How many secondary students go on to tertiary education?

– *Since 1995, the proportion of young people graduating from upper secondary programmes has grown by seven percentage points on average in OECD countries with comparable data.*

– *Girls are now more likely than boys to complete upper secondary education in OECD countries, a reversal of historical trends.*

– *Entry rates to university-level education increased by more than 20 percentage points on average in OECD countries between 1995 and 2008.*

Significance

This indicator shows how many students finish secondary education and then make the transition into tertiary education. Completing upper secondary education does not in itself guarantee that students are adequately equipped with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to enter the labour market or tertiary studies. However, research has shown that young people in OECD countries who do not finish secondary education face severe difficulties when it comes to finding work.

Findings

In 22 of the 26 OECD and partner countries with comparable data, the percentage of young people graduating from upper secondary education rates exceeds 70%. In Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and *Israel* it is at least 90%. Graduation rates for girls exceed those for boys in almost all OECD and partner countries, except Switzerland and Turkey. The gap is greatest in Denmark, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain and *Slovenia*, where girls' graduation rates exceed those of boys by more than 10 percentage points (see Table A2.1 in *Education at a Glance 2010*).

In most countries, upper secondary education is designed to prepare students to enter university-level education (tertiary-type A). (In Germany, Switzerland and *Slovenia*, however, students are more likely to graduate programmes that lead to vocationally oriented tertiary education, or tertiary-type B.) Despite this, there is significant variation between countries in the numbers of young people graduating from upper secondary who actually go on to university. For instance, in Belgium, Chile, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan and *Estonia* and *Israel*, the gap is more than 20 percentage points, suggesting that many young people who could go on to university do not do so. It should be noted that the structure of national education systems, such as the prevalence of vocationally oriented tertiary education, and the requirement to perform military service account for some of these variations.

In Australia, Austria, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the *Russian Federation* and *Slovenia*, the percentage of young people graduating from upper secondary education is substantially lower than the percentage entering university-level education. For some countries, notably Australia, Austria, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, this apparent anomaly is explained in large part by the presence of international students. When data on such students are excluded, the entry rate for university-level education in Australia, for example, falls by 26 percentage points (see Chart A2.5 in *Education at a Glance 2010*). In Switzerland, the *Russian Federation* and *Slovenia*, the explanation can lie in students graduating from upper secondary programmes designed to prepare them for vocationally oriented tertiary education but who later enter university-level education.

Trends

The proportion of students graduating from upper secondary programmes grew by seven percentage points on average in OECD countries with comparable data between 1995 and 2008. Entry rates to university-level education also rose substantially, by nearly 20 percentage points.

Definitions

Data for the 2007-08 school year are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics, administered by the OECD in 2009. Upper secondary graduation rates are calculated for the years 2005-08 as net graduation rates, which represent the estimated percentage of the age cohort that will complete education at those levels. Gross graduation rates are presented for the years 1995, 2000-04 for all countries. The net entry rate for a specific age is obtained by dividing the number of first-time entrants of that age to each type of tertiary education by the total population in the corresponding age group.

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 2010* (Indicator A2).

Areas covered include:

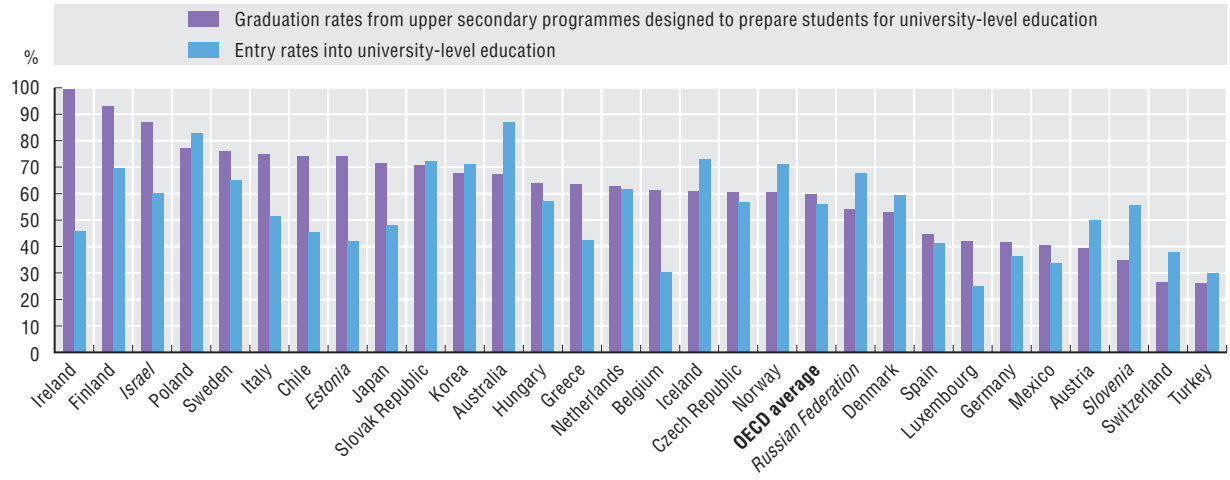
– Current upper secondary graduation rates and trends.

– Graduation rates from non-tertiary post-secondary education.

– Entry rates by field of education.

Figure 1.5. **Access to university-level education for upper secondary graduates, 2008**

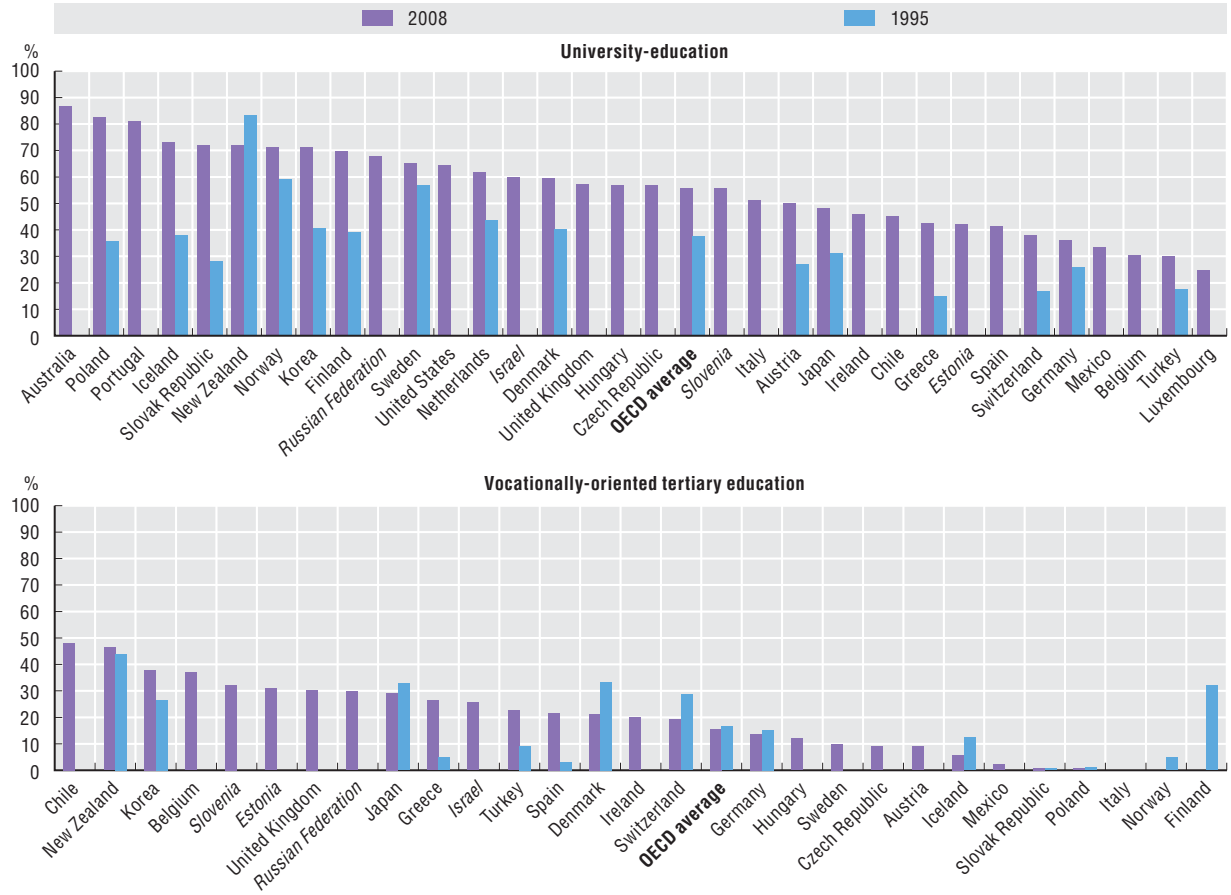
This figure shows the percentage of young people graduating from upper secondary programmes who go on to study at university level. In some countries (e.g. Australia), the proportion for the latter is higher than for the former – an apparent anomaly that may be explained by high numbers of international students at tertiary level.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance* 2010, A2.1 and A2.3, available at *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310111*.

Figure 1.6. **Trends in entry rates to tertiary education (1995, 2008)**

These figures show the growth – or otherwise – in the percentage of young people entering university-level education and vocationally oriented tertiary education. Entry rates have risen in most OECD countries.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance* 2010, Table A2.4, available at *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310111*.