

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

A well-educated and well-trained population is essential for the social and economic well-being of countries. Education plays a key role in providing individuals with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to participate effectively in society and in the economy. It also contributes to the expansion of scientific and cultural knowledge. Educational attainment is a commonly used proxy for the stock of “human capital”, i.e. the skills available in the population and the labour force.

Definition

Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education completed by each person, shown as a percentage of all persons in that age group. Tertiary education includes both tertiary-type “A programmes”, which are largely theoretically-based and designed to provide qualifications for entry to advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements; and tertiary-type “B programmes”, which are more occupationally-oriented and lead to direct labour market access. Upper secondary education typically follows completion of lower secondary schooling. Lower secondary education completes provision of basic education, usually

in a more subject-oriented way and with more specialised teachers.

Comparability

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97) is used to define the levels of education in a comparable way across countries. See the OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics for a description of ISCED-97 education programmes and attainment levels and their mappings for each country.

Overview

OECD countries have seen significant increases in the proportion of the adult population attaining tertiary education over the last decades. In 15 OECD countries the share of the population aged 25-64 having attained the tertiary level of education is 30% or more. In Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the United States, this share is significantly higher. Conversely, in the Czech Republic, Italy and Turkey the share of the population 25 to 64 with tertiary attainment is below 14%.

An indication of long term trends in educational attainment can be obtained by comparing the current attainment levels of younger and older age cohorts. For instance, comparing the tertiary attainment levels of 25-34 year olds with those of 55-64 year olds shows an increase in tertiary attainment for Korea over the past 30 years exceeding 40 percentage points; this is more than 30 percentage points higher than the OECD average. In contrast, other OECD countries over the same period experienced only marginal increases (United States) or even falls (Germany).

The overall growth in the number of individuals who have completed tertiary education provides a complementary indication of the increase in the stock of human capital available in each country. The number of individuals that have attained tertiary education has increased each year by 7% or more in Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey. In Ireland, Spain and Turkey, the overall population growth has put additional strains on the higher education system, whereas this has been of less concern in Germany and Japan.

Sources

- OECD (2009), *Education at a Glance*, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- Blöndal S., S. Field and N. Girouard (2002), *Investment in Human Capital Through Post-Compulsory Education and Training: Selected Efficiency and Equity Aspects*, OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No. 333, OECD, Paris.
- Blöndal, S., S. Field and N. Girouard (2002), “Investment in Human Capital through Upper-Secondary and Tertiary Education”, *OECD Economic Studies*, No. 34, 2002/1, OECD, Paris.
- Hansson, B. (2007), *Effects of Tertiary Expansion: Crowding-out effects and labour market matches for the higher educated*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 10, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *Reviews of National Policies for Education*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *Trends Shaping Education – 2008 Edition*, OECD, Paris.

Methodological publications

- OECD (2004), *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics: Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications*, OECD, Paris.

Web sites

- OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), www.oecd.org/edu/ceeri.
- OECD Education at a Glance, www.oecd.org/edu/eag2009.



Education attainment

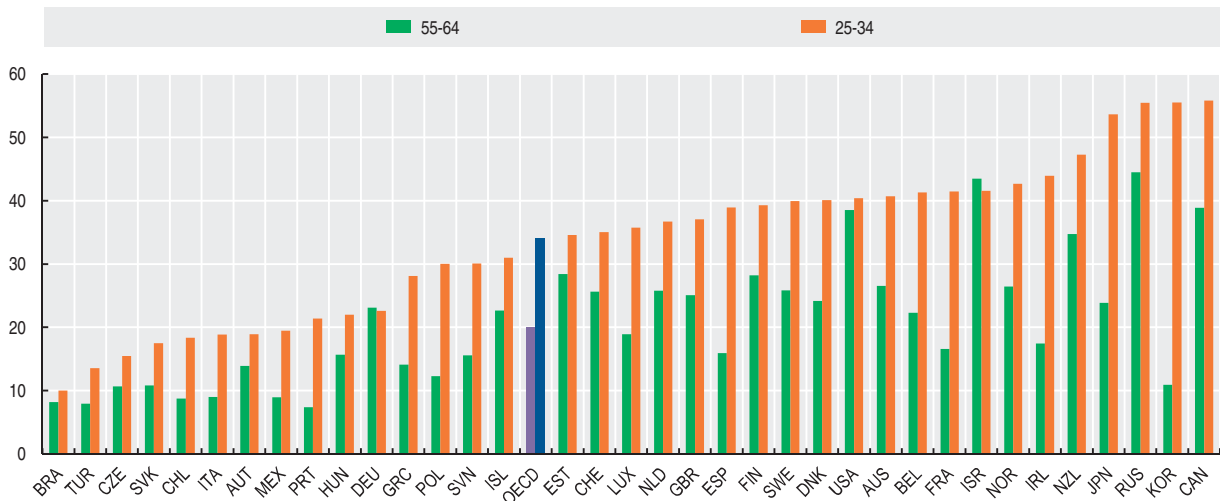
As a percentage of total population in that age group

	Population with tertiary education, 2007					Population aged 25-64								
	25-64	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	Below upper secondary			Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary			Tertiary education		
						1997	1998	2007	1997	1998	2007	1997	1998	2007
Australia	33.7	40.7	33.9	32.2	26.6	46.7	44.0	31.8	29.0	30.6	34.4	24.3	25.4	33.7
Austria	17.6	18.9	19.1	17.5	13.9	26.4	25.8	19.9	63.0	60.5	62.6	10.6	13.7	17.6
Belgium	32.1	41.3	35.5	28.3	22.3	45.0	43.3	32.0	29.9	31.4	35.9	25.1	25.3	32.1
Canada	48.3	55.8	52.6	44.6	38.9	22.3	21.4	13.4	40.3	40.4	38.3	37.4	38.2	48.3
Czech Republic	13.7	15.5	14.3	14.2	10.7	15.0	14.7	9.5	74.3	74.9	76.8	10.6	10.4	13.7
Denmark	32.2	40.1	34.1	30.4	24.2	..	21.5	24.5	..	53.2	43.3	..	25.4	32.2
Finland	36.4	39.3	42.7	35.8	28.2	31.7	31.0	19.5	38.9	38.8	44.2	29.4	30.2	36.4
France	26.8	41.4	28.7	19.8	16.6	40.5	39.3	31.3	39.5	40.1	41.9	20.0	20.6	26.8
Germany	24.3	22.6	25.7	25.1	23.1	16.8	16.2	15.6	60.6	60.8	60.1	22.6	23.0	24.3
Greece	22.7	28.1	25.9	20.7	14.1	55.9	54.1	40.4	28.6	29.1	36.9	15.5	16.8	22.7
Hungary	17.7	22.0	17.4	15.8	15.7	37.0	36.7	20.8	50.8	50.1	61.2	12.2	13.2	18.0
Iceland	29.8	31.0	35.4	27.9	22.6	43.9	44.6	35.5	35.3	34.4	34.7	20.9	21.0	29.8
Ireland	32.2	43.9	34.3	25.2	17.5	50.4	48.7	32.4	26.8	30.2	35.4	22.8	21.1	32.2
Italy	13.6	18.9	14.0	11.3	9.0	..	59.3	47.7	..	32.1	38.7	..	8.6	13.6
Japan	41.0	53.7	46.2	41.4	23.9	20.3	20.0	..	49.1	49.4	59.0	30.6	30.6	41.0
Korea	34.6	55.5	40.0	21.0	10.9	37.9	33.6	22.1	42.3	43.9	43.3	19.8	22.5	34.6
Luxembourg	26.5	35.7	27.3	22.0	18.9	..	..	34.3	..	..	39.2	..	..	26.5
Mexico	15.9	19.5	15.9	14.9	9.0	72.2	72.0	66.7	15.8	15.8	18.4	12.0	12.2	14.9
Netherlands	30.8	36.7	30.8	30.2	25.8	..	35.7	26.8	..	40.1	42.4	..	24.2	30.8
New Zealand	41.0	47.3	41.4	39.4	34.7	39.0	38.0	28.4	33.5	33.9	30.6	27.5	28.1	41.0
Norway	34.2	42.7	36.2	30.8	26.5	17.0	15.4	21.1	57.2	57.2	44.7	25.8	27.4	34.2
Poland	18.7	30.0	17.7	12.8	12.3	23.0	21.7	13.7	66.8	67.4	67.6	10.2	10.9	18.7
Portugal	13.7	21.4	13.6	10.4	7.4	..	82.1	72.5	..	9.6	13.8	..	8.3	13.7
Slovak Republic	14.1	17.5	13.0	13.8	10.8	21.4	19.8	13.0	68.1	69.9	72.9	10.5	10.3	14.1
Spain	29.0	38.9	32.2	22.7	15.9	68.8	67.1	49.3	12.6	13.2	21.7	18.6	19.7	29.0
Sweden	31.3	40.0	31.0	28.9	25.9	24.7	23.9	15.4	47.8	48.1	53.3	27.5	28.0	31.3
Switzerland	31.3	35.0	33.8	30.0	25.6	18.7	16.4	14.6	59.1	61.4	55.5	22.2	22.2	29.9
Turkey	10.8	13.6	9.6	8.8	7.9	79.0	78.2	71.3	13.4	14.4	17.9	7.6	7.5	10.8
United Kingdom	31.8	37.1	32.3	30.5	25.1	40.9	39.9	31.7	36.5	36.3	36.5	22.6	23.8	31.8
United States	40.3	40.4	42.2	39.6	38.5	14.1	13.5	12.1	51.8	51.6	47.6	34.1	34.9	40.3
OECD average	27.5	34.2	29.2	24.9	20.1	37.0	37.8	29.8	42.6	41.8	43.2	20.4	20.5	27.4
Brazil	9.6	10.0	9.5	10.1	8.2	..	..	63.2	..	..	27.2	..	..	9.6
Chile	13.2	18.3	12.5	11.4	8.7	..	..	50.0	..	..	36.9	..	..	13.2
Estonia	33.3	34.6	33.7	35.5	28.4	..	..	10.9	..	..	55.8	..	..	33.6
Israel	43.6	41.5	45.8	44.1	43.5	..	..	19.6	..	..	36.8	..	..	43.6
Russian Federation	54.0	55.5	58.1	54.3	44.5	..	..	11.1	..	..	34.0	..	..	54.9
Slovenia	22.2	30.1	22.6	19.5	15.6	..	..	18.2	..	..	59.6	..	..	22.2

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/826124112463>

Population that has attained at least tertiary education

Percentage, 2007



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/821553547007>



From:
OECD Factbook 2010
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2010-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2010), "Education Attainment", in *OECD Factbook 2010: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2010-69-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. 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 or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.