

SNAPSHOTS

Global Assessment // Local Impact

ISSN 2652-1555 (Online)

ISSUE 15 / SEPTEMBER 2021



by Sue Thomson

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE:

www.acer.org/snapshots

ENQUIRIES:

snapshots@acer.org

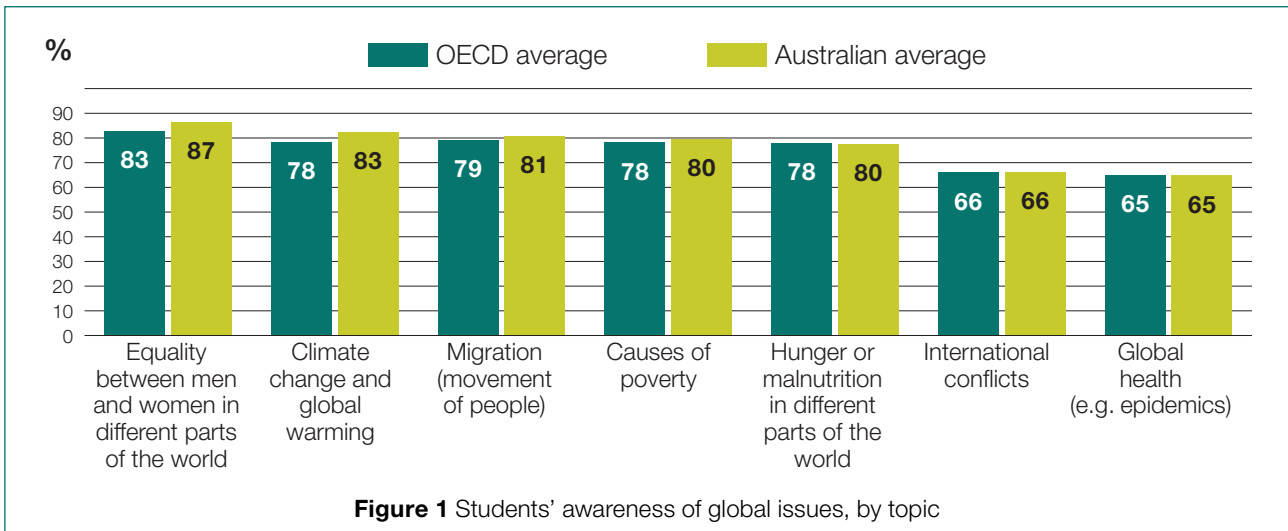
How aware of global issues are Australian 15-year-olds?

The most recent OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey enables educators, policy makers and the wider community to compare Australian students with each other, as well as with their counterparts across the world.

PISA measures the extent to which 15-year-old students near the end of compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills that young adults need to meet the challenges of the future.

A new module in PISA 2018 looked at Global Competence, and the first dimension to be examined for Australian students is their awareness of global issues. Students were asked to report the extent to which they knew about various issues (*I have never heard of this; I have heard about this but I would not be able to explain what it is really about; I know something about this and could explain the general issue; and I am familiar with this and I would be able to explain this well*). They responded to statements about seven issues:

- ▶ climate change and global warming
- ▶ global health (e.g. epidemics)
- ▶ migration
- ▶ international conflicts
- ▶ hunger or malnutrition in different parts of the world
- ▶ causes of poverty, and
- ▶ equality between men and women in different parts of the world.



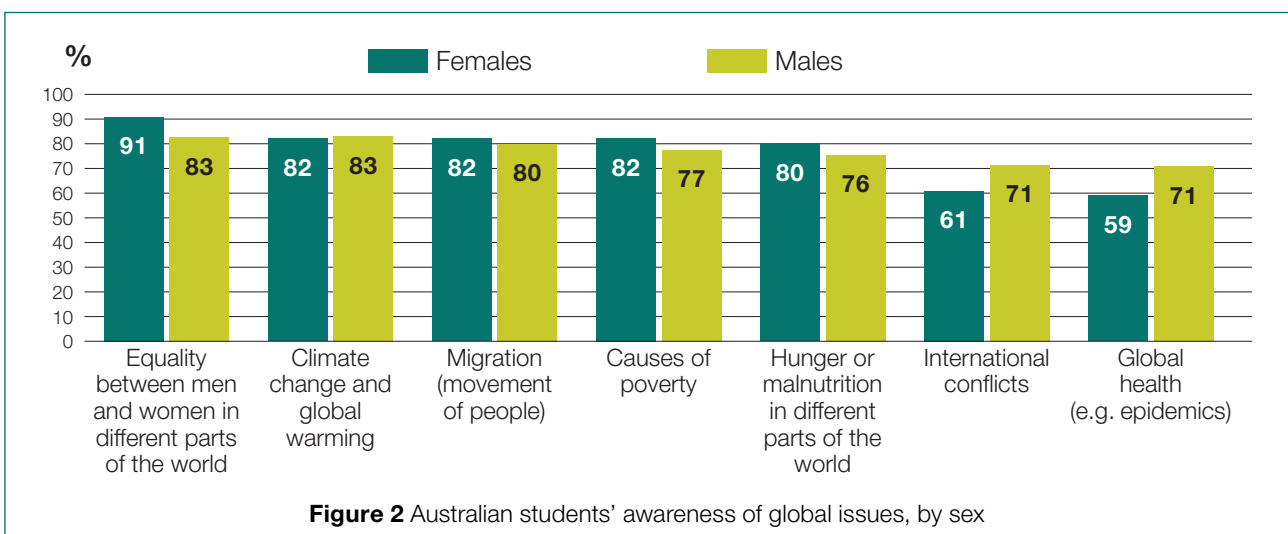
Responses were used to construct an index of awareness of global issues. Positive values on this index mean that the student expressed a greater awareness about global issues than the average student across OECD countries.

Australian students overall had a score of 0.10 on this index, slightly higher than the OECD average of 0.01. There were wide variations internationally – students in Canada (0.14), and Ireland (0.12) having a similar score to Australia but students in New Zealand (-0.06) and Korea (-0.26) for example, reporting lower levels of awareness than on average across the OECD. There were no significant gender differences found on the overall average index, but there were significant differences in the index for disadvantaged

students (-0.20) compared to that of advantaged students (0.41) on average across the OECD.

For further analysis, responses were grouped into two categories, 1) *I have never heard of this; I have heard about this but I would not be able to explain what it is really about;* and 2) *I know something about this and could explain the general issue; I am familiar with this and I would be able to explain this well.*

The item, regarding equality between men and women were the most familiar to Australian students, and students across the OECD on average, with 87% of Australian students and 83% from the OECD on average responding that they could at least explain the issue generally (Figure 1). The next highest level of awareness for Australian students was for climate change and global



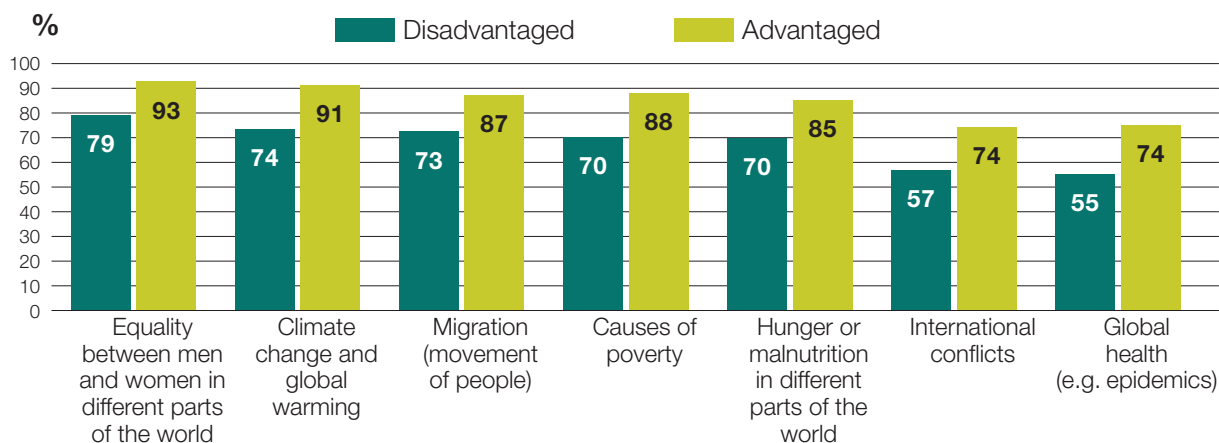


Figure 3 Australian students' awareness of global issues, by socioeconomic background

warming – 83% of Australian students compared with 78% across the OECD on average were familiar with this issue. Of particular interest, given events of the past twelve months or so, is that the least widely understood issue was global health – e.g. epidemics. The second least understood topic was global conflicts.

Were there differences between males' and females' awareness?

Overall, female students in Australia reported greater awareness of global issues than male students (Figure 2). Female students reported significantly higher awareness about issues to do with gender equality, migration, causes of poverty and hunger or malnutrition, while Australian males reported significantly and substantially¹ higher levels of awareness than their female counterparts in international conflicts and global health. Climate change and global warming was the only issue on which there were no significant gender differences.

It is interesting that the largest gender gaps in awareness were on gender equity, where the gap was just over eight percentage points in favour of females, and on international conflict and global health, where the gap was almost where the gap was almost 11 percentage points and 12 percentage points, respectively in favour of males.

What about differences by socioeconomic background?

There were also significant differences found for students grouped by socioeconomic background (Figure 3). These were all significant, unlike the gender differences. Advantaged students reported a much greater awareness than disadvantaged students of all issues. The smallest difference was with gender equity (79% of disadvantaged students compared to 93% of advantaged students) while the largest was with global health (55% of disadvantaged students compared to 75% of advantaged students). The OECD argue that “such differences in awareness related to socioeconomic status might be the result of unequal access to opportunities at school to learn about global issues, resulting from measures that separate or sort students” (p. 71).

Self-efficacy regarding global issues

PISA has traditionally asked students to judge their capabilities in academic areas such as mathematics, science and reading. In 2018, students were asked how well they thought they could do certain tasks related to global competence. Students responded on a four-point scale: *I could not do this, I would struggle to do this on my own, I could do this with a bit of effort,*

¹ While all differences discussed in this Snapshot are statistically significant, meaning that the difference meets the requirement of statistical significance at the 0.05 level, not all of these significant differences are substantial, in terms of their size. Given the large numbers of students who participate in PISA each cycle, it is possible to find some significant differences that are quite small, a matter of one or two percentage points.

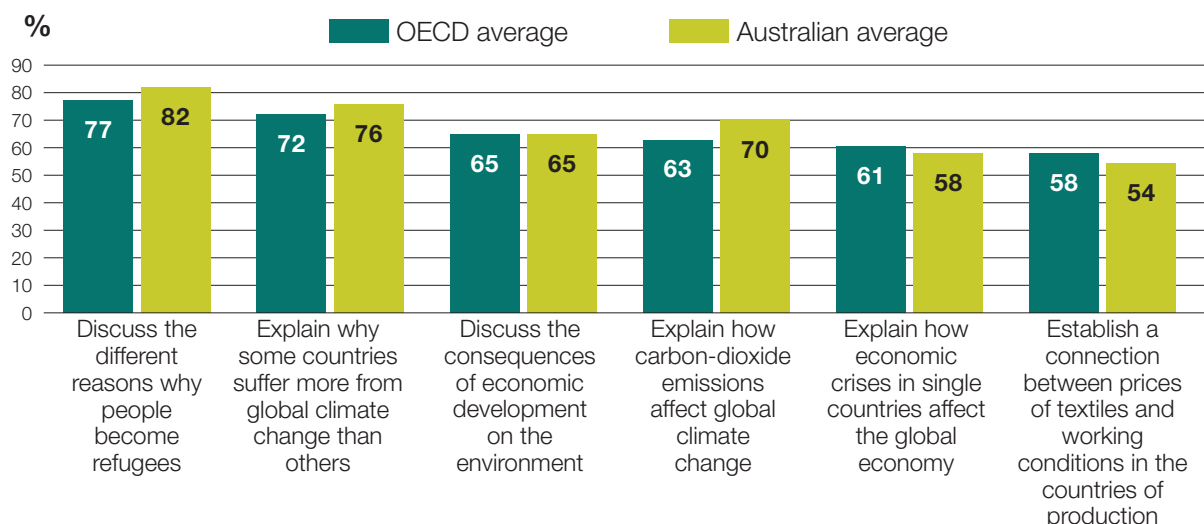


Figure 4 Self-efficacy regarding global issues, by task

and I could do this easily. Student responses were combined to form an index of self-efficacy regarding global competence index. The OECD average was set to 0, so positive scores on this index mean that the students expressed greater self-efficacy than the average student across the OECD.

Australian students scored 0.05 on this index, which was significantly higher than the OECD average, but significantly lower than for students in Canada (0.14), Germany (0.21), Singapore (0.15), and Korea (0.16). It was, however, significantly higher than for students in New Zealand (-0.08), Scotland (-0.19) or the Slovak Republic (-0.42).

Figure 4 shows the proportion of students on average over the OECD and in Australia who responded either that *I could do this with a bit of effort* or *I could do this easily* for each of the tasks.

Of the six questions regarding self-efficacy about global issues, students both on average across the OECD and in Australia responded that they are most confident discussing the different reasons people become refugees. Some 77% of

students on average across the OECD, and 82% of students in Australia reported that they could discuss the different reasons for this easily or with some effort, as opposed to not being able or struggling to do it.

Around 72% of students internationally and 76% of Australian students felt similarly that they could explain why some countries suffer more than others from global climate change. A significantly lower proportion of Australian students than on average over the OECD reported that they were confident discussing how economic crises in single countries affects the global economy (61% OECD average, 58% Australian average) or establishing a connection between prices of textiles and working conditions in the countries of production (58% OECD average, 54% Australia average). A possible reason for these differences is that students may be more familiar with topics covered more extensively in the media, such as the refugee crisis and climate change, than with topics requiring more technical knowledge.



ASK YOURSELF:

- ▶ Why would there be gender differences in student responses to these issues?
- ▶ Does my school explore issues such as these and would this give my students the knowledge they need to be responsible global citizens?