

# Educational Inequality and its Intergenerational Persistence: International Comparisons

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**Abstract:** The standardization of test scores, which is a regular feature of most data on educational achievement, prevents a cardinal interpretation of inequality measures defined over those variables. Many common measures are not even ordinally equivalent to the original inequality in the underlying data. This paper presents comparable, ordinally equivalent measures of inequality in educational achievement for 57 countries for which PISA surveys were conducted in 2006. We also assess the robustness of the measures to sample selection biases arising from the PISA sampling frame. A simple measure of the intergenerational persistence of inequality (IPI) – or inequality of opportunity – is also computed for all countries. This measure is shown to be cardinally insensitive to standardization. As an application, we present its correlations with mean test scores, GDP per capita, the composition of educational spending, and tracking at the secondary school level. Continental European and Latin American countries display greater intergenerational transmission of inequality in educational achievement than nations in Asia, Scandinavia and North America. The share of spending in primary schooling (tracking in secondary schools) is negatively (positively) associated with IPI.

**Keywords:** Educational inequality; intergenerational transmission; inequality of opportunity; tracking.

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