Why do we need computer skills?

- *About a third of people in OECD countries have good computer skills.*
- *About one in ten people still lack the basic computer skills needed to for many everyday tasks.*
- *Younger adults are better at using computers than older adults, with 51% of people aged 16-24 having a high level of computer skills.*
- *On average, 36% of men are computer savvy, compared with 32% of women.*

Significance

Access to, and use of, computers both at home and at work is now widespread in OECD countries. For most of today's workers, information and communication technologies (ICT) skills are key to getting a job or a better salary, and for economies, they are crucial for remaining competitive in the global market. OECD countries anticipate that technology will continue to be a key driver of job creation, and have placed the development of ICT skills as the most important policy strategy for economic recovery. This section looks at how far adults are able to solve problems using computer technology.

Findings

About 70% of households in most OECD countries have computers and are connected to the Internet, but this does not tell us whether people are able to use their computers to acquire information, or perform practical tasks. In fact, a large number of adults still have little or no experience in using computers and most of those who do use them are only capable of using familiar basic functions such as sorting e-mails into pre-existing folders.

On average in 24 OECD countries, 9% of adults report having no prior computer experience. This ranges from around 2% in Sweden, Norway and Denmark to over 20% in Italy and the Slovak Republic. About 33% of people have good computer skills, with only 5.8% of people at the highest level and 28.2% at the level just below. In Sweden, Finland and Japan 8% of people reach the highest level.

Strikingly, the majority of workers in all countries do not have good computer skills, with up to 66% of workers in Korea, and 59% in the Slovak Republic and the United States having low ICT skills. However, about 50% of adults in skilled jobs are also highly skilled in computers, whereas only 20% of adults in elementary occupations have these skills.

Highly-educated adults are better at ICT than less-educated adults, with 52% of tertiary graduates possessing good computer skills compared to 19% of people with upper secondary education. This is also true for adults with at least one tertiary-educated parent. About 55% of them are computer savvy, compared to only 16% of adults with less-educated parents.

On average, 51% of young adults are highly-skilled in ICT. This varies from 63% in Korea, and 62% in Finland and Sweden to 38% in Poland and the United States. Very few older adults, aged 55-65, have high ICT skills.

In all the countries surveyed, men are better at using computers than women, with 4 percentage points separating the proportion of highly-skilled men and women. In Japan, this difference goes up to 11 percentage points, whereas in Australia and Canada only 1 point separates them. However, the gender gap in computer use has narrowed, particularly among younger people, with almost no differences in use between men and women aged 16-24.

Definitions

All data are based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012.

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 2014* (Box A1.2) and *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills.*

Areas covered include:

– Computer skills by age, gender, education and social background.

Further reading from OECD

OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills,* OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en.*

OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training (series).

OECD Skills Studies (series).

Figure 6.3. **Adult computer and problem-solving skills, 2012**

This figure shows the percentage of 16-65 year-olds that can use computers to acquire information and resolve problems.
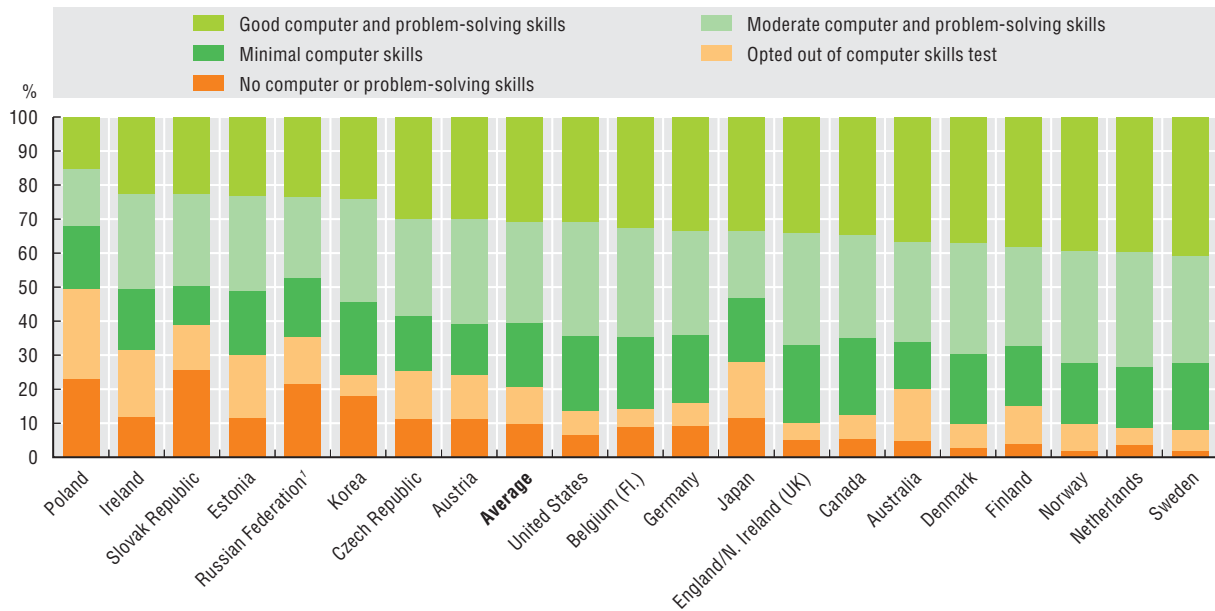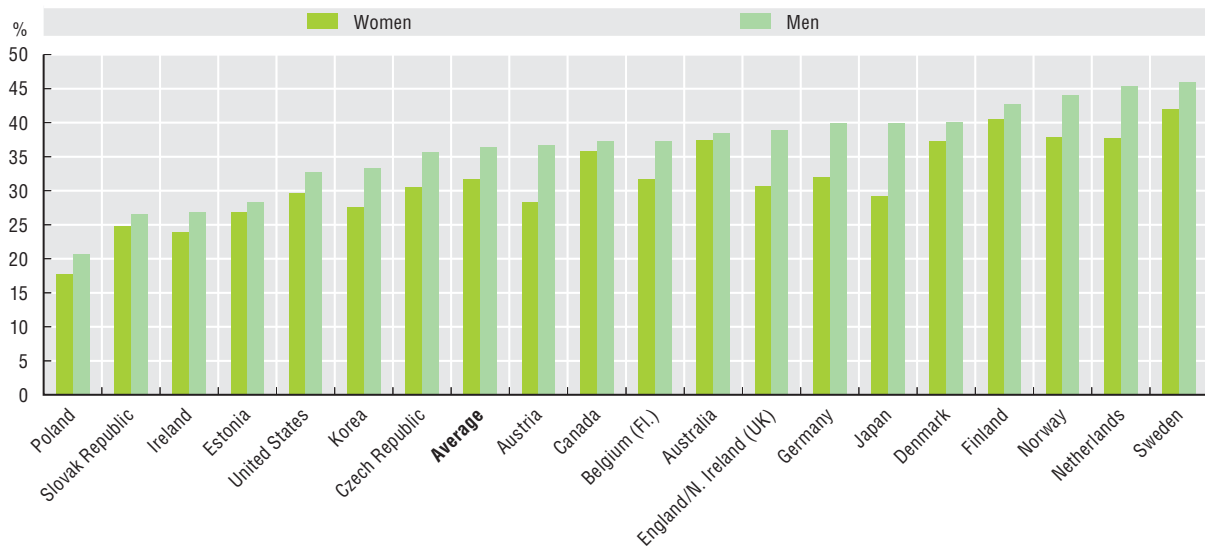

1. Data do not include Moscow municipal area.
Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014*, Chart Box A1.2a, available at *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933115065*.

Figure 6.4. **Computer skills among men and women, 2012**

This figure shows the percentage of men and women that can use computers to acquire information and resolve problems.

Source: OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, Figure 3.5 (P) available at *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932900897*.
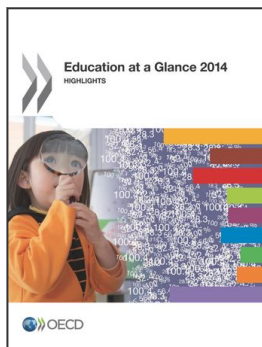
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