

## EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

A well-educated and well-trained population is essential for the social and economic well-being of countries. Education plays a key role in providing individuals with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to participate effectively in society and in the economy. It also contributes to the expansion of scientific and cultural knowledge. Educational attainment is a commonly used proxy for the stock of “human capital”, i.e. the skills available in the population and the labour force.

### Definition

Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education completed by each person, shown as a percentage of all persons in that age group. Tertiary education includes both tertiary-type “A programmes”, which are largely theoretically-based and designed to provide qualifications for entry to advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements; and tertiary-type “B programmes”, which are more occupationally-oriented and lead to direct labour

market access. Upper secondary education typically follows completion of lower secondary schooling. Lower secondary education completes provision of basic education, usually in a more subject-oriented way and with more specialised teachers.

### Comparability

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97) is used to define the levels of education in a comparable way across countries. The *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics* describes of ISCED-97 education programmes and attainment levels and their mappings for each country.

Data on educational attainment of 25-year-olds and older are based on UNESCO for Argentina, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

### Overview

OECD countries have experienced significant increases in the proportion of the adult population attaining tertiary education over the last decades. In 2009, over 30% of the population aged between 25 and 64 has attained tertiary level education, in more than half of OECD countries. In Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand and the United States, this share is significantly higher, while in the Russian Federation this figure exceeds 50%. Conversely, in Italy, Portugal and Turkey, as well as some of the other G20 countries (Argentina, Brazil, China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa), the share of the population between the ages of 25 to 64 with tertiary attainment is below 15%.

An indication of long-term trends in educational attainment can be obtained by comparing the current attainment levels of younger and older age cohorts. For instance, comparing tertiary attainment levels, in almost all countries the proportion of 25-34 year-olds is greater than that among the generation about to leave the labour market (55-64 year olds). Korea shows the largest increase in tertiary attainment over the past 30 years with almost 50 percentage points of the difference between the proportion of young adults and older adults with tertiary education; this is more than 30 percentage points higher than the OECD average. In contrast, other OECD countries over the same period experienced only marginal increases (Germany and the United States), or even declines (Israel).

On average across OECD countries, 27% of adults now have only primary or lower secondary levels of education, 44% have upper secondary education and 30% have a tertiary qualification. Over the past decade most of the changes in educational attainment have occurred at the low and high ends of the attainment distribution. Between 1999 and 2009 the share of those who have not attained an upper secondary education decreased by 10 percentage points while the proportion with tertiary education increased by 8.9 percentage points across OECD countries. This largely reflects the fact that older workers with low levels of education have moved out of the labour force, and that many countries have expanded their focus on higher education in recent years.

### Sources

- OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance*, OECD Publishing.

### Further information

#### Analytical publications

- Hansson, B. (2007), “Effects of Tertiary Expansion: Crowding-out effects and labour market matches for the higher educated”, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 10.
- OECD (2011), *Reviews of National Policies for Education*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2010), *Trends Shaping Education*, OECD Publishing.

#### Methodological publications

- OECD (2004), *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics: Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications*, OECD Publishing.

### Online databases

- OECD Education Statistics.

### Websites

- OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), [www.oecd.org/edu/ceri](http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri).
- OECD Education at a Glance, [www.oecd.org/edu/eag2011](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2011).



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## Education attainment

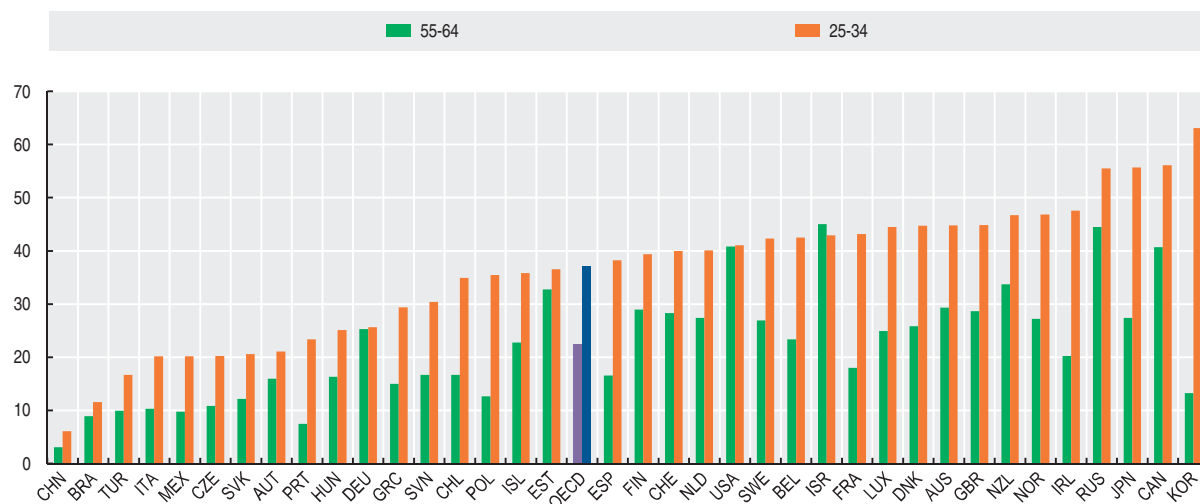
As a percentage of total population in that age group

	Population with tertiary education					Population aged 25-64								
	25-64	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	Below upper secondary			Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary			Tertiary education		
						1998	1999	2009 or latest available year	1998	1999	2009 or latest available year	1998	1999	2009 or latest available year
Australia	36.9	44.8	38.0	33.6	29.3	44.0	42.6	29.0	30.6	30.7	34.1	25.4	26.7	36.9
Austria	19.0	21.1	20.3	18.3	15.9	25.8	24.9	18.1	60.5	61.4	62.8	13.7	13.7	19.0
Belgium	33.4	42.5	36.9	30.3	23.4	43.3	42.6	29.4	31.4	30.7	37.2	25.3	26.7	33.4
Canada	49.5	56.1	55.7	45.1	40.7	21.4	20.5	12.4	40.4	40.2	38.1	38.2	39.3	49.5
Chile	24.4	34.9	24.2	20.2	16.6	..	..	31.0	..	..	44.7	..	..	24.4
Czech Republic	15.5	20.2	14.8	15.6	10.8	14.7	14.0	8.6	74.9	75.2	75.9	10.4	10.8	15.5
Denmark	34.3	44.7	39.0	28.3	25.8	21.5	20.4	23.7	53.2	53.1	42.0	25.4	26.5	34.3
Estonia	36.0	36.6	36.3	37.7	32.8	..	..	11.1	..	..	53.0	..	..	36.0
Finland	37.3	39.4	44.5	37.5	29.0	31.0	28.5	18.0	38.8	40.2	44.7	30.2	31.3	37.3
France	28.9	43.2	32.3	22.2	18.0	39.3	38.1	30.0	40.1	40.4	41.1	20.6	21.5	28.9
Germany	26.4	25.7	27.8	26.4	25.3	16.2	18.8	14.5	60.8	58.3	59.1	23.0	22.9	26.4
Greece	23.5	29.4	26.4	21.6	15.0	53.9	52.2	38.8	29.3	30.4	37.7	16.8	17.3	23.5
Hungary	19.9	25.1	19.0	18.3	16.3	36.7	32.6	19.4	50.1	53.8	60.7	13.2	13.5	19.9
Iceland	32.8	35.8	38.2	31.7	22.8	44.6	44.0	34.1	34.4	33.6	33.1	21.0	22.4	32.8
Ireland	35.9	47.6	39.4	28.2	20.2	48.7	44.9	28.5	30.2	34.7	35.7	21.1	20.5	35.9
Israel	44.9	42.9	47.1	44.9	45.0	..	..	18.2	..	..	36.9	..	..	44.9
Italy	14.5	20.2	15.4	11.8	10.3	59.3	57.8	45.7	32.1	33.0	39.8	8.6	9.3	14.5
Japan	43.8	55.7	48.7	44.7	27.4	20.0	19.0	..	49.4	49.1	56.2	30.6	31.8	43.8
Korea	38.8	63.1	44.3	25.8	13.2	33.6	32.6	20.1	43.9	44.3	41.2	22.5	23.1	38.8
Luxembourg	34.8	44.5	37.9	29.0	24.9	..	44.1	22.7	..	37.5	42.5	..	18.3	34.8
Mexico	15.9	20.2	14.9	15.1	9.8	72.0	72.8	64.8	14.5	14.0	19.3	13.5	13.2	15.9
Netherlands	32.8	40.1	33.6	30.8	27.4	35.7	45.3	26.6	40.1	32.1	40.6	24.2	22.6	32.8
New Zealand	40.1	46.7	41.2	37.8	33.7	38.6	38.0	27.8	33.7	33.5	32.2	27.6	28.5	40.0
Norway	36.7	46.8	39.7	32.8	27.2	15.4	15.1	19.3	57.2	57.4	44.0	27.4	27.5	36.7
Poland	21.2	35.4	20.9	13.1	12.6	21.7	21.5	12.0	67.4	67.2	66.8	10.9	11.3	21.2
Portugal	14.7	23.3	15.1	11.0	7.4	82.1	81.2	70.1	9.5	10.2	15.2	8.3	8.7	14.7
Slovak Republic	15.8	20.6	14.6	14.1	12.1	19.8	17.6	9.1	69.9	72.4	75.2	10.3	10.1	15.8
Slovenia	23.3	30.4	26.0	19.4	16.7	..	..	16.7	..	..	60.0	..	..	23.3
Spain	29.7	38.2	33.5	25.2	16.6	67.1	64.9	48.2	13.2	14.1	22.1	19.7	21.0	29.7
Sweden	33.0	42.3	34.6	28.7	26.9	24.4	23.7	14.2	53.9	54.2	52.7	21.7	22.1	33.0
Switzerland	35.0	40.0	37.9	33.0	28.3	16.3	16.1	13.1	60.8	60.3	51.7	22.9	23.6	35.2
Turkey	12.7	16.6	11.3	9.7	9.9	78.2	77.5	68.9	14.4	14.4	18.3	7.5	8.1	12.7
United Kingdom	36.9	44.9	38.9	34.1	28.7	39.9	38.4	26.3	36.3	36.7	36.8	23.8	24.9	36.9
United States	41.2	41.1	43.1	39.9	40.8	13.5	13.1	11.4	51.6	51.2	47.4	34.9	35.8	41.2
OECD average	30.0	37.1	32.1	26.9	22.4	37.2	36.8	26.7	42.2	42.1	44.1	20.6	21.1	30.0
Brazil	10.9	11.6	11.3	10.7	8.9	..	..	59.3	..	..	29.8	..	..	10.9
China	4.6	6.1	4.8	3.0	3.1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Indonesia	4.5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Russian Federation	54.0	55.5	58.1	54.3	44.5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
South Africa	4.3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932506609>

## Population that has attained at least tertiary education

Percentage, 2009 or latest available year

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932506628>

