

# STARTING UNEQUAL: HOW'S LIFE FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN?

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CHILD WELL-BEING POLICY PAPER



# OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities

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The release of this policy paper has been authorised by Romina Boarini, Director of the OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE).

## Child Well-being Policy Papers

This paper charts the well-being of children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Built around the Child Well-being Measurement Framework set out in the 2021 report *Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies* (OECD<sup>[1]</sup>), and constructed using key comparative indicators from the forthcoming OECD Child Well-being Dashboard, it examines how the well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds compares both across OECD countries and relative to their more advantaged peers. Results highlight how growing up at the bottom end of the socio economic ladder leads to poorer outcomes in almost all well-being areas, and how these well-being inequalities are rooted in the poorer environments that disadvantaged children face at home, in school, and in the community.

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# Abstract

Childhood is a crucial period in life. The things that we learn, do, and experience in childhood play a critical role in shaping who we are and who we become, and can leave lasting impressions on our lives for years to come. However, not all children have the same opportunities to enjoy good childhoods and to learn and grow in ways that set them up well for adult life. Children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are at particular risk, as this paper shows.

Built using a series of key comparative indicators from the OECD Child Well-being Dashboard, this paper examines how the well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds compares both across OECD countries and relative to their more advantaged peers. Results highlight how growing up at the bottom end of the socio-economic ladder leads to poorer outcomes in almost all well-being areas, and how these well-being inequalities are rooted in the poorer environments that disadvantaged children face at home, in school, and in the community.

# Résumé

L'enfance est une période cruciale de la vie. Ce que nous apprenons, ce que nous faisons et ce que nous vivons pendant l'enfance joue un rôle essentiel dans la formation de l'être que nous sommes et que nous devenons, et peut laisser des traces durables dans notre vie pendant des années. Cependant, tous les enfants n'ont pas les mêmes chances de profiter d'une bonne enfance, d'apprendre et de grandir d'une manière qui les prépare bien à la vie adulte. Les enfants issus de milieux socialement et économiquement défavorisés sont particulièrement exposés à ce risque, comme le montre ce document.

Construit à partir d'une série d'indicateurs comparatifs clés tirés du tableau de bord de l'OCDE sur le bien-être des enfants, ce document examine comment le bien-être des enfants issus de milieux défavorisés se compare à la fois dans les pays de l'OCDE et par rapport à leurs pairs plus favorisés. Les résultats montrent comment le fait de grandir au bas de l'échelle socio-économique entraîne des résultats moins bons dans presque tous les domaines du bien-être, et comment ces inégalités de bien-être sont enracinées dans les environnements moins favorables auxquels les enfants défavorisés sont confrontés à la maison, à l'école et dans leur communauté.

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# Introduction

Childhood is a crucial period in life. The things that we learn, do, and experience in childhood play a critical role in shaping who we are and who we become, and can leave lasting impressions on our lives for years to come. It is during childhood that individuals begin to develop the skills and abilities needed for success in later life, for instance, including in their professional life. These include traditional competencies like literacy and numeracy but also, for today's children, a range of additional reflective and socio-emotional skills needed to thrive in an increasingly inter-connected and digitised world (like self-confidence, critical thinking, problem-solving, and “collaborative and transformative competencies” – that is, competences that are important for contributing to society, such as empathy, reconciling tensions, and taking responsibility) (OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>). Childhood is also a critical period for health and physical development, for social and emotional development, for behaviour formation, and for a range of other factors that help shape our prospects and well-being in later life (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>).

However, not all children have the same opportunities to enjoy good childhoods and to learn and grow in ways that set them up well for adult life. Child well-being requires sustained support from families and caregivers, from schools, and from the wider community (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>) – supports that are not always available to all children. Children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (see Box 1) in particular consistently fall behind in many well-being areas. Disadvantaged children frequently do worse in school, for instance, and often leave education with poorer knowledge and skills than their more advantaged peers (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>). They also often have poorer physical health, poorer mental health, have less confidence in themselves, and report lower satisfaction with their lives (Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>).

The early inequalities experienced by children from disadvantaged families matter for the children themselves, of course. Children growing up in disadvantaged households not only experience poorer well-being now, but also face a lifetime of more limited opportunities, typically for reasons far outside their control. These inequalities also matter for the social and economic prosperity of society as a whole. Many of the well-being outcomes linked to childhood disadvantage – worse health, poorer knowledge and skills accumulation – strongly affect their chances of later becoming productive members of society and the labour force, and play a key role in the perpetuation of poverty and social exclusion.

The sources of childhood disadvantage are multiple. Child income poverty is an important driver, and is still widespread: on average across OECD countries, 13% of children are living in relative income poverty, rising to more than 20% in countries including Spain, the Republic of Türkiye (hereafter “Türkiye”) and the United States (OECD, 2022<sup>[6]</sup>). But importantly, and as this paper makes clear, the roots of disadvantage stretch far beyond family income. They stem from differences in the environments children face at home and with family, at school, and in the wider community. Many socially and economically disadvantaged children face poor conditions in several of these areas at once, with effects that interact and compound.

Better measuring child well-being and the drivers of child well-being is critical if policy makers are to design policies that help all children flourish, including those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Headline child well-being metrics and indicator dashboards can help by providing a comprehensive picture of how children are doing in different areas of life, and can contribute to an improved shared understanding of where key challenges lie and how to address multiple disadvantage through integrated child well-being strategies.



This paper builds on information from one such indicator dashboard – the OECD Child Well-being Dashboard (Box 2) – to chart the well-being of children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Constructed primarily using key comparative indicators from the Dashboard, it examines how the well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds compares both across OECD countries and relative to their more advantaged peers. Results highlight the pervasiveness of childhood disadvantage – how growing up at the bottom end of the socio-economic ladder impacts almost all areas of children’s lives, including areas where social gradients are well documented (e.g. child health, education) but also areas less often highlighted, including the ways in which children perceive themselves and the support they receive at home, at school, and in the community. In doing so, it illustrates the scope and scale of the policy challenge for governments looking to provide all children, including those in the least privileged positions, with the best possible start in life.

The paper is organised in line with a simplified version of the OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework (Box 2). It starts in section 1 with a series of key comparative indicators on children’s well-being outcomes, and how they differ with socio-economic status. Consistent with the Measurement Framework, these outcome indicators are arranged into four broad thematic areas: material well-being outcomes; physical health outcomes; cognitive and educational outcomes; and social and emotional outcomes. Section 2 outlines a series of key indicators on the drivers of children’s well-being outcomes: indicators of the things that children themselves think, do and experience (their attitudes, activities, behaviours, and relationships), as well as of the wider settings and environments in which they grow up (their families, their schools, and the communities and local areas). These indicators are again arranged into four thematic areas: home and family life; life at school and in early childhood education and care; social life and life in the community; and life online.

The paper’s final section briefly discusses implications for policy and practice.

## Key findings

### ***1. Children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds fare worse in almost all well-being areas***

The indicators presented in the first section of this paper show that, across well-being areas, children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds frequently experience poor well-being outcomes, especially when compared against those for their more advantaged peers. For example, children from disadvantaged backgrounds:

- Still too often lack access to basic material necessities, including basic food and nutrition, good-quality housing, and modern necessities like the Internet. For instance, on average across European OECD countries, more than 10% of low-income children continue to live in very poor quality housing.
- Are disproportionately likely to experience poor health outcomes, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds over-represented among overweight and obese children and among those reporting poorer self-rated health. On average across OECD countries, around 25% of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds are considered overweight or obese based on the World Health Organization’s definition, compared to 16% from the most advantaged households. And more than one in six disadvantaged children in the same age group rate their own health as only “fair” or “poor”, compared to one in ten advantaged children.

### Box 1. How this paper measures social and economic disadvantage

Socio-economic status, and childhood socio-economic disadvantage, are broad and multidimensional concepts. Revolving around a child and their family's position in society relative to others, socio-economic status looks to reflect children's access to important economic and social resources (e.g. financial capital, social capital, cultural capital) and how this access compares to others around them (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>). Social and economic disadvantage in childhood thus refers to a relative lack of access to important resources and a "low" relative family position more generally.

There is no strong international agreement on how socio-economic status and disadvantage should be measured, especially with respect to children. Different studies employ different metrics built on different source data. For child-focused data collections, measurement typically involves a combination of one or more measures covering parental education, parental occupational status, and/or household income or household possessions, with some variation in the exact measures used (Avvisati, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>; Cowan et al., 2012<sup>[8]</sup>). Other aspects of children's background can contribute to childhood social disadvantage – for example, family circumstances, and a racial, ethnic or migration background – but they are not considered in this paper.

This paper follows much of the international child literature by measuring socio-economic status and disadvantage primarily in terms of parental education, parental occupation, and household income or family/household possessions, with the exact measures used differing depending on the underlying source data. In all cases, disadvantage is measured as a relative concept with children from disadvantaged backgrounds defined in relation to others in their country or region.

For indicators based on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), socio-economic status is measured using the PISA Index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status – a composite measure derived from a series of variables on parental education, parental occupation, and the availability of a range of material possessions in the child's home (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>). In line with the PISA results reports (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>), children with index values in the bottom 25% for their country or economy are classified as "low socio-economic status" or disadvantaged, and those in the top 25% as high-status or advantaged.

A similar approach is used for indicators based on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In these cases, socio-economic status is measured using the PIRLS/TIMSS Home Resources for Learning Scale – a similar composite, constructed using information on parental education, parental occupation, and several learning relevant household assets like Internet access and the number of books in the home (Mullis et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Disadvantaged children are again defined as those with values among the bottom 25% within their country or region, and advantaged children those in the top 25%.

Socio-economic status is measured in a slightly narrower way for indicators based on both the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey (HBSC) and the Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-being (ISCWeB). HBSC-based indicators capture socio-economic status using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS) – a composite based on children's access to a series of common material assets and activities (Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). Consistent with the approach taken in the HBSC international reports (Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>), children with FAS scores in the bottom 20% for their country or region are classified as disadvantaged, and those with scores in the top 20% as advantaged. Indicators based on the Children's Worlds survey use a similar approach, albeit with a slightly different list of material assets and activities.

Lastly, for indicators based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey, disadvantage is captured through disposable household income, only. "Low income"

children are those with equivalised disposable household incomes in the bottom 25% of the national equivalised disposable income distribution, and "high income" children are those with incomes in the top 25% of the national distribution.

- Do worse in education. They are far less likely to perform well on international student assessments, such as OECD PISA, for instance: on average across OECD countries, only 6% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds reached "top performer" status on the OECD PISA tests, compared to 29% among the most advantaged. They are also far more likely to report limited ambitions for future education.
- More often report poorer social and emotional outcomes, including weaker perceived support from family, lower levels of self-belief, and lower levels of life satisfaction. On average across OECD countries, as many as 19% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds report low satisfaction with their life as a whole, compared to 14% among the most advantaged, with gaps as large as 10 percentage points in some countries.

## ***2. These well-being inequalities are rooted in the poorer environments that socially and economically disadvantaged children face at home, in school, and in the community***

Children's well-being outcomes do not emerge from nowhere. The things they do and the conditions they face at home, online, in school, and in the community, all help shape their outcomes, for better or worse.

By definition, several aspects of home and family life are different for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They may be living on lower incomes, have parents working in lower skill occupations, or have parents with lower levels of education – or some combination of all three. However, the challenges faced by children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds stretch far beyond income or parental occupation or education alone. The indicators presented in the second section of this paper illustrate how across OECD countries, socio-economic disadvantage is associated with poorer conditions and environments in virtually all areas of children's lives, all of which play an important role in driving their well-being outcomes:

- At home, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often more likely to miss out on important family activities and experience poorer quality relationships with parents. For example, on average across OECD countries, 36% of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds report finding it difficult to talk to their parents, compared to 28% among the most advantaged.
- At school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently experience poorer quality learning environments, are more likely to experience bullying, and more often report a lack of connectedness to their school. On average across OECD countries, only two-thirds of 15-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds report feeling like they belong at school, compared to three-quarters among the most advantaged.
- With peers, children from disadvantaged backgrounds less frequently feel like they have enough friends, and less often report feeling well supported by their friends. On average across OECD countries, only just over half (58%) of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds report feeling high support from their friends, falling to as low as 30% in some countries.
- In the community, children from disadvantaged backgrounds more often grow up in poorer quality local areas, placing limits on their opportunities to socialise and participate in community life. For example, on average across European OECD countries, 11% of low income children live in households that report problems with crime and violence in their area, compared to 7% for high income children.

- And online, children from disadvantaged backgrounds may be less well positioned to make the most of the digital world. Disadvantaged 15-year-olds are often significantly less likely than advantaged 15-year-olds to report using digital devices for schoolwork, or regularly reading news online. In many countries, they are also far less likely to strongly believe that the Internet is a valuable resource for accessing information. By contrast, there is little difference in children's risk of experiencing cyberbullying or problematic social media use by socio-economic status.

### ***3. Tackling social inequalities in child well-being will require co-ordinated policy action***

The breadth and depth of social inequalities in child well-being mean that policy efforts are needed on multiple fronts. Moreover, as noted throughout this paper, different areas of child well-being and different aspects of children's lives are frequently inter-connected, meaning that these policy efforts are likely to be fully effective only when designed and delivered in a co-ordinated and coherent way, with government departments, agencies and other actors from within and outside government working co-operatively around shared objectives. The challenge is to put in place policy structures that account for the multi-dimensional and inter-dependent nature of child well-being, and that ensure the many relevant actors share an understanding of key challenges and work together towards common goals.

## Box 2. The OECD Child Well-being Data Portal and OECD Child Well-being Dashboard

Good policies need good data, and good child well-being policies need information on the many areas of children's lives that matter for their well-being and quality of life. To help countries better understand how they are performing on child well-being, the OECD provides two data-focused resources – the OECD Child Well-being Data Portal, and the OECD Child Well-being Dashboard – offering a range of comparative data on children and their well-being.

### OECD Child Well-being Data Portal

The OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) is the OECD's hub for comparative data on child well-being. Structured using the OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework (OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>) (see below), the Data Portal contains over 200 comparative measures on child well-being **outcomes** and the **drivers** of well-being stemming from children's environments, available where possible for all OECD Members and Partners, OECD Accession countries, and EU Member states.

To help countries monitor well-being inequalities across different groups of children, as well as their performance relative to other OECD countries, data are provided both for all children and disaggregated by key demographic and socio-economic characteristics, including gender, migrant status, and household income or socio-economic status.

The *Data Portal* is built on the latest available data from OECD databases and a range of leading international child surveys and data collection programmes, including the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey (HBSC) and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

### OECD Child Well-being Dashboard

Complementing the *Data Portal*, the OECD Child Well-being Dashboard (<https://oe.cd/cwb-dashboard>) is a tool for policy makers and the public to monitor countries' efforts to promote child well-being. Built using a selection of headline indicators from the Data Portal, and again organised in line with the OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework (OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>) (see below), the Dashboard contains 20 key internationally comparable indicators on **children's well-being outcomes** stretching across four core child well-being outcome areas: material well-being; physical health; cognitive and educational well-being; and social and emotional well-being. It also contains a range of additional context indicators on **important drivers of child well-being** and on **child-relevant public policies**.

Indicators for the Dashboard have been selected based on their importance both for children's well-being now and for their development, skills and well-being outcomes in later life. While the Dashboard looks to cover the well-being of children of all ages, limitations in data availability mean that most indicators focus on those in middle childhood and adolescence. The data are drawn mostly from large international child surveys, which makes it possible to report on disparities between and within countries across different groups of children; most indicators can be updated at regular intervals to monitor trends over time.

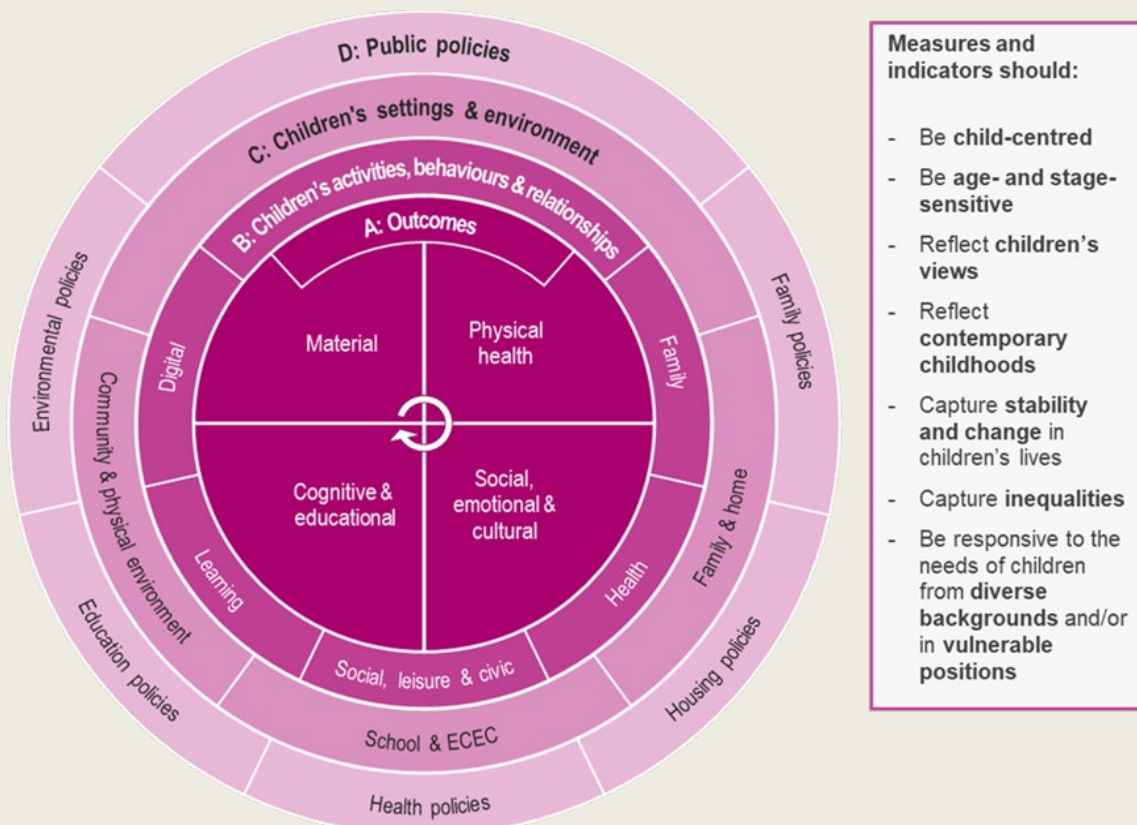
### The OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework

The OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework was first introduced in the OECD's 2021 report *Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies* (OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>). Grounded in an in-depth review of the child well-being literature, the framework sets out a vision for what aspects of children's lives need to be measured, and how, in order to best monitor child well-being and its determinants.

The starting point for the framework is a conception of child well-being that is multi-dimensional and forward-looking, implying that children should be able to both enjoy a “good” positive childhood in the here and now, and have the opportunity to develop skills and abilities that set them up well for the future.

Reflecting increasing recognition in child well-being research of the importance of the environments and settings in which children grow up, the framework adopts a multi-level or “ecological” structure, covering both child well-being outcomes and potential drivers and influences (Figure 1). Children’s well-being outcomes are at the centre of the framework (Level A), surrounded by a series of drivers and influences. Level B covers child-level influences: the things that children do or are engaged in that can contribute to their well-being outcomes, including their activities, attitudes, behaviours, and relationships. Level C covers environment-level influences: aspects of children’s settings and environments that can impact well-being, either directly or indirectly, for example by shaping opportunities and influencing attitudes and behaviours. This includes children’s family and home environments, the environments they face at school or in childcare, and their wider physical and community environments. Level D covers child-relevant public policies, such as public family and housing policies and public health policies.

**Figure 1. The OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework**



Source: (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>), *Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e82fded1-en>.

# 1 Children's well-being outcomes

## Material well-being outcomes

Children need access to a range of material goods to develop and to grow up healthy. First and foremost, they need access to food and nutrition, appropriate clothing, and shelter and housing. Just as for adults, these are essential for children's basic survival. But good child material well-being goes far beyond just ensuring that children's subsistence needs are met. To flourish and thrive, children need access to things that allow them to learn and play, to engage with peers and adults, and to be connected and accepted within the societies in which they live. For children growing up in OECD countries today, depending on their age, this often means access to things like a computer and the Internet, outdoor leisure activities, holidays, as well as books, toys and other resources important for learning and playing.

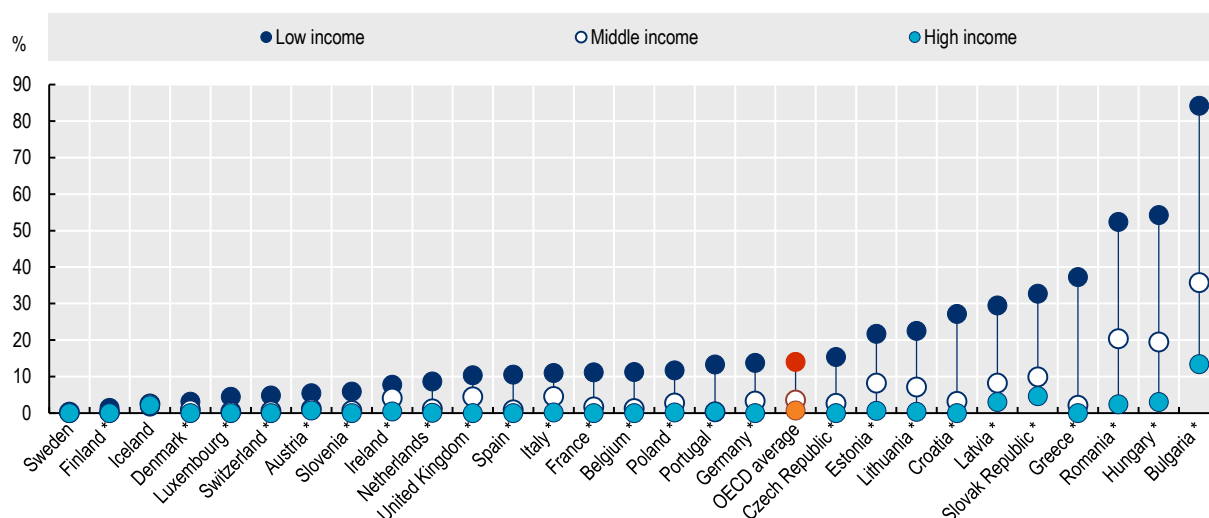
Not all children are provided with the same material living conditions, however, and material hardship remains an all too common reality for children in OECD countries. Despite many parents prioritising their children's needs over their own, families with lower incomes in particular are often limited in their ability to provide children with access to the goods and services important for their growth, development, and full participation in society (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Importantly, though, material deprivation is not an inevitable result of low income or disadvantage: as the data in this section show, some OECD countries do well at providing an environment in which most children have access to material essentials regardless of background, even if many countries still have a way to go.

The indicators shown below focus on how disadvantaged children fare on three basic aspects of material well-being: children experiencing food deprivation; children experiencing severe housing deprivation; and children without access to the Internet at home. Data on other key aspects of children's material well-being are available in the OECD Child Well-Being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>).

Adequate food and nutrition is a basic material necessity for children, and a central aspect of their material well-being. Proper nutrition is critical for child development, especially (but not only) in the early years, and also plays an important role in children's learning capabilities and behaviours (Dani, Burrill and Demmig-Adams, 2005<sup>[10]</sup>; Nyaradi et al., 2013<sup>[11]</sup>; Kim et al., 2016<sup>[12]</sup>). In 2014, the most recent year with available data, on average across European OECD countries, 14% of children in low income households were experiencing food deprivation – defined as living in a household where at least one child did not have either fruits and vegetables at least once a day, or a meal with meat, chicken or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) at least once a day (Figure 2). Food deprivation rates for children in low income households ranged from less than 2% in Finland, Iceland and Sweden, to over 30% in Greece and the Slovak Republic, and more than 50% in Hungary.

## Figure 2. Children experiencing food deprivation

1- to 15-year-olds experiencing food deprivation, by income level, 2014



Note: Data refer to 1- to 15-year-olds that live in households where at least one child (age 1 to 15) does not have either fruits and vegetables at least once a day or one meal with meat, chicken or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) at least once a day because the household cannot afford it. "Low income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the bottom quintile of the national equivalised disposable income distribution. "High income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the top quintile of the national distribution. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high income are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator MAT\_FDEP, based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

### Box 3. A note on the COVID-19 crisis and the data used in this report

The COVID-19 crisis has had and will continue to have important effects on children's lives (OECD, 2020<sup>[13]</sup>; Thorn and Vincent-Lancrin, 2021<sup>[14]</sup>). The pandemic and the associated policy responses impacted practically all areas of children's lives, including their schooling, their lives at home, and their ability to spend time with friends and other people outside the family, all of which could have long-term effects on their well-being, including their psychological well-being (OECD, 2020<sup>[13]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[15]</sup>; UNICEF, 2021<sup>[16]</sup>). While the full impact of the crisis on children is still to be determined, there is little doubt that the current generation of children have grown up in unique circumstances and faced unique challenges quite unlike those experienced by previous generations.

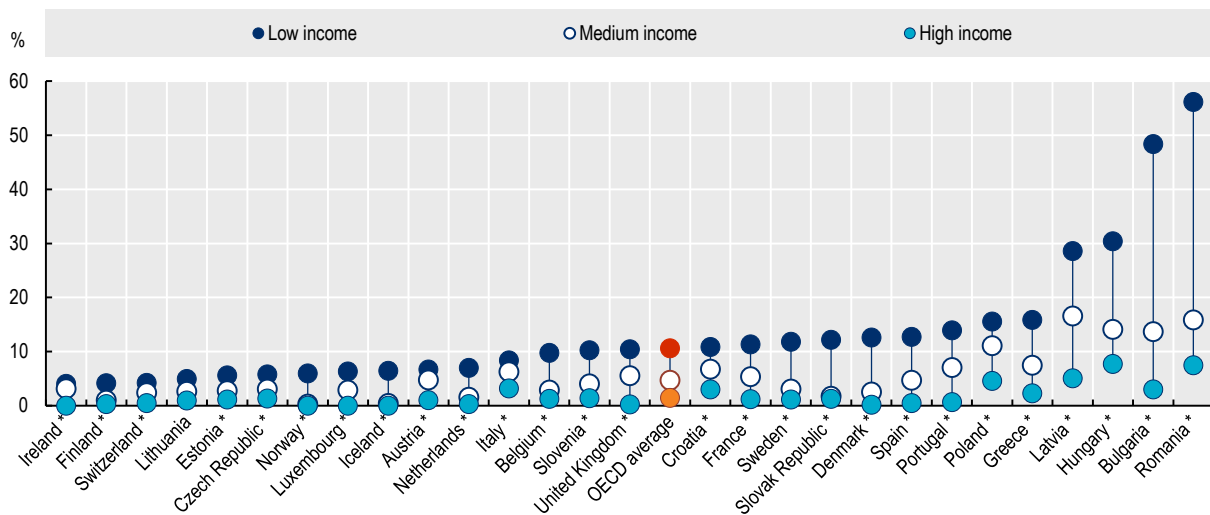
Due to limits on the regularity of international child data collections, much of the data used in this paper refer to years prior to the COVID-19 crisis. Findings can be seen as a baseline picture of child well-being at the start of the crisis. There is, however, little reason to believe that any of the inequalities in child well-being highlighted through the paper have closed in the years since the crisis began. Evidence from several OECD countries suggests that disadvantaged children have faced particular challenges during the pandemic, including in their schooling (Thorn and Vincent-Lancrin, 2021<sup>[14]</sup>). Disadvantaged children are less likely to have had access to digital learning resources, for instance, or to suitable places to study at home (OECD, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>). To a large extent, the pandemic is likely only to have exacerbated existing inequalities and further limited the opportunities of disadvantaged children.



Good-quality housing is a similar necessity, with important links to children’s physical health, as well as a range of social and emotional outcomes (OECD, 2021<sub>[11]</sub>). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often at considerable risk of living in households that are overcrowded (see OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (OECD CWBDP), indicator MAT\_OVCR), that have problems with light, damp, leaks or rot (OECD CWBDP, indicator MAT\_HCON), and/or that lack basic sanitation facilities (OECD CWBDP, indicator MAT\_SANI). Overall, on average across European OECD countries, more than 10% of children in low income households also live in households experiencing severe housing deprivation – defined in line with Eurostat as households that are both overcrowded and deprived on at least one of a series of housing quality measures – rising to well over 25% in some countries (e.g. Hungary and Latvia) (Figure 3). By way of comparison, in many European OECD countries, less than 1% of high income children live in households experiencing severe housing deprivation.

**Figure 3. Children experiencing severe housing deprivation**

0- to 17-year-olds living in households experiencing severe housing deprivation, by income level, 2020 or latest available



Note: "Severe housing deprivation" is defined and measured in line with the Eurostat definition. Under the Eurostat definition, a household experiencing "severe housing deprivation" is one that is both overcrowded and experiencing one or more of the following: the dwelling has a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor; the dwelling has neither a bath nor a shower; the dwelling has no flushing toilet for exclusive use of the household; the dwelling is considered too dark. "Low income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the bottom quintile of the national equivalised disposable income distribution. "High income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the top quintile of the national distribution. Data for Ireland and the United Kingdom should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. Data for Poland and Italy refer to 2019, and for Iceland and the United Kingdom to 2018. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high income are significant at p<0.05.

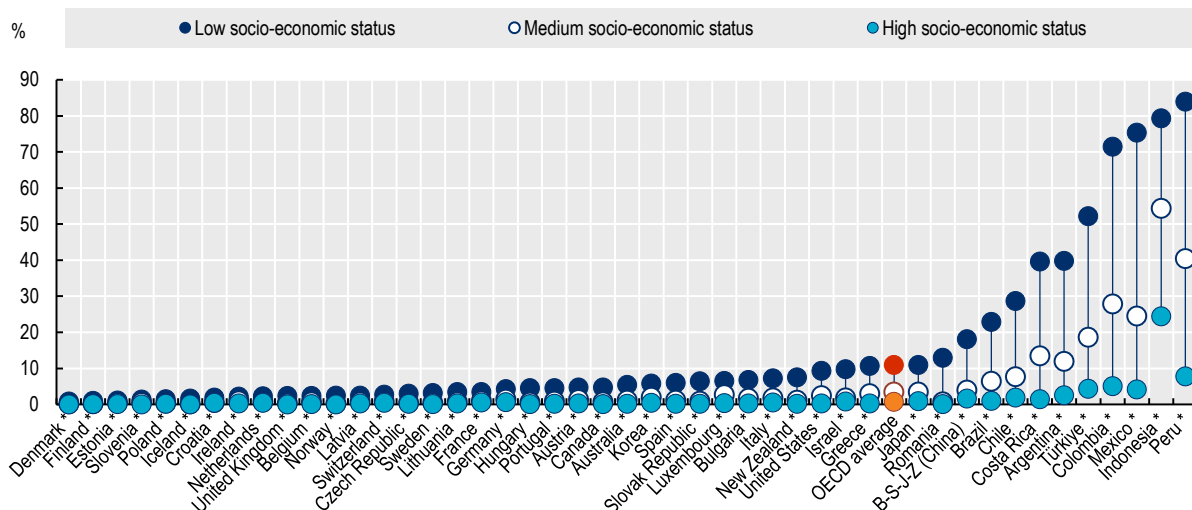
Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator MAT\_HDEP, based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Children’s material needs go much further than basic necessities like food and shelter. Today’s children also need access to a range of other goods and activities that allow them to learn and develop and to engage and participate in modern society (OECD, 2021<sub>[11]</sub>). Internet access (Figure 4) provides one of the clearest examples: children’s social lives are increasingly lived online, through social networks and video games, and the Internet is playing an increasingly important role in children’s education. In many OECD countries, Internet access is now almost universal for children regardless of background. However, there are exceptions: in several OECD countries (e.g. Greece, Israel, Japan, and the United States) around or more than one in ten 15-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds report not having Internet access at

home, rising to more than one in four in Chile and Costa Rica, and one in two in Türkiye. In Colombia and Mexico, more than two-thirds of all disadvantaged 15-year-olds report not having an Internet connection at home.

#### Figure 4. Children without an Internet connection at home

15-year-old students who report not having an Internet connection at home, by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: 15-year-old students were asked "Which of the following are in your home? ... A link to the Internet" and presented with the response options "Yes" and "No". Data refer to the percent responding "No". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator MAT\_INTP, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

### Physical health outcomes

For children, as for adults, health is key component of well-being. Being in good health helps children live the lives they want, and is instrumental for their learning and later life outcomes (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Good health plays an important role in children's educational attainment, for instance (Currie, 2009<sup>[18]</sup>; Jackson, 2015<sup>[19]</sup>; Burns and Gottschalk, 2020<sup>[20]</sup>). Poor health in childhood, in contrast, can have long-lasting detrimental effects on many aspects of children's lives, including on their health status and a range of social and employment outcomes later in adulthood (Currie et al., 2010<sup>[21]</sup>; Flores and Kalwij, 2014<sup>[22]</sup>; Currie, 2016<sup>[23]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>).

An appraisal of children's physical health (and the risks to it) requires a broad set of data on different aspects of health status and physical development at different stages of childhood (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). This may include information on birth outcomes (such as low birth weight and preterm birth rates), physical and anthropometric development (e.g. weight, height and head circumference), and body mass index (BMI) and the prevalence of overweight and obesity. It also requires information on the prevalence of certain diseases, injuries and self-reported health status. Information on children's health-related behaviours (e.g. nutrition and eating, habits, sleep patterns, practices of physical activity), as well as on key environmental

risk factors (e.g. exposure to dampness, lead or pollution) is also key for assessing how policies can make a difference.

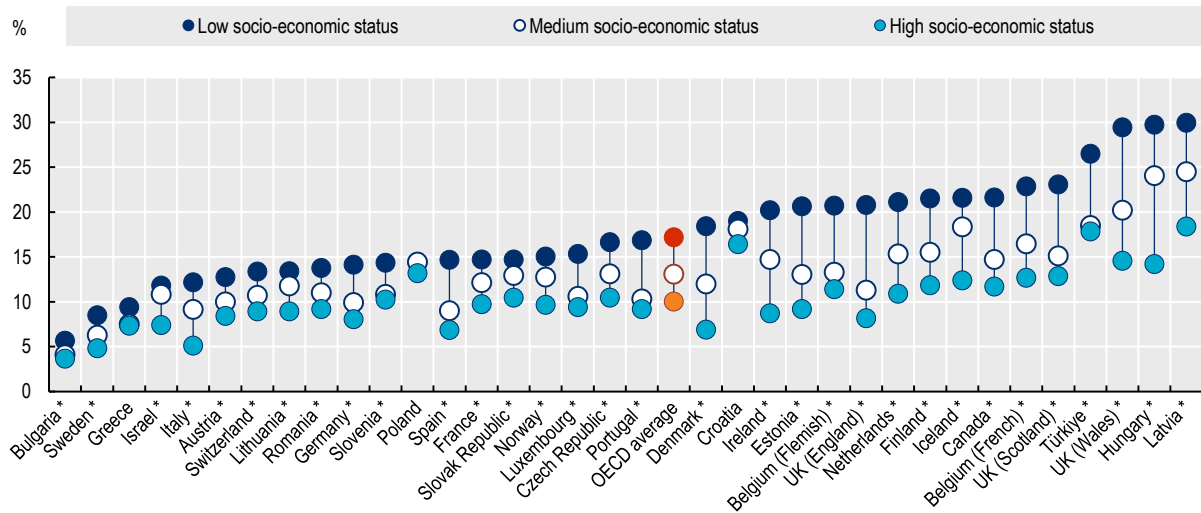
Not all these dimensions are well covered by the data available, however. A relatively wide range of comparative data are available on children's health outcomes at population level, thanks to a range of administrative health data, as well as modern modelled estimates from sources such as the *Global Burden of Disease* project (IHME, 2022<sup>[24]</sup>). However, comparative child health data that can be disaggregated by socio-economic status are more scarce (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). There is a particular lack of comparable information on birth outcomes and early childhood health for children from disadvantaged backgrounds – an important data gap, given both the importance of and known social gradients in early childhood health (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; Blumenshine et al., 2010<sup>[25]</sup>; Balaj et al., 2021<sup>[26]</sup>).

Here, the focus is on data providing summary information on children's self-perceived health status (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds reporting "fair" or "poor" health) and on two dimensions seen as markers of poor health: adolescents' overweight and obesity, and the presence of health-driven activity limitations. While not strictly a health *outcome*, this sub-section also presents information on 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds who report getting the recommended daily exercise – an indicator of physical activity, and an important component of good child physical health.

Self-rated health (Figure 5) is a self-reported summary measure that represents how children think and feel about their health as a whole. Levels of self-rated health differ considerably across OECD countries, possibly reflecting differences in question interpretation as well as differences in actual perceived health (Schnohr et al., 2016<sup>[27]</sup>). However, comparisons *within* countries may be less affected by semantic issues, and point to large gaps in self-rated health along socio-economic lines. In almost all OECD countries with available data, disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds are significantly less likely than the most advantaged to rate their own health as "excellent" (OECD CWBDP, indicator HTH\_SRHLA), and significantly more likely to rate their own health as only "fair" or "poor" (Figure 5). On average across OECD countries with available data, more than one in six 11-, 13- and 15-year-old children from disadvantaged backgrounds self-report "fair" or "poor", compared to one in ten among the most advantaged. In several OECD countries, including England (United Kingdom), Hungary, and Wales (United Kingdom), rates of "fair" or "poor" self-rated health are more than twice as high among disadvantaged children than among the most advantaged.

**Figure 5. Children reporting fair or poor health**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who rate their own health as "fair" or "poor", by socio-economic status, 2017-18



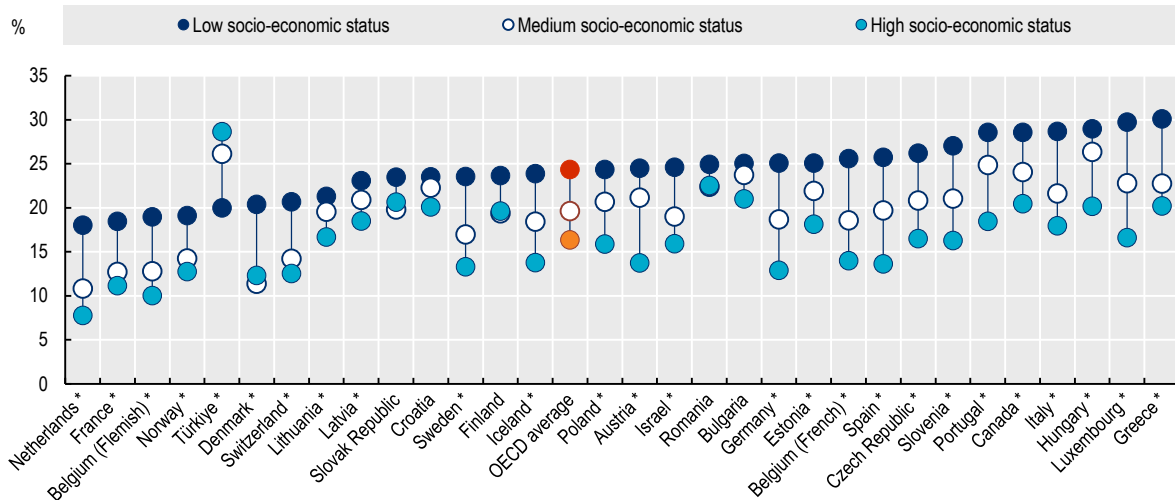
Note: Data refer to the percent of children who, when asked "Would you say your health is ...?" and presented with the response options "Excellent", "Good", "Fair" or "Poor", respond with either "Fair" or "Poor". Data for some countries (Canada and the Slovak Republic) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. Socio-economic status is measured using the HBS Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator HTH\_SRHLB, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

For children in middle childhood and adolescence, overweight and obesity represents an increasingly important public health concern (OECD, 2019<sup>[28]</sup>). Excess weight is associated with a range of health conditions both in childhood and adulthood, as well as several social and emotional outcomes, including self-esteem, and children's outcomes at school (OECD, 2019<sup>[28]</sup>). Overweight and obesity rates have increased generally in many OECD countries in recent decades (OECD, 2019<sup>[29]</sup>), but are often much higher among children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). Data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey show that, on average across 26 OECD countries, just under 25% of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children are considered overweight or obese based on the World Health Organization's age- and sex-specific child growth curves (De Onis et al., 2007<sup>[30]</sup>), compared to 16% from the most advantaged households (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Children who are overweight or obese**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who are classified as 'overweight' or 'obese' according to the World Health Organization child growth curve, by socio-economic status, 2017-18

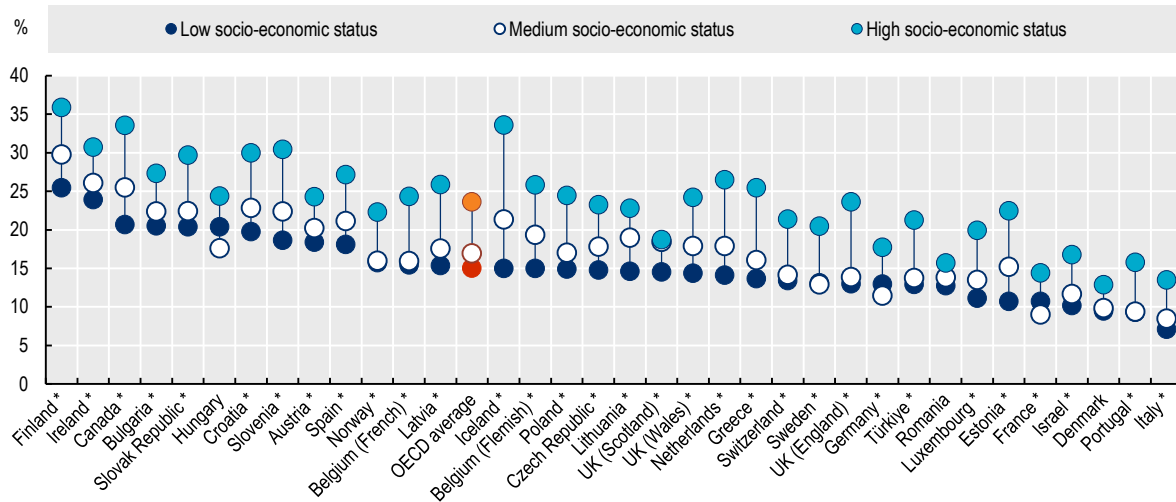


Note: Data refer to the percent with a Body Mass Index (BMI) that would be classified as 'overweight' or 'obese' according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) age- and sex-specific child growth curves. The WHO child growth curves provide single growth references by age and sex, and are not adjusted for factors such as ethnicity. Data for some countries (Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French), Estonia, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and Romania) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions). In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator HTH\_OVWT, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Gaps in overweight rates can be linked to differences in patterns of food consumption and regular exercise. In 2017-18, on average across 26 OECD countries, 11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children from disadvantaged backgrounds were roughly one-third less likely than the most advantaged to report engaging in at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (Figure 7) – the WHO recommended daily activity for children in middle childhood and adolescence (WHO, 2020<sub>[31]</sub>). In several OECD countries (e.g. Estonia, Iceland, Italy and the Netherlands), the share of disadvantaged children engaging in at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous activity was around or less than half that of the most advantaged.

### Figure 7. Children who get the WHO-recommended daily exercise

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report engaging in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day over the past seven days, by socio-economic status, 2017-18

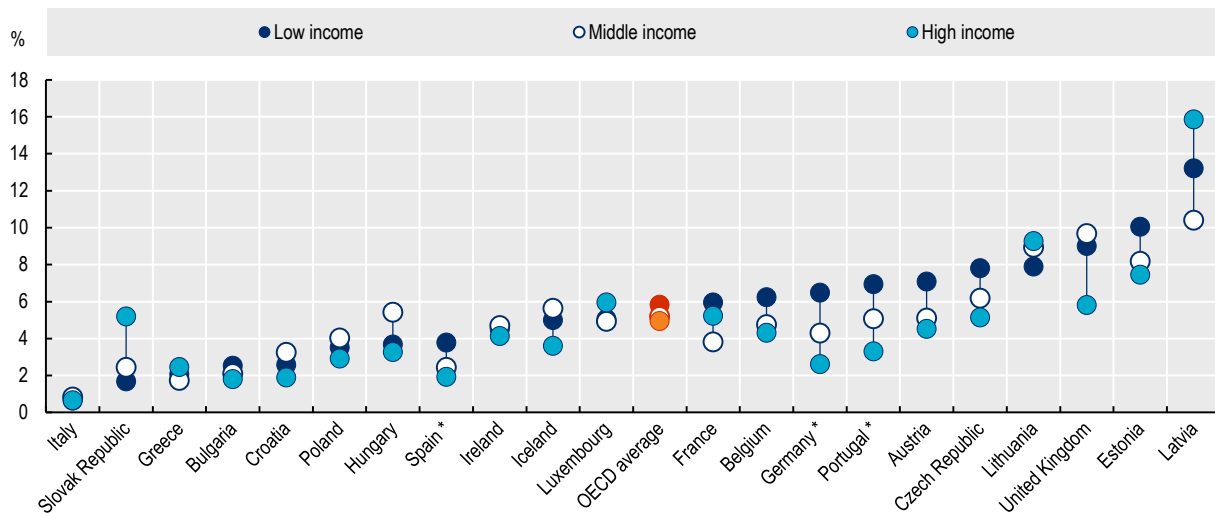


Note: Data refer to the percent of children who, when asked "Over the past 7 days, on how many days were you physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day?" and presented with response options ranging from "0 days" to "7 days", respond with "7 days". Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). Data for some countries (Canada and the Slovak Republic) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator HBA\_DEXE, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Poor health can impact on children's abilities to live the lives they want. Health-driven activity limitations (Figure 8) provides a headline global measure of the extent to which health disorders and conditions affect children's usual activities. Data from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey, covering all children up to age 15, suggest gaps in child activity limitations across socio-economic groups are often small. There are exceptions, however, including in Germany, Portugal and Spain, where children from low-income households are significantly more likely than children from high-income households to be living with health-driven activity limitations.

### Figure 8. Children with health-driven activity limitations

0- to 15-year-olds who live with limitations in their activities because of health problems, by income level, 2017



Note: Data refer to the percent of children (0- to 15-year-olds) who are reported by the household respondent as living with limitations in their usual activities due to an ongoing physical or mental health problem, illness or disability. "Low income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the bottom quintile of the national equivalised disposable income distribution. "High income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the top quintile of the national distribution. Data for the United Kingdom should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high income are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator HTH\_LMAH, based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

### Cognitive and educational outcomes

Compared to other areas of children's well-being, a relatively broad range of comparative data are available on children's cognitive development and educational outcomes, particularly for children who have completed at least a few years of compulsory school (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). International student assessment programmes like the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and OECD PISA provide high-quality comparable data on children's cognitive skills, as well as, increasingly, wider aspects of children's learning and development, including their metacognitive abilities and their educational aspirations.

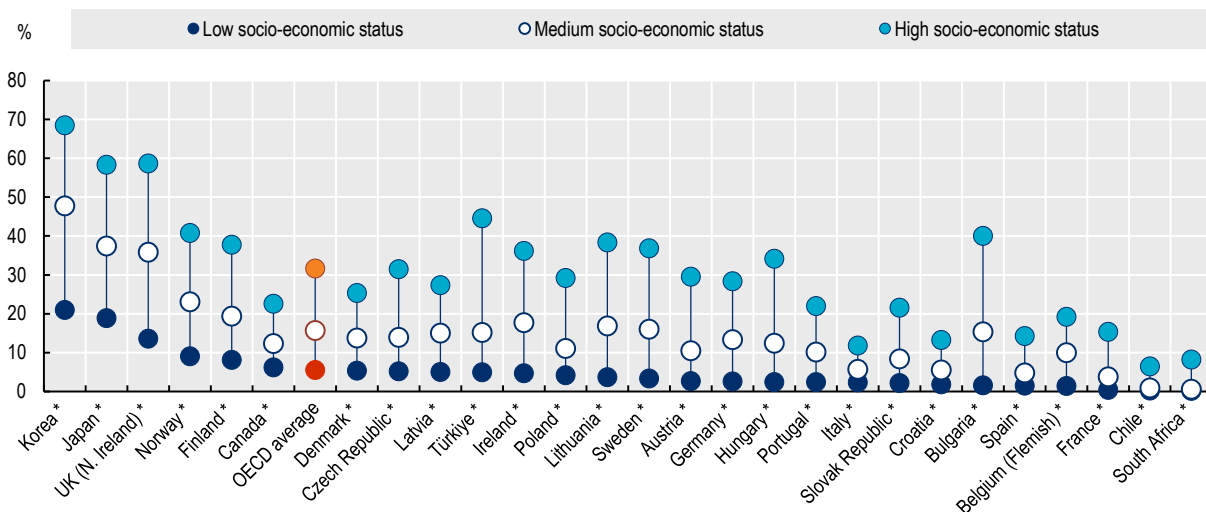
Here, four key indicators are used to capture children's education and learning outcomes, and how these outcomes vary with socio-economic position. Two indicators – "fourth grade" children (children around age 10) who are high achievers on at least one of the TIMSS mathematics and science assessments, and 15-year-olds who are "top performers" in at least one of the three core PISA subjects – capture their cognitive skill development. Two other indicators – 15-year-olds who are high relative achievers in metacognition, and 15-year-olds who expect to complete tertiary education – capture wider aspects of children's education and learning outcomes.

Cognitive skills are a cornerstone of children's learning (OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>), and gaps in cognitive skills emerge early. Large-scale comparative data on early cognitive skill development are scarce, but evidence from the OECD's International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study – which examines the cognitive and social-emotional skills of 5-year-olds in three OECD countries: Estonia, England (United Kingdom), and the United States – points to significant differences across socio-economic groups in emergent literacy and numeracy skills even before children start school (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>).

For children around age 10, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provide important comparable information on skills in reading and in mathematics and science, respectively. Results from the latest rounds show that across the three assessments, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are frequently more likely to perform poorly, and substantially less likely to perform very well, than their more advantaged peers. In 2019, on average across OECD countries with available data, just 5% of children from low socio-economic status households performed at advanced levels in one or both of the TIMSS mathematics and science assessments, falling to less than 1% in France and Chile (Figure 9). For children from the most advantaged households, the average share reaching advanced levels was 32%. Similar gaps are also visible at the bottom end of the performance scale – with less advantaged children consistently more likely to perform at low levels on one or both of the TIMSS assessments (OECD CWBDP, indicator CDE\_TMLO) – as well as on the PIRLS reading assessment (OECD CWBDP, indicators CDE\_PRTA and CDE\_PRLA).

**Figure 9. Children around age 10 who are top performers in maths and/or science**

"Fourth grade" students who attained the Advanced International Benchmark in at least one of the two TIMSS assessment subjects (mathematics and science), by socio-economic status, 2019



Note: Data refer to the percent of "fourth grade" students who attained the "Advanced International Benchmark" in at least one of the two TIMSS test subjects (mathematics and science). For more detail on the construction of the TIMSS achievement scales and achievement benchmarks, see the TIMSS 2019 Technical Report (<https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/methods/index.html>). "Fourth grade students" is used as shorthand for the TIMSS fourth grade target populations, and refers generally to students in their fourth year of formal schooling. Data for Norway, Türkiye, and South Africa refer to children in their fifth year of formal schooling. Socio-economic status is measured using the TIMSS/PIRLS Home Resources for Learning (HRL) scale. "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the HRL scale that are among the bottom 25% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the HRL scale that are among the top 25% within their country or region. Data for Canada cover students from the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec, only. Data for some countries (Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, the UK (N. Ireland), and South Africa) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low or medium and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator CDE\_TMTO, based on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2019 (TIMSS 2019).

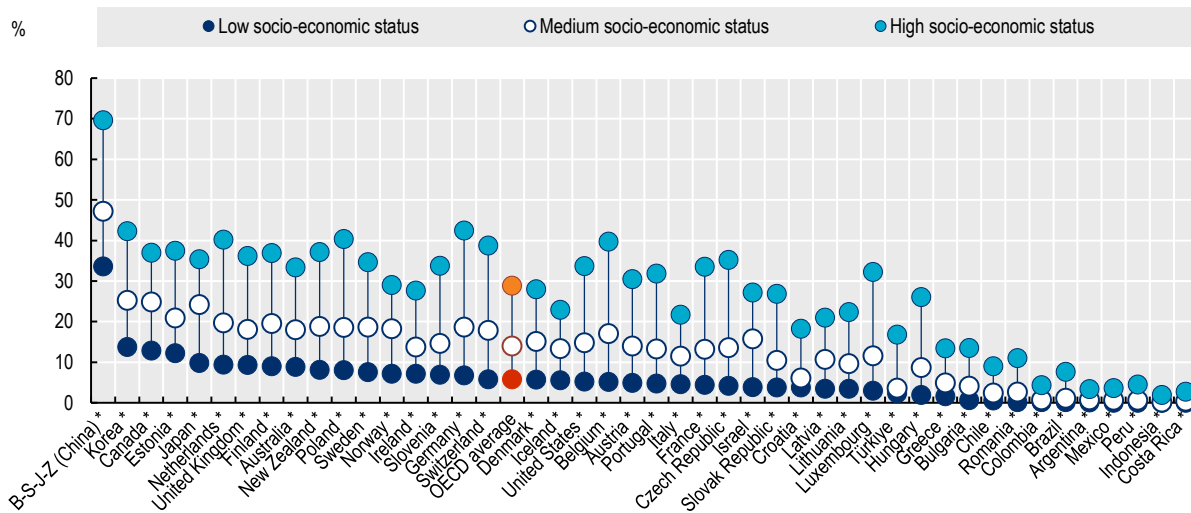
Data from the OECD PISA assessments, which target children age 15, paint a similar picture. In 2018, on average across OECD countries, slightly under 6% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds were "top performers" in at least one of the three core PISA subjects (reading, mathematics, and science) – one fifth the rate for the most advantaged 15-year-olds (29%) (Figure 10). Even in the OECD countries where disadvantaged students do best (Korea, Canada and Estonia), top performer rates for disadvantaged 15-year-olds reach



only around 12-14%, or three times lower than for their most advantaged peers. At the bottom end of the performance scale, on average, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were approximately three times more likely than the most advantaged to be “low achievers” on at least one of the three core subjects (OECD CWBDP, indicator CDE\_PILO).

### Figure 10. Children age 15 who are top performers in reading, maths and/or science

15-year-old students who are "top performers" in at least one of the three core PISA subjects (reading, mathematics and science), by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: Data refer to the percent of 15-year-old students who attained Level 5 or 6 in at least one of the three core PISA subjects (reading, mathematics and science). For more detail on the construction of the PISA proficiency scales and proficiency levels, see the PISA 2018 Technical Report (<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/pisa2018technicalreport/>). Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator CDE\_PITO, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

Being good at reading, maths and science is not everything when it comes to children's learning. While traditional core competencies like literacy and numeracy remain important, there is increasing international recognition that today's children also need a broader range of skills and abilities in order to thrive (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; 2019<sup>[2]</sup>). One example is metacognitive skills, including learning-to-learn skills and the ability to recognise one's knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.<sup>1</sup> Metacognitive skills help children succeed at school (OECD, 2021<sup>[33]</sup>), but are also central to capacities for lifelong learning and the ability to accumulate new skills and knowledge throughout life – something that is likely to be vital for today's children, given the changing world of work and growth in the knowledge economy (OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>; 2021<sup>[34]</sup>). Here too, however, disadvantaged children frequently fall behind their more advantaged peers. Recent rounds of

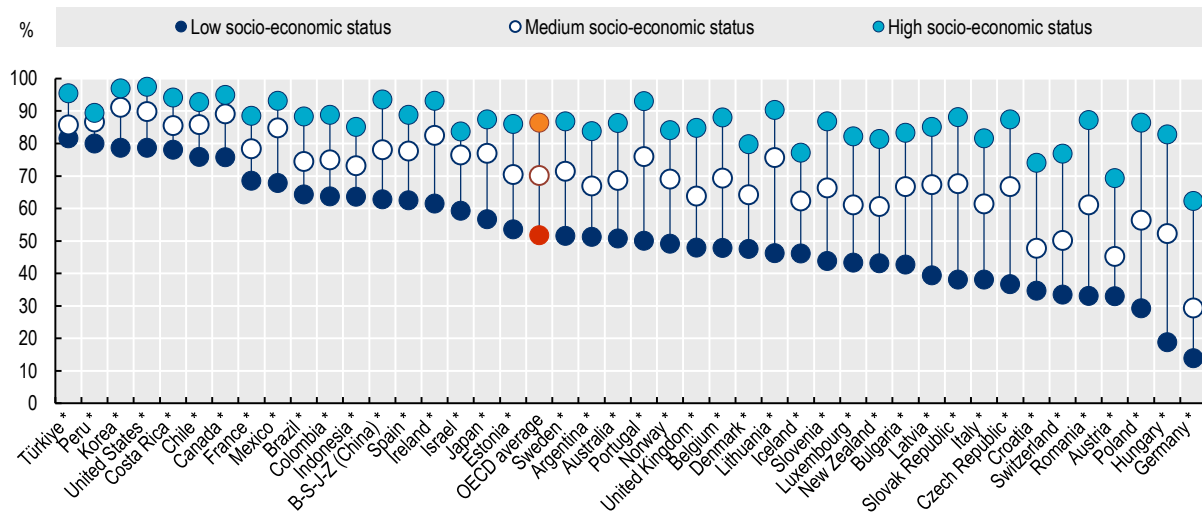
<sup>1</sup> Other examples of important competencies outside the traditional core areas of literacy and numeracy include: transversal cognitive competences such as problem solving, critical thinking and creative thinking; social and emotional skills, such as collaboration, open-mindedness, and task performance; a range of digital competences, such as data literacy, media literacy, and digital content creation; and transformative competencies, that is, competences that are important for contributing to society, such as taking responsibility, reconciling tensions, and creating new value (OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>; 2021<sup>[11]</sup>).

OECD PISA have included assessments of metacognitive competences relating to reading, including children's strategies for understanding and remembering, for assessing credibility, and for summarising information. Children from low socio-economic status households consistently perform worse on all three (OECD CWBDP, indicators CDE\_UNREA, CDE\_SUMMA and CDE\_ASCRA).

Differences in educational performance across socio-economic groups are reflected in children's ambitions for their future education. In 2018, on average across OECD countries, just over 50% of 15-year-olds from low socio-economic status households expected to complete higher education, compared to more than 85% from high socio-economic status households (Figure 11). Lower educational performance among disadvantaged children can only partly explain this gap: evidence from OECD PISA suggests that even among high achievers, disadvantaged children are much less likely than advantaged children to expect to complete higher education (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>). Low self-belief as well as the financial and opportunity costs of higher education are factors potentially deterring even the most able disadvantaged children from pursuing higher education (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>).

**Figure 11. Children who expect to complete higher education**

15-year-old students who report expecting to complete tertiary education, by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: 15-year-old students were asked "Which of the following do you expect to complete?" and presented with the response options "<ISCED level 2>", "<ISCED level 3B or C>", "<ISCED level 3A>", "<ISCED level 4>", "<ISCED level 5B>" and "<ISCED level 5A or 6>". Data refer to the percent responding either "<ISCED level 5B>" or "<ISCED level 5A or 6>". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for Mexico and Peru should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator LRN\_EXTE, based on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database.

## Social and emotional outcomes

Social and emotional well-being stands at the heart of what many people would consider "good" well-being generally. Centred on internal processes like children's emotions, behaviours, and thoughts and feelings towards themselves and others, social and emotional well-being covers aspects like children's emotional security, their emotional states, their mental health and their life satisfaction, as well as their "social and emotional skills" – skills revolving around how children perceive themselves, manage their emotions and

engage with others that are complementary to and interconnected with cognitive skills (OECD, 2021<sup>[35]</sup>). These skills are increasingly recognised as central to children's development, and play an important role in shaping a range of well-being outcomes, including education outcomes, labour market outcomes, and health outcomes, among others (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[35]</sup>; Kautz et al., 2014<sup>[36]</sup>).

Internationally comparable data on children's social and emotional well-being is improving, but still limited (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Several international child surveys – including the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey and OECD PISA – contain information on certain aspects of social and emotional well-being, but coverage in many areas remains patchy. Data for children in early childhood is again lacking. This sub-section concentrates on five main indicators of children's social and emotional well-being: 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds who report high overall support from their family; 15-year-old students who report self-efficacy; 15-year-old students presenting a growth mindset; 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds who report multiple subjective health complaints; and 15-year-olds who report low life satisfaction.

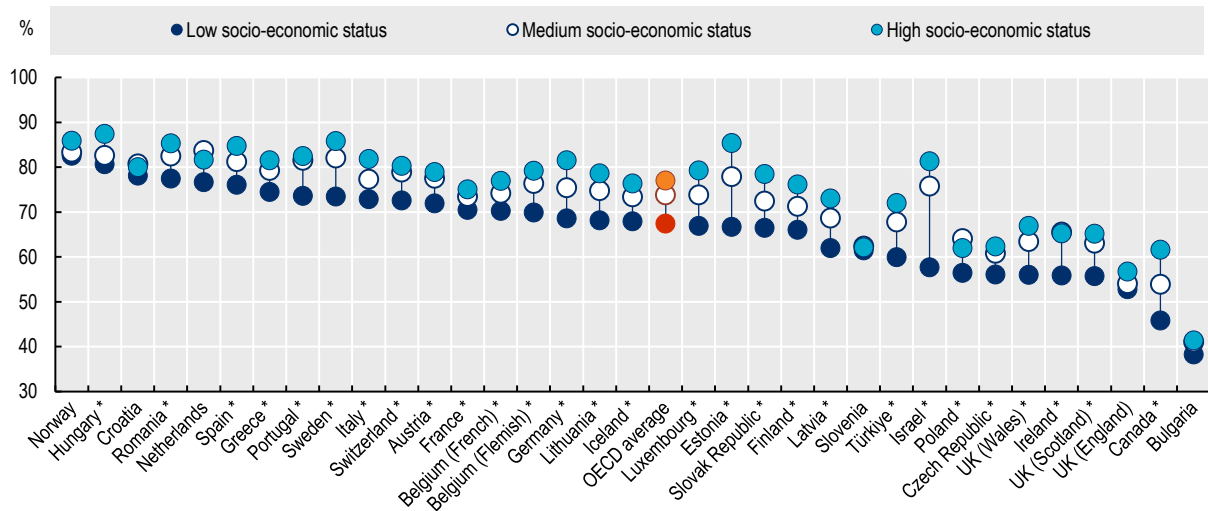
Children's sense of safety and of feeling supported and cared for, especially by family, is a fundamental component of social and emotional well-being. These are basic emotional needs that underpin children's functioning and interactions with the world. For young children, comparable international data on these issues are scarce – an important evidence gap, given the importance of emotional security in early childhood (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>).

For older children, data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey show that disadvantaged children frequently report lower perceived support from family than children from more advantaged households. In 2017-18, on average across OECD countries with available data, 67% of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds reported feeling high overall support from their family, falling to as low as around 55% in England (United Kingdom) and Scotland (United Kingdom), and 46% in Canada (Figure 12). For their peers in the most advantaged households, the average was 77%.

Exactly *why* perceived family support tends to differ with socio-economic status is not yet fully understood (Duncan et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). One possible reason is that greater time pressures, combined with weaker options for balancing work and family and higher family stress, mean that parents in disadvantaged families are often more limited in the amount of quality time they can spend with children, even if they enjoy their time with children just as much as more advantaged parents (Guryan, Hurst and Kearney, 2008<sup>[38]</sup>; Kalil and Ryan, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>). Compared to those in more advantaged families, disadvantaged parents may also have less expertise on child-supporting and emotionally nurturing activities, and less capacity to pay for children's preferred activities, contributing to lower perceived support. And parenting styles may play a role too. There is some evidence to suggest that parents in disadvantaged families are more likely to adopt "authoritarian" approaches to parenting, in which they less often engaged in dialogue with children and where punishment tends to be harsh. This is in contrast to "authoritative" parenting, where parents combine high demands on children with high levels of warmth and responsiveness (Doepke and Zilibotti, 2019<sup>[40]</sup>).

**Figure 12. Children reporting strong perceived support from family**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report feeling high overall support from their family, by socio-economic status, 2017-18



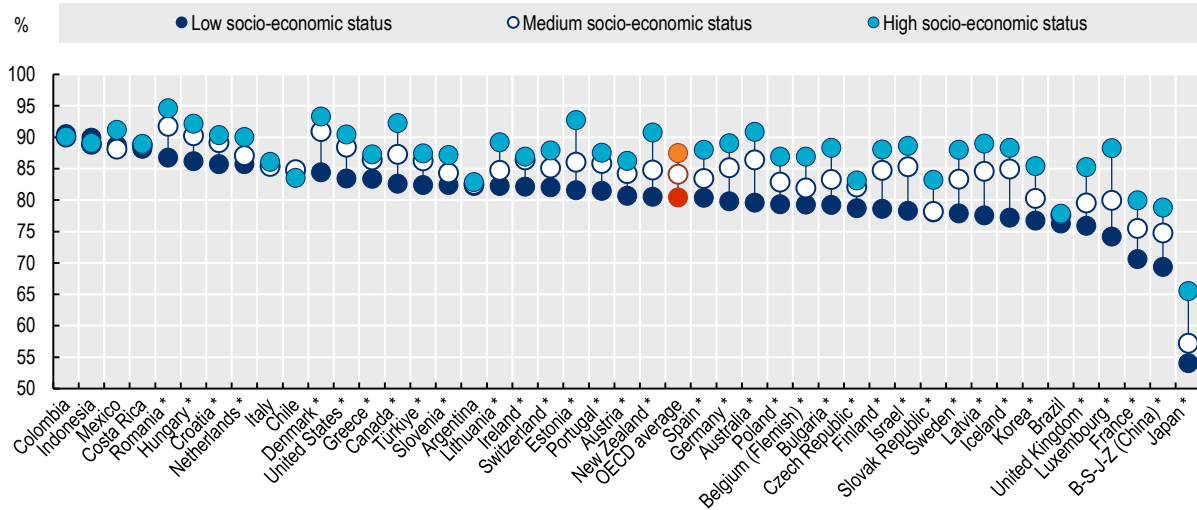
Note: Data refer to the percent of children who score 5.5 or more on the HBSC Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Family), categorised as high perceived family support. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). Data for some countries (Canada, Israel, the Slovak Republic, and UK (Wales)) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SEC\_FSUPA, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Self-efficacy is one important skill for socialising and learning. Children who lack confidence in their abilities are less likely to set ambitious goals for themselves, and less likely to persevere when facing challenges (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Data from the latest round of OECD PISA point towards lower levels of expressed self-efficacy among disadvantaged 15-year-olds in most OECD countries (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). For example, in all but five OECD countries with available data, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were significantly less likely than the most advantaged to have confidence in their ability to find their way out of difficult situations (Figure 13). Conversely, in a handful of OECD countries, children from more advantaged backgrounds were more likely to express fears around failing (OECD CWBDP, indicators SEC\_FOFWA and SEC\_FOFAA) – the other side of the self-efficacy coin (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>), possibly reflecting greater pressures to succeed placed on them.

**Figure 13. Children expressing self-efficacy**

15-year-old students who agree (or strongly agree) with the statement "When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it", by socio-economic status, 2018



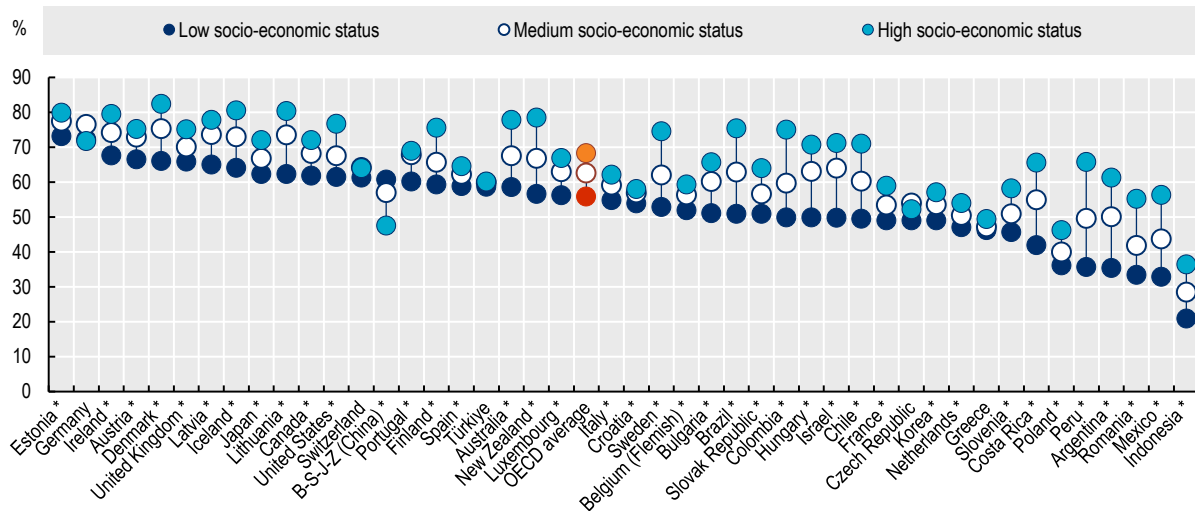
Note: 15-year-old students were asked "How much do you agree with the following statements? When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it" and presented with the response options "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". Data refer to the percent responding "Agree" or "Strongly agree". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for Belgium refer to the Flemish Community of Belgium only. Data for some countries (Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands and Brazil) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SEC\_RESFA, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

Holding a "growth mindset" – the belief that ability and intelligence are not fixed and can be developed through effort, application and support – is another important social and emotional skill. Growth mindsets promote challenge-seeking, foster resilience, and may help mitigate the psychological impact of negative life events (Dweck and Yeager, 2019<sup>[41]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[42]</sup>). Children with growth mindsets have been shown to set themselves more ambitious learning goals, express greater self-belief, and perform better at school (OECD, 2021<sup>[42]</sup>). Data from OECD PISA point to large socio-economic gaps in the frequency of growth mindsets in most OECD countries: in 2018, across almost all OECD countries with available data, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were significantly less likely than the most advantaged to disagree that their intelligence cannot change very much over time – a response signifying a growth mindset (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Children expressing a growth mindset**

15-year-old students who "disagree" (or "strongly disagree") with the statement "Your intelligence is something about you that you can't change very much", by socio-economic status, 2018



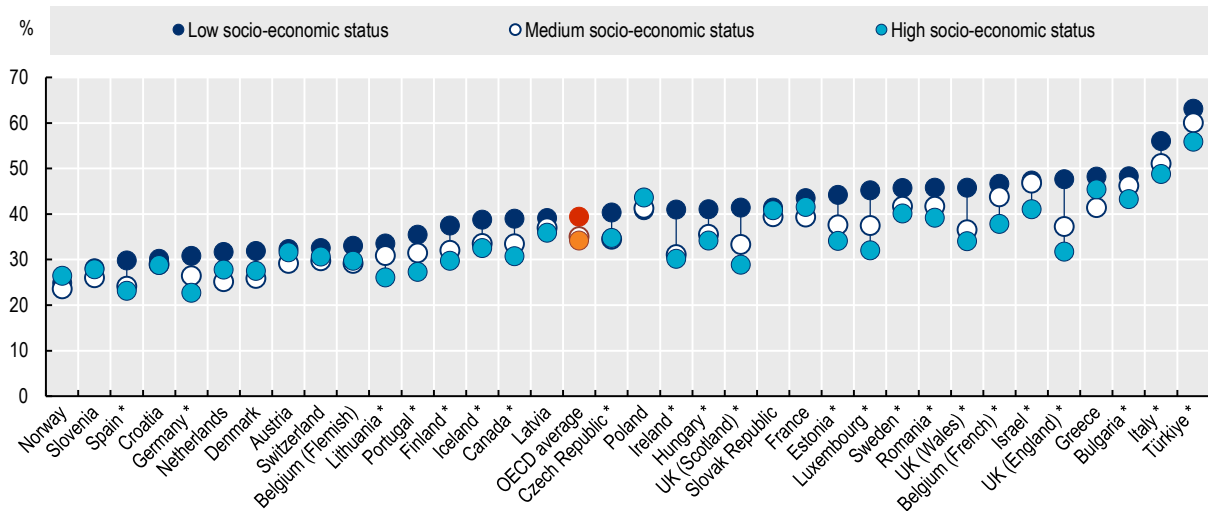
Note: 15-year-old students were asked "How much do you agree with the following statement? ... Your intelligence is something about you that you can't change very much" and presented with the response options "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". Data refer to the percent responding "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for Belgium refer to the Flemish Community of Belgium only. Data for some countries (Mexico, the Netherlands, Brazil and Peru) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SEC\_GRMI, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

In more acute cases, poor social and emotional well-being can manifest in psychological disorders and mental illness. Comparable cross-national data on diagnosed mental health conditions disaggregated by socio-economic status are not available. At the non-clinical level, however, data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey show that in many OECD countries, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often at least slightly more likely than the most advantaged to report multiple subjective health complaints – psychosomatic health complaints that can impair functioning. In several countries, including Ireland, Germany, Luxembourg, and England, Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom), multiple subjective health complaints are at least one-third more common among children from disadvantaged backgrounds than among their most advantaged peers (Figure 15).

**Figure 15. Children reporting multiple subjective health complaints**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report multiple subjective health complaints, by socio-economic status, 2017-18



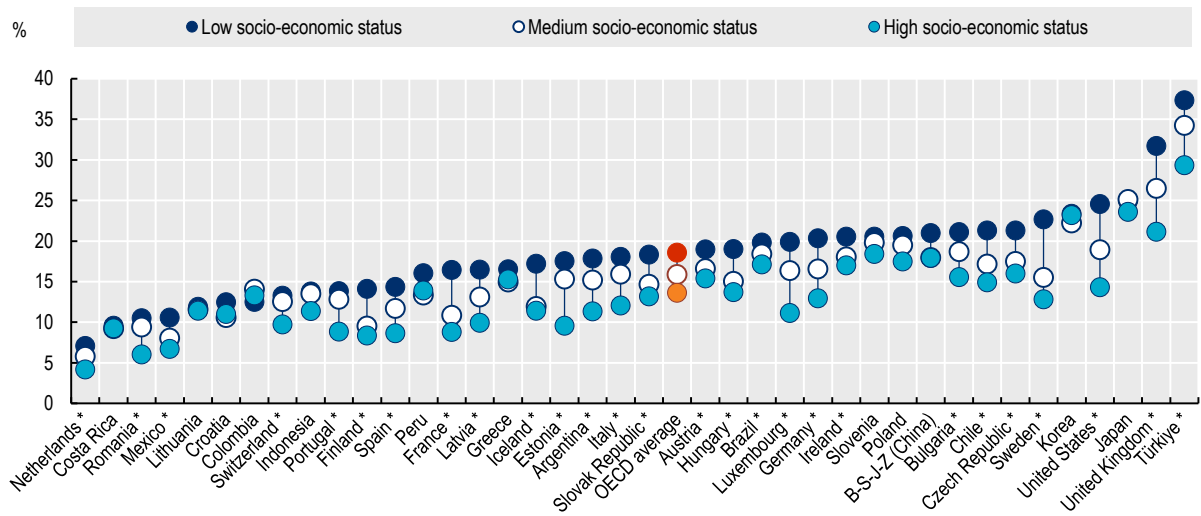
Note: Data refer to the percent of children who, when asked how often they had experienced a series of symptoms (headache; stomach ache; backache; feeling low; feeling irritable or bad tempered; feeling nervous; difficulties in getting to sleep; and feeling dizzy) in the last six months, and presented with response options for each symptom ranging from "About every day" to "Rarely or never", respond with at least "More than once a week" on two or more symptoms. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). Data for some countries (Canada and the Slovak Republic) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SEC\_MSHC, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Life satisfaction is frequently used as a headline indicator of social and emotional well-being. Indeed, for some experts, life satisfaction comes closer than any other measure to providing a global summary measure of well-being as a whole (Layard, 2016<sup>[43]</sup>; Frijters et al., 2020<sup>[44]</sup>). Data from OECD PISA – as well as from other sources, like HBSC, using slightly different questions – show that across most OECD countries, children from disadvantaged backgrounds report substantially lower life satisfaction than more advantaged children (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>; Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). In 2018, on average across OECD countries, 19% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds reported low satisfaction with their life as a whole, compared to 14% of the most advantaged (Figure 16). In some countries (Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States), the gap in the share reporting low satisfaction was as large as 10 percentage points. In several OECD countries, disadvantaged children were also significantly less likely than their advantaged peers to report high levels of life satisfaction (OECD CWBDP, indicator SEC\_PLFSA).

**Figure 16. Children who are unsatisfied with their lives**

15-year-old students who report low satisfaction with their life as a whole, by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: Data are based on responses by students to the question "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?". Students were asked to record their response on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning 'not at all satisfied' and 10 meaning 'completely satisfied'. Students recording a 4 or below were classified as reporting 'low satisfaction'. Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for some countries (Brazil, Mexico, the Netherlands and Peru) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SEC\_PLFSB, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.



## 2 Drivers of children's well-being outcomes

Children's well-being outcomes do not emerge in a vacuum. The things they do and the conditions they face at home, online, in school, and in the community all help shape their outcomes, for better or worse (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Supportive environments – for example, a loving and supportive family or a high-quality school – can act as a resource for well-being, providing children with the materials, support and opportunities they need to thrive. Less supportive environments, on the other hand, can hamper children's well-being, disrupting development and potentially jeopardising their chances of learning and growing to the best of their abilities.

This section uses a series of key comparative indicators to examine the different spheres of children's lives important for their well-being outcomes – their home and family lives, their lives at school, their social lives and life in the community, and their lives online – and how they differ with socio-economic background. It looks at both children's own behaviours, activities and attitudes, and broader aspects of the environments and settings in which they live – for example, the quality and climate at their schools, and the characteristics of the communities in which they grow up.

### Home and family life

Home and family life is central to children's well-being. Families provide children with their “base camp”; the foundation from which they explore the world. Families can offer children love, care, attention and support – essentials that allow them to feel secure, protected, and confident – and play a crucial role in their learning and skill development, especially in the early years. Families are also central in the delivery of material goods and in protecting children from hardship.

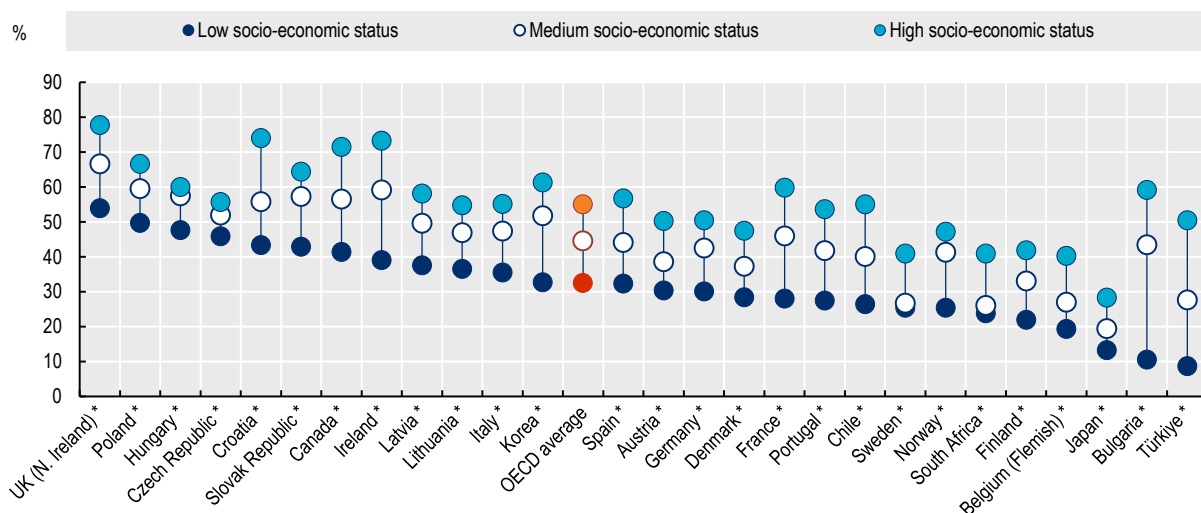
By definition, several aspects of home and family life are different for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They may be living on lower incomes, have parents working in lower skill occupations, or have parents with lower levels of education – or some combination of all three. However, the challenges faced by children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds stretch far beyond income or parental occupation or education alone, including into the things they do at home and the ways they spend their time, as well as their relationships with family and parents – crucial resources that have links with child well-being outcomes in several areas (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; Duncan et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>)

This sub-section focuses on three comparative indicators of children's home and family life. One indicator – “fourth grade” children (around age 10) who “often” engaged in early literacy and numeracy activities before starting primary school – captures an important activity at home with family. The remaining two – 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds who report finding it difficult to talk to their parents, and 15-year-olds who strongly agree that their parents encourage them to be confident – reflect aspects of the quality of child-parent relationships.

Early home learning activities like shared reading, counting objects and drawing shapes can contribute to children's learning and skill development (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; Duncan et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). Children who are more frequently read to by parents show higher levels of emergent literacy, for example (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>). Comparative data on how often current young children engage in early learning activities at home are not available, but the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study contains retrospective parent-reported information on the frequency with which children who are now in "fourth grade" (around age 10) engaged in home learning activities before starting primary school (Figure 17). The data show that, across all OECD countries with available data, "fourth grade" children from disadvantaged households are significantly less likely than the most advantaged to have regularly engaged in early learning activities with parents or other family members when they were young. In some countries (Canada, Chile, France, Ireland and Türkiye), the gap in the share who regularly engaged in home learning activities is as large as 30 percentage points or more.

**Figure 17. Children around age 10 who engaged in regular home learning activities when young**

"Fourth grade" students whose parents report they (or someone else in the household) "often" engaged in early literacy and numeracy activities with the child before they started primary/elementary school, by socio-economic status, 2019



Note: Data refer to the percent of "fourth grade" students classified as having "often" engaged in early learning activities at home before entering primary/elementary school, based on the TIMSS Early Literacy and Numeracy Activities scale. The TIMSS Early Literacy and Numeracy Activities scale is a derived multi-item scale, constructed using IRT (Item Response Theory) scaling and based on students' parents' responses when asked how often they or someone else in the household engaged in a series of eighteen early learning activities with the child before they began primary/elementary school. "Fourth grade students" is used as shorthand for the TIMSS fourth grade target populations, and refers generally to students in their fourth year of formal schooling. Data for Norway, Türkiye, and South Africa refer to children in their fifth year of formal schooling. Socio-economic status is measured using the TIMSS/PIRLS Home Resources for Learning (HRL) scale. "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the HRL scale that are among the bottom 25% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the HRL scale that are among the top 25% within their country or region. Data for Canada cover students from the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec, only. Data for some countries (Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, the UK (N. Ireland), and South Africa) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low or medium and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

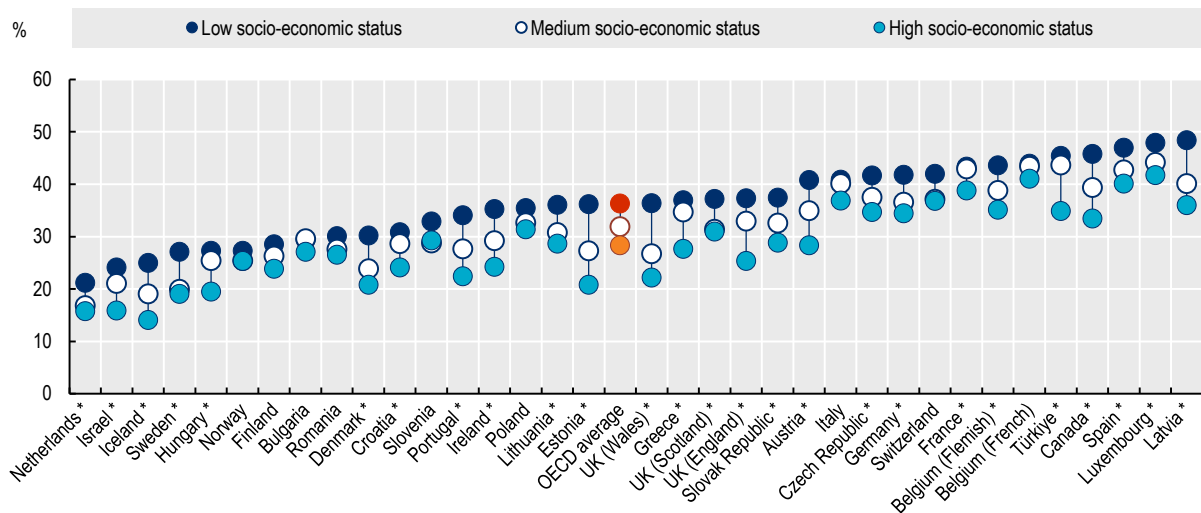
Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator FAM\_ELAPA, based on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2019 (TIMSS 2019).

Ease of communication is an important indicator of child-parent relationship quality. Good communication at home reflects healthy family functioning and the extent to which parents are able to act as protective assets when children are facing difficulties (Brooks et al., 2015<sup>[45]</sup>; Molcho, 2019<sup>[46]</sup>). The Health Behaviour

in School-aged Children survey asks children aged 11, 13 and 15 about the ease with which they feel they can talk to their parents about things that really bother them. Results from 2017-18 show that in many OECD countries, disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds were significantly more likely than the most advantaged to report finding it difficult to talk to their parents (Figure 18), with gaps visible even in countries where reported parent-child communication difficulties were relatively rare, like the Netherlands, Iceland, Israel, and Sweden.

**Figure 18. Children who find it difficult to talk to their parents**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report finding it difficult (or very difficult) to talk to one or both of their parents, by socio-economic status, 2017-18



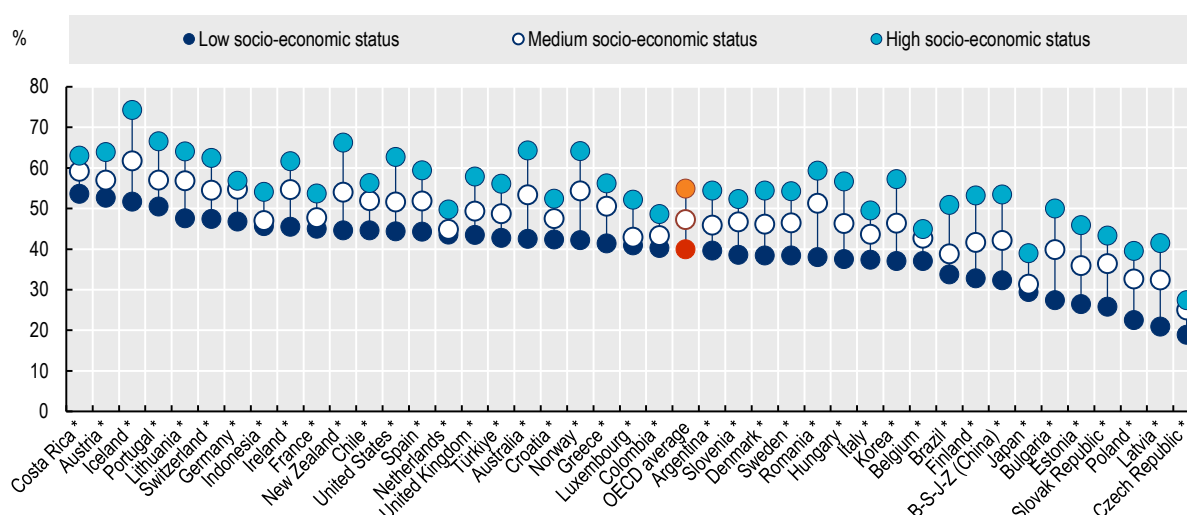
Note: Children (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds) were asked the questions "How easy is it for you to talk to the following persons about things that really bother you?" "... Father" and "... Mother", and presented with the response options "Very easy", "Easy", "Difficult" and "Very Difficult". Children could also respond "Don't have or see this person". Data refer to the percent responding "Difficult" or "Very difficult" for either their mother or father. Children who report that they "Don't have or see" both a/their mother and a/their father are excluded. Data for some countries (Canada and the Slovak Republic) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator FAM\_TLKP, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Emotional support from parents is similarly important for children. A lack of parental emotional support has been linked to a range of adverse child and adult outcomes, including lower self-efficacy, weaker learning goals, and more socio-emotional problems (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>; Chentsova Dutton, Choi and Choi, 2020<sup>[47]</sup>; Ulferts, 2020<sup>[48]</sup>). In its last two rounds, OECD PISA has asked 15-year-olds a series of questions about the emotional support they receive from parents, particularly with respect to their schooling and education. The data show that across OECD countries, the most disadvantaged 15-year-olds are less likely than most advantaged to report receiving emotional support from parents, with differences often especially large in the share that *strongly* agree that their parents provide them with emotional support – that is, in those that most clearly or firmly report emotional support (OECD CWBDP, indicators FAM\_PSEEA, FAM\_PSFDA and FAM\_PECFA). Figure 19 shows one example – 15-year-olds who strongly agree that their parents encourage them to be confident. Differences between disadvantaged and the most advantaged 15-year-olds are significant in all OECD countries with available data, with the average share

of disadvantaged 15-year-olds who strongly agree that their parents encourage them to be confident (40%) 15 percentage points higher than the average share for the most advantaged 15-year-olds (55%).

### Figure 19. Children firmly reporting that their parents encourage them to be confident

15-year-old students who strongly agree with the statement "My parents encourage me to be confident", by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: 15-year-old students were asked "Thinking about <this academic year>: to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My parents encourage me to be confident" and presented with the response options "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". Data refer to the percent responding "Strongly agree". Percent among valid responses only. Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for some countries (Austria, Chile, Colombia, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland, Brazil, Argentina and Bulgaria) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator FAM\_PECFA, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

## Life at school and in early childhood education and care

Schools (and for younger children, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services) play a key role in children's lives. It is at school (or in ECEC) that children do much of their learning, of course. But school life also matters for many other aspects of children's well-being. Classmates play a major role in children's social lives, for instance, while the wider climate that children face at school (for example, in teacher's classroom practices and behaviours, or in the relationships between children, teachers, parents and the local community) can affect not just children's education outcomes, but also a range of wider well-being outcomes (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; 2019<sup>[5]</sup>).

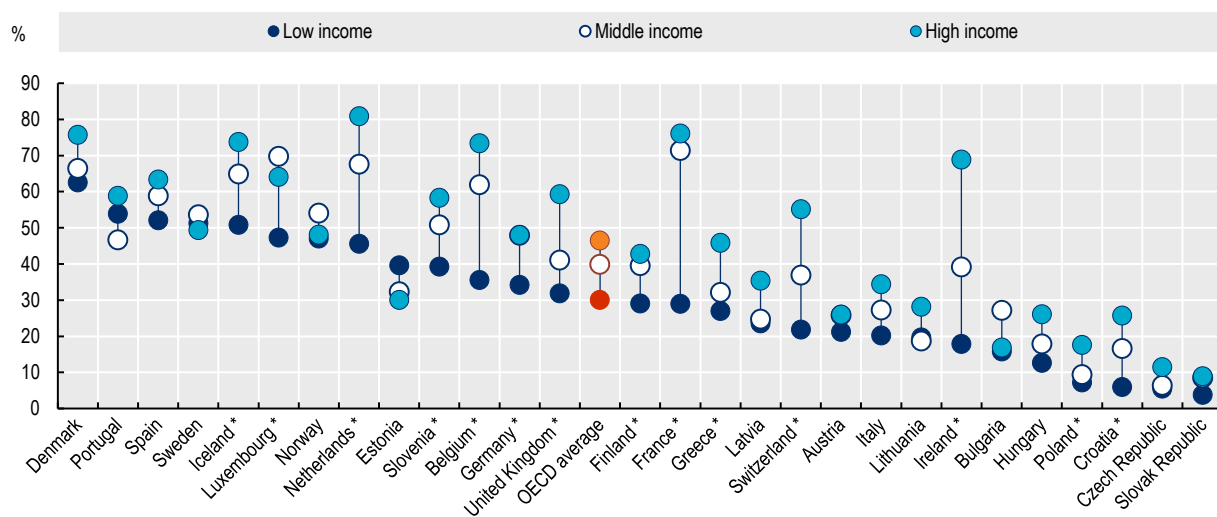
Thanks to the big international student assessment programmes (PIRLS, TIMSS and OECD PISA), a relatively wide range of comparative data are available on children's lives in primary and secondary schools. Wide scale comparable data on young children's experiences in ECEC are scarcer. Four main indicators are used here to capture socio-economic differences in children's life in school and ECEC: 0- to 2-year-olds participating in early childhood education and care; 15-year-olds reporting a poor relative

disciplinary climates in their classroom; 15-year-olds reporting experiencing bullying at school; and 15-year-olds who feel like they belong at school.

Early childhood education and care can play an important role in helping disadvantaged children realise their full potential. Evidence from several OECD countries suggests that some ECEC programs can help foster lasting skill development in disadvantaged children, even if the evidence for more advantaged children is mixed (Shuey and Kankaraš, 2018<sup>[49]</sup>; Duncan et al., 2022<sup>[50]</sup>). Importantly, however, participation among children from disadvantaged backgrounds remains a challenge in many OECD countries, especially for very young children under age three (OECD, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). In 2019, in European OECD countries, 0- to 2-year-olds from low income backgrounds were on average about one-third less likely than 0- to 2-year-olds from high income backgrounds to participate in ECEC, with gaps largest in France and Ireland (Figure 20).

### Figure 20. Children under age three participating in early childhood education and care

0- to 2-year-olds participating in early childhood education and care, by income level, 2019 or latest available



Note: Data for Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom refer to 2018. Data refer to children using centre-based services (e.g. nurseries or day care centres and pre-schools, both public and private), organised family day care, and care services provided by (paid) professional childminders, regardless of whether or not the service is registered or ISCED-recognised. Income level is based on the child's position in the equivalised disposable income distribution for children aged less than or equal to 12. "Low income" refers to children in the first tertile, "middle income" to those in the middle tertile, and "high income" to those in the top tertile. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high income are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Family Database, <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>.

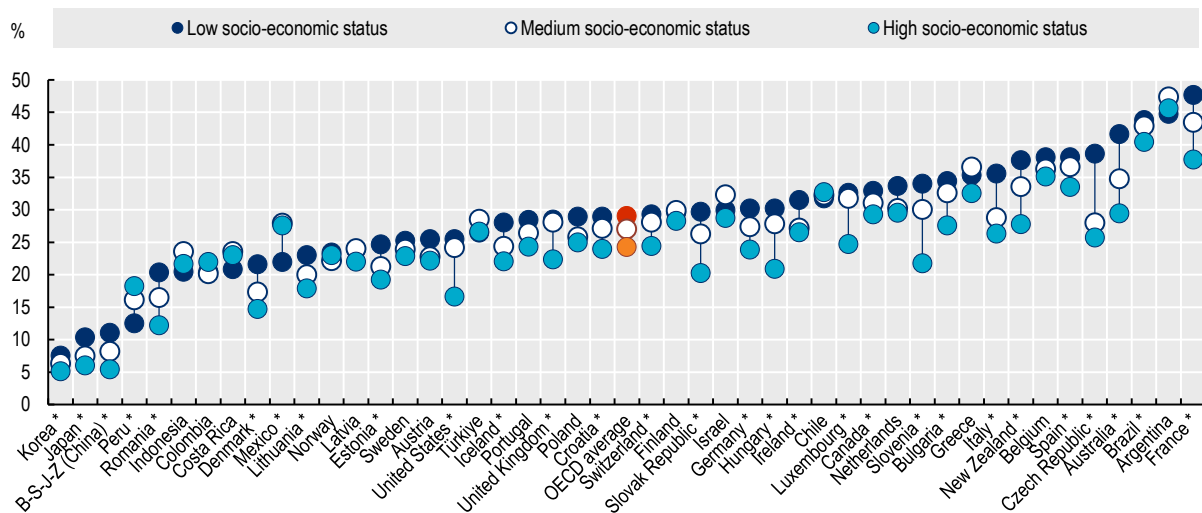
Participation gaps are somewhat less of an issue once children enter compulsory school, with enrolment in basic education close to universal across OECD countries (OECD, 2021<sup>[52]</sup>). However, even when enrolled, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are in many countries more likely than their more advantaged peers to regularly skip or miss school (OECD CWBDP, indicator LRN\_SKPD). Early school leaving also remains a challenge in many OECD countries, and the likelihood of being "NEET" – not in employment, education or training – as a young person is often higher for those from disadvantage backgrounds, including with less highly educated parents (OECD, 2016<sup>[53]</sup>).

Attending school or ECEC is one thing; attending a high-quality school or ECEC service is another. Across levels of education, "good" schools and services with positive climates can promote children's learning and wider well-being and may help compensate for disadvantage (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>; 2019<sup>[5]</sup>; 2021<sup>[54]</sup>). Poor schools and services may do the opposite.

Disciplinary climate – the extent to which children are exposed to disruptive behaviour in the classroom – is one important indicator of school quality and climate. Disruptive behaviour in the classroom prevents teachers from teaching and students from learning (Mostafa, Echazarra and Guillou, 2018<sup>[55]</sup>), and has been linked consistently with lower educational performance (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Data from OECD PISA show that in 2018, in slightly over half of OECD countries, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were significantly more likely than the most advantaged to report a poor relative disciplinary climate in their classroom (Figure 21), with gaps in some countries (Australia, the Czech Republic, France and Slovenia) as large as 10 percentage points or more. Data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study point in a similar direction for “fourth grade” children around age 10: in several OECD countries, less advantaged children are more likely to be attending schools experiencing problems with poor discipline (OECD CWBDP, indicator SCH\_SDISA).

**Figure 21. Children reporting a poor relative disciplinary climate in their classroom**

15-year-old students with low relative values on the PISA Index of Disciplinary Climate, with reference to their language-of-instruction lessons, by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: Data refer to the percent of 15-year-old students with values on the PISA Index of Disciplinary Climate that are among the lowest 25% across all OECD countries with available data. (For students in non-OECD countries, those with values at a level equivalent to the lowest 25% across all OECD countries with available data). The PISA Index of Disciplinary Climate is a derived multi-item scale, constructed using IRT (Item Response Theory) scaling and based on students' responses when asked how often the following happens in their language-of-instruction lessons: “Students don't listen to what the teacher says”; “There is noise and disorder”; “The teacher has to wait a long time for students to quiet down”; “Students cannot work well”; and “Students don't start working for a long time after the lesson begins”. Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). “Low socio-economic status” refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. “High socio-economic status” refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. China (B-S-J-Z) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SCH\_SDICB, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

Several other aspects of school quality and climate and the wider learning environment tend to be worse for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In a number of OECD countries, disadvantaged 15-year-olds are less likely than the most advantaged to report high co-operation among students at their school (OECD CWBDP, indicator SCH\_SCOPA), are less likely to report high levels of enthusiasm from their teachers (OECD CWBDP, indicator SCH\_TENTA), and are more likely to attend schools experiencing high staffing shortages (OECD CWBDP, indicator SCH\_SSSH) – a central component of school quality,

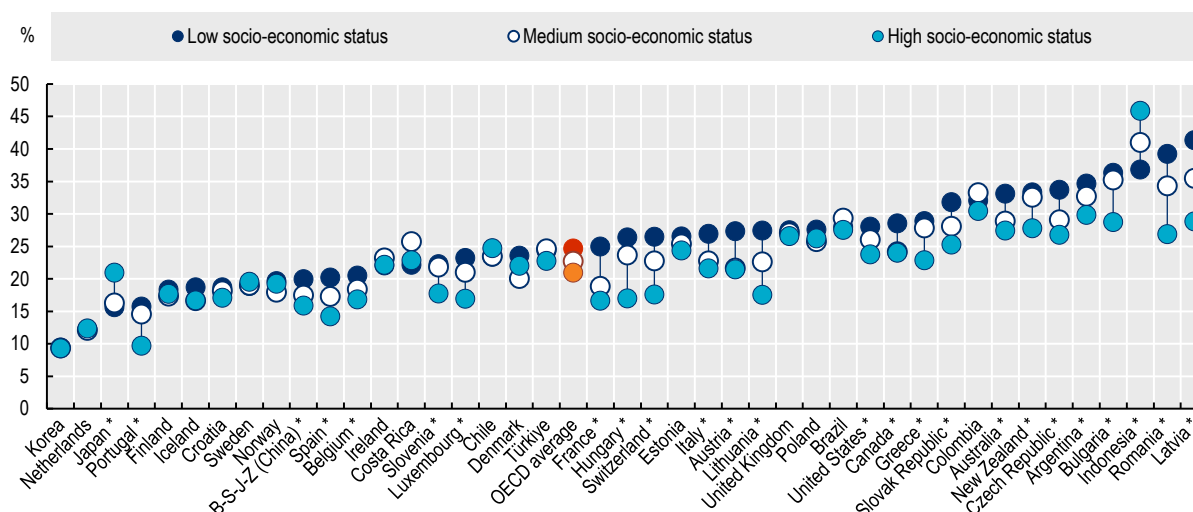
given the importance of well-qualified teaching and support staff to children's learning and well-being (OECD, 2020<sup>[56]</sup>). However, there are some exceptions. Class sizes are often smaller in schools with higher concentrations of disadvantaged children, for example, as are student-teacher ratios (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>).

How children experience their time at school – for example, how they get along with classmates, and the extent to which they feel connected to their school – can shape both their learning outcomes and a range of other important well-being outcomes. Children who experience adverse relations with schoolmates tend to do worse academically, for instance (Wang et al., 2014<sup>[57]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Children who feel like they belong at their school perform better academically, report better high self-esteem and learning motivation, and also report higher happiness and life satisfaction (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020<sup>[58]</sup>; O'Brien and Bowles, 2013<sup>[59]</sup>).

Bullying provides one important indicator of peer relations at school, and has been linked to several important well-being outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). The frequency of being bullied varies considerably across OECD countries (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>); in many, however, disadvantaged children are at least slightly more likely to be at risk than their more advantaged peers. Data from OECD PISA show that in 2018, in about half of OECD countries, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were significantly more likely than the most advantaged to report experiencing regular bullying, although the opposite was true in Japan (Figure 22). Data from TIMMS paint a similar picture for “fourth grade” children: in 2019, in more than two-thirds of OECD countries with available data, “fourth grade” children around age 10 from less advantaged backgrounds were significantly more likely to report experiencing bullying at least once a month (OECD CWBDP, indicator LRN\_TBULA).

**Figure 22. Children reporting being the victim of bullying**

15-year-old students who report experiencing any of a specified list of bullying acts at school at least a few times a month, by socio-economic status, 2018



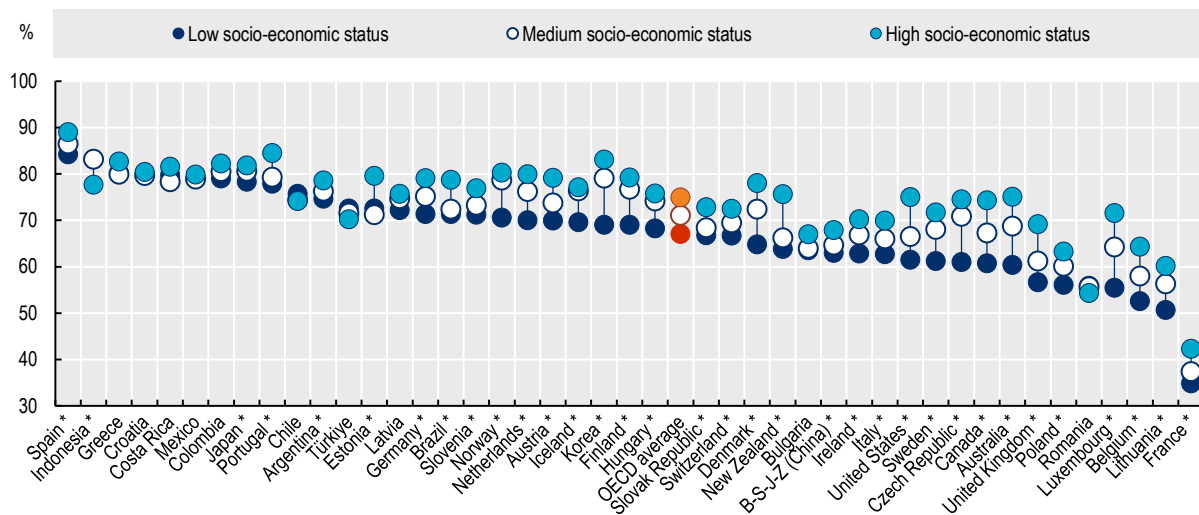
Note: Data refer to the percent of 15-year-old students who, when asked how often they had experienced six different types of bullying behaviour in school, responded to at least one with the answer “a few times a month” or “once a week or more”. Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). “Low socio-economic status” refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. “High socio-economic status” refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People’s Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for some countries (Austria, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Brazil, Argentina and Bulgaria) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator LRN\_PBUL, based on *the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

Children's sense of belonging at school is a similarly important indicator of their school experience. Recent rounds of OECD PISA have asked 15-year-olds a series of questions revolving around how accepted they feel at school, including one on whether they "feel like they belong at school" specifically. Results show lower levels of belonging among disadvantaged 15-year-olds in almost all OECD countries (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>): in 2018, in all but seven OECD countries with available data, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were significantly less likely than the most advantaged to agree that they felt like they belong at school (Figure 23). Similar data are available from TIMSS for "fourth grade" children (children around age 10), and tell a similar story: in about half of OECD countries with available data, children from less advantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to report feeling like they belong at their school (OECD CWBDP, indicator LRN\_TBELA).

### Figure 23. Children who feel like they belong at school

15-year-old students who agree (or strongly agree) with the statement "I feel like I belong at school", by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: 15-year-old students were asked "Thinking about your school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at school" and presented with the response options "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". Data refer to the percent responding "Agree" or "Strongly agree". Percent among valid responses only. Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for some countries (Chile, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Brazil, Argentina and Bulgaria) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator LRN\_PBELA, based on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database.

### Social life and life in the community

For children in middle childhood and especially in adolescence, peer relationships, friendships and connections with others in the community represent an increasingly important driver of well-being. Friendships provide an alternative source of support to family and have links with a range of well-being outcomes (Currie et al., 2012<sup>[60]</sup>; Gifford-Smith and Brownell, 2003<sup>[61]</sup>; Burns and Gottschalk, 2019<sup>[62]</sup>), while connections with the community more widely are important for fostering children's social capital (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). However, not all children have the same opportunities to make friendships and participate



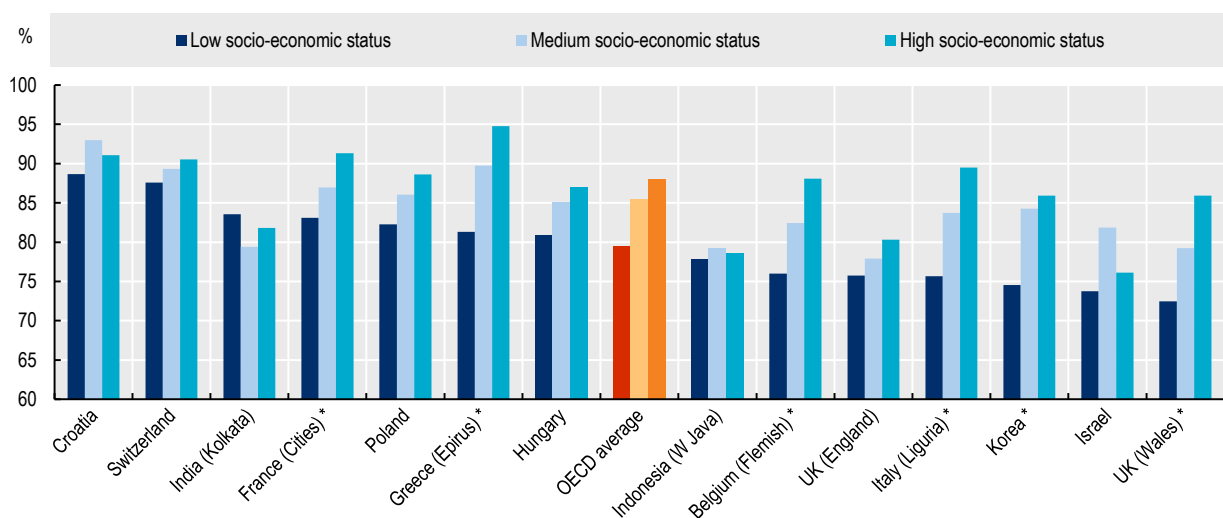
in community life. In addition to their schools, the quality of children's local areas plays an important role in shaping their opportunities to play, socialise, and make connections with others outside the family (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>).

Five main indicators are used here to reflect children's social lives and lives in the community, and how these differ with socio-economic status. Two indicators (10-year-olds who feel they have enough friends, and 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds reporting high support from their friends) capture aspects of the quantity and perceived quality of children's friendships. One (15-year-olds reporting having participated in voluntary work in the past year) reflects one aspect of participation in community life. The final two (10-year-olds who report that there are enough places to play and have a good time in their local area, and 0- to 17-year-olds in households that report problems with crime and violence) touch on aspects of children's local areas that may limit their ability to make meaningful connections with others.

While having large numbers of friends does not always guarantee good-quality friendships, children who are unable to make friends may miss out on opportunities to develop important social skills and are at greater risk of internalising problems like loneliness and depression (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020<sup>[63]</sup>; Currie et al., 2012<sup>[60]</sup>). Uniquely for an international child survey, the *Children's Worlds* survey asks children in middle childhood whether they believe they have enough friends (Figure 24). Although available for only a minority of OECD countries, results show frequent differences between the least- and most- advantaged children. In 2016-19, on average across nine OECD countries, 80% of 10-year-old children from disadvantaged backgrounds strongly agreed that they have enough friends, compared to 88% among the most advantaged.

### Figure 24. Children who feel that they have enough friends

10-year-old school children who strongly agree with the statement "I have enough friends", by socio-economic status, 2016-2019



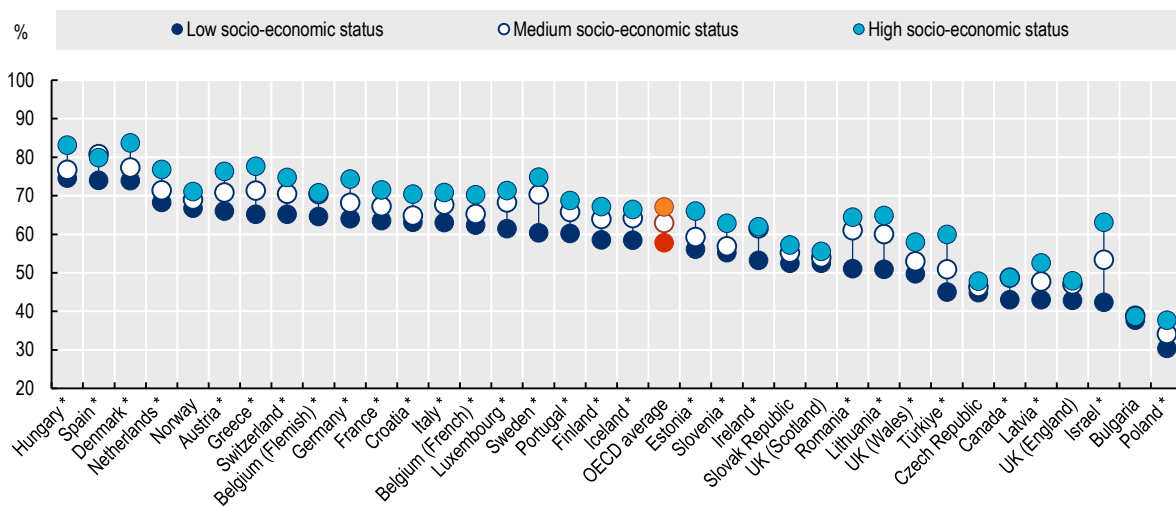
Note: 10-year-olds were asked how much they agree with the statement "I have enough friends". Response options were "I do not agree", "I agree a little", "I agree somewhat", "I agree a lot" and "I totally agree". Data here refer to the percent of children responding "I agree a lot" or "I totally agree". Children responding "Don't know" are excluded. Socio-economic status is measured using a modified version of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey Family Affluence Scale. "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the modified FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country, region, or area. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores that are among the top 20% within their country, region, or area. The OECD average excludes the United Kingdom (England and Wales). In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SOC\_FRNEA, based on Children's Worlds: International Survey of Children's Well-being (ISCWeB) Wave Three (2016-2019).

Friendship *quality* also matters (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020<sup>[63]</sup>), and also frequently differs with socio-economic status. Data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey pick-up on one aspect of friendship quality – perceived support from friends – and show that disadvantaged children are consistently less likely to report feeling well supported by their friends than children from more advantaged households (Figure 25). In 2017-18, on average across OECD countries with available data, 58% of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds reported feeling high support from their friends, falling to 30% in Poland. The average for children in the most advantaged households was 67%, with gaps significant in the large majority of OECD countries with available data.

**Figure 25. Children reporting strong support from friends**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report feeling high overall support from their friends, by socio-economic status, 2017-18



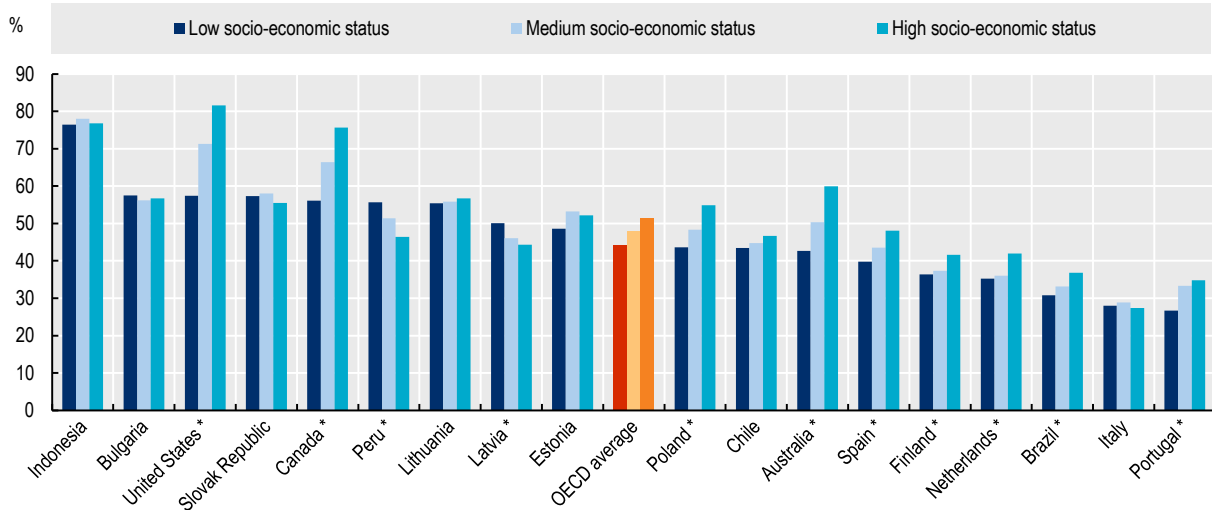
Note: Data refer to the percent of children who score 5.5 or more on the HBSC Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Friends), categorised as high perceived friend support. Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). Data for some countries (Canada and the Slovak Republic) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SOC\_FRSUA, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Participating in voluntary work (Figure 26) is one way that children and young people can engage in their communities. While available for less than half of OECD countries, data from OECD PISA show that engagement is often less common for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2018, on average across 14 OECD countries, 44% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds reported having participated in voluntary work in the past year, compared to 52% of the most advantaged. Gaps were largest, at around or above 20 percentage points, in Canada and the United States – both countries where child participation in voluntary work is very common – as well as, to a slightly lesser extent, Australia.

### Figure 26. Children participating in voluntary work

15-year-old students who report having undertaken voluntary work in the last 12 months, by socio-economic status, 2018



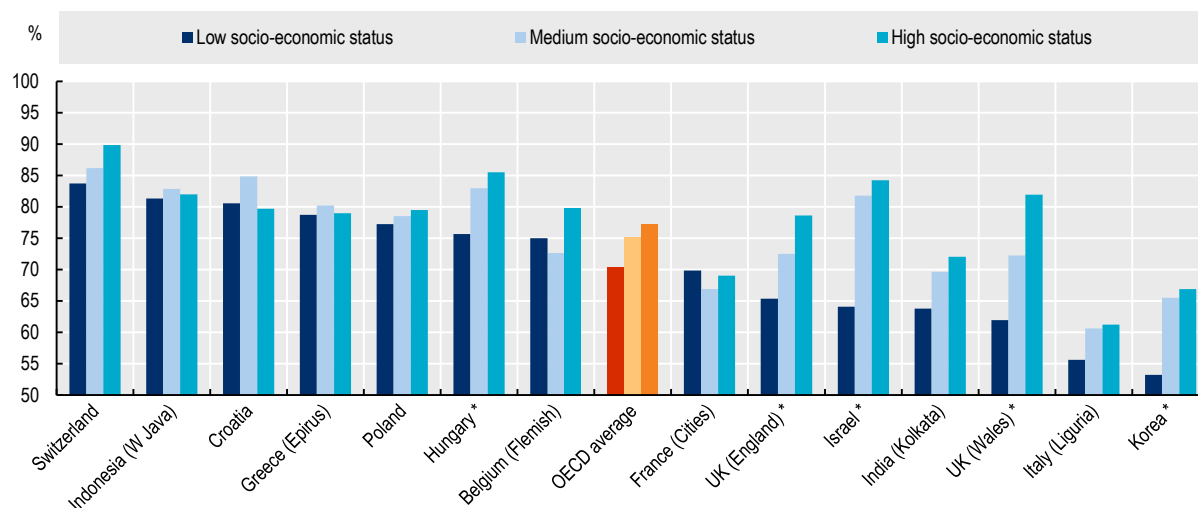
Note: 15-year-old students were asked "In the last 12 months, have you done the following things? ... Undertook voluntary work" and presented with the response options "Yes" and "No". Data refer to the percent responding "Yes". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. Data for some countries (Canada, Chile, Italy, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Brazil and Bulgaria) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator SOC\_VOLW, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

The availability of suitable places to play or spend time with others is one aspect that restricts children's opportunities to socialise and make connections. While again not available for all OECD countries, the Children's Worlds international survey asked children in middle childhood whether they agree that there are enough places to play and have a good time in their local area (Figure 27). Gaps are not always statistically significant, but in several OECD countries, children age 10 from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely than their more advantaged peers to strongly agree that their area has enough places to play and have a good time. In England (United Kingdom) and Korea, the gap in the share of 10-year-olds reporting having enough places to play or have a good time in their area was 13-14 percentage points, while in Israel and Wales (United Kingdom) it was 20 percentage points.

**Figure 27. Children who believe there are enough places to play in their area**

10-year-old school children who strongly agree with the statement "In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time", by socio-economic status, 2016-2019

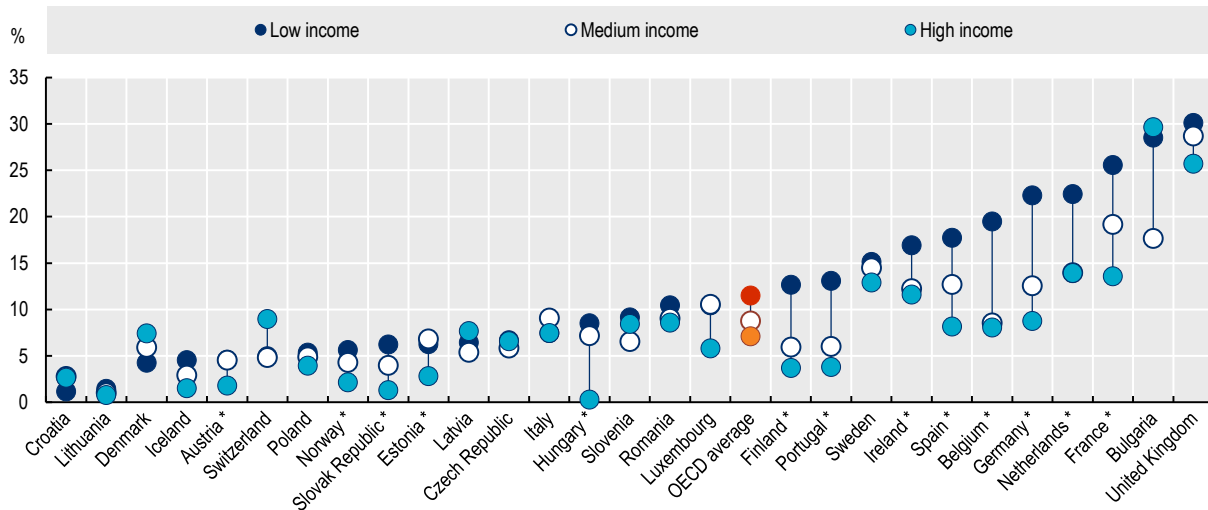


Note: 10-year-olds were asked how much they agree with the statement "In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time". Response options were "I do not agree", "I agree a little", "I agree somewhat", "I agree a lot" and "I totally agree". Data here refer to the percent of children responding "I agree a lot" or "I totally agree". Children responding "Don't know" are excluded. Socio-economic status is measured using a modified version of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey Family Affluence Scale. "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the modified FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country, region, or area. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores that are among the top 20% within their country, region, or area. The OECD average excludes the United Kingdom (England and Wales). In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator CPE\_EPPOA, based on Children's Worlds: International Survey of Children's Well-being (ISCWeB) Wave Three (2016-2019).

Crime and violence, or the fear of crime and violence, is another issue that limits children's abilities to make connections with others (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Neighbourhoods that are characterised by crime and violence erode a child's sense of predictability and trust in their environment, increasing the risk of misconduct problems (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000<sup>[64]</sup>). By contrast, neighbourhoods with good physical facilities and where children and families feel safe provide children with opportunities to develop relationships outside the family and pursue social activities and personal interests (McKendrick, 2014<sup>[65]</sup>). In 2020 (or nearest available year), on average across European OECD countries, 11% of children in low income households also lived in households that reported problems with crime and violence in their area, rising to 26% in France, and over 30% in the United Kingdom (Figure 28). The average for children in high-income households was 7%, with gaps largest at more than 10 percentage points in Belgium, France and Germany. For several OECD countries, data from Children's Worlds also point to gaps across socio-economic groups in the share of children who themselves report feeling safe in their local area (OECD CWBDP, indicator CPE\_FSLAA).

**Figure 28. Children in households reporting problems with crime or violence in their area**

0- to 17-year-olds in households that report problems with crime or violence in the area, by income level, 2020 or latest available



Note: Data refer to the percent of children (0- to 17-year-olds) in households that report problems with crime, violence or vandalism in the area in which they live. "Low income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the bottom quintile of the national equivalised disposable income distribution. "Medium income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the middle three quintiles of the national equivalised disposable income distribution. "High income" children are those with equivalised disposable incomes in the top quintile of the national distribution. Data for Iceland and the United Kingdom refer to 2018, and for Germany, Italy and Poland to 2019. Data for the United Kingdom should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high income are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator CPE\_PCRM, based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

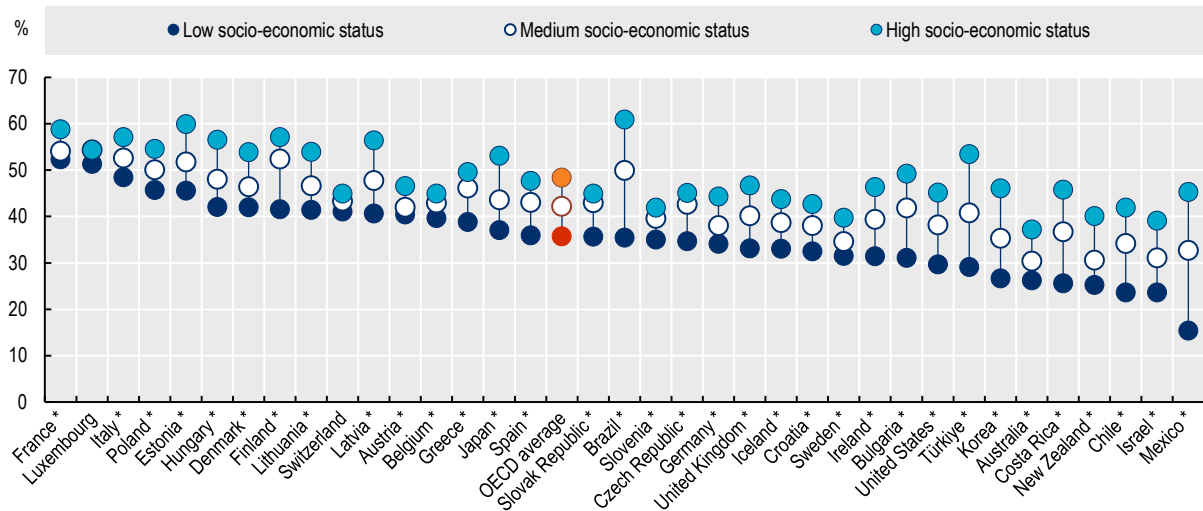
## Life online

The digital environment poses opportunities and risks for children's well-being. A healthy and balanced use of digital tools provides children with opportunities for expression, for learning, and for making connections in ways that are not always possible in the offline world. But the digital environment also carries dangers for children – including through abuse and harmful content – and not all children are as well placed as others to make the most of what the digital environment has to offer.

International data on children's lives online are improving but still limited (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). This data gap makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions on links between children and adolescents' use of the Internet and digital tools and their well-being outcomes (Box 4). Existing evidence suggests, however, that children's online activities and experiences, most of which is gained at home and at school, often varies with socio-economic status (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007<sup>[66]</sup>; Muschert and Ragnedda, 2015<sup>[67]</sup>; Muschert and Ragnedda, 2015<sup>[67]</sup>). For example, data from OECD PISA suggest that at age 15, in most OECD countries, disadvantaged children are more likely than their advantaged peers to be "heavy" Internet users, defined as reported use of the Internet for at least 40 hours per week outside of school (OECD CWBDP, indicator DIG\_IHVV). The types of things that children do online may also differ with socio-economic background, too. For instance, PISA results suggest that disadvantaged 15-year-olds are often significantly less likely than advantaged 15-year-olds to report regularly reading news online (Figure 29) or using digital devices for schoolwork (OECD CWBDP, indicator DIG\_DSCW), as well as to report regularly participating in social networks (OECD CWBDP, indicator DIG\_DSOC). However, in several countries, they are significantly *more* likely to report regularly playing online games (OECD CWBDP, indicator DIG\_DGME).

**Figure 29. Children who report reading news on the Internet every day or almost every day**

15-year-old students who report using digital devices to read news on the Internet every day or almost every day, by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: 15-year-old students were asked "How often do you use digital devices for the following activities outside of school? ... Reading news on the Internet (e.g. current affairs)". Response options were "Never or hardly ever", "Once or twice a month", "Once or twice a week", "Almost every day" and "Every day". Data refer to the percent responding "Almost every day" or "Every day". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. Data for some countries (Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Israel, Mexico, Slovak Republic, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Bulgaria) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator DIG\_DNWS, based on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database.

#### Box 4. Children digital use and socio-emotional well-being outcomes

Concerns over the potential effects of children's and adolescents' digital technology use on their well-being have been emerging since the 1990s. Early studies were conducted, however, at a time in which children's digital and online engagement was generally still marginal and impacts were difficult to discern and biased by sample limitations (Vilhelmson, Eildér and Thulin, 2017<sup>[68]</sup>; George et al., 2018<sup>[69]</sup>). As access to digital technologies has widened dramatically and an ever-increasing majority of children found their way online, new research in this field has appeared, but findings are mixed and often inconclusive (Castellacci and Tveito, 2018<sup>[70]</sup>; Orben and Przybylski, 2019<sup>[71]</sup>; 2019<sup>[72]</sup>; Stiglic and Viner, 2019<sup>[73]</sup>).

Some evidence suggests a negative relationship between digital technology usage and child and adolescent well-being (Fioravanti, Dèttore and Casale, 2012<sup>[74]</sup>; Kelly et al., 2018<sup>[75]</sup>; Kross et al., 2013<sup>[76]</sup>; Parkes et al., 2013<sup>[77]</sup>; Twenge et al., 2018<sup>[78]</sup>). These studies indicate that children's increased usage of digital technologies is associated with increased depressive symptoms and difficulties in psychosocial adjustment, reduced self-esteem/self-concept, and increased social isolation through the displacement of in-person socialising activities. Other studies, however, find a positive relationship between child well-being and time spent on digital technologies (Berryman, Ferguson and Negy, 2018<sup>[79]</sup>; Davis, 2012<sup>[80]</sup>; Gross, 2009<sup>[81]</sup>). They find that children's use of digital technologies helps widen social networks, reduce social anxiety, and reduce social isolation (Best, Manktelow and Taylor,

2014<sup>[82]</sup>). Other studies still, find no significant association at all (Babic et al., 2017<sup>[83]</sup>; Baker and White, 2011<sup>[84]</sup>; Bruggeman et al., 2019<sup>[85]</sup>; Leung, 2014<sup>[86]</sup>).

Studies increasingly indicate a small (if any) association between children's time spent on digital technologies and socioemotional well-being. For example, Orben and Przybylski's (2019<sup>[71]</sup>) study with three large-scale datasets found statistically significant associations between children's digital technology use and well-being problems, but effects were smaller than those observed for apparently neutral activities (e.g., regularly eating potatoes) (Orben and Przybylski, 2019<sup>[72]</sup>).

Moreover, the negative association between screen time and socioemotional well-being concerns intensive users of digital tools. Data from OECD PISA points to a U-shaped association between time spent on the Internet and life satisfaction, with extreme Internet users (more than 6 hours a day) showing lower life satisfaction than any other student, and moderate Internet users (1-2 hours a day) having the highest life satisfaction (OECD., 2017<sup>[87]</sup>).

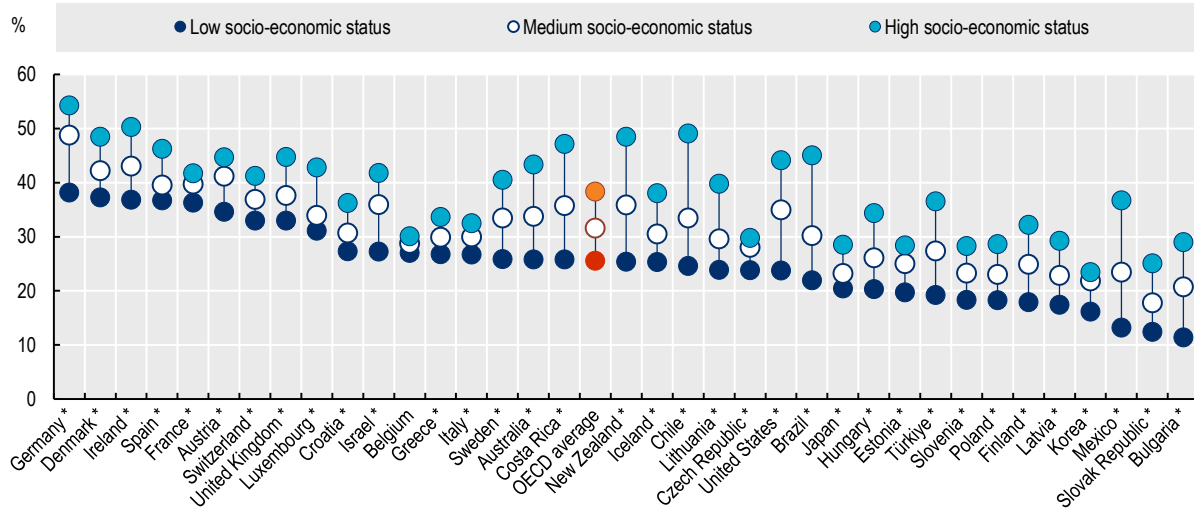
It is not just time but also the type of online activities that might matter. For instance, Bohnert and Gracia (2021<sup>[88]</sup>; Bohnert and Gracia, 2022<sup>[89]</sup>) found that children spending 3 hours or more per day on TV or digital screen time experience a higher decline in socioemotional well-being. Notably, though, most types of digital activities (i.e. gaming, educational, socializing) had small effects on children's socioemotional well-being. By contrast, engagement in digital media activities seem to lead to increasing child socioemotional problems. In addition, children from advantaged backgrounds seem to benefit from more positive effects from their time spent on online learning activities (Bohnert and Gracia, 2022<sup>[89]</sup>).

Other evidence also suggests that excessive social media use may be associated with poorer sleeping patterns, body image concerns, and associated disordered eating among young women and men (with the association possibly strengthening over time) (OECD, 2018<sup>[90]</sup>). Moreover, recent research on the effects of social media on clinically diagnosed depressed children underlines that social media can exacerbate depressive symptoms for children who are already at high risk (i.e. with already existing socioemotional problems) (Rich, 2019<sup>[91]</sup>; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2020<sup>[92]</sup>; Bohnert and Gracia, 2021<sup>[88]</sup>). Yet, the evidence base is still emerging and it remains difficult to establish clear causal links between different forms of child digital engagement and well-being outcomes, although research suggests that effects differ across risks levels and depending on the well-being indicator that is examined.

Children's options for making the most of what the digital environment has to offer depend in part on their attitudes towards, and knowledge of, what is possible online. Recent rounds of OECD PISA have asked 15-year-olds a series of questions around their attitudes to the digital world and how they feel when online, including one on whether they believe that the Internet is a "great resource for obtaining information" – a question touching on children's awareness of the resources the Internet has to offer. In 2018, across almost all OECD countries with available data, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were significantly less likely than the most advantaged to report believing that the Internet is a great resource for information, with gaps especially large in the share that *strongly* agree – that is, in the share that most clearly believe in the Internet as an information resource (Figure 30). On average across OECD countries, only 26% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds strongly agreed that the Internet is a great resource for information, compared to 38% of the most advantaged, with rates among disadvantaged children in several countries (e.g. Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovak Republic, Türkiye, and the United States) close to or less than half those among the most advantaged.

### Figure 30. Children who firmly believe that the Internet is a great resource for information

15-year-old students who "strongly agree" with the statement "The Internet is a great resource for obtaining information I am interested in (e.g. news, sports, dictionary)", by socio-economic status, 2018



Note: 15-year-old students were asked "Thinking about your experience with digital media and digital devices: to what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements? The Internet is a great resource for obtaining information I am interested in (e.g. news, sports, dictionary)" and presented with the response options "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". Data refer to the percent responding "Strongly agree". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. Data for some countries (Australia, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Bulgaria) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

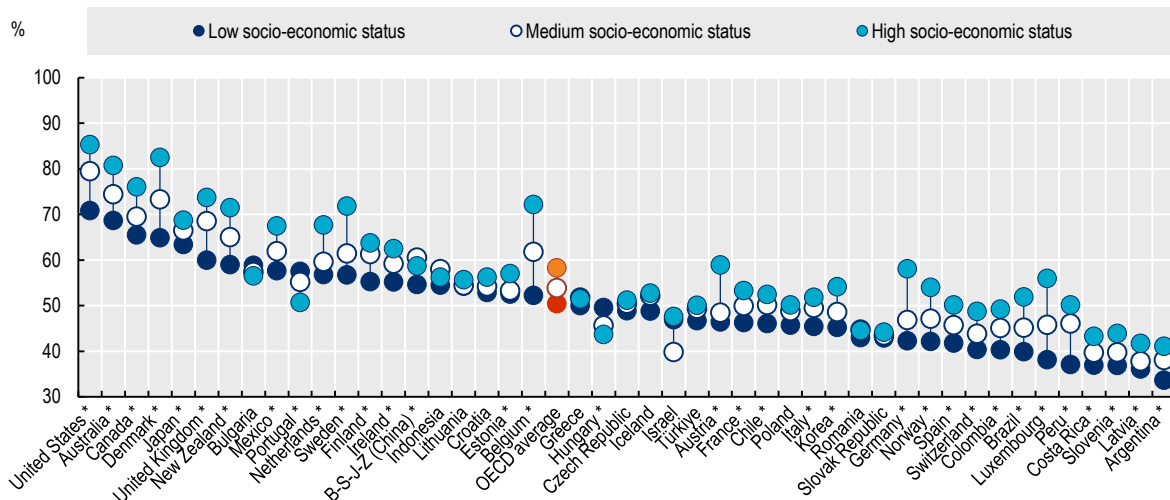
Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator DIG\_IGRIA, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

Similarly, children's abilities to stay safe online rely in part on their knowledge and understanding of online risks. Comparative data on children's knowledge of online risks themselves are not available. However, the latest round of OECD PISA asked 15-year-olds whether they had been taught at school a series of digital skills relating to online risks, including how to detect subjective or biased information, how to detect phishing emails, how to trust information online, and how to understand the consequences of making information publicly available online. Across all four questions, disadvantaged 15-year-olds were frequently less likely to report having been taught about the respective risk in school (OECD CWBDP, indicators DIG\_TTIO, DIG\_TCMP, DIG\_TISB and DIG\_TPSE). Gaps were largest in the share reporting they had been taught how to detect subjective or biased information: on average, 50% of disadvantaged 15-year-olds reported having been taught this any time at school, compared to 58% of the most advantaged (Figure 31). In some countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and Finland), gaps between the least- and most- advantaged 15-year-olds reporting having been taught how to detect subjective or biased information reach over 15 percentage points.



**Figure 31. Children who report being taught to detect subjective or biased information**

15-year-old students who report being taught at school "How to detect whether the information is subjective or biased", by socio-economic status, 2018



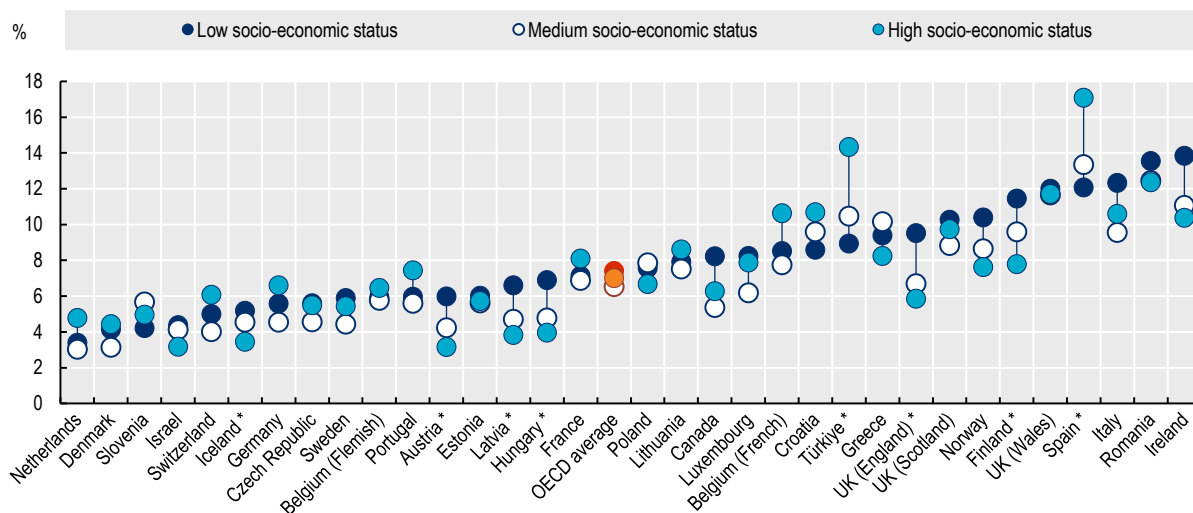
Note: 15-year-old students were asked "At school, have you ever been taught the following things? How to detect whether the information is subjective or biased" and presented with the response options "Yes" and "No". Data refer to the percent responding "Yes". Socio-economic status is measured using the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the bottom 25% within their country or economy. "High socio-economic status" refers to students with scores on the ESCS index that are among the top 25% within their country or economy. B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four PISA-participating provinces/municipalities of the People's Republic of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Data for some countries (Israel, the Netherlands) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator DIG\_TISB, based on the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Database*.

While associations between the quantity of "screen time" and children's well-being are not always clear (Box 4) (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019<sup>[62]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>) – and while for many children, the potential "displacement" effects of the use of digital tools on physical activity are likely only to be small (Kardefelt-Winther, 2017<sup>[93]</sup>) – the intense use of digital tools could pose a risk for well-being if it interferes with other areas of children's lives (including sleep quality (LeBourgeois et al., 2017<sup>[94]</sup>)). Problematic social media use (Figure 32) is an indicator of the extent to which children report that their use of one specific digital tool – social media – might come at the expense of relationships and other activities, like hobbies (Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). The frequency of problematic social media use differs across countries but is generally low, and differences by socio-economic status are mixed and uncommon: while in some OECD countries (Austria, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia and England (UK)) disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds are more likely than the most advantaged to report problematic social media use, in others (Spain and Türkiye), the opposite is true. Overall, on average across OECD countries with available data, children from disadvantaged backgrounds were approximately as likely (7.4%) as the most advantaged (7.0%) to report problematic social media use.

**Figure 32. Children reporting problematic social media use**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report problematic social media use, by socio-economic status, 2017-18



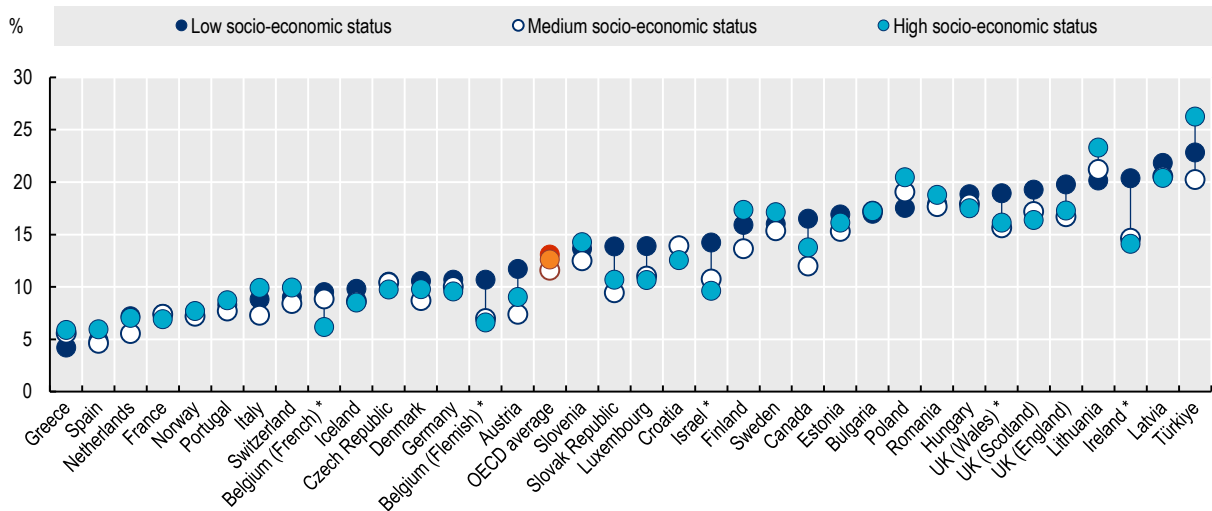
Note: Children were asked a series of nine questions about whether, over the past year, social media use has had a negative impact on various aspects of their lives. "Social media", in this instance, is defined as referring to social network sites and instant messengers. Response options for each question were "No" or "Yes". Data refer to the percent of children who respond "Yes" to at least six of the nine questions. Data for some countries (Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Wales (United Kingdom) and Croatia) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator DIG\_SMPU, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

Cyberbullying is the aggressive targeting of a victim by peers through digital technologies (Gottschalk, 2022<sup>[95]</sup>). Similar to "traditional" bullying, being the victim of cyberbullying has been linked to a range of well-being outcomes, including depression and anxiety, as well as poorer self-rated health, increased subjective health complaints, and lower life satisfaction (Gottschalk, 2022<sup>[95]</sup>). Unlike traditional bullying, however, cyberbullying does not seem to be linked to socio-economic status (Inchley et al., 2016<sup>[96]</sup>; Inchley et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). Data from the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* survey show that in 2017-18, across most OECD with available data, 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds were no more or less likely than the most advantage to report having been the victim of cyberbullying at least once in the past couple of months (Figure 33). On average, 13.1% of disadvantaged 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds reported being the victim of cyberbullying, compared to 12.6% of the most advantaged.

**Figure 33. Children reporting being the victim of cyberbullying**

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report having been a victim of cyber-bullying at least once in the previous couple of months, by socio-economic status, 2017-18



Note: Children were asked "In the past couple of months how often have you been cyberbullied (e.g., someone sent mean instant messages, email or text messages; wall postings; created a website making fun of you; posted unflattering or inappropriate pictures of you online without permission or shared them with others)?" Response options ranged from "I have not been cyberbullied in the past couple of months" to "Several times a week". Data refer to the percent of children who respond "Once or twice", "2 or 3 times a month", "About once a week" or "Several times a week". Socio-economic status is measured using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale (FAS). "Low socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the bottom 20% within their country or region. "High socio-economic status" refers to children with scores on the FAS that are among the top 20% within their country or region. The OECD average excludes Belgium (both Flemish- and French-speaking regions) and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales). Data for some countries (Canada and the Slovak Republic) should be interpreted with caution due to high missing data rates. In countries marked with an \*, differences between low and high socio-economic status are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: OECD Child Well-being Data Portal (<https://oe.cd/cwb-data>) indicator DIG\_CYBU, based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2017-18.

## 3

## Child well-being dashboards can help navigate better futures for disadvantaged children

The indicators presented in this paper illustrate a stark reality for children growing up in socially and economically disadvantaged households. Disadvantaged children in OECD countries frequently experience poorer material well-being, have poorer physical health, do worse at school, and report poorer social and emotional well-being than their more advantaged peers. These outcome gaps stretch across OECD countries and are reflected in, and driven by, the poorer quality of disadvantaged children's lives at home, in school, with friends and in the community. Some of these social inequalities are well-known; social gradients in child health and education outcomes, for example, will not come as surprise to many. But the indicators presented in this paper show that these inequalities stretch further into other areas less often documented in the literature, including in children's self-efficacy and aptitude for facing difficult situations, in how they perceive the support they receive from their families, and in how they see themselves in the future. Children growing up in disadvantaged households are starting life with unequal resources, and this appears to translate into early life inequalities in outcomes and in capabilities to seize opportunities.

Improving the well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds requires strong policy action. This includes policy action to mitigate the impact of social and economic disadvantage, but also poverty- and disadvantage prevention policies that aim to tackle disadvantage at source (OECD, 2018<sup>[97]</sup>). Examples of the latter include policies to help parents into work (including skills and training programmes and work incentives policies) and family support policies, like early childhood education and care support, which both help parents to work and can foster children's early learning and development. Support for parents from the pre-natal period, and for children throughout childhood, is crucial for detecting and responding to possible unmet needs before problems become more serious and difficult or costly to address (OECD, 2009<sup>[98]</sup>; Riding et al., 2021<sup>[99]</sup>). The provision of family and social support services to meet the nutritional, health, housing, educational and social needs of children and parents is also important for ensuring that disadvantages in different areas do not combine and accumulate (Riding et al., 2021<sup>[99]</sup>). Schools have a role to play too, including by paying attention to children's well-being and the specific needs of disadvantaged children, as well as by tackling possible discrimination in children's and teacher's behaviours and in school evaluation processes (Cerna et al., 2021<sup>[100]</sup>).

Policy action for disadvantaged children should be co-ordinated and coherent. The breadth and depth of social inequalities in child well-being mean that efforts are needed in multiple policy areas stretching across multiple government departments and agencies, as well as from other actors inside and outside government. What's more, as noted throughout this paper, different areas of child well-being and different aspects of children's lives are frequently inter-connected, meaning consistent support is needed across all domains if children are to see real changes in their life experience and outcomes (OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>). Aspects of material well-being are important for health outcomes, for instance, while several areas of health are

important for education and learning. These linkages mean that individual policies targeting specific aspects of childhood disadvantage are unlikely to be fully effective unless accompanied by complementary policies targeting the many other areas of disadvantage. Tackling childhood disadvantage needs not just action on multiple policy fronts, but also action that is comprehensive, co-ordinated and joined-up. Helping disadvantaged children beat the odds requires actions that both improve the support they receive from their environments and ensure that they develop the skills needed to seize opportunities (OECD, 2019<sup>[101]</sup>).

Forthcoming work by the OECD shows that OECD countries are at different stages in the development of co-ordinated child policy (OECD, Forthcoming<sup>[102]</sup>). While some countries have developed strategies and frameworks for whole-of-government child policy action, child policy making in others remains largely fragmented. For many OECD countries, putting in place the kinds of policy structures needed to better support children's well-being will likely require not just a deep redesign of policy content from a multidimensional perspective, but also a refocusing of government attention on agreed priorities and shared outcome-based objectives, and a realignment of action towards the collaborative work needed to best meet these objectives.

Child well-being indicator dashboards, such as the one on which this paper is built, are an important tool that can help governments develop more co-ordinated and coherent policy approaches (Durand and Exton, 2019<sup>[103]</sup>). Well-being indicator sets and dashboards help provide policy makers and key stakeholders with a more complete and comprehensive picture of children's lives, and a shared understanding of issues which can serve as organising frameworks for policy development. By providing a common frame of reference, indicator dashboards can help governments establish shared goals and policy priorities, in turn supporting strategic alignment and promoting co-operation across departments and agencies (Exton and Shinwell, 2018<sup>[104]</sup>). They can also be combined with a range of other policy-making tools (e.g. impact assessments, cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis) to promote more holistic and coherent approaches to policy development (Durand and Exton, 2019<sup>[103]</sup>).

Like all empirical activities, well-being indicator sets and dashboards are limited by the available data. The data used in the OECD Child Well-being Dashboard (see Box 2) show that even at the international level, there is already the potential for child well-being indicators to shed light on many important child policy challenges and priorities. The choice made here has been to focus on a few overarching indicators in different areas of child well-being, with priority given to outcomes that are important for children's well-being both now and in the future (i.e. their *well-becoming*). Indicators capture both children's outcomes and their environments, as well as on their activities and perceptions, both of which are important mediators of the potential effects that environments can have on outcomes.

However, as discussed in depth in OECD (2021<sup>[11]</sup>), there are still many important data gaps when it comes to capturing child well-being. For example, children under school age are often not well covered by existing cross-national data, nor are several aspects of children's material and social and emotional well-being (OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>). Children in very vulnerable situations, including indigenous children and children exposed to violence, in alternative care, and with a disability, are also either not easily identified or poorly covered (UNECE, 2022<sup>[105]</sup>). And there are also often issues with the regularity and timeliness with which key child data series are collected, which makes tracking progress difficult. The overview provided in this paper shows the importance of the inequalities experienced by children in their various environments depending on their family socio-economic status. Improving the availability of data on these aspects shaping children's opportunities remains a key challenge at both national and international levels.

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