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**i n F o c u s**

**Do girls and boys engage  
with global and intercultural  
issues differently?**

Programme for International Student Assessment



## Do girls and boys engage with global and intercultural issues differently?

In most countries and economies, girls reported having:

- Higher awareness of but lower self-efficacy regarding global issues than boys.
- Greater ability to understand the perspectives of others, greater interest in learning about other cultures, greater respect for people from other cultures, more positive attitudes towards immigrants, but lower cognitive adaptability.
- Greater awareness of intercultural communication.
- Greater agency regarding global issues but lower propensity to take action for collective well-being and sustainable development.

Boys are more likely than girls to participate in activities in which they are expected to give and discuss their views, while girls are more likely than boys to report participating in activities related to intercultural understanding and communication.

In recent years, more attention has been paid to the way gender interacts with intercultural and global learning opportunities. While evidence shows that schools are shaping a gendered citizenry, the notions of citizenship in this research has been notably local with limited focus on global conceptions of citizenship (Tormey and Gleeson, 2012<sup>[1]</sup>). This issue of PISA in Focus takes a deeper look at equitable access to global and intercultural learning opportunities and differences in boys' and girls' dispositions and attitudes towards global and intercultural issues.

### How do boys and girls differ in global and intercultural attitudes?

PISA 2018 asked students a series of questions about their global and intercultural attitudes and dispositions<sup>1</sup>. Those questions focused on the four dimensions of global competence: students' ability to examine local and global issues, their capacity to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others, their ability to engage in effective communication across cultures, and their willingness to take action for collective well-being and sustainable development. Information from the responses were used to construct nine indices covering the four dimensions of global competence.

Findings show some important gender differences. For instance, in 45 out of 65 countries and economies, girls reported significantly greater awareness of global issues than boys. This gender gap was largest in Albania, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Saudi Arabia, while it was non-significant in 19 countries and economies. Moreover, in 22 out of 65 countries and economies, girls showed greater self-efficacy regarding global issues than boys, meaning that girls believed more strongly they were capable of acting on and managing global issues than boys; the reverse was true in 17 countries.

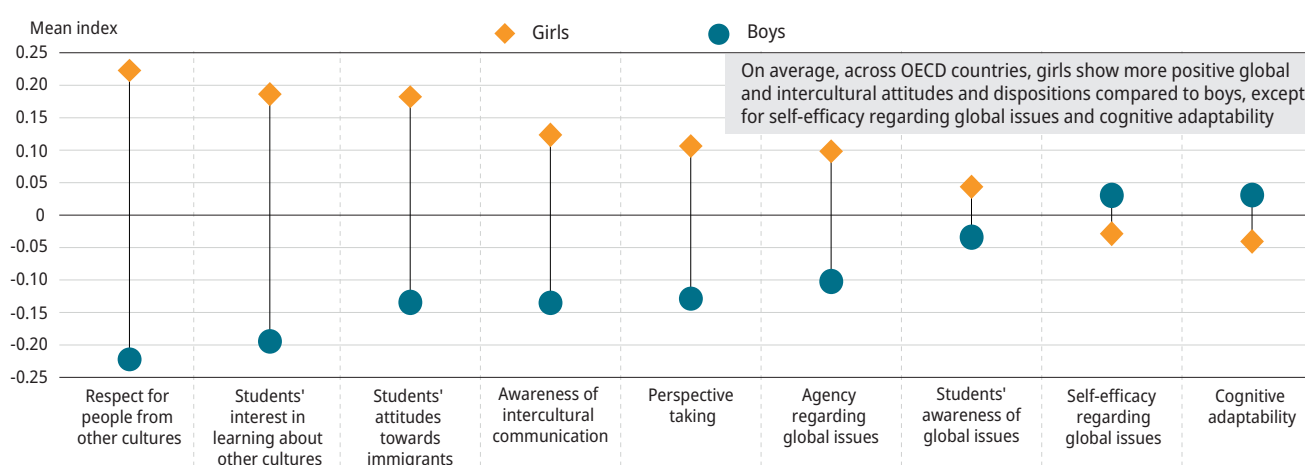
When it comes to understanding the perspectives of others, in all countries and economies except the Dominican Republic, girls reported a greater capacity than boys to take others' perspectives. Differences in favour of girls were the largest in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Kosovo, Serbia and the United Arab Emirates. Similarly, girls showed greater interest in other cultures than boys. Differences in favour of girls were statistically significant in all countries and economies except Korea.

Furthermore, in all countries and economies, girls reported greater respect for people from other cultures than boys. However, in 28 out of the 65 countries/economies that took the questionnaire, boys reported greater cognitive adaptability than girls. In other words, boys reported a greater capacity to adapt to new and unfamiliar situations than girls.

Girls reported greater cognitive adaptability than boys in only six countries/economies: Baku (Azerbaijan), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Jordan, Lithuania and the United Arab Emirates. The gender differences in this index were mostly the inverse of what was observed for the indices of respect for people from other cultures, interest in learning about other cultures and ability to understand different perspectives.

In all countries and economies except Hong Kong (China), Macao (China) and Viet Nam, girls showed more positive attitudes towards immigrants than boys. These gender differences were particularly large in Australia, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, New Zealand, North Macedonia and Scotland (United Kingdom). Moreover, across all countries and economies, girls reported greater awareness of intercultural communication than boys.

## Difference between girls and boys in global and intercultural attitudes and dispositions



Countries/economies with a positive difference in favour of girls	65	63	57	65	65	54	46	22	6
Countries/economies with no difference	0	1	3	0	1	10	19	27	31
Countries/economies with a positive difference in favour of boys	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	17	29

**Note:** All differences between boys and girls are statistically significant.

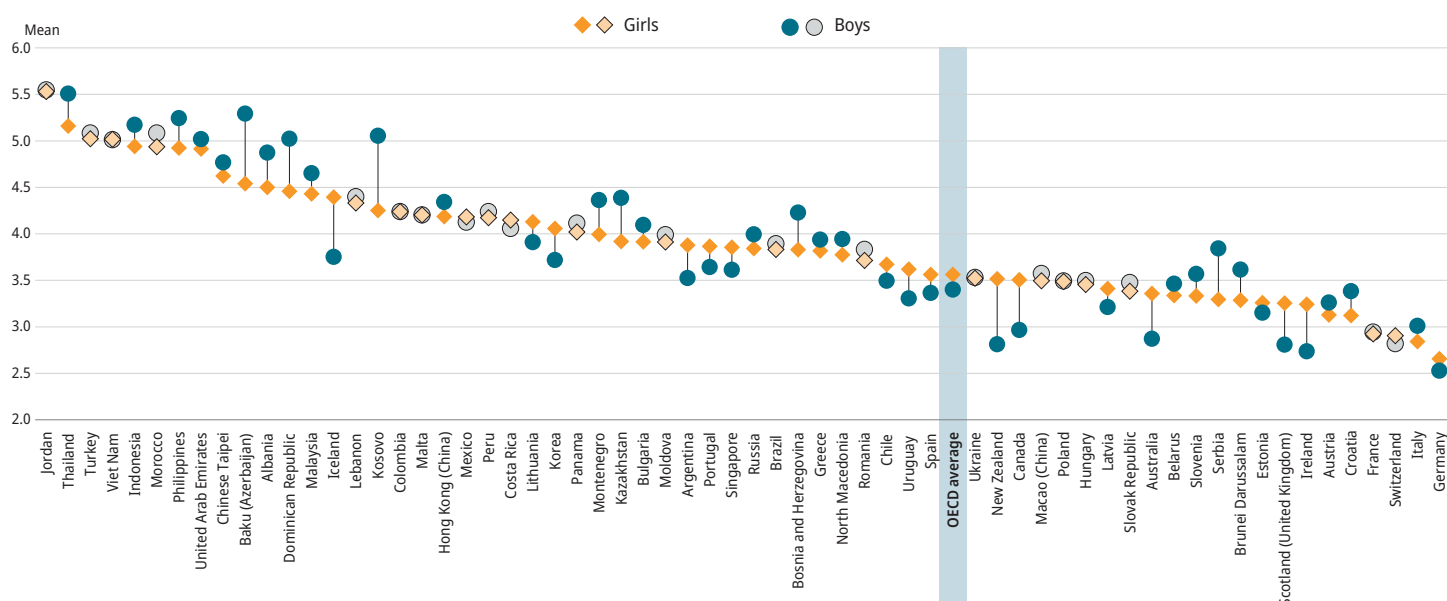
Items are ranked in descending order of the mean index for girls.

**Source:** OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results, Volume VI, Table VI.B1.2.3, Table VI.B1.2.6, Table VI.B1.3.3, Table VI.B1.3.6, Table VI.B1.3.9, Table VI.B1.3.12, Table VI.B1.3.15, Table VI.B1.4.3 and Table VI.B1.5.3.

Students who are aware of and confident about dealing with global and intercultural issues, who understand the perspectives of others, and able to communicate across cultures, should be able to translate those dispositions into an ability and willingness to take action for collective well-being and sustainable development. In 53 of 63 countries and economies, girls reported greater agency

regarding global issues than boys<sup>2</sup>. The largest gender gaps in favour of girls were observed in Australia, Ireland, Jordan, Lithuania and New Zealand. On the other hand, boys reported a greater number of actions taken for sustainability and collective well-being in 26 countries and economies. The reverse was true in 17 countries and economies and on average across OECD countries.

## Number of actions taken, by gender



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

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the mean number of actions taken by girls.

**Source:** OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results, Volume VI, Table VI.B1.5.19.

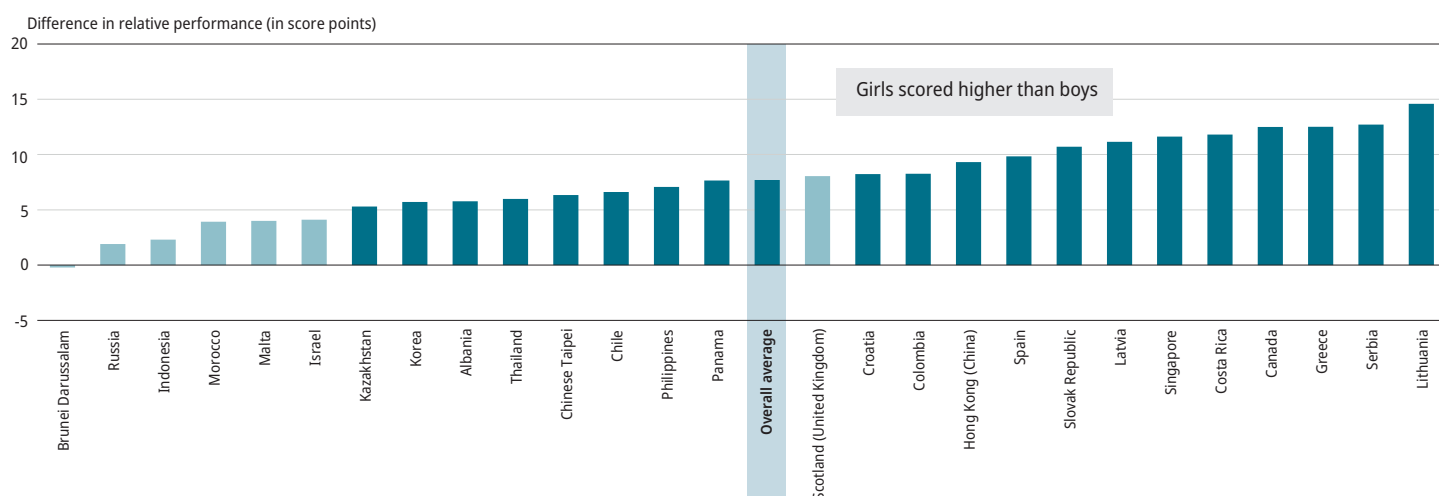
## How do girls and boys perform on the global competence test?

In addition to differences in attitudes and dispositions, girls outperformed boys on the global competence cognitive test in all countries and economies except Scotland (United Kingdom).<sup>3</sup> On average across all countries and economies, girls outperformed boys by 26 score points. The largest gender differences

in favour of girls were observed in Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia and Thailand, while the smallest were observed in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Russia.

Once students' performance in mathematics, science and reading were taken into account, differences in favour of girls in relative performance were non-significant in 7 countries and economies, while they remained significant in the other 20.

## Differences in relative performance in global competence, by gender



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

Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the score-point difference in global competence performance between boys and girls.

**Source:** OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results, Volume VI, Figure VI.6.8.

## To what extent do girls and boys differ in their engagement with global and intercultural learning activities?

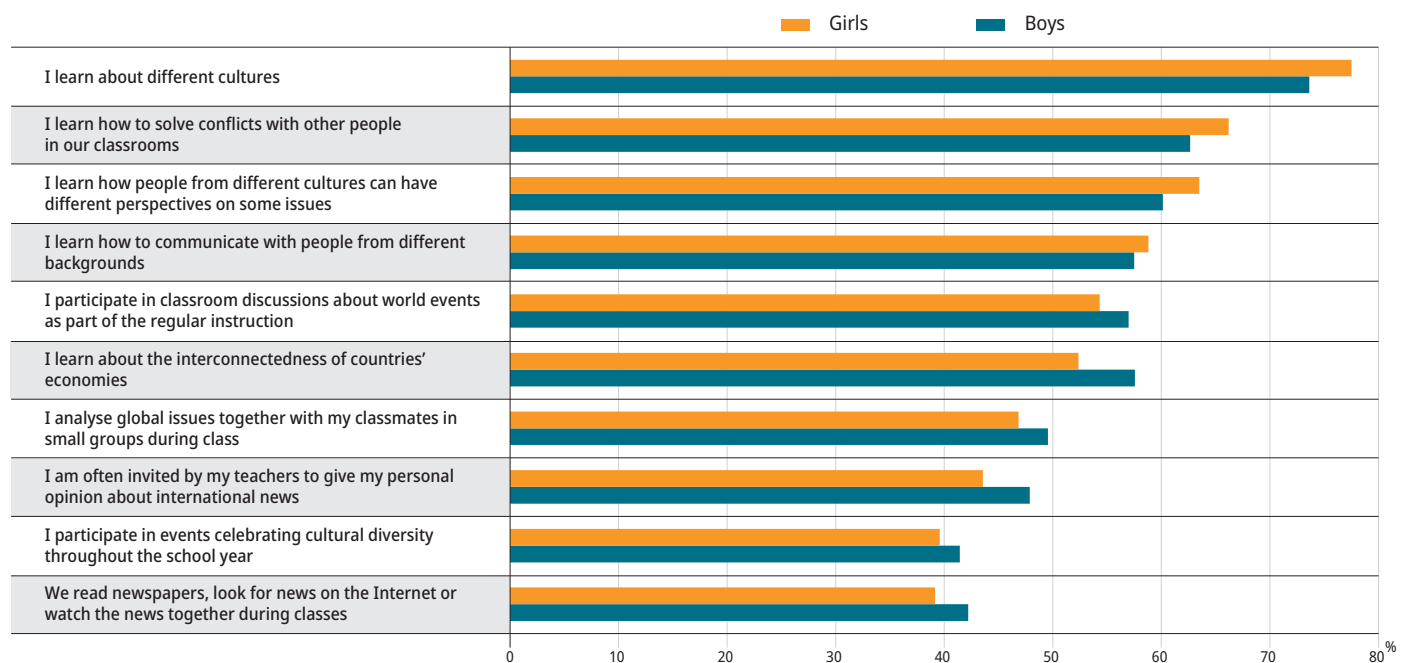
Existing evidence shows important differences in how boys and girls learn about and interact with global and intercultural issues at school. For instance, even though boys might attend more learning activities in general, girls are more interested in learning opportunities focusing on global social responsibility including topics on poverty and inequality for example.

In PISA 2018, students were asked 10 questions on global and intercultural learning opportunities at school. The findings show some differences in exposure to individual learning opportunities. For instance, more boys than girls (about 5 percentage

points more) reported that they learn about the interconnectedness of countries' economies on average across OECD countries. Boys were also more likely than girls to read newspapers, look for news on the Internet or watch the news together during class (a difference of 3 percentage points), be invited by their teachers to give their personal opinion about international news (a difference of 4 percentage points), participate in classroom discussions about world events (a difference of 3 percentage points) and analyse global issues together with their classmates (a difference of 3 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), learn about different cultures (a difference of 4 percentage points), and learn how people from different cultures can have different perspectives on some issues (a difference of 3 percentage points).

## Access to learning activities, by gender

Percentage of girls and boys who reported learning the following activities at school, OECD average



**Note:** All differences between boys and girls are statistically significant. Items are ranked in descending order of the percentage of girls.

**Source:** OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results, Volume VI, Table VI.B1.8.1.

In general, 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 participate in activities related to intercultural understanding and communication.

Those differences might reflect how girls and boys are socialised in the classroom and how their teachers encourage their engagement in the different activities. They could also reflect differences between boys and girls in interests and in self-efficacy.

## The bottom line

The most striking finding is the difference in how girls and boys engage with global and intercultural learning activities at school. Girls should be empowered to take an active role in more participatory learning activities and boys encouraged to participate in activities focusing on intercultural understanding and communication. This will foster more positive intercultural skills among boys and boost girls' self-efficacy in global and intercultural issues.

## Notes

1. All indices are presented in detail in annex A of PISA 2018 volume VI.
2. PISA 2018 asked students the extent to which they agree (“strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “agree”, “strongly agree”) with the following six statements: “I think of myself as a citizen of the world”; “When I see the poor conditions that some people live under, I feel a responsibility to do something about it”; “I think my behaviour can impact people in other countries”; “It is right to boycott companies that are known to provide poor workplace conditions for their employees”; “I can do something about the problems of the world”; and “Looking after the global environment is important to me”. Responses to these statements were combined to create an index of agency regarding global issues.
3. The cognitive test assessed students' performance on three of the four dimensions of global competence: students' ability to examine local and global issues, their capacity to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others, and their willingness to take action for collective well-being and sustainable development.

## For more information

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**See:** Tormey, R. and J. Gleeson (2012), "The gendering of global citizenship: findings from a large-scale quantitative study on global citizenship education experiences", *Gender and Education*, Vol. 24/6, pp. 627-645, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2011.646960>. [1]

**Coming next month:** Can a growth mindset help disadvantaged students close the gap?

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