

How many young people graduate from tertiary education?

- On average across 26 OECD countries with comparable data, 38% of young people complete university-level education.
- Graduation rates range from 10% or less in Luxembourg to 45% or more in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal and the Slovak Republic.
- Graduation rates for young women are notably higher than those for young men – 46% versus 30%.

Significance

Tertiary education serves as an indicator of the rate 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 Luxembourg, 10% or less of young people graduate from university-level education (tertiary-type A); by contrast, the proportion is at least 45% in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal and the Slovak Republic. (Note, however, that graduation rates for some countries with a higher number of international students, notably Australia and New Zealand, are artificially inflated by the presence of international students. For more, see Table A3.3 in *Education at a Glance 2010*.)

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 30%. The gender gap is at least 25 percentage points in Finland, Poland and the Slovak Republic and more than 40 percentage points in Iceland. In Germany, Luxembourg, Mexico, Switzerland and Turkey, the sexes are quite balanced. In Japan, by contrast, more men graduate from university-level education.

For the 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 1.4% of young people graduate from advanced research programmes in the OECD area. The proportion exceeds 2% in Finland, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (see Table A3.3 in *Education at a Glance 2010*).

Trends

On average across OECD countries, graduation rates from university-level education have increased by 21 percentage points over the past 13 years, and there were increases – often quite substantial – in virtually every country for which data are available. In Denmark, New Zealand, Norway and Spain, increases were more marked from 1995 to 2000 than from 2000 to 2008. New Zealand has even experienced a decline in its graduation rate since 2000, mainly due to the fluctuation of international students entering and leaving the country. Between, 2000 and 2008, the most significant increases were reported in the Czech Republic and Switzerland, where the rate almost tripled over the period. In Switzerland's case, this reflects the creation of a new class of universities of applied science. There were also notable increases in Iceland, Italy, Portugal and Turkey.

Definitions

Data for the 2007-08 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. (Graduation rates should not be confused with completion rates, which represent the proportion of people already enrolled in tertiary education who complete their course as opposed to those who drop out – see page 22.) 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 2010* (Indicator A3).

Areas covered include:

- Graduation rates by gender.
- Distribution of graduates, by field of education.
- Proportion of graduates following the Bologna structures.

Further reading from OECD

Higher Education Management and Policy (journal).

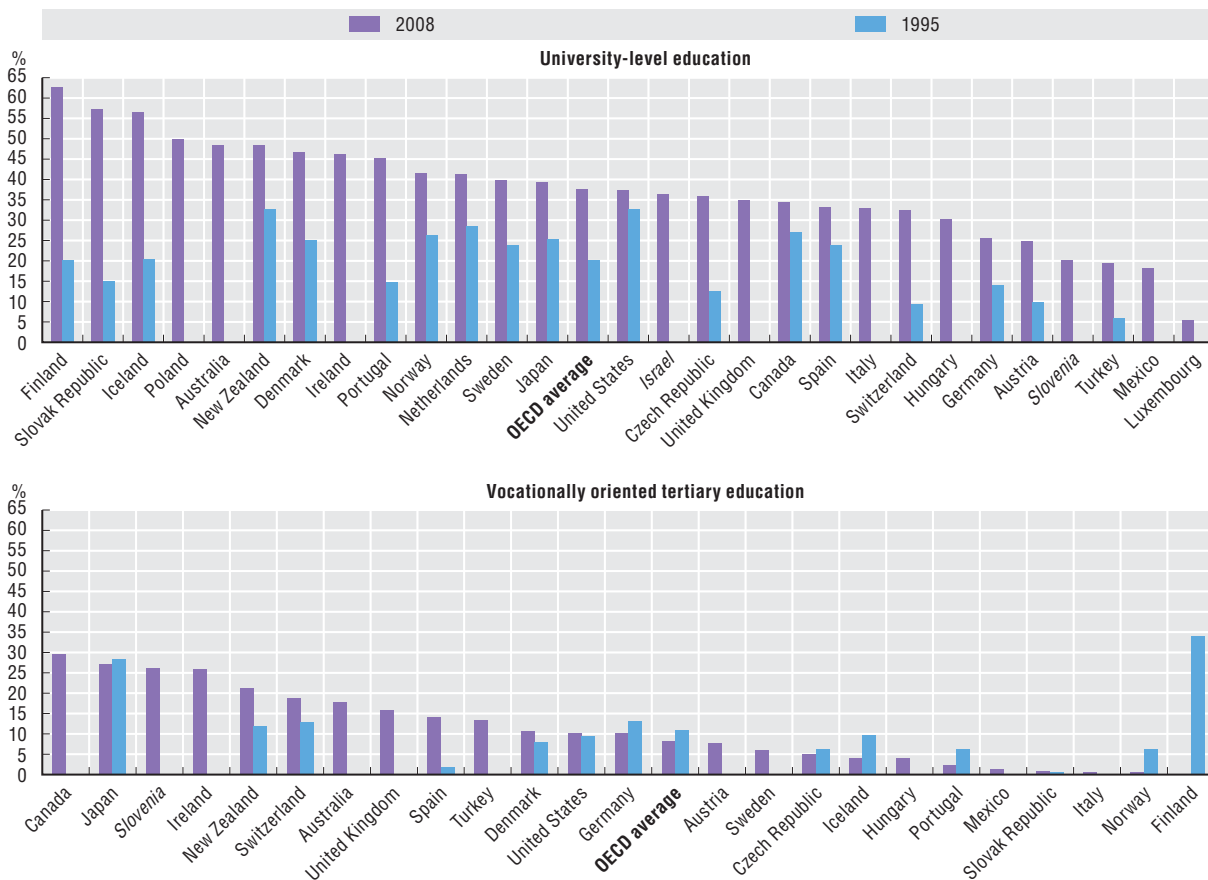
OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education (series of national reviews).

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

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Figure 1.7. **Graduation rates from tertiary education (1995, 2008)**

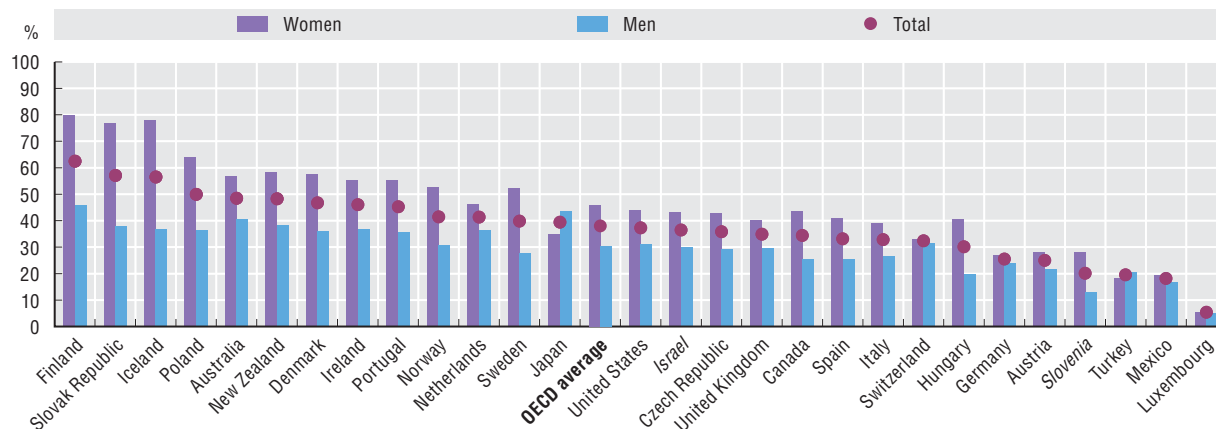
These figures show the growth or decline in the percentage of young people who are first-time graduates from university-level and vocationally oriented tertiary education.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table A3.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310130>.

Figure 1.8. **Graduation rates from university-level education by gender, 2008**

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



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table A3.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310130>.



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