



Media release

Datum 10.12.2024

Literacy, numeracy and problem-solving: Switzerland beats OECD average in all three test areas

Adults in Switzerland generally outperform the international average in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving tests. Nevertheless, around 30% of 16- to 65-year-olds – around 1.67 million people – have low skills in at least one of these three areas. Skill differences can often be explained by factors such as educational level, age, main language or place of origin. This is shown in the national report of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) on the initial results of the second cycle of the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). The results validate the federal government's targeted support measures to assist adults in improving their basic skills.

Finland, Japan, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands had the highest scores in all three test areas – literacy, numeracy and adaptive problem-solving – in international comparison. Switzerland's scores were significantly above the OECD average in all areas, as were scores in Canada, Denmark, the UK (England), Estonia, Belgium (Flanders) and Germany.

Very similar scores among language and geographical regions

Within Switzerland, there are hardly any differences in skills among the language and geographical regions. Values in Zurich and in the Espace Mittelland were slightly above the Swiss average, while they were slightly below average in the Lake Geneva region and in Eastern Switzerland.

Reading skills decline with age

Skills generally decline with increasing age. Among 56- to 65-year-olds, just over 30% have low reading skills, while the figure for 16- to 25-year-olds is only 10%. The situation is similar for the other two areas of everyday mathematics and adaptive problem solving. Differences

between the age groups remain even when taking other factors such as educational level into account.

Clear differences in skills according to level of education

With increasing level of education, skills also increase. Over 40% of people with no post-compulsory education have low skills in all three areas. This proportion is almost halved among those with an upper-secondary level qualification.

Higher scores when test language and main language match

Differences in scores can also be observed among people with different migration and language profiles. In general, people with Swiss nationality or those born in Switzerland achieve better results than people who have immigrated to the country. The same applies to people whose main language is the same as the test language, compared to people for whom this is not the case. Accordingly, people who have immigrated to Switzerland from neighbouring countries show similar levels of proficiency to people with Swiss nationality or who were born in Switzerland. This is in contrast to people from other EU27/EFTA or third countries. However, the differences relating to migration and language profile can largely be explained by differences in age and level of education.

Around 1.67 million people have low skills in at least one area

Low reading skills were found in 22% of the population surveyed (1.25 million people), almost 19% (1.06 million people) have low everyday maths skills and 24% (1.38 million people) have low adaptive problem-solving skills; 15% have low scores in all three areas. A further 6% have major deficits in two skills, while the remaining 9% have major deficits in only one (2.5% only in reading, 1.5% only in everyday mathematics and 4.7% only in problem solving). Overall, around 1.67 million people have low skills in at least one area. The vast majority of this group is in employment.

Federal government promotes basic skills in adults

The federal government supports adults in acquiring basic skills, which are of key importance for both society and the economy. The funding is based on different legal principles. For example, the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training enables the cantons to offer programmes to promote basic skills. Furthermore, language courses can be provided under the Unemployment Insurance Act as labour market measures for people registered as unemployed, or for newly arrived immigrants as part of the Cantonal Integration Programmes (CIP). The findings of the international PIAAC study will allow the federal government to make targeted improvements to its funding strategies: the data obtained will help to tailor the measures more effectively to the needs of the target groups. The federal government is working closely with intercantonal and national committees to increase the programmes' effectiveness, with the aim of providing adults in Switzerland with the skills they need for work and everyday life.

Contact/Enquiries:

FSO Communication, Tel.: +41 58 463 60 13, email: media@bfs.admin.ch

SERI Communication, Tel.: +41 58 463 04 59, email: medien@sbfi.admin.ch

Further information:

[Press conference - Skills of adults in Switzerland in 2023 - GNP Diffusion](#)

Availability of the results

This press release has been checked against the European Statistics Code of Practice. It guarantees the independence, integrity and accountability of national and community statistical bodies. Privileged access is controlled and under embargo.

In addition to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) and the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO) were also involved in project management and financing of the PIAAC in Switzerland. These bodies had access to the results of the publication during the embargo period. The Conference of the Cantonal Governments of Switzerland (CCG), the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) and the Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education (SCCRE) also had access to the results of the publication during the embargo period.