



**i n F o c u s**

**Do all students have equal  
opportunities to learn global and  
intercultural skills at school?**

Programme for International Student Assessment



## Do all students have equal opportunities to learn global and intercultural skills at school?

- The PISA 2018 assessment asked students about ten learning activities related to global competence. The most common learning activities students reported participating in were:
  - Learning about different cultures, with 76% of students across OECD countries reporting that they engage in this activity at school.
  - Learning how to solve conflicts with other people in the classroom, with 64% of students reporting doing so.
  - Learning how people from different cultures can have different perspectives on some issues, with 62% of students reporting doing this activity at school.
- Students reported engaging in about five learning activities related to global competence out of ten, on average across OECD countries. Students' attitudes and dispositions are positively and significantly associated with the number of global-competence learning activities in which they are engaged at school.
- Differences in access to global and intercultural learning opportunities at school were found between girls and boys, between students in general and vocational tracks, and between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students.

Many education systems seek to create an open, diverse and tolerant society, as education can play a significant role in countering racial, ethnic and national prejudice among children and adolescents. Education for living in an interconnected and diverse world could also contribute to forming generations of citizens who care about global and intercultural issues and who are able and willing to take action for sustainable development and collective well-being.

In its 2018 assessment, PISA assessed the competences needed to live in an interconnected and diverse world. Global competence is defined in PISA 2018 as a multi-dimensional capacity that encompasses the ability to: 1) examine issues of local, global and cultural significance; 2) understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others; 3) engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions across cultures; and 4) take action for collective well-being and sustainable development.

In addition to the global-competence cognitive test taken by 27 countries and economies, students and school principals in 66 countries and economies completed questionnaires on global competence. The questionnaire items covered students' attitudes

and dispositions on their: awareness of global issues; self-efficacy regarding global issues; interest in learning about other cultures; respect for people from other cultures; ability to understand the perspectives of others; cognitive adaptability; attitudes towards immigrants; awareness of intercultural communication; and agency regarding global issues. The questionnaire also covered the availability of learning opportunities at school and teachers' preparedness for teaching global and intercultural skills.

### To what extent are global and intercultural skills taught at school?

School principals were asked two sets of questions about the inclusion of global issues and intercultural learning in their schools' curriculum. PISA 2018 results show that global issues are commonly included in school curricula. The most common topic was climate change and global warming, with 88% of students attending a school whose principal reported that the subject is covered in the curriculum. On the contrary, the least common topic of the seven proposed in the questionnaires was global

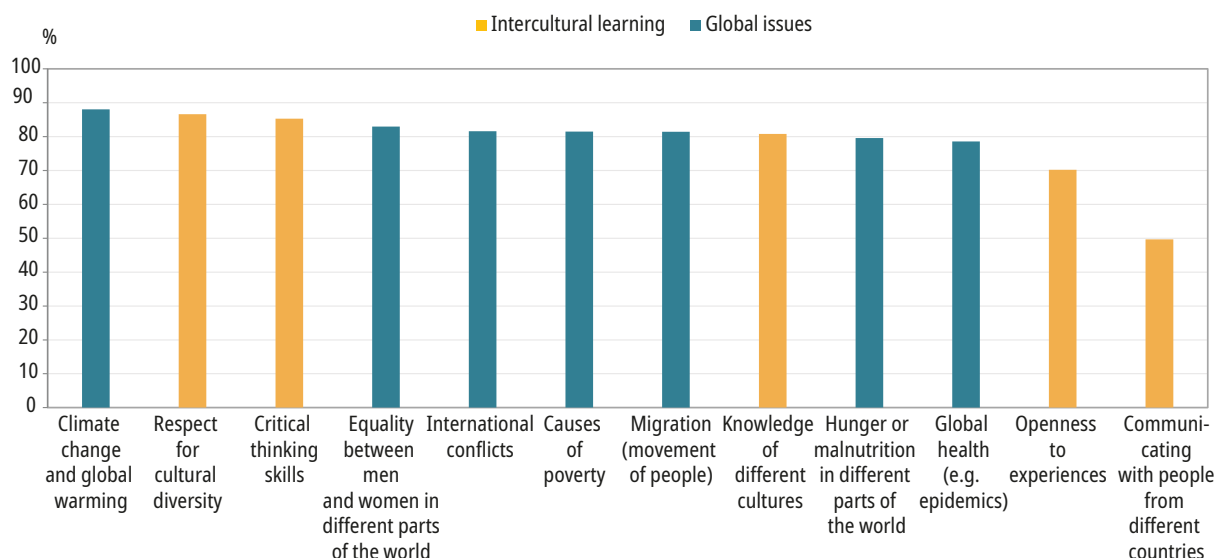
health, such as epidemics (79%). In many countries and economies, intercultural learning skills are also covered by school curricula. The most common topic covered was respect for cultural diversity, with 87% of

students attending a school whose principal reported that the curriculum includes this topic, while the least common topic was communicating with people from other cultures (50%).

## Global and intercultural topics covered in the curriculum

OECD average

Principals who reported that there is a formal curriculum for the following topics:



Items are ranked in descending order of the proportion of students in schools whose principal reported that the topic is covered in the curriculum.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.7.14 and Table VI.B1.7.15.

Students who participated in PISA 2018 were also asked ten questions about different learning activities related to global competence that they can engage in at school. Some 76% of students reported that they learn about different cultures at school, and some 64% of students reported that they learn how to solve conflicts with other people in the classroom. The least common learning activities, with 41% of students engaging in them, were looking for news on the Internet or watching the news together during classes; and participating in events celebrating cultural diversity throughout the school year. The most common activities students engage in were those that involve instruction and learning, rather than those that involve active discussion or participation. This could indicate that current teaching practices rely on teacher-directed instruction rather than participative activities.

When it comes to the total number of learning activities related to global competence, students reported engaging in about five activities on average across OECD countries out of ten, although this number varies between countries and economies. Students in Albania, Baku (Azerbaijan), Colombia,

the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Jordan, Peru, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand reported engaging in more than seven activities. Students in France, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, the Russian Federation, Scotland (United Kingdom) and Slovenia reported engaging in between four and five learning activities. Hence, the number of learning activities related to global competence available to students is not negligible in any of the countries or economies that participated in the assessment.

## Global-competence learning activities and student attitudes and dispositions

Students' attitudes and dispositions are positively and significantly associated with the number of global-competence learning activities in which they are engaged at school. Those associations remain positive after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profiles. The strongest associations were found in their: interest in learning about other cultures; awareness of global issues; agency regarding global issues; and self-efficacy regarding global issues.

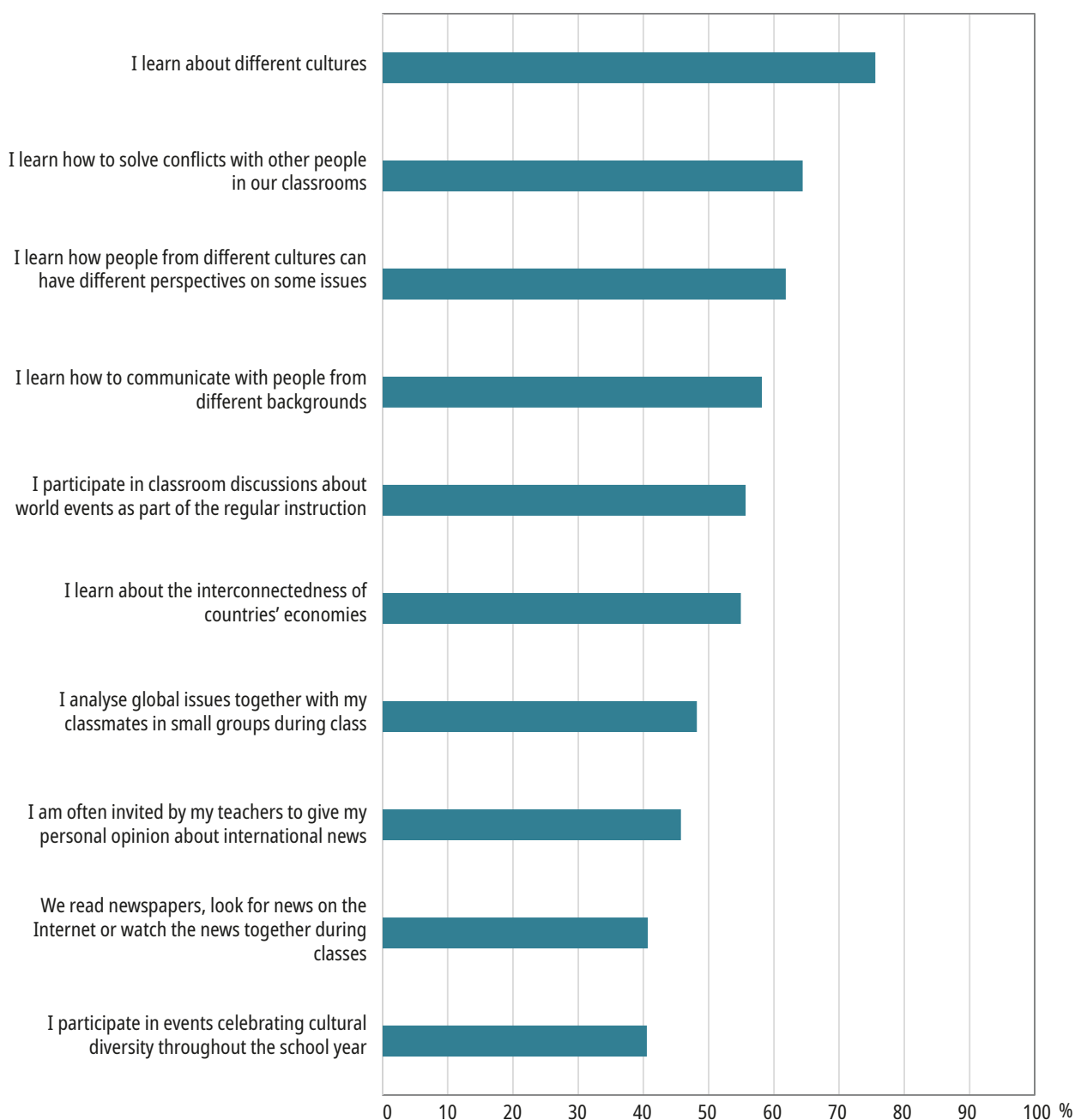
Detailed analyses of the associations between each of the ten learning activities and the nine students' attitudes and dispositions reveal universally positive and significant relationships, with very few exceptions. In particular, activities focusing on knowledge of global issues and on the interconnectedness of the world are related to students' awareness of and self-efficacy regarding global issues.

On the contrary, activities focusing on fostering interpersonal skills, such as communication and conflict resolution, are related to students' ability to understand different perspectives and to communicate with others. Hence, a complementary set of learning activities should be used to develop a comprehensive set of skills that students need to live in an interconnected world.

## Percentage of students engaged in learning activities related to global competence at school

OECD average

■ Students who reported learning the following at school



Items are ranked in descending order of the proportion of students who responded "yes".

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.7.1.

## Number of learning activities related to global competence that students engaged in at school



**Note:** The global competence sample from Israel does not include students in ultra-Orthodox schools and, thus, is not nationally representative. See PISA 2018 Technical Report (OECD, forthcoming) for details.

Countries and economies are listed in descending order of the number of learning activities students engage in at school.

**Source:** OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.7.1.

Moreover, two activities – learning about other cultures and learning that different people can have different perspectives about some issues – stand out as two of the most common learning activities related to global competence reported by students. The two activities are also positively associated with all attitudes. These two activities encompass elements of knowledge about other cultures as well as certain skills, such as critical and analytical thinking. In this sense, it is important that schools equip students not only with conceptual knowledge about other cultures, but also with skills that they could adapt and use in various circumstances.

**There are discrepancies in how different student groups are exposed to global and intercultural learning opportunities**

PISA 2018 found that learning activities related to global competence are positively associated with students' attitudes and dispositions. However, not all students participate equally in global-competence learning activities at school. For instance, boys were more likely than girls to participate in activities in which they are expected to give and discuss their views, while girls were more likely than boys to report participating in activities related to intercultural understanding and communication. More boys than girls (about 5 percentage points more) reported that they learn about the interconnectedness of countries' and economies, on average across OECD countries. Boys were also more likely than girls to be invited by their teachers to give their personal opinion about international news (a difference of 4 percentage points). In contrast, girls were more likely than boys to report that they learn how to solve conflicts with their peers in the classroom (a difference

of 4 percentage points), and learn about different cultures (again, a difference of 4 percentage points).

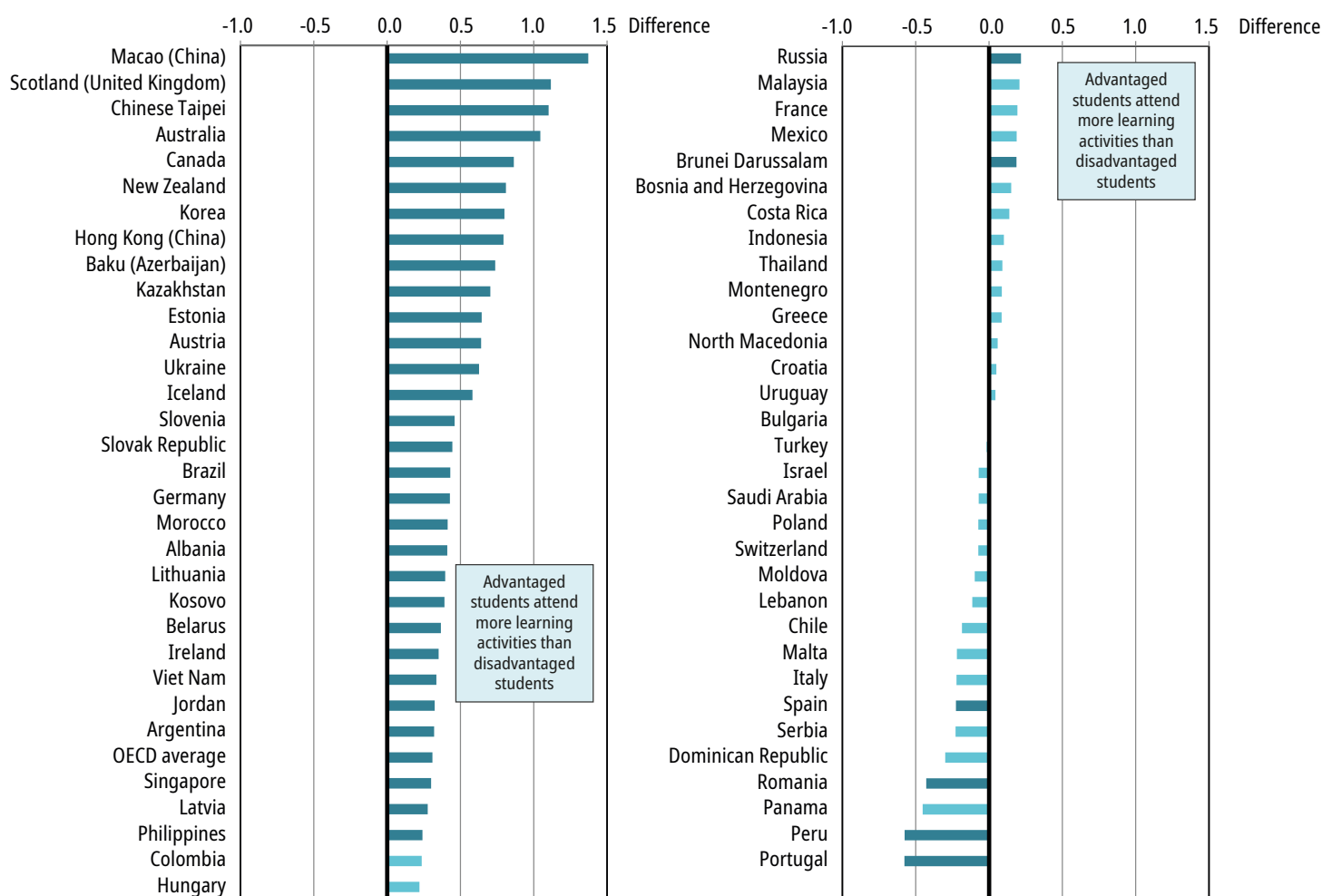
Another source of differences in access to learning activities related to global competence is the socio-economic profile of students. The findings show that advantaged students (those in the top quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) have access to more learning opportunities than disadvantaged students. This finding holds true in 33 of 65 participating countries and economies, with the largest differences observed in Australia,

Canada, Hong Kong (China), Korea, Macao (China), New Zealand, Scotland (United Kingdom) and Chinese Taipei.

Moreover, comparisons between general and vocational programmes show that students in general programmes engage more with the conceptual aspects of intercultural learning (e.g. learning about different cultures), while those in vocational programmes engage more with the practical aspects (e.g. participating in events celebrating cultural diversity).

## Number of learning activities related to global competence, by socio-economic status

Difference in the number of learning activities by students' socio-economic status  
(Advantaged - Disadvantaged)



**Notes:** Statistically significant values are shown in darker tones.

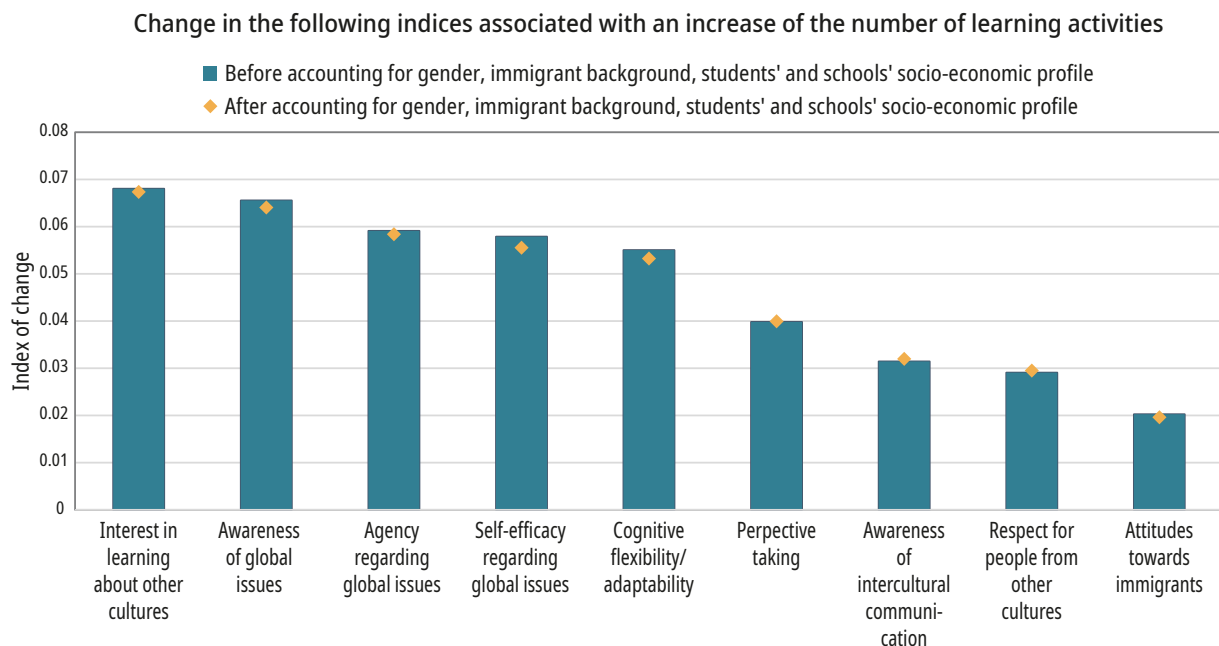
The global competence sample from Israel does not include students in ultra-Orthodox schools and, thus, is not nationally representative. See PISA 2018 Technical Report (OECD, forthcoming) for details.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

**Source:** OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.8.2.

# Number of learning activities related to global competence and students' attitudes

OECD average



1. The socio-economic profile is measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS).

**Note:** All associations are statistically significant.

**Source:** OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.7.11.

## The bottom line

Students with more positive global and intercultural dispositions tended to engage more broadly in learning activities at school such as learning about other cultures, developing perspectives on global issues, understanding how to communicate with people from different backgrounds, and learning to resolve conflicts with their peers. Schools and educators could integrate several learning activities to cover a wide range of global and intercultural topics. Effective learning requires a consistent approach rather than sporadic or one-off activities, however. This, in turn, requires curricula that cover the breadth of global and intercultural topics relevant to 15-year-olds. Moreover, equitable access to those opportunities is necessary, particularly among socio-economically disadvantaged students.

## Notes:

1. Scaled indices are fully described in Annex A1 of *PISA 2018 Results (Volume VI): Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?*

2. The total number of learning activities students are exposed to at school was constructed by summing students' answers to all ten questions. Values in this indicator range between zero and ten and give an indication of how systemically these activities are covered at schools.

## For more information

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**See:** OECD (2020), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume VI): Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5f68679-en>

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