

## 2. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF EDUCATION

### What are the social benefits of education?

- Adults with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to exhibit greater satisfaction with life and show higher levels of civic and social engagement.
- Grade 8 students who have higher levels of civic knowledge are generally more likely to vote and be supportive of gender equality.

#### Significance

Raising people's well-being and improving social cohesion are major concerns for OECD governments. There is general agreement on the important role that education and skills can play in attaining these outcomes, but far less certainty over how exactly this can be achieved. Against this background, this spread looks at the relationship between educational attainment and social measures of well-being in OECD countries. It focuses on three outcomes: life satisfaction, voting and attitudes towards gender inequality.

#### Findings

**Life satisfaction:** Adults with higher levels of educational attainment are generally more likely than those with lower levels of attainment to exhibit greater satisfaction with life. On average across OECD countries with available data, 76% of adults who have completed tertiary education and 58% of adults who are below upper secondary report satisfaction in life. Differences in life satisfaction across educational attainment are small in countries with an above average level of life satisfaction, while the differences tend to be large in countries with a below average level of life satisfaction.

**Voting:** Educational attainment is positively associated with various measures of civic and social engagement, including electoral participation, political interest and volunteering. Most surveyed countries with statistically significant associations between education and electoral participation show the relationship to be positive. On average across OECD countries with available data, only 74% of adults who have not attained an upper secondary education vote in national elections; but this proportion rises to 87% among adults with a tertiary education. These associations generally hold even after accounting for age, gender and income. This indicates that higher levels of education may help promote electoral participation

by improving people's knowledge, skills and social status that could raise the incentives to vote.

**Perception towards gender inequality:** Students in grade 8 (approximately 14 years of age) with higher levels of civic competencies show higher levels of expected adult electoral participation and supportive attitudes towards gender equality. On average across OECD countries, those who are at the lowest level on a civic competency scale score only an average of 43 points on the ICCS scale of supportive attitudes towards gender inequality, whereas those who are at the highest level on the scale score 55 points.

#### Definitions

Developmental work for this indicator was carried out by INES Network on Labour Market, Economic and Social Outcomes of Learning in collaboration with the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). Methodologies are based on work conducted by CERI's Social Outcomes of Learning project. Calculations are based on micro-data from the European Social Survey (ESS) 2008, International Social Survey Programme 2006, General Social Survey 2008 (Canada and New Zealand), KEDI Social Capital Survey 2008 and Life-long Education Survey 2009 (Korea) and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009.

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 A11).

#### Further reading from the OECD

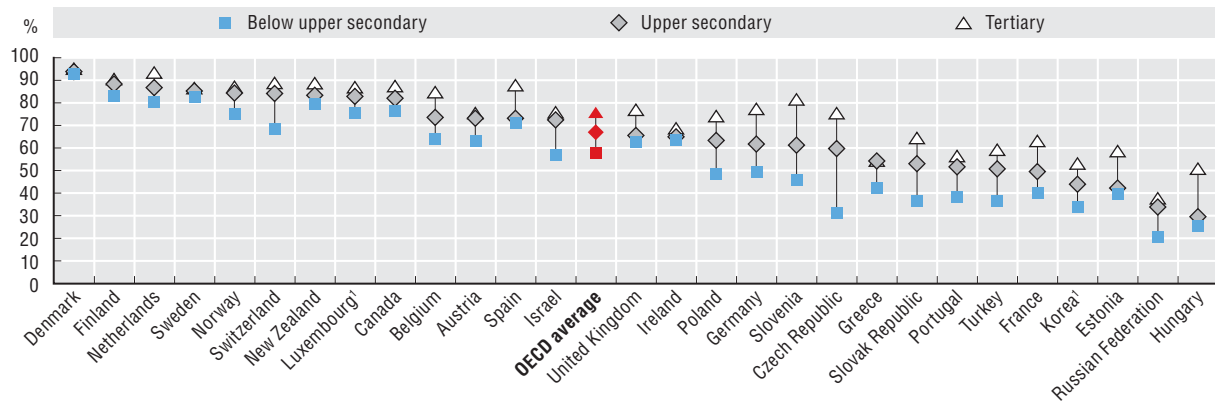
*Improving Health and Social Cohesion through Education* (2010).

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Figure 2.11. **Proportion of adults satisfied with life, by level of education, 2008**

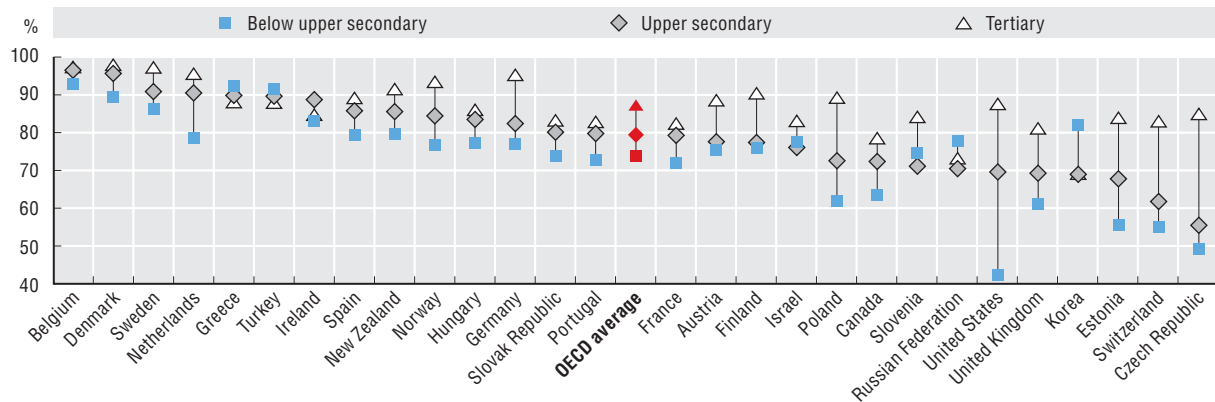
This figure shows the percentage of adults who reported being satisfied with life, by level of educational attainment. Adults with higher levels of educational attainment are generally more likely than those with lower levels of attainment to exhibit greater satisfaction with life.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table A11.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932463479>.

Figure 2.12. **Proportion of adults voting, by level of education, 2008**

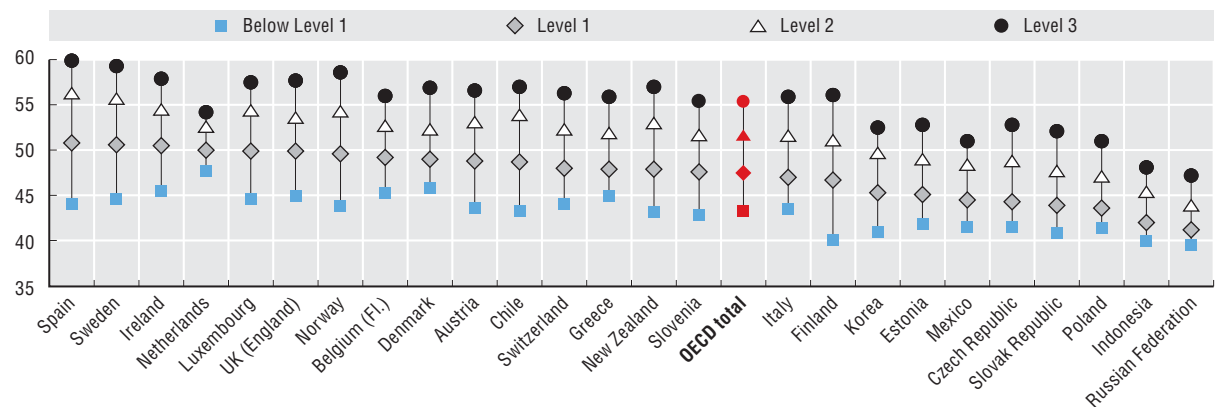
This figure shows the percentage of adults, by level of educational attainment, who reported voting during the previous national election. Adults with higher levels of educational attainment are generally more likely than those with lower levels of attainment to vote. Countries with compulsory voting are included in the data, i.e. Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg and Turkey.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table A11.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932463479>.

Figure 2.13. **Proportion of students who show supportive attitudes toward gender equality, by level of civic knowledge, 2009**

This figure shows the percentage of students who show supportive attitudes towards gender equality, by level of civic knowledge. The results are based on a test administered to lower-secondary students (8th grade) which ask students, among other things, if they support equal opportunities to take part in government.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table A11.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932463479>.



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