

# 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

## How do men and women differ in education levels?

- Girls are now more likely to complete upper secondary education than boys in almost all OECD countries, a reversal of historical trends.
- At upper secondary level, girls are more likely than boys to pursue programmes aimed at entry to university-level education.
- Overall, women represent 54% of new entrants in tertiary education in OECD countries.

### Significance

Across OECD countries, girls and women are establishing their place alongside boys and men in upper levels of education. It appears that public policies over the past 20 years that have tried to foster equality in education have made a significant impact on young women's motivation and expectations.

### Findings

Boys trail behind girls in upper secondary graduation rates in 22 of the 24 OECD countries for which data are available. The exceptions are in Switzerland and Turkey, where more boys than girls graduate from upper secondary education. The gender gap is greatest in Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway and Spain, where graduation rates for girls exceed those for boys by more than 10 percentage points.

At upper secondary level, programmes may be general – with the main aim of preparing students for university-level education – or vocational and pre-vocational. For almost all OECD countries with comparable data, the graduation rate for girls from general programmes is higher: 53% for girls against 41% for boys. In Austria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Norway, Portugal and the Slovak Republic, girls outnumber boys by three to two. Girls' representation in vocational programmes has been increasing, and their graduation rate now stands at 44%.

In tertiary level education, women represent 54% of new entrants, but the courses they take differ from those pursued by men. Women predominate in health and welfare, where they represent 75% of new entrants, and in humanities, arts and education, with 68% of new entrants. By contrast, the proportion of women choosing science subjects ranges from less than 25% in

Japan, the Netherlands and Switzerland to more than 35% in Denmark, Iceland, Italy and New Zealand. Men represent 77% of new entrants in the fields of engineering, manufacturing and construction.

### Trends

Women today are far more likely to have completed tertiary education than women 30 years ago, with more than twice as many women aged 25 to 34 having completed tertiary education than those aged 55 to 64.

### Definitions

Data are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered annually by the OECD. Upper secondary graduation rates are the number of students, regardless of age, who graduate for the first time from upper secondary programmes, divided by the population of people of typical upper secondary graduation age. The unduplicated count of graduates is calculated by netting out students who graduated from another upper secondary programme in the previous year. Net entry rates represent the number of first-time entrants to tertiary education of a particular age as a proportion of the total population of people of that age. The sum of net entry rates is calculated by adding the rates for each year of age.

In the table, percentages in excess of 100% reflect technical difficulties in defining typical graduation ages for upper secondary education and in applying ISCED classifications.

### Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2008* (Indicator A2).

Areas covered include:

- Post-secondary non-tertiary graduation rates (including by gender).
- Percentage of new entrants in tertiary education, by gender and field of education.

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Table 1.4. Graduation rates for boys and girls in upper secondary education, 2006

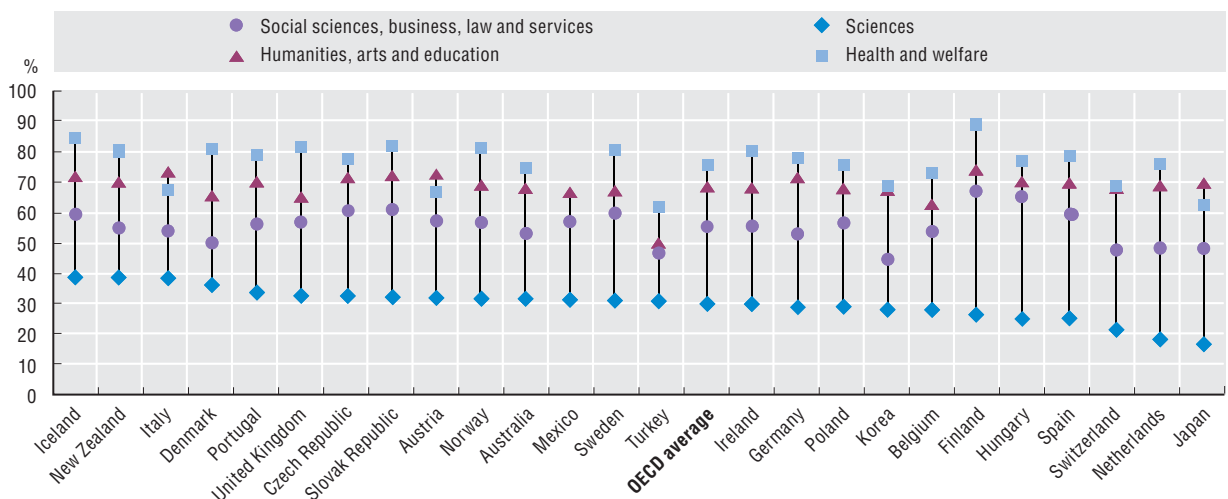
This table shows the percentage of boys and of girls graduating from upper secondary education, as well as the percentages of each gender pursuing general or vocational programmes at this level

	Total (unduplicated)			General programmes		Pre-vocational/vocational programmes	
	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Women	M + W	Women
Australia	m	m	m	68	74	41	45
Austria	m	m	m	17	20	50	38
Belgium	m	m	m	37	43	58	60
Canada	80	77	84	77	82	8	7
Czech Republic	90	88	92	18	23	72	69
Denmark	86	78	96	55	66	51	56
Finland	95	91	100	51	61	88	97
France	m	m	m	51	59	63	60
Germany	103	102	104	40	45	63	59
Greece	100	96	104	63	72	35	30
Hungary	85	81	90	70	77	18	14
Iceland	90	81	100	66	76	55	54
Ireland	86	81	93	63	65	53	69
Italy	86	84	88	31	41	69	62
Japan	93	92	93	70	73	23	21
Korea	93	92	94	66	67	27	27
Luxembourg	72	69	74	28	33	44	41
Mexico	42	38	46	38	42	4	4
Netherlands	m	m	m	36	39	66	67
New Zealand	74	63	85	m	m	m	m
Norway	91	80	103	56	68	42	40
Poland	80	76	84	59	70	36	26
Portugal	m	m	m	40	50	13	13
Slovak Republic	82	80	85	23	28	69	65
Spain	72	64	80	45	53	35	38
Sweden	76	73	79	34	40	42	39
Switzerland	89	90	89	30	34	69	62
Turkey	51	55	47	35	35	19	16
United Kingdom	88	85	92	m	m	m	m
United States	77	75	79	m	m	m	m
<b>OECD average</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>44</b>

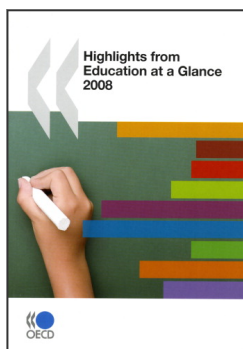
Source: OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance 2008*, Table A2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401482730488>.

Figure 1.11. Proportion of women entering various fields of education at tertiary level, 2006

This figure shows which subjects women study in tertiary education. On average, women make up less than 30% of science students, but more than 75% of health and welfare students.



Source: OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance 2008*, Table A2.6, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401482730488>.



**From:**  
**Highlights from Education at a Glance 2008**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264040625-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2009), "How do men and women differ in education levels?", in *Highlights from Education at a Glance 2008*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/eag\\_highlights-2008-10-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2008-10-en)

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