

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

How many young people graduate from tertiary education?

- On average across 25 OECD countries with comparable data, 37% of young people have completed university-level education (tertiary-type A).
- The proportion of young people in university-level education tends to be higher in countries where programmes are shorter.
- On average in OECD countries, graduation rates from university-level education have risen by 15 percentage points over the last 11 years.

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 (which varies widely in structure and scope) 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 Greece and Turkey, 20% or less of young people graduate from university-level education (tertiary-type A); by contrast, the proportion is more than 45% in Australia, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand and Poland.

Disparities in graduation rates are even greater between men and women (see also Figure 1.8). On average in OECD countries, more women obtain university-level qualifications than men – 45% compared to 30%. The gap is greatest in Iceland, at 46 percentage points. In Poland and Sweden it falls to 25 percentage points, while in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Turkey, the genders are quite balanced. In Japan significantly more men graduate from university-level education.

Countries with longer programmes tend to see lower graduation rates: in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and Greece, programmes in university-level education last at least five years, and university graduation rates are at or below 30%. In Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom, programmes usually last between three and five years and graduation rates are around 40% or higher.

On average in the OECD area, 9% 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 Ireland, Japan and

New Zealand. At the highest levels of tertiary education, about 1.4% of young people graduate from advanced research programmes in the OECD area (see Table A3.1 in *Education at a Glance 2008*).

Trends

On average across OECD countries, graduation rates from university-level education have increased by 15 percentage points over the past 11 years, and there were increases – often quite substantial – in virtually every country for which data are available.

Definitions

Data for the 2005-06 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. Graduation rates represent the estimated percentage of an age group that will complete tertiary education (Graduation rates should not be confused with completion, or dropout rates, which represent the proportion of people already enrolled in tertiary education who fail to complete their course, see pages 24-25). Data presented here refer only to first-time graduates.

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2008* (Indicator A3).

Areas covered include:

- Graduation rates and trends in tertiary education.
- Graduation rates by gender.

Further reading from OECD

Higher Education Management and Policy (journal).

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

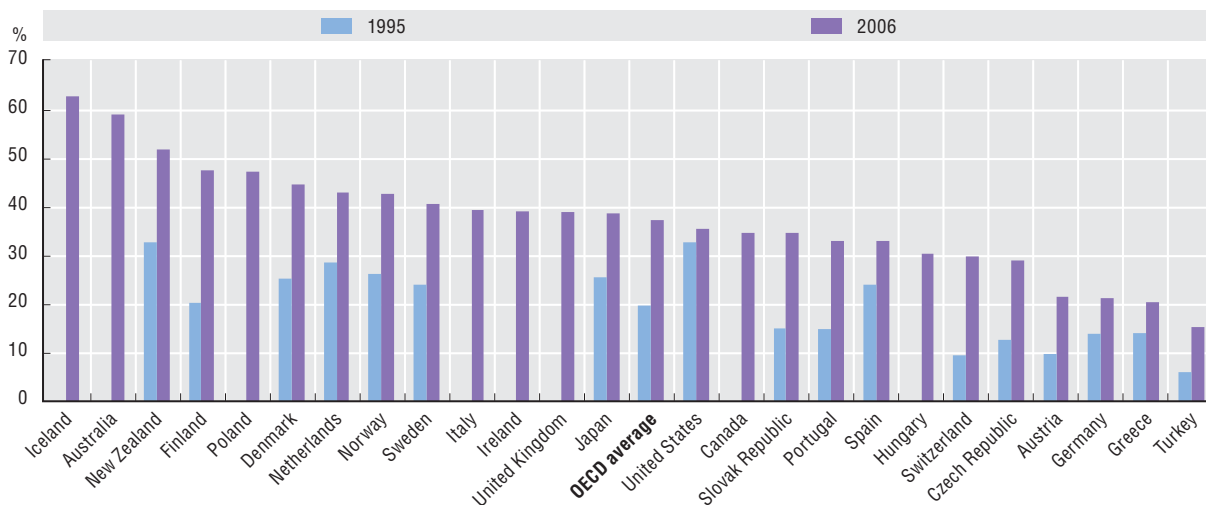
Higher Education and Regions: Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged (2007).

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Figure 1.7. Graduation rates from university-level education (1995, 2006)

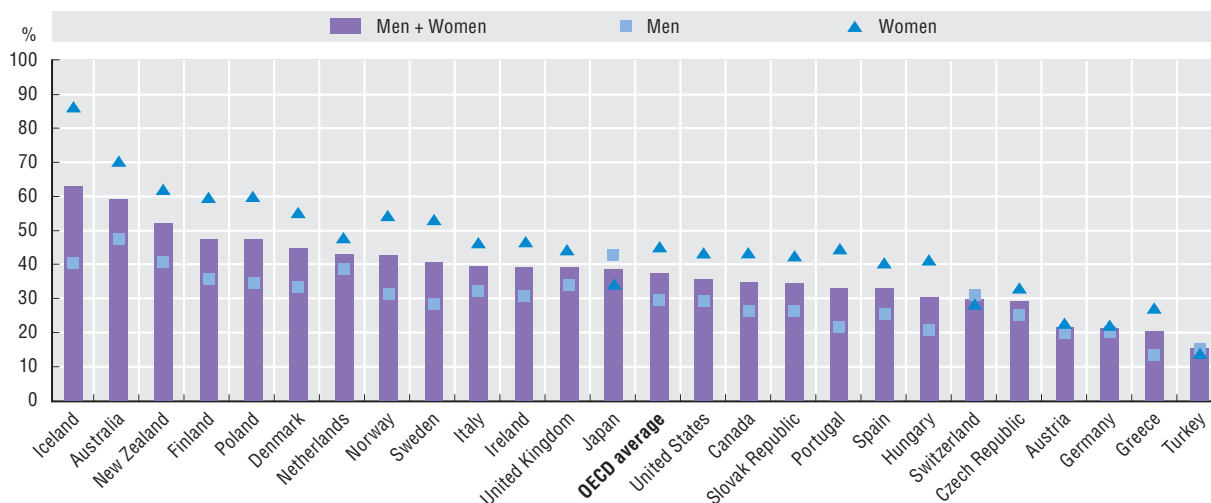
This figure shows the growth – or otherwise – in the percentage of young people who are first-time graduates from university-level education. On average, about 37% of young people graduate at this level in OECD countries.



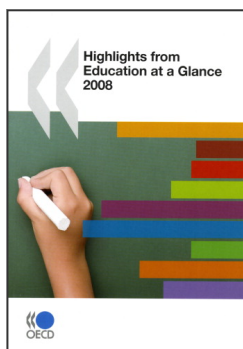
Source: OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance 2008*, Table A3.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401523756323>.

Figure 1.8. Graduation rates from university-level education by gender, 2006

This figure shows the percentage of young men and young women who are first-time graduates from university-level education. On average, about 45% of young women graduate at this level in OECD countries against about 30% of young men.



Source: OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance 2008*, Table A3.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401523756323>.



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