

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

How many young people finish secondary education?

- Based on current patterns of graduation, it is estimated that an average of 82% of today's young people in OECD countries will complete upper secondary education over their lifetimes.
- Girls are now more likely than boys to complete upper secondary education in OECD countries, a reversal of historical trends.
- 68% of students who begin upper secondary education complete the programmes they entered within the theoretical duration of the programme.

Significance

This indicator shows how many students finish secondary 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 this level of 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 imply how many students don't complete those programmes – can assist efforts to that end.

Findings

In 21 of the 28 countries with available data, the percentage of young people graduating from upper secondary education exceeds 75%. In Finland, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom it is at least 90%. Graduation rates for girls exceed those for boys in almost all OECD countries, except Germany and Switzerland (see Table A2.1 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

In most countries, upper secondary education is designed to prepare students to enter university-level education (tertiary-type A). Nonetheless, there is significant variation between countries in the numbers of students who graduate from upper secondary education and those who actually enter tertiary education. For instance, in Belgium, Chile, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Italy and Japan, the gap is more than 20 percentage points, suggesting that many young people who could enter university (tertiary-type A) 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.

It is estimated that 68% of boys and girls who begin an upper secondary programme graduate within the planned

duration of the programme. However, in some countries, it is relatively common for students and apprentices to take a break from their studies and leave the educational system temporarily. The proportion of students who complete their education in the stipulated time varies considerably among countries, with Ireland having the highest share, at 87%, and Luxembourg the lowest share, at 41%. Giving two extra years to students to complete the programmes slightly changes the ranking of the countries, with Estonia and the United States both around 87%, and Iceland in last place, at 58% (see Table A2.4 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

Trends

Since 1995, the upper secondary graduation rate has increased by an average of eight percentage points among OECD countries with comparable data, with an annual growth rate of 0.7%. The greatest growth occurred in Chile and Portugal; both showed an annual growth rate of more than twice the OECD average between 1995 and 2009 (see Table A2.2 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

Definitions

Data for the 2008-09 school year are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics, administered by the OECD in 2010. Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary graduation rates are calculated for the years 2005-09 as net graduation rates, which represent the estimated percentage of an age cohort that will complete education at those levels. Gross graduation rates are presented for the years 1995, 2000-04, or for 2005-09 for countries that are unable to provide such detailed data.

Data on successful completion of upper secondary programmes come from a special survey in which 20 countries participated, administered by the OECD in December 2010.

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2011* (Indicator A2).

Areas covered include:

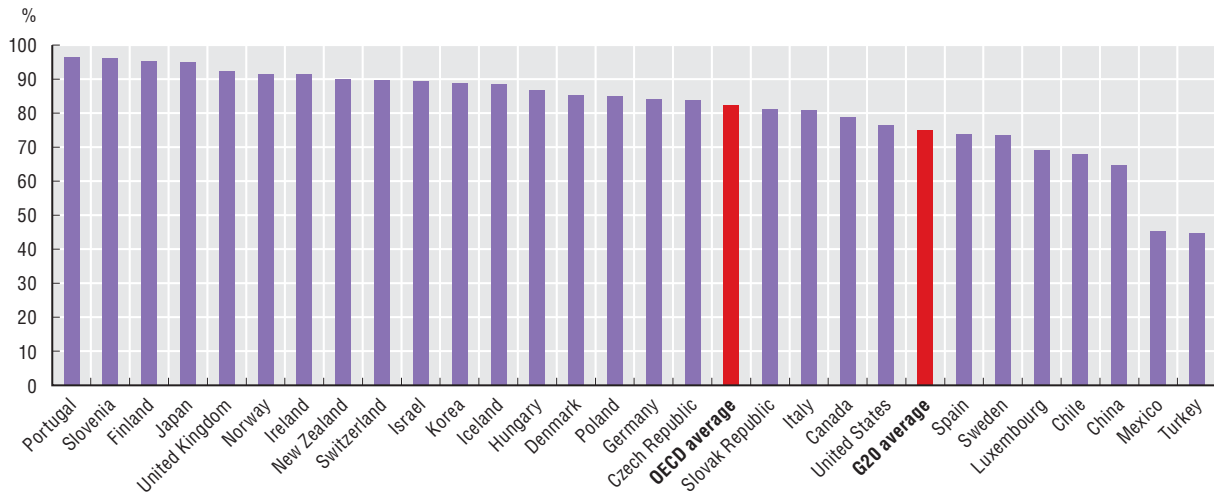
- Current upper secondary graduation rates and trends.
- Successful completion of upper secondary programmes, by programme orientation and gender.

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Figure 1.5. **Upper secondary graduation rates, 2009**

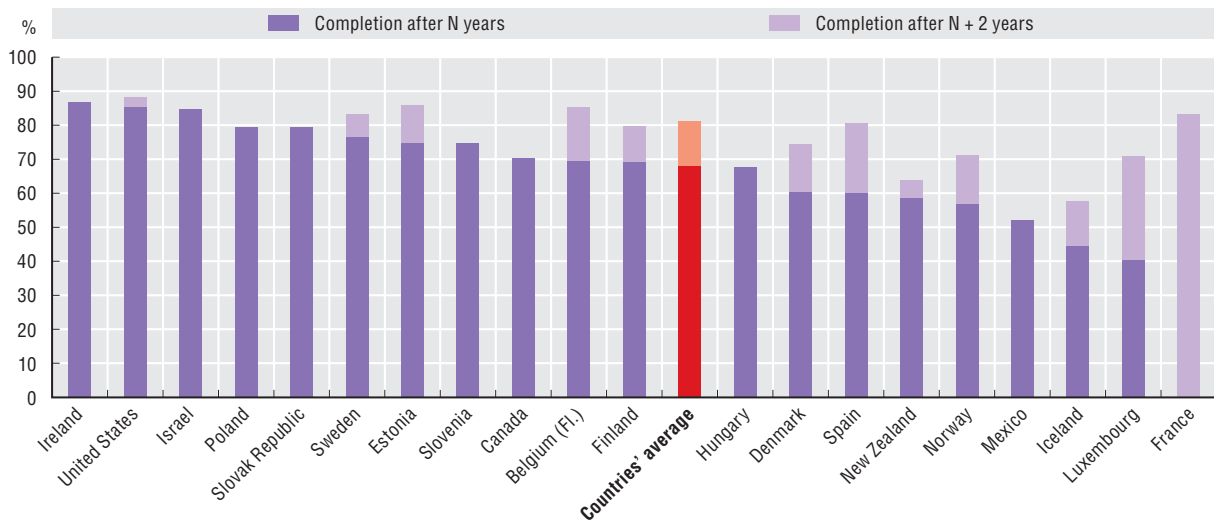
This figure shows the percentage of young people graduating from upper-secondary programmes. It represents the relationship between all the graduates in a given year and a particular population.



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table A2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932462358>.

Figure 1.6. **Successful completion of upper secondary programmes**

This figure shows the percentage of students who enter an upper secondary programme for the first time and who graduate from it. It represents the relationship between the graduates and the new entrants in the same level of education. The calculation is made in the amount of time normally allocated for completing the programme and also after an additional two years (for students who had to repeat a grade or who studied part-time, etc.).



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table A2.4, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932466690>.



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