

## 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

### How many young people enter tertiary education?

- Based on current patterns of entry, it is estimated that an average of 59% of today's young adults in OECD countries will enter university-level programmes and 19% will enter vocationally oriented programmes over their lifetimes.
- Between 1995 and 2009, entry rates for university-level programmes increased by an average of nearly 25 percentage points across OECD countries, while entry rates for vocationally oriented programmes remained stable.
- The age at which young people enter tertiary education varies widely among countries, from a median age of 18.6 in Japan to 23.7 in Israel.

#### Significance

This indicator shows how many students will enter a specific type of tertiary education programme during their lifetimes. It also sheds light on the accessibility and perceived value of attending tertiary programmes, and provides some indication of the degree to which a population is acquiring the high-level skills and knowledge valued by today's labour market. High entry and participation rates in tertiary education imply that a highly educated labour force is being developed and maintained.

#### Findings

It is estimated that 59% of young adults in OECD countries will enter university-level programmes (largely theory-based) during their lifetimes if current patterns of entry continue. In several countries, at least 70% of young adults enter these kinds of programmes, while in Belgium, China, Indonesia and Mexico, at most 35% enter (see Figure 1.7).

The proportion of students entering vocationally oriented programmes is generally smaller, mainly because these programmes are less developed in most OECD countries. Proportions range from 3% or fewer in Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal and the Slovak Republic; to 30% or more in Argentina, Belgium, Estonia, Korea, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey and the United Kingdom; and to at least 50% in Chile and New Zealand. Belgium, Chile and China are the three countries where more students entered vocationally oriented programmes than university-level programmes in 2009.

On average, in all OECD countries with comparable data, the proportion of young adults entering university-level programmes in 2009 increased by 12 percentage points since 2000 and by nearly 25 percentage points since 1995. In Australia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Korea, Poland and the Slovak Republic, entry rates into these programmes increased by more than 20 percentage points between 2000 and 2009.

Only Finland, Hungary, New Zealand and Spain have experienced a decline in entry rates into these programmes. In Hungary and Spain, the decrease is counterbalanced by a significant increase in entry rates into vocationally oriented programmes during the same period. In New Zealand, the rise and fall of entry rates between 2000 and 2009 closely mirrors the rise and fall of the number of international students over the same period.

Among OECD countries, 19% of young adults in OECD countries will enter vocationally oriented programmes during their lifetimes. Between 1995 and 2009, overall net entry rates into these programmes have remained relatively stable except in Spain and Turkey, where they have increased by 20 percentage points.

Traditionally, students enter academic programmes immediately after having completed upper secondary education, and this remains true in many countries. For example, in Belgium, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, 80% of all new entrants into university-level programmes are under 23 years of age (see Figure 1.8). In other countries, the transition from upper secondary to tertiary education may occur at a later age because of time spent in the labour force or the military.

#### Definitions

Data on trends in entry rates for the years 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 are based on a special survey carried out in OECD countries in January 2007. The net entry rate for a specific age is obtained by dividing the number of new 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 2011* (Indicator C2).

Areas covered include:

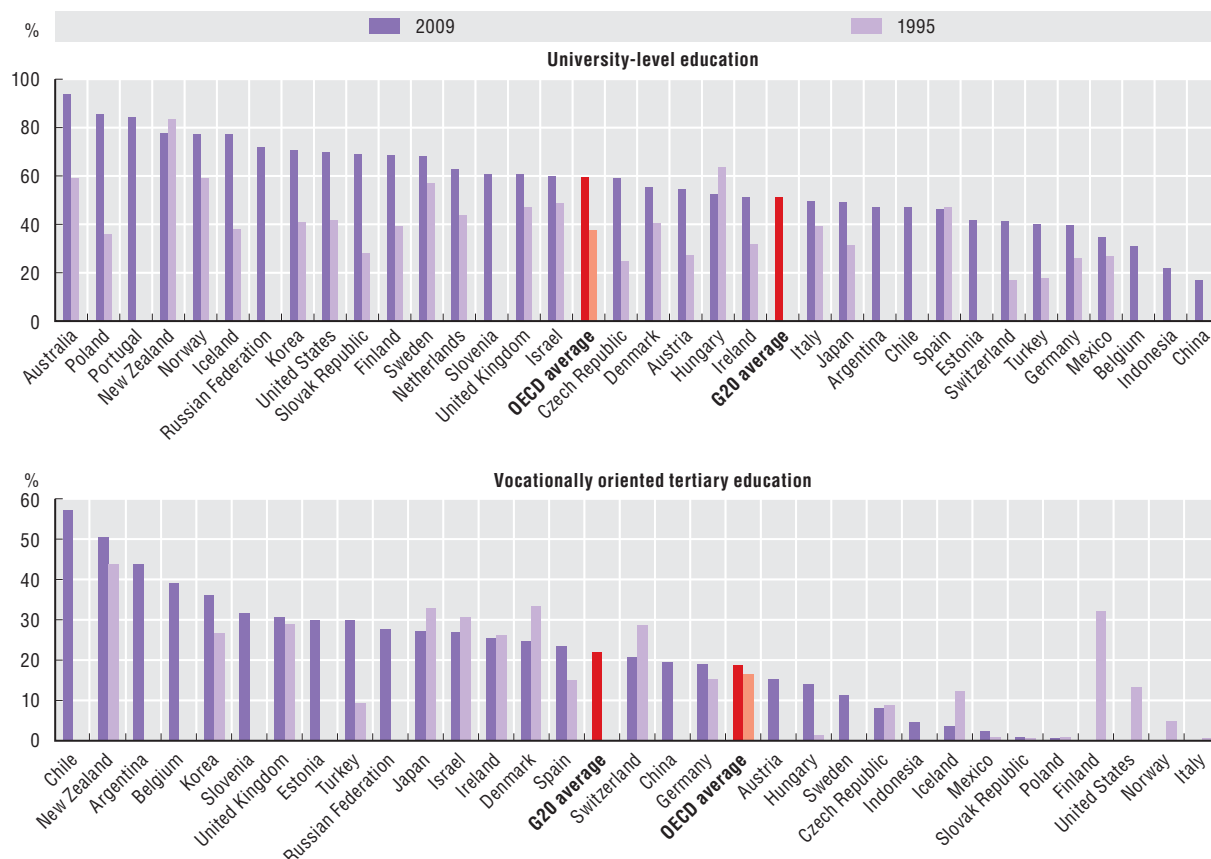
- Entry rates by level of education.
- Age of new entrants in tertiary education.
- Age distribution of new entrants.

# 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

## How many young people enter tertiary education?

Figure 1.7. **Entry rates into tertiary education (1995, 2009)**

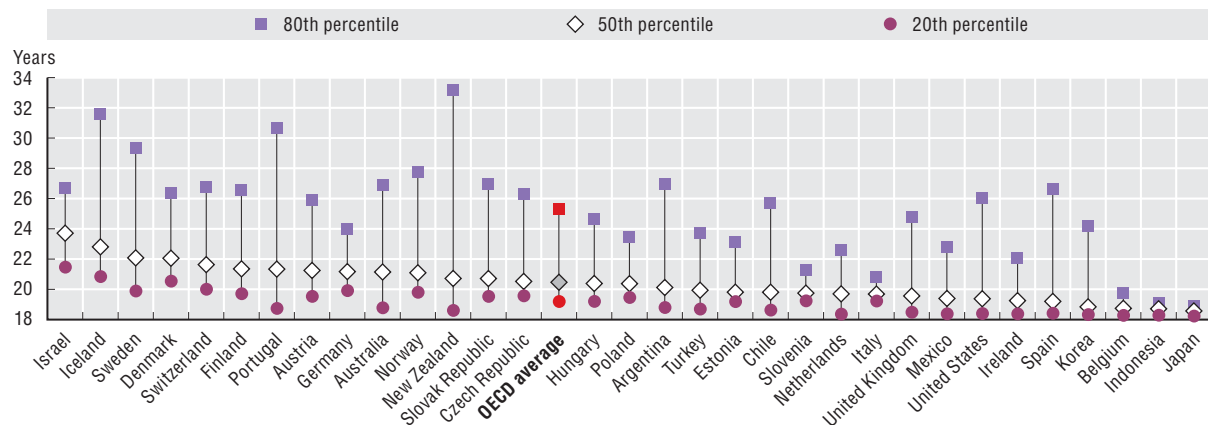
These figures show the growth – or otherwise – in the percentage of young people entering university-level education and vocationally oriented tertiary education. Entry rates have risen in most OECD countries.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table C2.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464448>.

Figure 1.8. **Age distribution of new entrants in university-level education, 2009**

This figure shows the age distribution of new entrants in university-level programmes, by percentage. For example, in Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, 80% of all first-time entrants into university-level programmes are under 23 years of age.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table C2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464429>.



**From:**  
**Education at a Glance 2011**  
Highlights

**Access the complete publication at:**  
[https://doi.org/10.1787/eag\\_highlights-2011-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2011-en)

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2011), "How many young people enter tertiary education?", in *Education at a Glance 2011: Highlights*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/eag\\_highlights-2011-6-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2011-6-en)

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to [rights@oecd.org](mailto:rights@oecd.org). Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com) or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at [contact@cfcopies.com](mailto:contact@cfcopies.com).