Symposium XI

Thursday, April 6th, 2017, 11:30 – 13:00

**Symposium: Social trust, education and skills**

**Chair**
William Thorn (OECD, France)

**Room:** Beethoven-Saal 1

**Abstract**

Part I: Trust is a complex, multidimensional concept that is hard to define and operationalize. However, despite ongoing disputes about how best trust can be conceived and measures, there is a general consensus on the importance trust has for social well-being and economic performance. Robert Putnam (1993) in his influential book Making Democracy Work, argued that ‘generalized trust’ fosters social solidarity between citizens, willingness to cooperate, and is therefore an important prerequisite of functioning democracies. In societies with high levels of generalized trust individuals share new ideas and exchange information efficiently, interacting with each other to overcome collective action problems (Fukuyama, 1995; Ostrom, 1990; Putnam, 1993, Tavits, 2006). Empirical work confirms that trust is an important social and economic resource: it is associated with economic development and functioning democratic institutions (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Putnam, 1993; Inglehart, 1997). In this symposium we want to look at different dimensions of social trust: interpersonal, institutional and political investigating the role education and skills can play in determining the propensity individuals have of trusting others. Although education has been identified as one of the strongest correlates of interpersonal trust, it is far less established what mechanisms are responsible for education gradients in trust, and what is the role of cognitive skills in shaping social trust. Even less is known about the role skills play in shaping institutional trust and the extent to which individuals perceive public actors to be responsive to citizens’ demands. The three papers presented in this symposium exploit information in PIAAC to explore different mechanisms and processes that lay behind the generation of trust. Although PIAAC did not contain information on institutional trust, it contained an indicator of external political efficacy, which reflects individuals' beliefs on the responsiveness of governments.

Part II: Launched in 2005, the first cycle of PIAAC responded to the need for information to make cross-national comparisons on adult skills and related outcomes as well as the need to provide data for key national indicators. Its aim was to provide reliable information on how well education, training systems and life-long learning opportunities enable individuals to contribute to the social well-being and economic growth of their countries so that the quality and impact of education, training and life-long learning opportunities could be monitored and improved. The collaboration between education and labour market specialists in the development and analysis of PIAAC also provided a basis for international collaboration across different stakeholders in order to define and implement effective educational, training and labour market policies. Since the implementation of the first cycle of PIAAC, the policy discussion in many of the countries that participate in the study has progressively recognised the importance of non-labour market outcomes in shaping individual and social welfare, as the role non-cognitive skills play in determining how individuals fare in the labour market and in everyday life. Member countries are taking stock of the information provided by the first cycle of PIAAC and beginning to identify what needs they see as priority for the development of the second cycle. This symposium will detail proposals developed by the Organisation for
Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Secretariat, in conjunction with international experts, on two new modules: the first on non-cognitive skills and the second on non-labour market outcomes. The symposium will argue that the inclusion of personality characteristics and non-economic outcome measures will provide significant value added to the study in terms of policy insights and research potential. In the symposium developmental work conducted in these two areas will be discussed and participants in the symposium will have the opportunity to suggest improvements in light of future developments for potential inclusion in the second cycle of PIAAC.

**Presentations**

- **Title:** Beyond educational attainment: The importance of skills and lifelong learning for social outcomes. Evidence for Europe from PIAAC.  
  **Authors:** Esperanza Vera-Toscano, Margarida Rodrigues & Patricia Costa *(European Commission, France)*
- **Title:** Mind that gap: The mediating role of intelligence and education in explaining disparities in external political efficacy in 22 countries.  
  **Author:** Francesca Borgonovi *(OECD, France)*
- **Title:** Personality characteristics.  
  **Author:** Milos Kakaras *(OECD, France)*
- **Title:** Non-economic outcomes.  
  **Author:** Francesca Borgonovi *(OECD, France)*

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**Title:** Beyond educational attainment: The importance of skills and lifelong learning for social outcomes. Evidence for Europe from PIAAC.

**Authors**  
Esperanza Vera-Toscano, Margarida Rodrigues & Patricia Costa *(European Commission, France)*

**Abstract**  
Empirical evidence suggests that educational attainment nurtures individuals' social outcomes and promotes active participation in society and stability. However, it is unclear to what extent other types of human capital also correlate with social outcomes. To further disentangle this issue, we explored the unique opportunity offered by the PIAAC survey through its provision of information on educational attainment, observed individual key skills proficiency, and participation in adult education and training (adult lifelong learning). We therefore studied the association between these human capital variables and social outcomes, specifically interpersonal trust and participation in volunteer activities. Results revealed that these social outcomes are affected not only by the formal qualification obtained, determined by the education variable, but throughout the life-cycle. In fact, education and training when undertaken during adult life have a significant impact, especially for volunteering. The fact that the skill proficiency also plays a significant role is extremely relevant, as skills are more likely to change over the life-cycle either in a positive or negative way. Indeed, while the formal education received is constant after exiting the educational system, skills more accurately reflect competences: first, because individuals with the same level of education may have different skill levels due to differences in the quality of education or ability; second, because skills can vary over time, for example, they may increase with work experience or informal education or decrease as a result of depreciation and ageing. These findings suggest that social outcomes are prone to be affected by many factors other than formal education, suggesting that policy makers can implement recommendations.
even after formal education has been completed.

**Title: Mind that gap: The mediating role of intelligence and education in explaining disparities in external political efficacy in 22 countries.**

**Author**
Francesca Borgonovi (OECD, France)

**Abstract**
I examine between-country variations in overall levels of external political efficacy and disparities in political efficacy by parental education. Furthermore, I identify the mediating role of individuals' cognitive abilities and own education, as well as how contextual characteristics determine the importance cognitive abilities have for political self-efficacy beliefs. I use data from the 2012 OECD Survey of Adult Skills, a large-scale international assessment containing information on the education, cognitive skills, parents' education and external political efficacy of individuals in 22 countries worldwide. I find that external political efficacy is strongly related to parents' education in virtually all countries examined and that, on average, around 60% of the parental education gradient is mediated by cognitive abilities and own education. Such mediating role differs across countries. Countries with plurality electoral rules enjoy smaller disparities in external political efficacy, but at the expense of overall lower levels of external political efficacy. Smaller disparities are explained by the fact that in these countries cognitive abilities are considerably less importantly associated with political efficacy than in countries with other political systems. Level of economic development and the quality of political institutions are not associated with disparities in external political efficacy but are positively associated with overall levels of external political efficacy.

**Title: Personality characteristics.**

**Author**
Milos Kakaras (OECD, France)

**Abstract**
Personality characteristics shape human behaviour and influence a wide range of life events and outcomes. They do so not only through their immediate effects on life outcomes, but also through their indirect effects on other important personal factors and intermediate life events, such as the development of cognitive capacities, the attainment of educational qualifications or the formation of a family. As such, personality characteristics have a demonstrated relevance for a wide range of policy issues and represent an important subject of policy interest.

Although the assessment of these characteristics is complex, a wide range of measurement instruments has been developed and tested, with relatively solid measurement properties and a range of applications. What is more, the efficiency of these instruments is often superior to those designed to measure cognitive skills, with some of them being able to provide a broad assessment of basic personality dimensions within one minute of testing time. Thus, the inclusion of some of these measures in various policy-oriented assessment programmes, such as PIAAC, would add valuable information about the ways in which these characteristics interact with cognitive skills and other personal and external factors in influencing important life events.

**Title: Non-economic outcomes.**
Author
Francesca Borgonovi (OECD, France)

Abstract
Reflecting an increasing dissatisfaction with measures of income as good proxy of individuals' and measures of GDP as measures of societies' welfare, the Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress recommended that national statistical agencies collect and publish direct measures of well-being.

The key objective of PIAAC is to identify and examine the benefits that are associated with information processing skills, and the extent to which underlying differences in such skills mediate or moderate the effects of education, personal background characteristics and labour market participation. In order to appreciate such benefits in full it is important to characterise individuals' broad well-being, which includes material well-being (through measures of income and labour market participation) as well as physical well-being (health), psychological well-being (satisfaction with different life domains), and social well-being (social connectedness, social capital and civic participation).

PIAAC offers a unique opportunity to evaluate the broad social benefits education can have, both examining the indirect effects it has through labour market performance and skills acquisition. In the second cycle, PIAAC could widen and deepen the coverage of existing well-being outcome constructs. The proposal is to develop a module on non-labour market outcomes articulated around 5 themes: Health (health status and behaviours); Well-being (satisfaction with life domains); Civic engagement and leisure time; Social connectedness; Trust (institutional and interpersonal).