

How many young people graduate from tertiary education?

- Some 40% of today's young adults in OECD countries are expected to complete university-level education over their lifetimes, based on current patterns of graduation.
- About 11% of today's young adults in OECD countries are expected to complete vocationally oriented education over their lifetimes.
- A student in an OECD country obtains his/her first university-level degree at the age of 27 on average, with ages ranging from 24 in the United Kingdom to 29 or more in Finland, Iceland, Israel and Sweden.

Significance

Tertiary education rates indicate a country's capacity to equip future workers with advanced and specialised knowledge and skills. People have strong incentives to obtain a tertiary education in OECD countries, including higher salaries and better employment prospects. Tertiary education varies widely in structure and scope between countries, and graduation rates are influenced both by the ease of access to these programmes, flexibility in completing them and the demand for higher skills in the labour market. Expanding access to and improving the quality of tertiary education are vital to knowledge-based economies, but these objectives are even more difficult to achieve when budgets are tight.

Findings

Some 40% of young people, on average across the 28 OECD countries with comparable data, will graduate from university-level programmes during their lifetimes, based on 2011 patterns of graduation. The proportion ranges from less than 25% in Chile, Mexico and Turkey, to 50% or more in Australia, Denmark, Iceland, New Zealand, Poland and the United Kingdom.

Most graduates at all levels of tertiary education are women, except at the doctoral level. An estimated 48% of today's young women and 32% of today's young men on average in OECD countries will complete university-level education over their lifetimes, based on current patterns of graduation.

Some 1.6% of young people today are expected to complete advanced research programmes on average across OECD countries, up from 1.0% in 2000. Countries with the highest increase in advanced research graduation rates are Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom, where graduation rates increased by at least 1 percentage point from 2000 to 2011. China had a graduation rate of 2.2% in 2011 – above the OECD average.

International students represent a significant share of tertiary graduates in a number of countries. In Australia, Austria, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, at least 10% of students graduating with a first degree in tertiary education are international students.

Trends

University-level graduation rates have risen by 20 percentage points on average across OECD countries with available data over the past 16 years, while rates for vocationally oriented tertiary programmes have remained stable. Doctorates represent only a small proportion of tertiary programmes but the graduation rate has doubled over the past 16 years.

Definitions

Data are for the 2010-11 academic year and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2012. Data on the impact of international students on tertiary graduation rates are based on a special survey conducted by the OECD in December 2012.

Tertiary graduates are those who obtain a university degree, vocational qualifications, or advanced research degrees of doctorate standard. Net graduation rates represent the estimated percentage of an age group that will complete tertiary education over their lifetimes, based on current patterns of graduation.

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 2013* (indicator A3).

Areas covered include:

- Graduation rates by qualification level and by gender.

Further reading from OECD

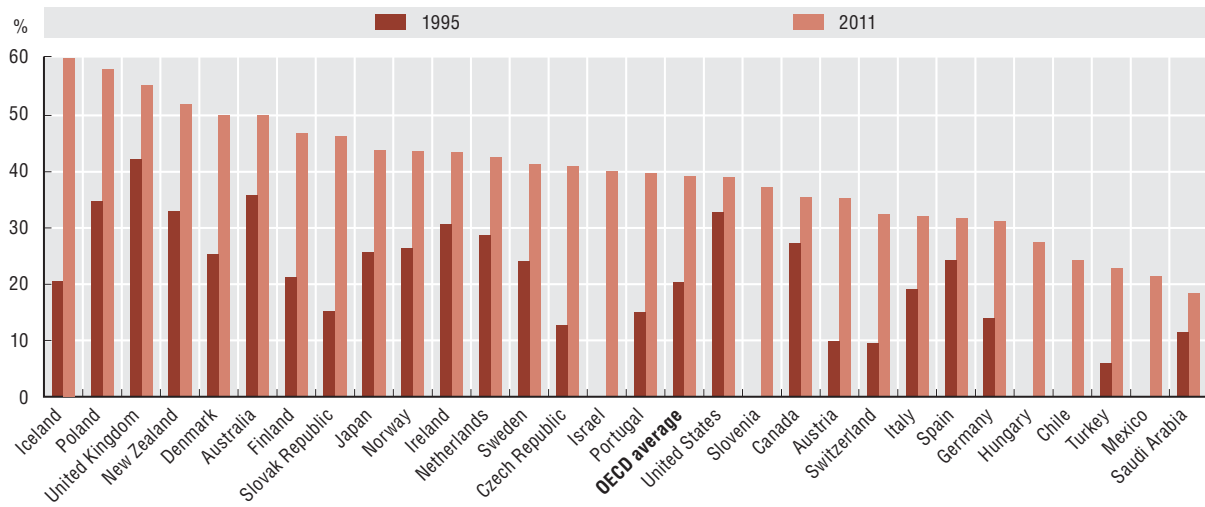
Higher Education Management and Policy (journal)

OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education (series of national reviews)

How many young people graduate from tertiary education?

Figure 2.3. **First-time graduation rates from university-level education (1995, 2011)**

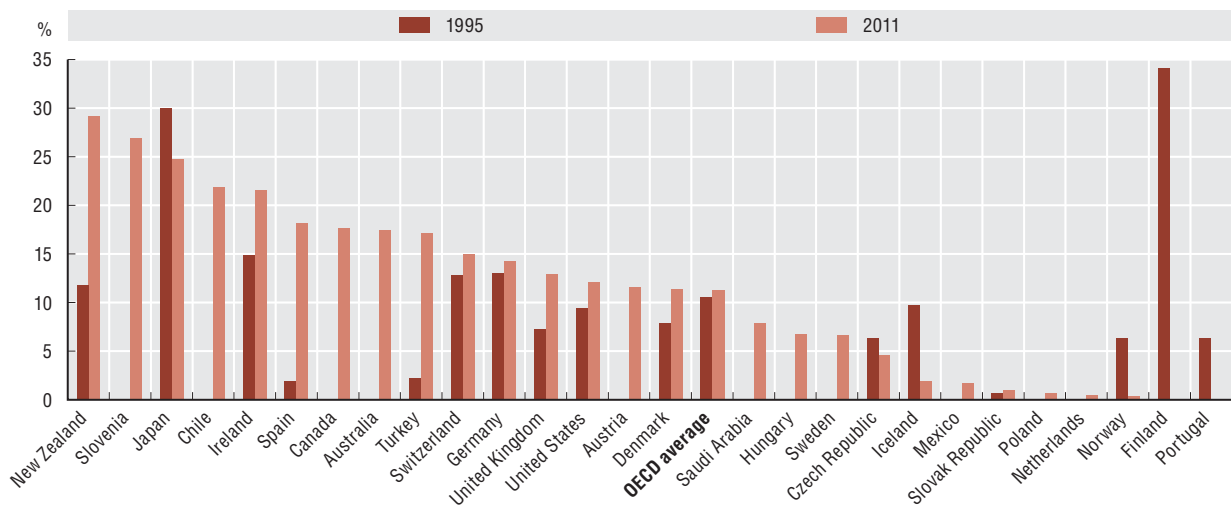
These figures show the growth in the percentage of first-time graduates from university-level education.



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013*, Chart A3.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932846386>.

Figure 2.4. **First-time graduation rates from vocationally oriented education (1995, 2011)**

These figures show the growth or decline in the percentage of first-time graduates from vocationally oriented tertiary education.



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013*, Chart A3.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932846386>.



From:
Education at a Glance 2013
Highlights

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2013-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2013), "How many young people graduate from tertiary education?", in *Education at a Glance 2013: Highlights*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2013-9-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.