

## 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

### How successful are students in moving from education to work?

- Across OECD countries, a 15-year-old in 2009 could expect to spend about 6.9 additional years in formal education.
- As labour market conditions worsened during the recent economic crisis, the expected number of years in education slightly increased, as did the time spent in unemployment and out of the labour force.
- On average, completing upper secondary education reduces unemployment among 20-24 year-olds by 7.4 percentage points and among 25-29 year-olds by 6 percentage points.
- As educational attainment increases, the incidence of long-term unemployment decreases.

#### Significance

The recession that followed the financial crisis of 2008 has led to a big increase in unemployment in OECD countries. When the labour market deteriorates, those making the transition from school to work are often the first to encounter difficulties. This spread looks at the number of years young people can be expected to spend in education, employment and non-employment. In the wake of the economic crisis, long-term unemployment among young adults is likely to rise in most countries, especially for those who have not completed upper secondary education.

#### Findings

On average, a 15-year-old can expect to spend 6.9 years in formal education, but this rises to a high of at least 8 years in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia, and less than 6 years in Brazil, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Spain, and Turkey. In addition, an average 15-year-old can expect over the next 15 years to hold a job for about 5 years and 10 months, to be unemployed for 11 months and to be out of the labour market – neither in education nor seeking work – for 1 year and 4 months.

Unemployment rates among youth not in school vary according to their level of educational attainment, an indication of how further education can improve their economic opportunities. Young people (15-19 years old) who are not in employment, education or training, or “NEETs”, have attracted considerable attention in some countries, in part because they often receive little or no support from the welfare system. On average across OECD countries, the proportion of NEETs among 15-19 year-olds is 8.4%, ranging from less than 3% in Denmark, Luxembourg and Slovenia to 29% in Turkey (see Table C4.4a in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

With jobs hard to find, returning to or remaining in education serves as an alternative for many youth. Between 2008 and 2009, the proportion of 15-29 year-olds in education in OECD countries rose by 0.5 percentage points. Overall, data suggest that these increases in participation largely reflect people remaining in – rather than returning to – education.

Since it has become the norm in most OECD countries to complete upper secondary education, those who fail to do so are much more likely to have difficulty finding a job when they enter the labour market. In Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, the Slovak

Republic, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, the unemployment rate for 20-24 year-old non-students with less than upper secondary education attainment is 15% or more. Completing upper secondary education reduces the unemployment rate among this age group by an average of 7.4 percentage points (see Table C4.3 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

Completing tertiary education reduces the unemployment rate among 25-29 year-olds who are not in school by an average of 2.1 percentage points, but actual figures vary considerably across countries. For example, in Australia, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, the proportion of unemployed 25-29 year-olds who have completed tertiary education does not exceed 3%. In France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey, this figure is at least 6%. Conversely, some countries are more able than others to provide employment for young adults with relatively low levels of educational attainment. For example, in Greece, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, Switzerland and Turkey, 25-29 year-old tertiary graduates actually have higher unemployment rates than those with lower levels of educational attainment.

#### Definitions

Data are collected as part of the annual OECD Labour Force Survey, and usually refer to the first quarter, or the average of the first three months of the calendar year, thereby excluding summer employment. For certain European countries, the data come from the annual European Labour Force Survey. Persons in education include those attending school part-time and full-time. Non-formal education or educational activities of very short duration are excluded.

Information on data for Israel:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

#### Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2011* (Indicator C4).

Areas covered include:

- Expected years in education and not in education for 15-29 year-olds, as well as trends and gender differences.
- Transition from school to work for different age cohorts.

#### Further reading from the OECD

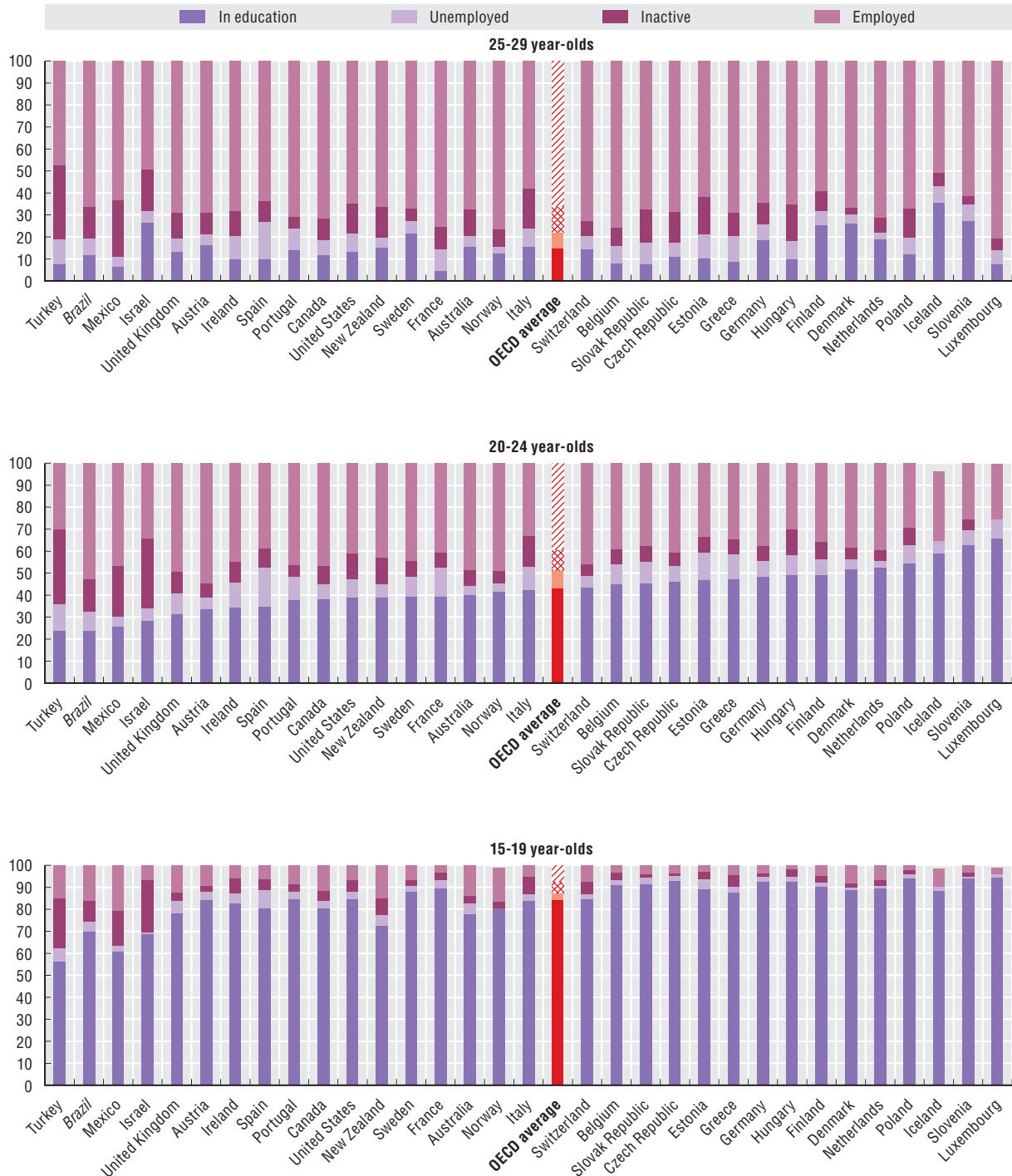
*Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students* (2010).  
*From Education to Work* (2005).

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Figure 1.15. **Distribution of work status among young adults, 2009**

These figures show the distribution of work status among young adults, by age group. Young adults leaving school and entering a difficult labour market are more likely to become unemployed or fall outside the labour force entirely.



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table C4.2a, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464619>.



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