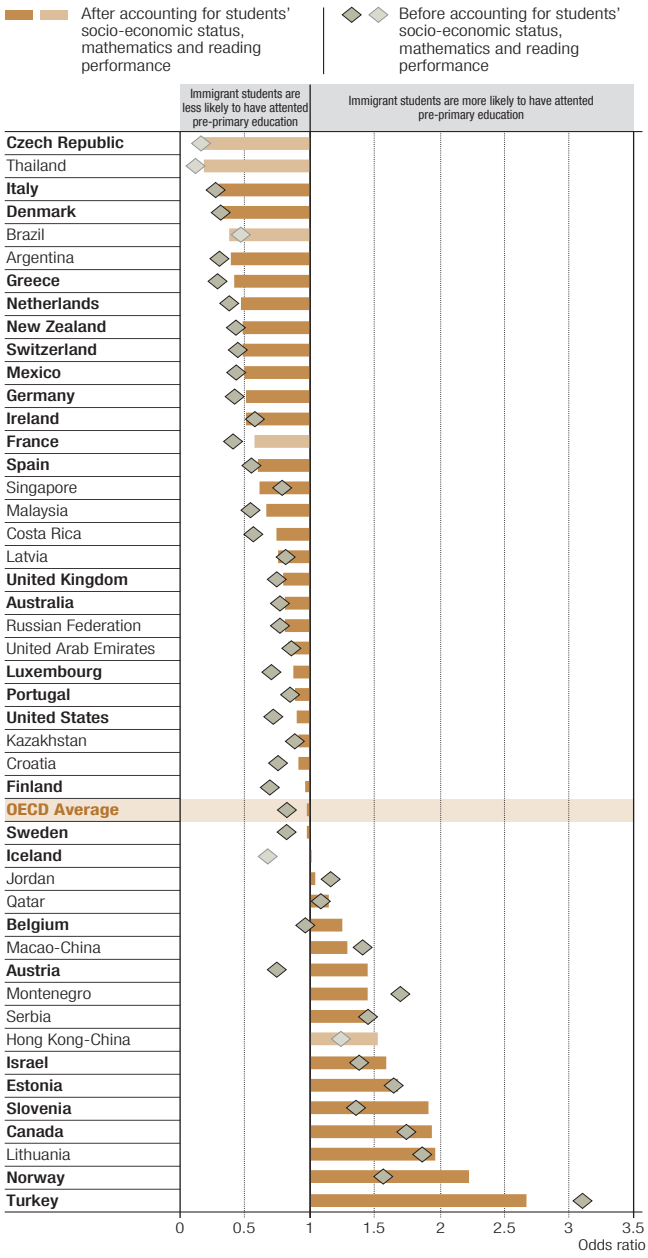
Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the reading score of immigrant students who had attended pre-primary education.

Note: Statistically significant score-point differences in reading between immigrant students who had attended pre-primary education and those who had not are shown next to the country/economy name.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Figure 11: Attendance at pre-primary education and immigrant background

Difference in the likelihood of having attended pre-primary education between immigrant students and non-immigrant students



How to read the graph: A value of 2 for the odd ratio means that first-generation immigrant students are twice as likely as non-immigrant students to have attended pre-primary education. Similarly, a value of 0.5 for the odds ratio means that first-generation immigrant students are half as likely as non-immigrant students to have attended pre-primary education.

Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order the difference between immigrant students and non-immigrant students in the likelihood of having attended pre-primary education, after accounting for student characteristics.

Notes: Statistically significant differences are marked in a darker tone.

Immigrant students are defined in the analysis as the children of foreign-born parents and the foreign-born students who arrived in the country where the test was conducted when they were three years old or younger. Only students with valid values on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status are included in the analysis.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

The drawbacks of grade repetition and early tracking for immigrant students

School systems react to diversity in their student populations in different ways. Some sort students by ability, mostly through grade repetition. In theory, this gives struggling students more time to master the curriculum. In fact, there is scant evidence that grade repetition actually benefits student learning.

Grade repetition is often linked to students' socio-economic status: PISA finds that, when comparing two students with similar mathematics and reading performance, the student who is more disadvantaged than the other is more likely to have repeated a grade. And grade repetition is costly for school systems and for the economy in general, since retained students are more likely to drop out, stay longer in the school system, or spend less time in the labour force.

Figure 12 shows that immigrant students are 3.4 times more likely than non-immigrant students to repeat a grade either in primary or secondary school, on average across OECD countries. Differences in grade repetition between immigrant and non-immigrant students are particularly large in countries that host relatively high percentages of asylum seekers, such as Finland and Sweden. And immigrant students are found to be more likely to repeat grades even after accounting for their performance in mathematics and reading and their socio-economic status.

These findings suggest that students' knowledge of the customs and practices that pertain to formal schooling, as well as teachers' expectations for their students, may play a large role in the decision on whether or not school systems require a student to repeat a grade. And if immigrant students are more likely to have repeated a grade, they may thus be older than their classmates, which could impede their integration into groups of peers.

How does tracking at school limit choices later on?

Tracking is another education policy that can affect immigrant students' progress through schooling. Early tracking of students into academic or vocational programmes tends to increase inequalities in the school system because students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to end up in "lower" tracks. Immigrant parents are likely to be unfamiliar with the school system of the host country and may not know how to choose the programme that would best suit their child. Even fully informed parents might fail to have their children enrolled in academic tracks if negative expectations or stereotypes about immigrant students are deeply entrenched in the host society and if vocational tracks are perceived to offer a more direct path into the labour market.

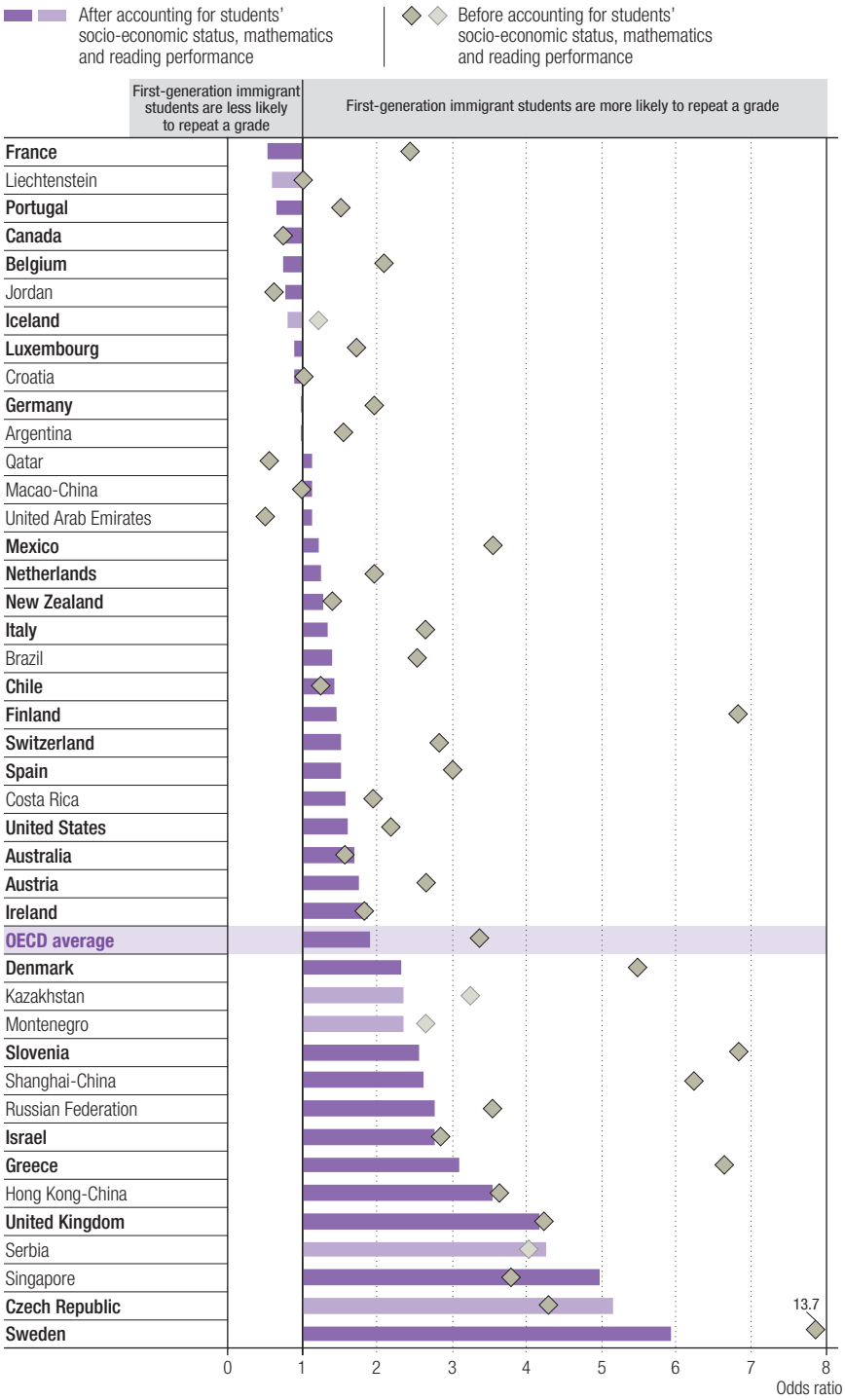
PISA finds that, after accounting for socio-economic status and performance in reading and mathematics, immigrant students are 44% more likely than non-immigrant students to be enrolled in vocational programmes. The systematic tracking of disadvantaged immigrants into vocational tracks and less-demanding courses not only limits the academic skills they may acquire, but also creates an additional barrier into high-status professional occupations later on. After all, many employers distinguish among prospective employees based on the school attended and the degree earned. Early tracking is particularly troubling in those school systems where students cannot easily change tracks after their initial choice.

WHAT CAN COUNTRIES DO?

- **Reduce or eliminate the use of ability grouping and grade repetition.** Instead, identify struggling students early and offer them extra support. For immigrant students, identify language-training needs early, since proficiency in reading is key to all learning.
- **Avoid early tracking.** Both academic and vocational programmes can help students to acquire the skills they need to contribute to society and participate fully in the economy. Give immigrant students enough instructional time to realise their full potential before assigning them to any particular programme of study.

Figure 12: Grade repetition and immigrant background

Difference in the likelihood of repeating a grade between first-generation immigrant students and non-immigrant students



How to read the graph: A value of 2 for the odd ratio means that first-generation immigrant students are twice as likely as non-immigrant students to repeat a grade. Similarly, a value of 0.5 for the odds ratio means that first-generation immigrant students are half as likely as non-immigrant students to repeat a grade.

Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order the difference between first-generation immigrant students and non-immigrant students in the likelihood of repeating a grade, after accounting for student characteristics.

Note: Statistically significant differences are marked in a darker tone.

Only students with valid values on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status are included in the analysis.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Teaching multicultural classes

Teachers in schools with diverse student populations recognise that handling cultural diversity in class is difficult and requires preparation. Often, students differ not only in the knowledge and skills they have acquired in their early years, but also in the strategies they use to approach and solve problems. Mathematics teachers who are not fully aware of these differences in approaches to mathematics problems, for example, or who "play down" cultural differences and instead argue for general notions of ability and equity, are ill-equipped to build on the knowledge and experience that students from different backgrounds bring to class.

Indeed, more and more schools are beginning to recognise that minority students have a lot to contribute to the classroom. On average across OECD countries, only 4% of students attend schools whose principal reported that ethnic heterogeneity is a serious obstacle to learning. But results from PISA also reveal that, within countries, there are large differences in schools' preparedness to handle multicultural student populations – and, consequently, in their perception of diversity as a hindrance to, rather than a resource for, learning.

How open are schools to ethnic diversity?

Not surprisingly, principals of disadvantaged schools are much more likely than principals of advantaged schools to report that ethnic diversity hinders learning. This view reflects the fact that immigrant students – those with, arguably, the largest learning and linguistic deficits – are generally concentrated in the same, disadvantaged schools. It also shows that disadvantaged schools would benefit enormously by regarding ethnic diversity as an educational resource, not a liability.

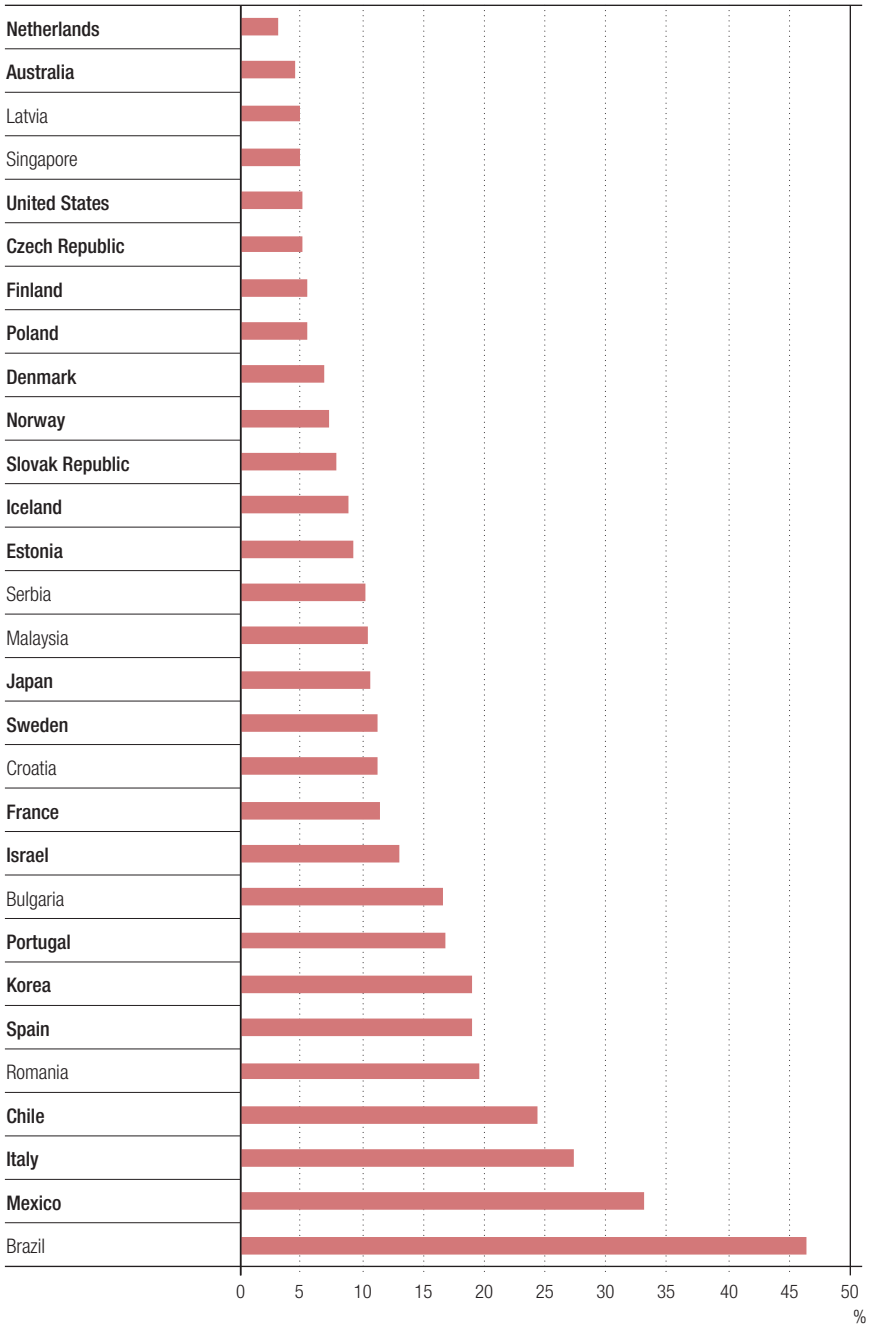
But many teachers, themselves, feel ill-prepared to teach ethnically diverse classes. Figure 13 shows the large proportions of teachers in several countries who reported, through the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), that they need more professional development in the area of teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting. The proportions are strikingly large in Latin American countries and in the European countries that recently saw rapid increases in the linguistic and cultural diversity in their schools, notably Italy and Spain.

WHAT CAN COUNTRIES DO

- **Provide specific, formal training on diversity, intercultural pedagogy and language development for school leaders and teachers,** in both initial and in-service training programmes.
- **Train teachers in formative assessments,** through which teachers track students' progress and adjust their teaching to meet individual students' needs.
- **Offer incentives for teachers and school leaders to work in disadvantaged schools.** These can include specialised initial and in-service training, mentoring for beginning teachers working in these schools, financial rewards and professional recognition.

Figure 13: Teachers' needs for professional development for teaching in a multicultural setting

Percentage of lower secondary teachers indicating they have a high need for professional development in the area of teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting



Countries are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of lower secondary teachers.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2013 Database.

Immigrants' high aspirations – and the willingness to work to achieve them

What drives people from their home country is the urgent desire to make a better, safer life for themselves and, especially, their children. Immigrants are determined to make the most of any opportunity that arises from the considerable sacrifices they made by migrating. Indeed, many immigrant parents hold expectations for their children's lives that match or even exceed those of non-immigrant families.

PISA finds, for example, that the parents of immigrant students in Belgium, Germany and Hungary are more likely to expect that their children will earn a tertiary degree than the parents of students without an immigrant background. This is remarkable, given that immigrant students in these countries do not perform as well as, and their families are more socio-economically disadvantaged than, non-immigrant students.

How ambitious are immigrant students?

Immigrant students, themselves, hold ambitious expectations for their own careers. Among the countries and economies that participated in PISA 2006, immigrant students in 14 countries and economies were more likely than non-immigrant students to expect to be working as professionals or managers when they were 30; in 26 countries/economies, immigrant students' career expectations were similar to those held by non-immigrant students.

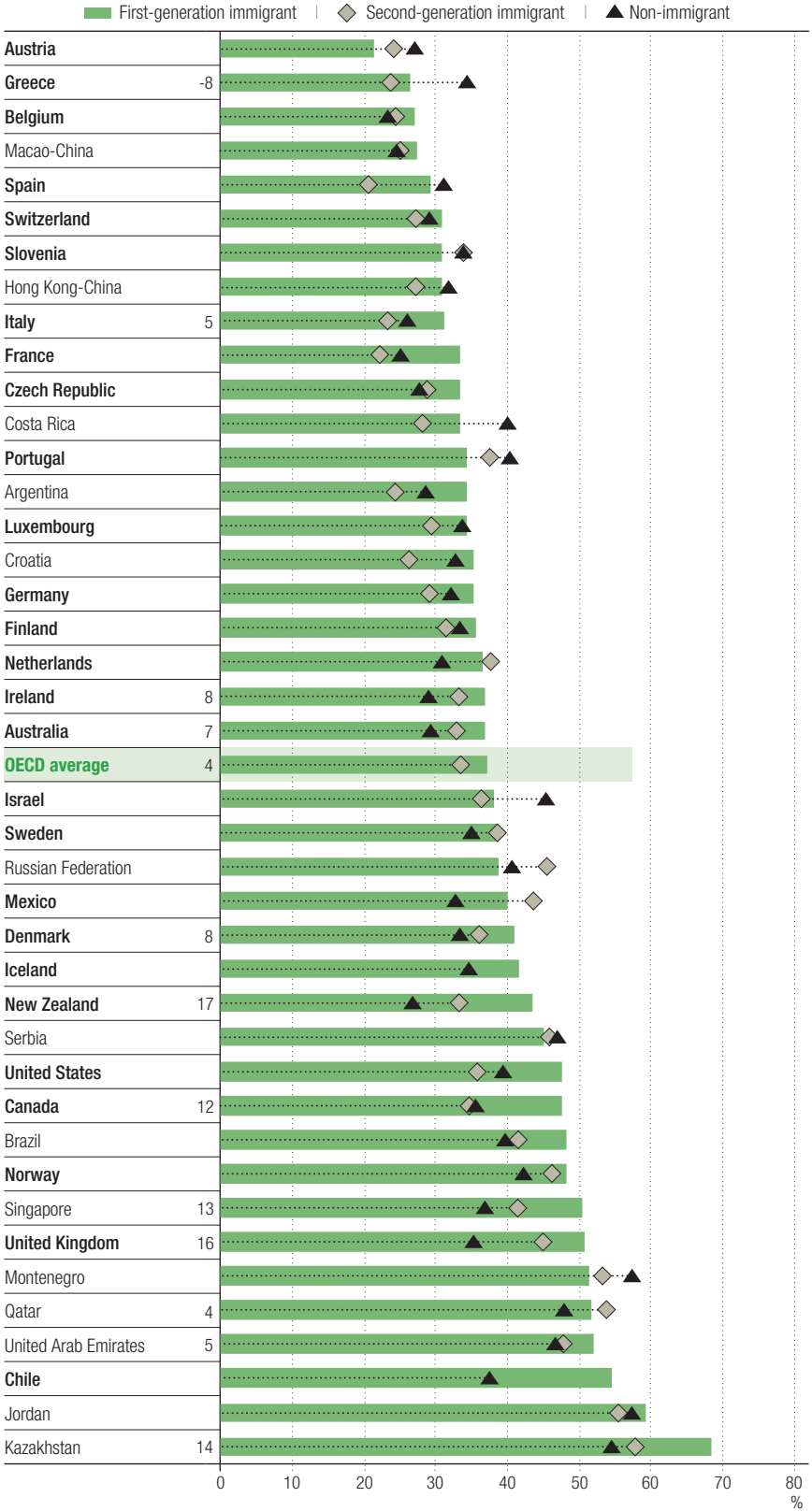
Expectations for higher education and careers are often self-fulfilling prophecies: students who hold ambitious – but realistic – expectations for their future are more likely to put greater effort into their learning and make better use of the education opportunities available to them. In fact, PISA results show that, despite the considerable challenges and barriers they face, many immigrant students do succeed in school – a testament to their and their families' drive, motivation and openness.

Figure 14 shows that a higher percentage of first-generation immigrant students than students without an immigrant background reported that they like to solve complex problems. On average across OECD countries, around 33% of students without an immigrant background so reported, compared with 34% of second-generation immigrant students and 37% of first-generation immigrant students.

In addition, PISA data show that in Australia, Israel and the United States, the share of disadvantaged students who perform among the top quarter of all students who participated in PISA is larger among immigrant students than among non-immigrant students. These highly motivated students, who manage to overcome the double disadvantage of poverty and an immigrant background, have the potential to make exceptional contributions to their host countries.

Figure 14: Openness to problem solving, by immigrant background

Percentage of students who reported that they like solving complex problems



Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of first-generation immigrant students who reported that they like solving complex problems.

Note: Statistically significant score-point differences between first-generation immigrant students and non-immigrant students who reported that they like solving complex problems are shown next to the country/economy name.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

Photo credits: Thanh Ha Bui/HotSpot Media

For further information, please contact:
edu.contact@oecd.org

or visit our websites:
http://www.oecd.org/edu/
http://www.oecd.org/migration-insights/