

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

How many young people finish secondary education?

- On average 84% of today's young people in OECD countries are expected to complete upper secondary education over their lifetimes, based on current patterns of graduation. For G20 countries, the level is 80%.
- Young women are now more likely than young men to graduate from upper secondary programmes in almost all OECD countries, a reversal of the historical pattern.
- More than 10% of upper secondary graduates in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Norway are 25 or older while in Iceland nearly 20% of them are.

Significance

This section shows how many students are expected to finish secondary education. Upper secondary education, aims to equip students with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to enter the labour market or tertiary education, and to become engaged citizens. Graduating from upper secondary education has become increasingly important in all countries, as the skills needed in the labour market are becoming more knowledge-based and as workers are progressively required to adapt to the uncertainties of a rapidly changing global economy. Young people in OECD countries who do not finish secondary education face severe difficulties when it comes to finding work. Policy makers are examining ways to reduce the number of early school-leavers, defined as those students who do not complete their upper secondary education. Internationally comparable measures of how many students successfully complete upper secondary programmes – which also show how many students are not completing these programmes – can assist efforts to that end.

Findings

First-time upper secondary graduation rates equal or exceed 75% in 25 of 31 countries with available data. In Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom, graduation rates equal or exceed 90%. Graduation rates for women now average 87% compared with 81% for men.

Among countries with available data, 72% of students who begin upper secondary education complete the programmes they entered within the theoretical duration of the programme. However, there are large differences in completion rates, depending on gender and type of programme. This also varies by country, as 95% of students in Korea complete their education in the stipulated time, whereas only 40% do in Luxembourg.

Students graduate for the first time at upper secondary level at the age of 19, on average among OECD countries. However, this age varies between countries: from 17 years

in Israel, New Zealand, Turkey and the United States to 22 or older in Iceland and Norway.

Traditionally, more men have graduated from pre-vocational and vocational programmes than women, but more young women are graduating from vocational programmes and approaching the graduation rates of their male counterparts. Today the average graduation rate for vocational programmes is 50% for men compared with 46% for women. And in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain, graduation rates for women are at least 5 percentage points higher than those for men.

Gender differences are also apparent in young people's choice of field of study when pursuing vocational education. Engineering, manufacturing and construction are by far the most popular fields of study for boys, (almost half of them chose these fields in 2012). On the other hand, girls are more dispersed among social sciences, business and law (24%), health and welfare (19%), and services (19%).

Trends

Since 2000, upper secondary graduation rates have increased by an average of almost 8 percentage points among OECD countries with comparable data. The greatest increase occurred in Mexico, which showed an annual growth rate of 3% between 2000 and 2012.

Definitions

Data refer to the 2011-12 academic year and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2012.

Data on trends in graduation rates at upper secondary level for the years 1995 and 2000 through 2004 are based on a special survey carried out in January 2007.

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 2014* (Indicator A2).

Areas covered include:

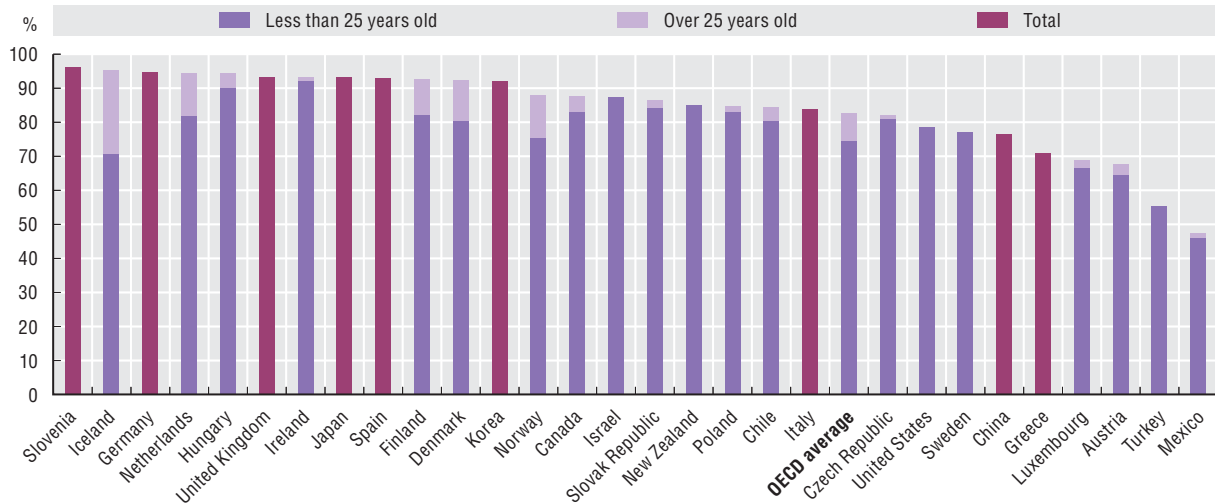
- Current upper secondary graduation rates and trends.
- Successful completion of upper secondary programmes, by programme orientation and gender.

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Figure 1.7. Upper secondary graduation rates, 2012

This figure shows the percentage of students who enter an upper secondary programme for the first time and who graduate from it in the amount of time normally allocated for completing the programme.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart A2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933115255>.

Figure 1.8. Average age of upper secondary graduates, 2012

This figure shows the average age of students who enter and successfully complete an upper secondary programme.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart A2.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933115274>.



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