

How many secondary students go on to tertiary education?

- On average across the OECD area, 83% of young people graduate from upper secondary education.
- In the past 11 years, the proportion of students graduating at this level in OECD countries has increased by an average of 7 percentage points.
- In total across the OECD area, 56% of young people will go on to university-level education.

Significance

This indicator shows how many students finish secondary education and then make the transition into tertiary education. Completing upper secondary education does not in itself guarantee that students are adequately equipped with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to enter the labour market or tertiary studies. However, research has shown that young people in OECD countries who do not finish secondary education face severe difficulties when it comes to finding work.

Findings

Across the OECD area, 83% of young people finish upper secondary education. In 22 of 24 OECD countries with comparable data, upper secondary graduation rates exceed 70%, while in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Korea and Norway, they equal or exceed 90%.

In most countries, upper secondary education is designed to prepare students to enter university-level education (tertiary-type A). In Austria, Germany and Switzerland, however, students are more likely to graduate from upper secondary programmes that lead to vocationally oriented tertiary education (tertiary-type B), where courses typically run for two years with a focus on practical, technical or occupational skills.

In total across the OECD area, 56% of young people will go on to university-level education. In Australia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Sweden, this rises to at least 65%, while in the United States the level stands at 64% (although this includes both university-level and vocationally oriented tertiary education). Turkey has seen a large increase in the number of students entering university-level education, but its entry rate is only 31% and it remains, with Mexico, at the bottom of the scale.

The proportion entering vocationally oriented tertiary education is generally smaller in OECD countries, mainly because these programmes are less developed.

In OECD countries for which data are available, 16% of young adults, on average, enter these sorts of programmes, while 2.8% will eventually enter advanced research programmes.

Trends

Graduation from upper secondary education has effectively become the norm in most OECD countries. In recent years, the highest growth has occurred in Greece, Norway, Sweden and Turkey, while in Germany, Japan, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, and the United States graduation levels have remained stable. The proportion of students in Mexico and Turkey graduating from upper secondary education has increased considerably since 2000, thus reducing the gap with other OECD countries.

Definitions

The data for the 2005-06 school year are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics, administered annually by the OECD. Upper secondary graduation rates are estimated as the number of students, regardless of age, who graduate for the first time from upper secondary programmes, divided by the population at the age at which students typically graduate from upper secondary education. The net entry rate to tertiary education for a specific age is obtained by dividing the number of first-time entrants of that age to each type of tertiary education by the total population in the corresponding age group. The sum of net entry rates is calculated by adding the rates for each year of age.

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:

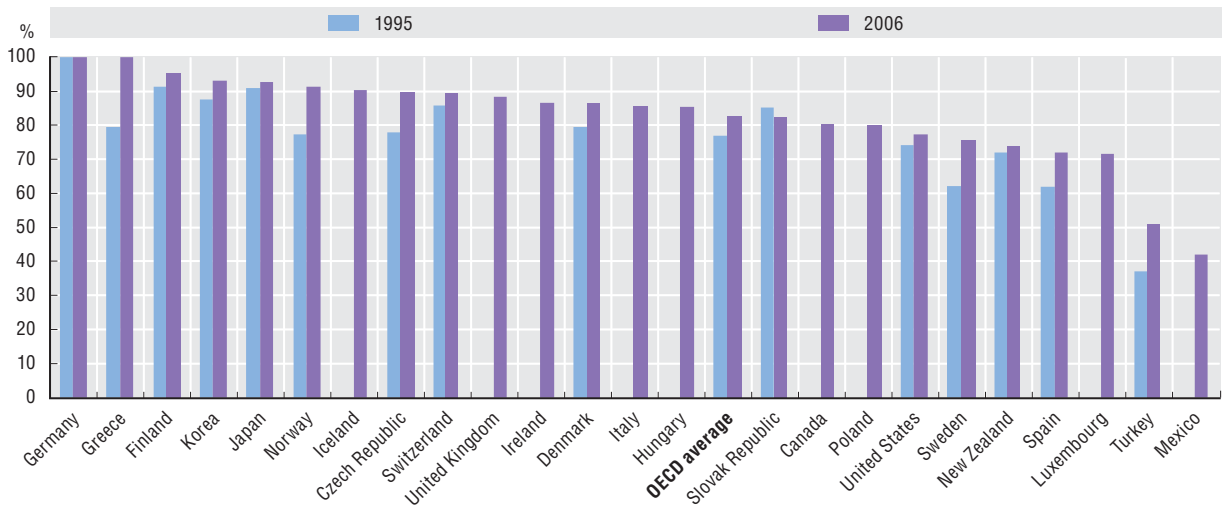
- Current upper secondary graduation rates and trends.
- Graduation rates from post-secondary non-tertiary education.
- Entry rate by field of education.

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

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Figure 1.5. **Upper secondary graduation rates (1995, 2006)**

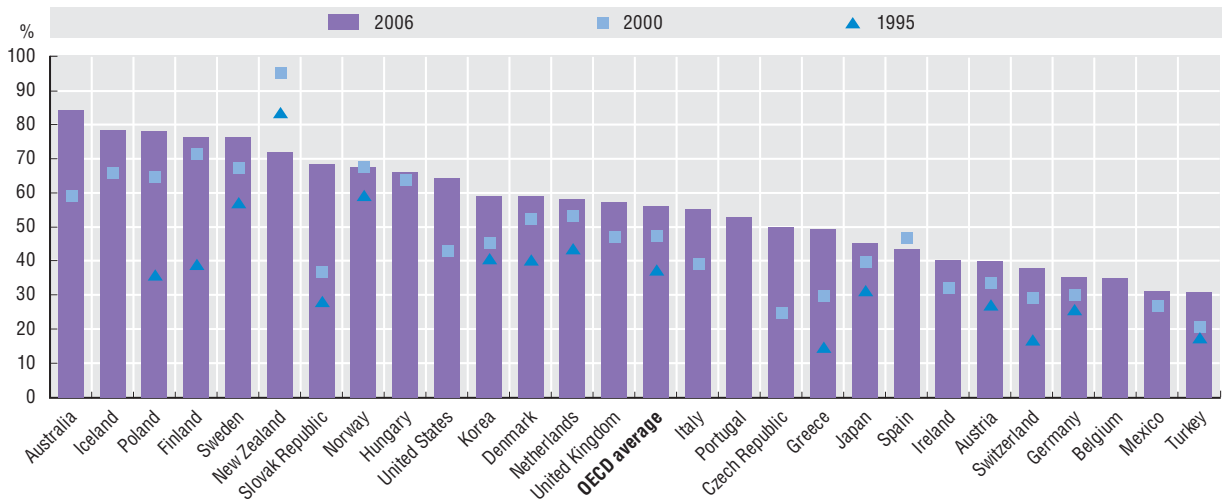
This figure shows the growth – or otherwise – in the numbers of young people graduating from upper secondary education.



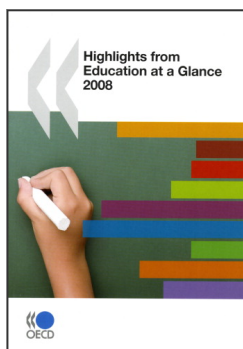
Source: OECD (2008), Education at a Glance 2008, Table A2.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401482730488>.

Figure 1.6. **Entry rates to university-level education (1995, 2000 and 2006)**

This figure shows the growth – or otherwise – in the percentage of young people entering university-level education. Entry rates have risen in most OECD countries.



Source: OECD (2008), Education at a Glance 2008, Table A2.5, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401482730488>.



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