

PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies)

The **Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)** is an international survey conducted in 34 countries. It is a collaboration between governments, an international consortium of organisations and the [OECD](#) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) assists governments in assessing, monitoring and analysing the level and distribution of skills among their adult populations as well as the extent of skills use in different contexts. The goal of PIAAC is to assess and compare the basic skills and the broad range of competencies of adults around the world. The assessment focuses on cognitive and workplace skills needed for successful participation in 21st-century society and the global economy. Specifically, PIAAC measures relationships between individuals' educational background, workplace experiences and skills, occupational attainment, use of information and communications technology, and cognitive skills in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and problem solving. *Such information can help governments to evaluate policies and design more effective interventions.*

By providing a direct measure of key cognitive skills in addition to measures of formal educational attainment, PIAAC will offer a far more complete and nuanced picture of the stock of human capital than has yet been available in most countries. In particular, PIAAC will give a picture of the distribution of the proficiency of the population according to the types and level of cognitive tasks they can perform together with the levels of formal education and training achieved. PIAAC will enhance the understanding of the effectiveness of education and training systems in developing basic cognitive skills and key generic work skills. For older cohorts, PIAAC will allow examination and analysis of the processes of skills loss and maintenance and the effectiveness of education and skill formation systems in supporting skills development over the lifecycle.

The PIAAC project seeks to answer the following policy questions:

- 1. How are skills distributed?** A comparison of skill levels, skill requirements, mismatches and investments in education and training across countries, and within countries across demographic categories, regions, sectors of industry, levels and fields of schooling.
- 2. Why are skills important?** The relation of skills to relevant labour market outcomes like employment opportunities, earnings, job security, and skill utilisation, as well as to other outcomes such as health, civic and political engagement.
- 3. What factors are related to skill acquisition and decline?** The relation between various learning activities – education, training, informal learning activities - and skill acquisition. The relation of experiences at work, in education and everyday life to skill decline among older individuals.

PIAAC involves two parts

- [The OECD Survey of Adult Skills](#)
- [Education and Skills Online Assessment](#)

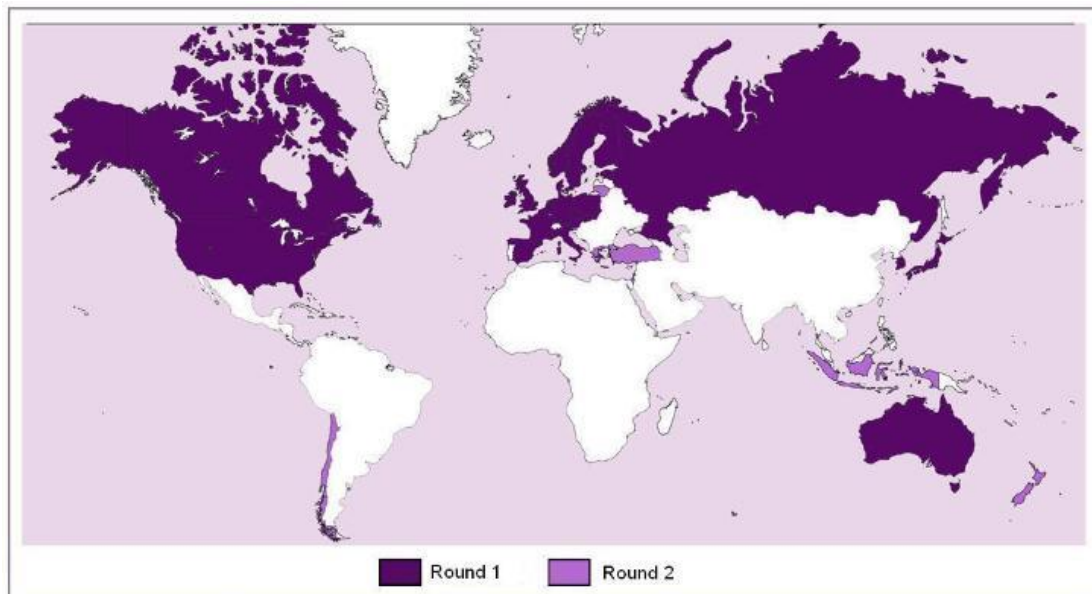
I . OECD SURVEY OF ADULT SKILLS

PIAAC is a complex assessment: the data collection is being conducted in multiple languages, in numerous countries with diverse populations, cultures, education and life experiences.

- The survey involves interviewing 5 000 adults aged 16 to 65 in their homes - 5 000 in each participating country; countries can choose larger samples to obtain more detailed information about groups of interest (e.g. younger cohorts).
- Literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to solve problems in technology-rich environments are assessed;
- A broad range of information from the adults taking the survey, including how their skills are used at work and in other contexts such as the home and the community are collected.
- Respondents answer questions via computer, although they can opt to complete a pencil-and-paper version of the survey.
- National authorities in participating countries are responsible for sampling, translating survey instruments and questionnaires, collecting and processing data.

Where is the survey undertaken?

Two rounds of the Survey of Adult Skills are under way: Round 1 (2008-13) with 24 participating countries, whose results will be released in October 2013, and Round 2 (2012-16) with 9 participating countries, whose results will be released in 2016. A third round is scheduled to begin in May 2014. ¹ **First results will be released on 8 October 2013**



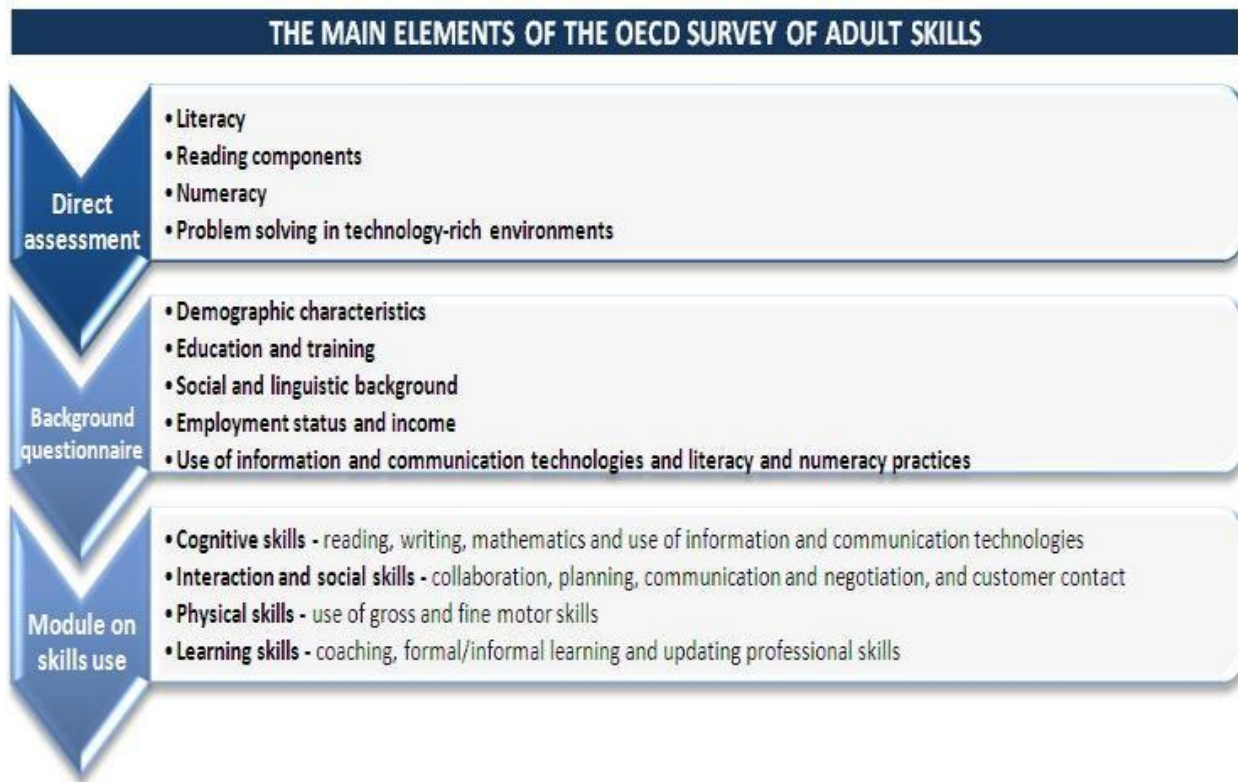
¹ Participating countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, *Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, *Lithuania, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New

An important element of the “added value” of the OECD Survey of Adult Skills compared with national surveys is its international comparative dimension.

The survey is designed

- to be valid cross-culturally, cross-nationally and cross-language
- for countries to be able to administer the survey in their national languages and still obtain comparable results
- to provide comparative analysis of skill-formation systems and their outcomes, and international benchmarking regarding adult skills

Main Elements of the Survey



- a. **The direct-assessment component** of the survey evaluates the skills of adults in three domains: literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. These skills are necessary in a broad range of contexts, from education through work to everyday life ([free preview](#)).

Zealand, Norway, Poland, *the Russian Federation, *Singapore, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

*OED partner country

- b. **The PIAAC background questionnaire** includes a range of information regarding the factors which influence the development and maintenance of skills such as education, social background, engagement with literacy and numeracy and ICTs, languages, as well as information on outcomes which may be related to skills. Information is collected on the current activity of respondents, employment status and income. In terms of non-economic outcomes, PIAAC includes questions on health status, volunteering, political efficacy and social trust.
- c. **Module on Skills Use** - The survey uses an innovative “job-requirements approach” to ask adults who are employed about a number of generic skills they use in the workplace. The survey asks adults how intensively and how frequently they use these skills at work. Information is also collected about four broad categories of generic work skills: cognitive skills, interaction and social skills, physical skills, and learning skills.
 - **Cognitive skills** encompass reading, writing, mathematics and the use of information and communication technologies.
 - **Interaction and social skills** cover collaboration and co-operation, planning work and use of time for oneself and others, communication and negotiation, and customer contact (e.g. selling products and services and advising).
 - **Physical skills** involve the use of gross and fine motor skills.
 - **Learning skills** cover activities such as instructing others, learning (formally or informally), and keeping up-to-date with developments in one’s professional field. In addition all respondents are asked about the frequency and intensity of their reading and numeracy related activities as well as their use of ICTs at home and in the community.

Who benefits from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills

- Educators, policy makers, labour economists and experts can use survey information to develop economic, education and social policies that will continue to enhance the skills of adults.
- Development agencies, international organisations, and other development partners can use the evidence from the data analysis to provide advisory services and support to countries.
- The ultimate beneficiaries could be citizens across participating countries who will benefit from more effective policy development and implementation.

Link to previous international surveys

The OECD Survey of Adult Skills builds on knowledge and experiences from two international surveys of adult skills – the International Adult Literacy Survey ([IALS](#)) (1994-98) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey ([ALL](#)) (2004-07). PIAAC enhances and expands on these previous assessments' frameworks and, at the same time, improves upon their design and methodologies.

The OECD survey considerably extends the scope of measuring adult skills to include those skills relevant to the digital age, particularly in the domains of literacy and problem solving. PIAAC also breaks new ground by introducing a self-reported measure of the use of skills at work.

The links between the three surveys will allow literacy levels to be compared over a 13-17-year period for some countries.

Links between skills assessed in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, ALL and IALS		
OECD (2008 – 2013)	ALL (2004-2007)	IALS (1994-1998)
	Prose literacy	Prose literacy
	Document literacy	Document literacy
Literacy (combined prose and document)	Literacy (combined prose and document*)	Literacy (combined prose and document*)
Reading components		
		Quantitative literacy
Numeracy	Numeracy	
	Problem solving	
Problem solving in technology-rich environments		

Using Data from the Survey of Adult Skills for Policy Decision Making

When establishing the PIAAC strategy, emphasis has been placed on being able to inform policies relevant to the following overarching themes:

- adult competencies and their individual as well as aggregate economic and social outcomes;
- the design and quality of education systems and levels and distributions of adult competencies;
- enhancing the prospects of adults at risk;
- improving school-to-work transitions and reducing youth unemployment;
- population ageing and lifelong learning;

Therefore the data from this survey will facilitate a better understanding of:

- Performance of education and training systems
- The extent and dimensions of illiteracy and poor literacy
- Gaps between labour markets and education and training
- Equity levels in access to education and intergenerational mobility
- Young people’s transition from education to work
- Identification of at-risk populations
- Links between key cognitive skills and variables, such as demographics, educational background, health, etc.

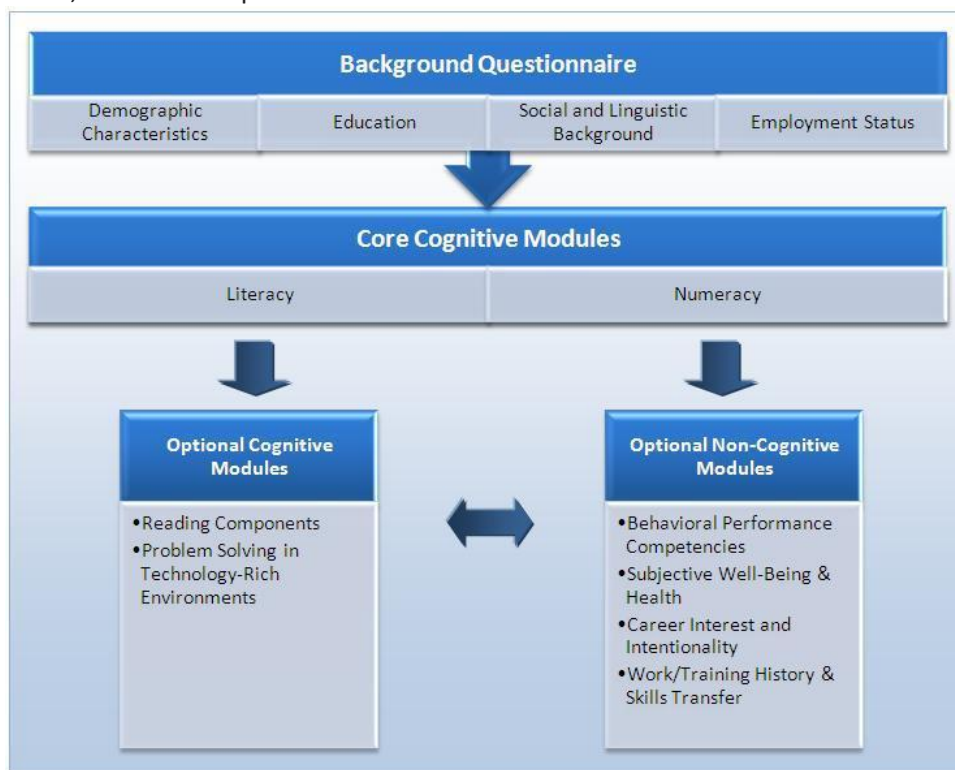
II. EDUCATION AND SKILLS ONLINE ASSESSMENT

The Online Version of PIAAC (in cooperation OECD and the European Union)

Education and Skills (E&S) Online is an **assessment tool** designed to provide individual level results that are linked to the survey measures. *E&S Online* measures a set of skills, including being able to understand and use printed and electronic texts, reason with numbers, and solve problems in technology environments.

The Main Elements of Education & Skills Online Assessment

E&S Online is a fully computerised measure, available over the internet. **It allows individuals to choose which skills they want to assess.** They can elect to get information on their reading component skills, problem-solving skills and on selected non-cognitive skills. *E&S Online* is available in several languages: English (Canada, Ireland, UK, US), French (Canada, France), Spanish (Spain, US), Czech, Italian and Japanese.



What information will be provided?

E&S Online will provide individuals and/or organisations with an easy-to-read report after the completion of the assessment. These reports will characterise the strengths and weaknesses in each cognitive area assessed. Scores will be reported in terms of described proficiency levels that capture the progression of task complexity and difficulty. In addition individuals and/or organisations will be able to benchmark their results against the OECD Survey of Adult Skills results from their country and internationally.



Who can take the assessment?

- Researchers who would like to have access to tests that could allow benchmarking to deepen and complement the results of their assessment efforts at a national or regional level.
- Organisations concerned with adult literacy and numeracy who seek literacy level benchmarks to compare with results of training.
- Universities, vocational education and training centers can use *E&S Online* as a diagnostic tool for incoming students and their literacy course needs.
- Government organisations interested in assessing learning needs for unemployed, prison populations or economically disadvantaged.
- Public or private companies who want to use the results to help with recruitment and candidate assessment and to identify training opportunities for their workforce.
- Students or out-of-school youth transitioning to post-secondary education/training who can use the results to assess their individual course needs.
- Adults of any age who either wish to re-enter an educational or training environment or want to demonstrate their workforce readiness skills.
- Any individuals who might want to compare their results with those obtained at the national and international level or to determine whether their skills have improved over time as the result of educational efforts.

III The next steps – Third round

Expanding to more countries. The OECD is actively soliciting interested government officials and policy makers for a third round of the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, planned for 2014-18.

Financing. The OECD will work with low and middle-income countries interested in participating in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, donors and other agencies to ensure sustainable funding to meet the costs of implementation.

Capacity building. The OECD provides countries with continuous training and high-level technical support throughout the survey process, as well as access to high-quality expertise in measuring adult skills.

- [Timetable for third round](#)
- Learn how to **join the Third Round** of the survey **here**



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Related documents

- [Andreas Schleicher, “PIAAC: A NEW STRATEGY FOR ASSESSING ADULT COMPETENCIES”, in International Review of Education, Springer 2008](#)
- [PIAAC Background Questionnaire](#)
- [Background Questionnaire – Conceptual Framework](#)
- <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/>