

## 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

### Does parental education affect students' chances?

- About 40% of non-student adults have a higher level of educational attainment than their parents, on average.
- Women are more successful than men in attaining a higher level of education than their parents. Some 40% of women and 38% of men have a higher level of educational attainment than their parents, on average.
- More than 30% of non-student adults whose parents have not attained upper secondary education did not attain this level of education themselves.

#### Significance

Because of its strong links to earnings, employment, overall wealth and the well-being of individuals, education can reduce inequalities in societies, but it can also reproduce them. Giving all young people a fair chance to obtain a quality education is a fundamental part of the social contract. Addressing inequalities in education opportunities is critically important for maintaining social mobility and broadening the pool of candidates for higher education and high-skilled jobs.

#### Findings

Tertiary education attainment rates have been growing in recent years, especially among younger generations. On average among countries, about 40% of adults have a higher level of educational attainment than their parents. Intergenerational educational upward mobility is the highest in Finland, Flanders (Belgium), Korea and the Russian Federation, where more than 55% of adults have attained a higher level of education than their parents. On the contrary, 12% of non-student adults have lower educational attainment than their parents. In Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the United States more than 15% of this population does.

More than 30% of non-student adults whose parents have not attained upper secondary education have not obtained it themselves. On average, at least 35% of 20-34 year-olds in tertiary education have at least one parent who has completed that level of education. In Canada, Estonia, Germany, Japan, Norway and Sweden, at least 65% of these students do. The likelihood of a student participating in tertiary education is twice as great if at least one of the parents attained upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, and about 4.5 times as great if both parents attained tertiary education. On average, only 9% of tertiary students have parents with low levels of education.

Women are slightly more likely than men to attain a higher level of education than their parents. But in Austria, Germany, Korea, and the Netherlands, men are considerably more upwardly mobile in educational attainment than women.

#### Trends

The expansion of education systems in many OECD countries, both at the upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary levels of education, has given young people (25-34 year-olds) an opportunity to attain a higher level of education than their parents. On average, 32% of young people have achieved a higher level of education than their parents, while only 16% have not been able to reach their parents' education level, among OECD countries with available data. In all countries except Estonia, Germany, Norway and Sweden, upward mobility in education is more common than downward mobility, reflecting the expansion of education systems in most OECD countries. The expansion of education has been particularly pronounced in France, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Spain and the Russian Federation, where the difference between upward and downward educational mobility for the 25-34 year-olds is 30 percentage points or more.

#### Definitions

"Adults" refers to 25-64 year-olds.

All data are based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012. PIAAC is the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies.

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* (Indicator A4).

Areas covered include:

- Odds of attending higher education if parents are highly educated.
- Intergenerational mobility.

#### Further reading from OECD

OECD (2013), *PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity (Volume II): Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201132-en>.

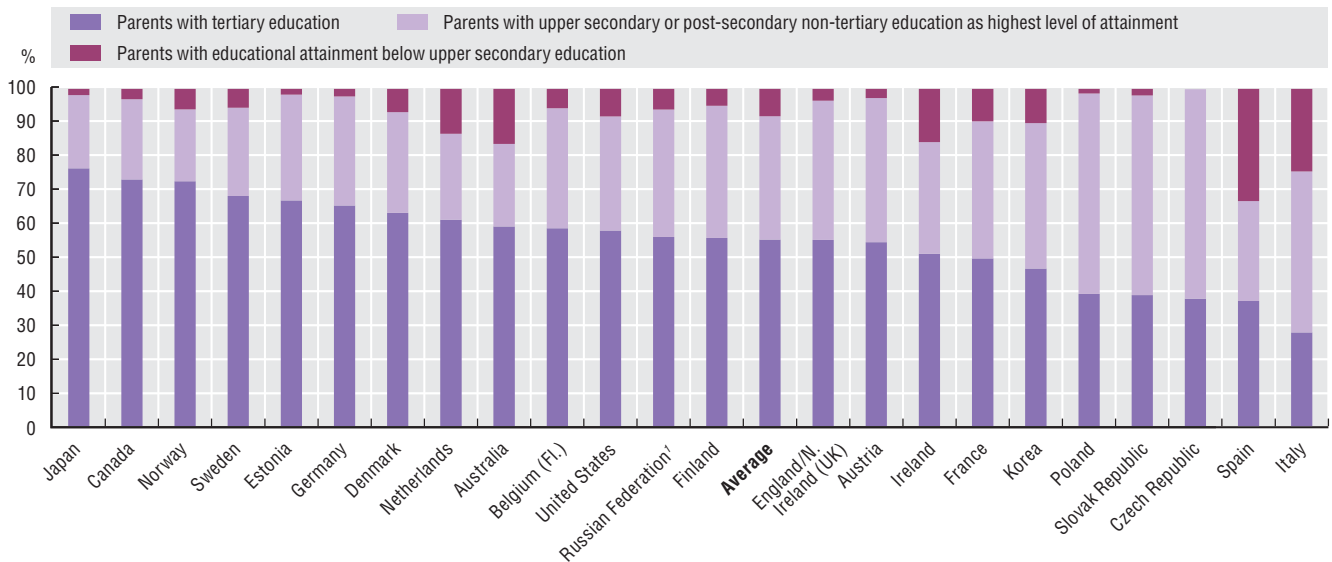
OECD (2012), *Let's Read Them a Story! The Parent Factor in Education*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264176232-en>.

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Figure 1.9. **Percentage of 20-34 year-olds in tertiary education, by parents' education level, 2012**

Countries are ranked in descending order of the participation in tertiary education of 20-34 year-olds that have parents with tertiary attainment.

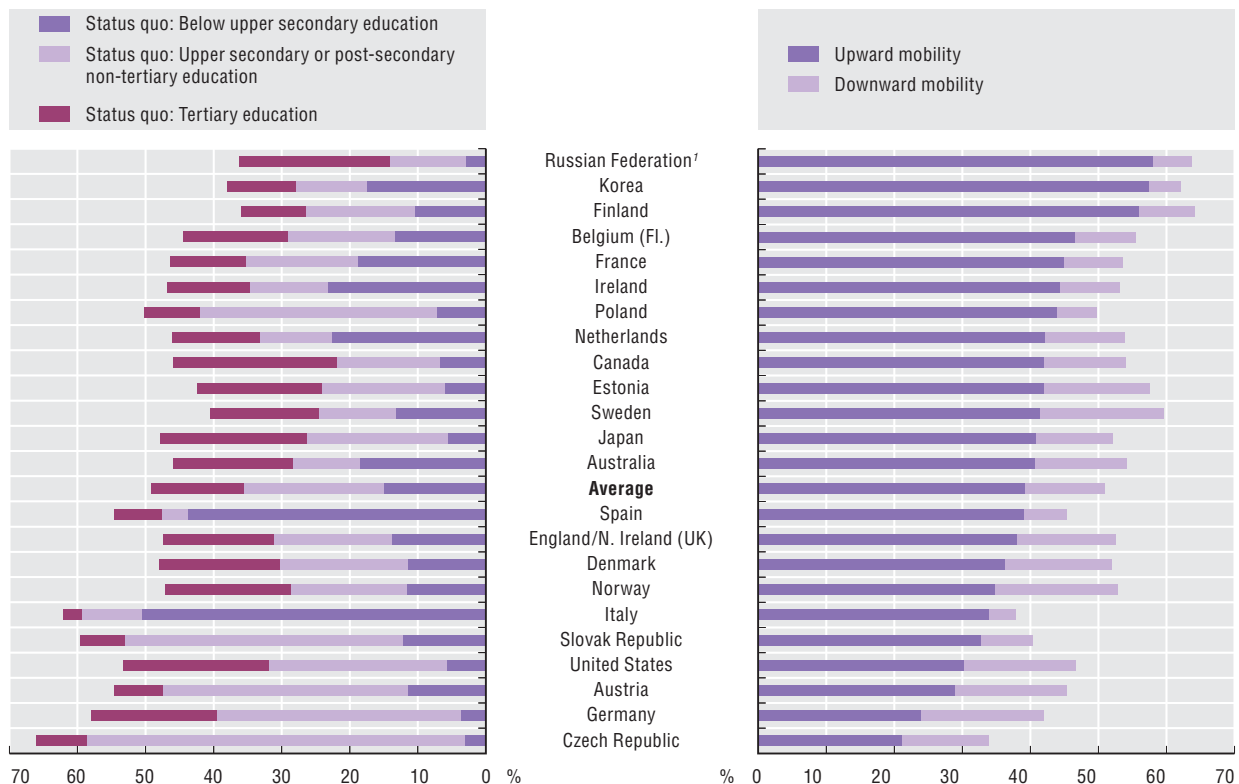


1. Data do not include Moscow municipal area.

Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014*, Chart A4.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933115635>.

Figure 1.10. **Intergenerational mobility in education, 2012**

This figure shows the percentage of 25-64 year-old non-students whose educational attainment is higher than (upward mobility), lower than (downward mobility) or the same as (status quo) that of their parents.



1. Data do not include Moscow municipal area.

Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014*, Chart A4.3, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933115673>.



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