

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

How many young people graduate from tertiary education?

- Across 27 OECD countries with comparable data, an average of 39% of young people complete university-level education.
- Graduation rates range from 20% and below in Mexico and Turkey to 50% and above in Iceland, New Zealand, Poland and the Slovak Republic.
- Graduation rates for young women are notably higher than those for young men – 46% versus 31%.

Significance

Tertiary education serves as an indicator of the capacity at which countries produce advanced knowledge. Countries with high graduation rates at tertiary level are also those most likely to be developing or maintaining a highly skilled labour force. Graduation rates from tertiary education (the structure and scope of which varies widely between countries) are influenced both by the degree of access to tertiary programmes and by the demand for higher skills in the labour market.

Findings

Graduation rates vary significantly between countries: In Mexico and Turkey, around 20% or less of young people graduate from university-level education (tertiary-type A); by contrast, the proportion is 50% or more in Iceland, New Zealand, Poland, the Slovak Republic. (Note that graduation rates for some countries, in particular Australia and New Zealand, are artificially inflated by the presence of international students. For more, see Table A3.3 in *Education at a Glance 2011*.)

Disparities in graduation rates are even greater between men and women. On average in OECD countries, significantly more women obtain university-level qualifications than men, 46% versus 31%. The gender gap in favour of women is at least 25 percentage points in Iceland, Poland and the Slovak Republic. In Germany, Mexico and Switzerland, graduation rates between sexes are quite balanced. In Japan and Turkey, by contrast, more men graduate from university-level education.

In 26 OECD countries with comparable data, about 10% of young people graduate from vocationally oriented tertiary education (tertiary-type B). Graduation rates are significant – in excess of 20% of young people – in only a few OECD countries, most notably Canada, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand and Slovenia. At the highest levels of tertiary education, about 1.5% of young people graduate from advanced research programmes in the OECD area. The proportion exceeds 2.5% in Finland, Germany, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland (see Table A3.3 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

Trends

On average across OECD countries with comparable data, graduation rates from university-level education have increased by 19 percentage points over the past 14 years, and there were increases – often quite substantial – in virtually every country for which data are available. The increase was particularly steep between 1995 and 2000, and then levelled off. During the past three years, graduation rates have remained relatively stable at around 38%. The most significant increases since 1995 were reported in Austria, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland and Turkey, where the annual growth rate is over 8%.

Definitions

Data for the 2008-09 academic year are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics that is administered annually by the OECD. Tertiary graduates are those who obtain a university degree, vocational qualifications, or advanced research degrees of doctorate standard. Net graduation rates represent the estimated percentage of an age group that will complete tertiary education. Data presented here refer only to first-time graduates.

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 A3).

Areas covered include:

- Graduation rates by gender.

Further reading from the OECD

Higher Education Management and Policy (journal).

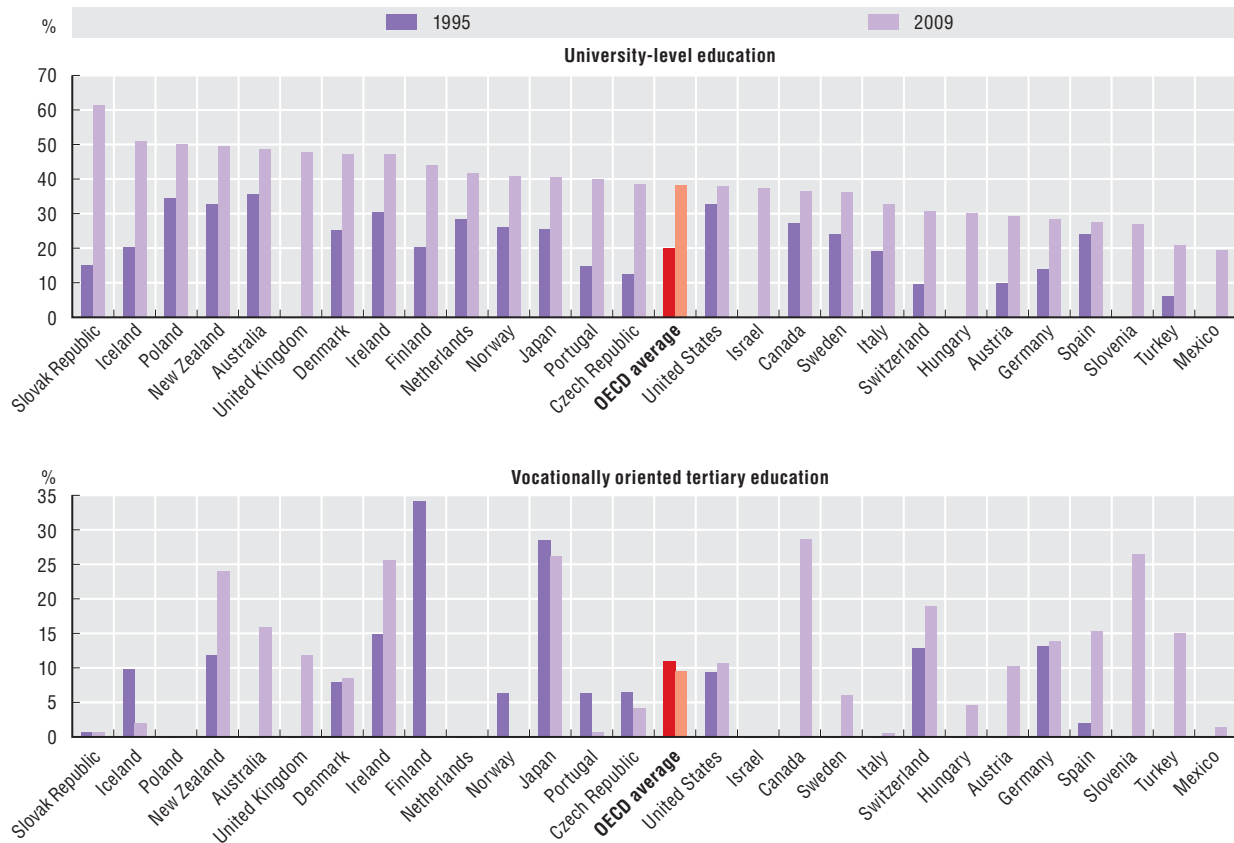
OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education (series of national reviews).

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Figure 1.9. **First-time graduation rates from tertiary education (1995, 2009)**

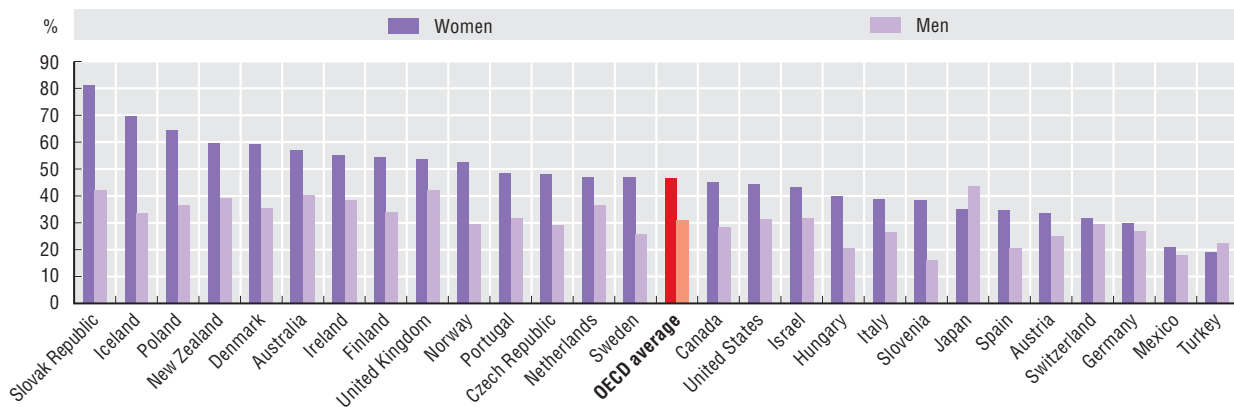
These figures show the growth or decline in the percentage of first-time graduates from university-level and vocationally oriented tertiary education.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table A3.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932462453>.

Figure 1.10. **Graduation rates from university-level education, by gender, 2009**

This figure shows the percentage of young men and young women who are first-time graduates from university-level education.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table A3.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932462434>.



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