

Factsheet: SDG4 targets and how PIRLS can help



Target 4.1: Universal primary and secondary education

- Reading literacy is on the rise internationally.** The results of PIRLS 2016 demonstrate a number of positive developments in reading literacy worldwide. For the first time in the history of the study, as many as 96% of Grade 4 students from over 60 education systems achieved above the PIRLS low international benchmark. Out of 41 countries and dependent territories with comparative data from PIRLS 2011, 18 exhibited statistically significant improvements in students' reading comprehension and 13 maintained their 2011 results. Since 2001, reading achievement has improved in 11 countries and dependent territories, while the average results of students from Hong Kong SAR, the Russian Federation, Singapore, and Slovenia have increased by more than 40 score points.
- How PIRLS helps.** The Education 2030 Agenda places learning outcome indicators at the heart of the international education-monitoring framework. Part of the global indicator 4.1.1 is the percentage of students who meet a minimum level of proficiency in reading at grades 2/3 and at the end of primary education. Despite active steps taken since 2016 by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, there is yet no global standard for proficiency. With its system of benchmarks, PIRLS delivers a reliable, internationally recognized measurement tool for reading achievement, directly informing global indicator 4.1.1.



Target 4.2: Early childhood development and universal pre-primary education

- Early start in reading literacy has lasting benefits.** PIRLS 2016 found an increase in parental involvement in students' early literacy activities in 16 countries and dependent territories. Students, whose parents engaged them in early literacy activities often (39%) and sometimes (58%), had higher average scores of 529 and 505, respectively, while students whose parents reported never or almost never doing so (3%) recorded an average score of 419. PIRLS 2016 also observed that more students had attended pre-primary education than in previous cycles. As many as 59% of the students surveyed in PIRLS 2016 had attended three or more years of pre-primary school, and these students had the highest average reading achievement (520 score points). A correlation between early literacy activities by parents and pre-schooling was also identified by the study. At each level of pre-primary attendance, from three years or more to one year or less, the students whose parents often engaged them in early literacy activities demonstrated higher average reading achievement than those whose parents were less engaged.
- How PIRLS helps.** One of the indicators under Target 4.2 refers to stimulating home environments for learning. PIRLS evidence supports the advantages of investing in early childhood literacy activities and helps identify the most vulnerable countries and students. In eight participating countries and dependent territories, the percentage of children whose parents did not read to them at all exceeded 5%, and, for example, in Morocco this reached 29%.



Target 4.4: Relevant skills for decent work

- Good readers have little difficulty reading online.** Students in all the countries and dependent territories participating in ePIRLS were good to excellent readers. On average, 50% of students reached the high international benchmark, demonstrating the ability to integrate information across websites and interactive features. While, among the 14 countries and dependent territories and the two benchmarking entities participating in ePIRLS, Singapore, Norway, and Ireland were among top-performers, there was a slight variation between PIRLS and ePIRLS results within countries. The study found that the students familiar

with using computers in school contexts, especially as part of classroom instructional activities, had a relative advantage in ePIRLS.

- **How PIRLS helps.** Target 4.4 of the monitoring framework focuses on information and communications technology skills in general – and digital literacy skills in particular. ePIRLS offers insight into the development of digital literacy skills at a young age. Grade 4 students in almost all countries and dependent territories that took part in ePIRLS had high exposure to technology at home and at school. With the exception of Georgia (where the figure was 9%), no more than 2% of students reported low access to digital devices at home. Teachers reported that at most 15% of fourth graders (in Portugal and the United Arab Emirates) were affected by shortages of digital resources at school.



Target 4.5: Gender equality and inclusion

- **The gender gap favours girls.** On average, in PIRLS 2016, female students outperformed their male counterparts by 18 points in 48 countries and dependent territories, leading in literary (48 countries and dependent territories) and informational (39 countries and dependent territories) reading purposes, including information retrieving and inferencing (47 countries and dependent territories), and interpreting and integrating (48 countries and dependent territories). Girls also performed better in ePIRLS, but here the gender gap was less pronounced than in the PIRLS assessment.
- **Supportive home environment related to higher achievement.** PIRLS found that students whose parents reported many home resources for learning had much higher achievement scores than children whose parents reported some or few. Students whose parents reported greater enjoyment of reading generally achieved better. A concerning trend was revealed by the PIRLS 2016 results in this area: in 31 countries and dependent territories, there was a decrease in parents' positive attitudes toward reading.
- **How PIRLS helps.** The Education 2030 Agenda calls on leaving no one behind and requires access to disaggregated data. PIRLS allows for a greater disaggregation of data on learning outcomes by gender, socioeconomic status, and language, as well as by age and other variables obtained from the different background questionnaires.



Target 4.a: Effective learning environments

- **Well-resourced, academically oriented and safe schools are associated with higher achievement scores.** In PIRLS 2016, students in well-resourced schools had higher average achievement scores (521 score points) than those in schools somewhat affected (507 score points) or affected a lot (474 score points) by resource shortages. The schools' academic orientation, as well as the higher level of teachers' experience, had also a positive impact on the achievement. PIRLS 2016 identified a positive trend in school safety, with teachers from 16 countries and dependent territories reporting that schools have become more safe and orderly since 2011. As in previous cycles of the study, it was observed that being bullied at school had a negative influence on students' achievement. Although only 14% of students reported that they were bullied about weekly, their average PIRLS score of 482 was 39 score points below the average achievement among those who were never or almost never bullied.
- **How PIRLS helps.** The Education 2030 Agenda recognizes a safe learning environment as a predictor of higher achievement. As one of the aspects of school safety, PIRLS reports on the incidence of bullying, which in 2016 varied greatly across countries and dependent territories. For example, 42% of students from South Africa reported being bullied weekly; in Finland, only 5% of students report such frequent bullying.



Target 4.c: Increase the supply of qualified teachers

- **Students have access to well-qualified reading teachers.** In most countries and dependent territories, reading teachers held at least a Bachelor or equivalent degree, but there is variability both within and across countries and dependent territories. For example, in Morocco and Italy, large numbers of grade 4 students are taught by reading teachers reporting only an upper secondary education certificate as their highest level of formal education completed (40% and 63%, respectively).

- **Teacher professional development does not adequately address specialized skills required to ensure reading achievement for all children.** While nearly two-thirds of grade 4 students are taught by reading teachers who report having studied reading pedagogy or teaching methods specific to reading instruction as an area of emphasis during their formal teacher education, only 18% and 23%, respectively, of grade 4 students were taught by reading teachers who reported having studied second language learning and remedial reading instruction as areas of emphasis. This means that teachers may not be appropriately prepared to ensure inclusive and equitable quality learning for all.
- **How PIRLS helps.** Target 4.c puts emphasis on increasing the supply of qualified teachers around the world. PIRLS informs this target by reporting the level of formal education and qualifications obtained by reading teachers of grade 4 students. Another indicator of teacher quality is whether teachers have received pedagogical training. In the case of PIRLS, this includes information on teachers' study of the classroom language, reading pedagogy, reading theory, assessment methods for reading, as well as second language teaching, and methods for remedial instruction.