

## 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 report that their health is “good”, that they are interested in politics and have more interpersonal trust.
- The biggest increase in the likelihood of people reporting better health is seen among those who have completed upper secondary, rather than tertiary, education. By contrast, the biggest jump in people reporting higher levels of political interest is between those who have completed tertiary, rather than upper secondary, education.
- The association between educational attainment and social outcomes remains after adjusting for gender and age; it also remains, but is less strong, after adjusting for income.

#### Significance

Raising people’s standard of health and improving social cohesion are major concerns for OECD governments. There is general agreement on the important role education can play in attaining both 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 for 27 countries. It focuses on three outcomes that reflect the health and cohesiveness of the society: self-assessed health, political interest and interpersonal trust.

#### Findings

**Health:** Education can benefit people’s physical and mental well-being by helping them choose healthier lifestyles, better manage illness and avoid conditions that could damage their health, such as dangerous jobs. The effect can be direct, for example raising individual’s competencies, and indirect, for example raising income, which helps improve living conditions.

For self-reported good health, the greatest differences are seen between people who have completed upper secondary education and those who have not (and this holds true even after controlling for gender and age).

**Political interest:** Education can directly increase civic and social engagement by providing people with relevant information and experience and by developing competencies, values and beliefs that encourage civic participation. Indirectly, it may act by raising individuals’ social status and thus potentially offering better access to social and political power.

The biggest increase in the likelihood of people expressing political interest is seen in those who have completed tertiary education, and, again, this is

the case after adjusting for gender and age. For example, in Canada, the probability of tertiary graduates expressing an interest in politics was 25 percentage points higher than among people with only an upper secondary education; the gap was only 2 points between people with an upper secondary education and those who had not completed this level of education.

**Interpersonal trust:** Education can have a direct impact by helping individuals better understand and embrace the values of social cohesion and diversity. It can also work indirectly: People with higher levels of education are likely to live and work in environments in which crime and anti-social behaviour tend to be less frequent; the opposite is likely to be true for those with low levels of education.

Unlike the previous two categories, the increase in interpersonal trust between people at different levels of educational attainment is relatively consistent.

#### 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. 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) 2004, 2006 and 2008, International Social Survey Programme 2006, General Social Survey 2008 (Canada and New Zealand), KEDI Social Capital Survey 2008 (Korea) and the National Health Interview Survey 2008 (United States). Readers should note that, given the potentially significant cross-country bias in reporting one’s health status, comparisons on self-reported health should be interpreted with caution.

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 A9).

#### Further reading from OECD

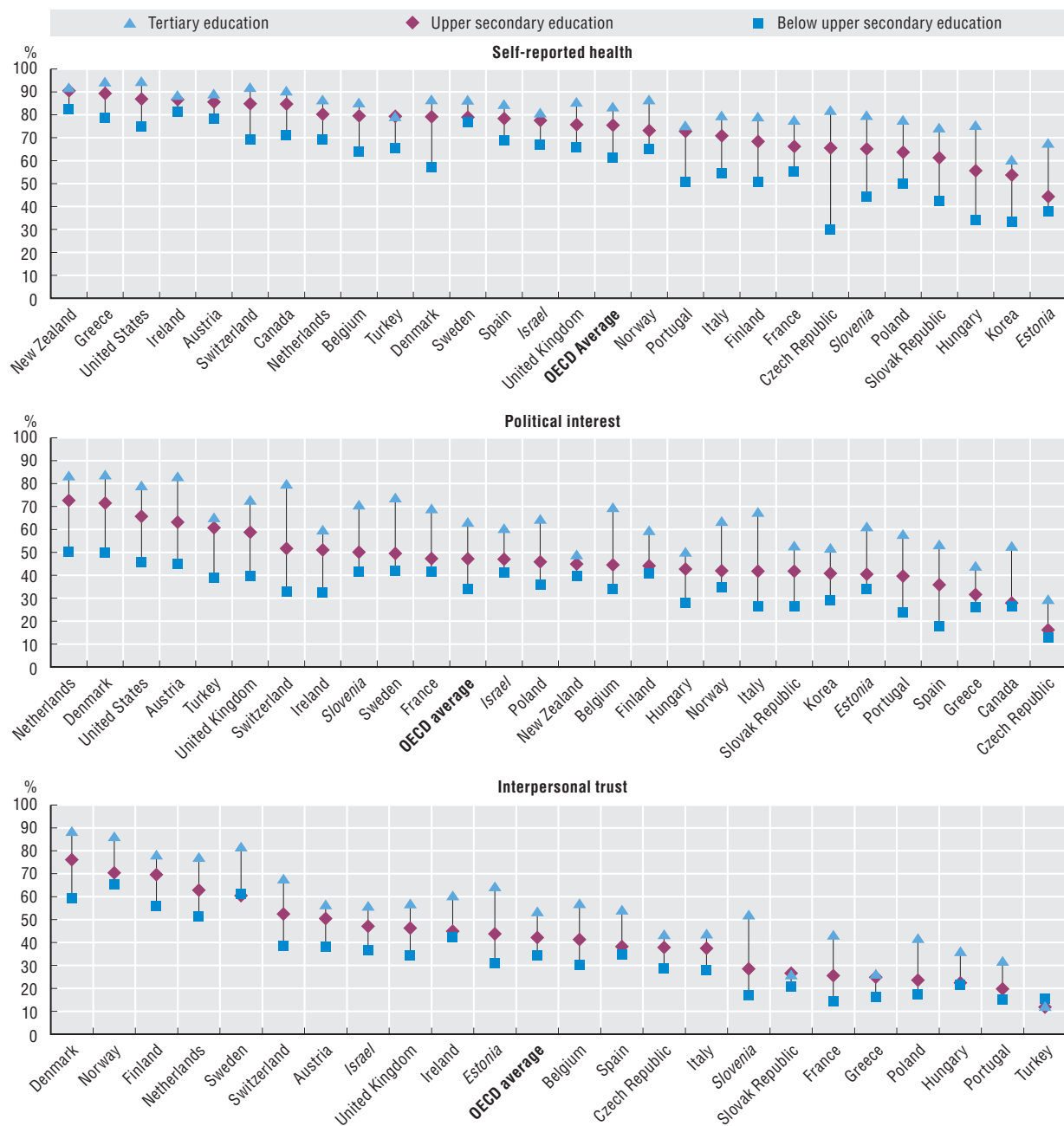
*Improving Health and Social Cohesion through Education* (forthcoming, 2010).

## 2. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF EDUCATION

What are the social benefits of education?

Figure 2.11. **Proportion of adults reporting various social outcomes by level of education (2008)**

These figures show the percentages of adults reporting good health, an interest in politics and interpersonal trust by level of educational attainment.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Tables A9.1, A9.2 and A9.3, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310244>.



### **3. PAYING FOR EDUCATION**

How much is spent per student? .....	52
Has spending per student increased? .....	54
What share of national wealth is spent on education? .....	56
What share of public spending goes on education? .....	58
What is the role of private spending? .....	60
How much do tertiary students pay? .....	62
What are education funds spent on? .....	64
What accounts for variations in spending on salary costs? ...	66



**From:**  
**Highlights from Education at a Glance 2010**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
[https://doi.org/10.1787/eag\\_highlights-2010-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2010-en)

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2010), "What are the social benefits of education?", in *Highlights from Education at a Glance 2010*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/eag\\_highlights-2010-20-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2010-20-en)

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to [rights@oecd.org](mailto:rights@oecd.org). Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com) or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at [contact@cfcopies.com](mailto:contact@cfcopies.com).