

## International Educational Attainment

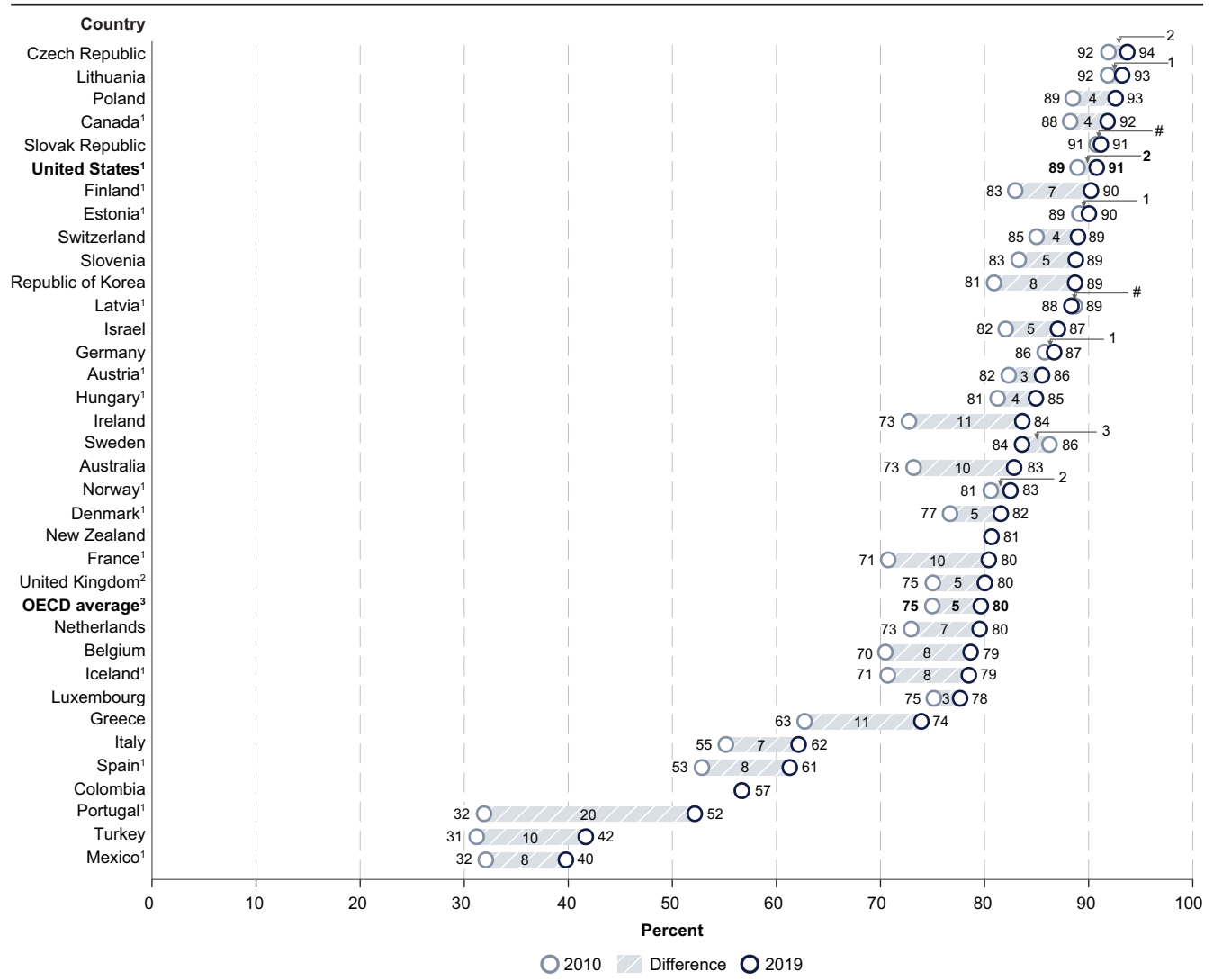
*Across OECD countries, the average percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds with any postsecondary degree increased from 31 percent in 2010 to 38 percent in 2019. In the United States, during the same period, the percentage increased from 42 percent to 48 percent.*

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a group of 37 countries whose purpose is to promote trade and economic growth. The OECD also collects and publishes an array of data on its member countries. This indicator uses OECD data to compare educational attainment across countries using two measures: *high school completion* and *attainment of any postsecondary degree*.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, “high school completion” refers to individuals who have been awarded a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, such as the GED.<sup>2</sup> “Attainment of any postsecondary degree” refers to individuals who have been awarded an associate’s or higher degree.<sup>3</sup>

Among the 35 countries<sup>4</sup> for which the OECD reported 2019 data on high school completion rates, the percentages

of 25- to 64-year-olds<sup>5</sup> who had completed high school ranged from 40 percent in Mexico to 90 percent or more in eight countries (Estonia, Finland, the United States, the Slovak Republic, Canada, Poland, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic). Twenty-three countries reported that more than 80 percent had completed high school as of 2019. Additionally, among the 36 countries<sup>6</sup> for which the OECD reported 2019 data on postsecondary attainment rates, the percentages earning any postsecondary degree ranged from less than 20 percent in Mexico and Italy to 50 percent or more in five countries (the Republic of Korea, Israel, Luxembourg, Japan, and Canada). Nineteen countries, including the United States, reported that 40 percent or more in this age range had earned any postsecondary degree as of 2019.

**Figure 1. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old who had completed high school in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries: 2010 and 2019**

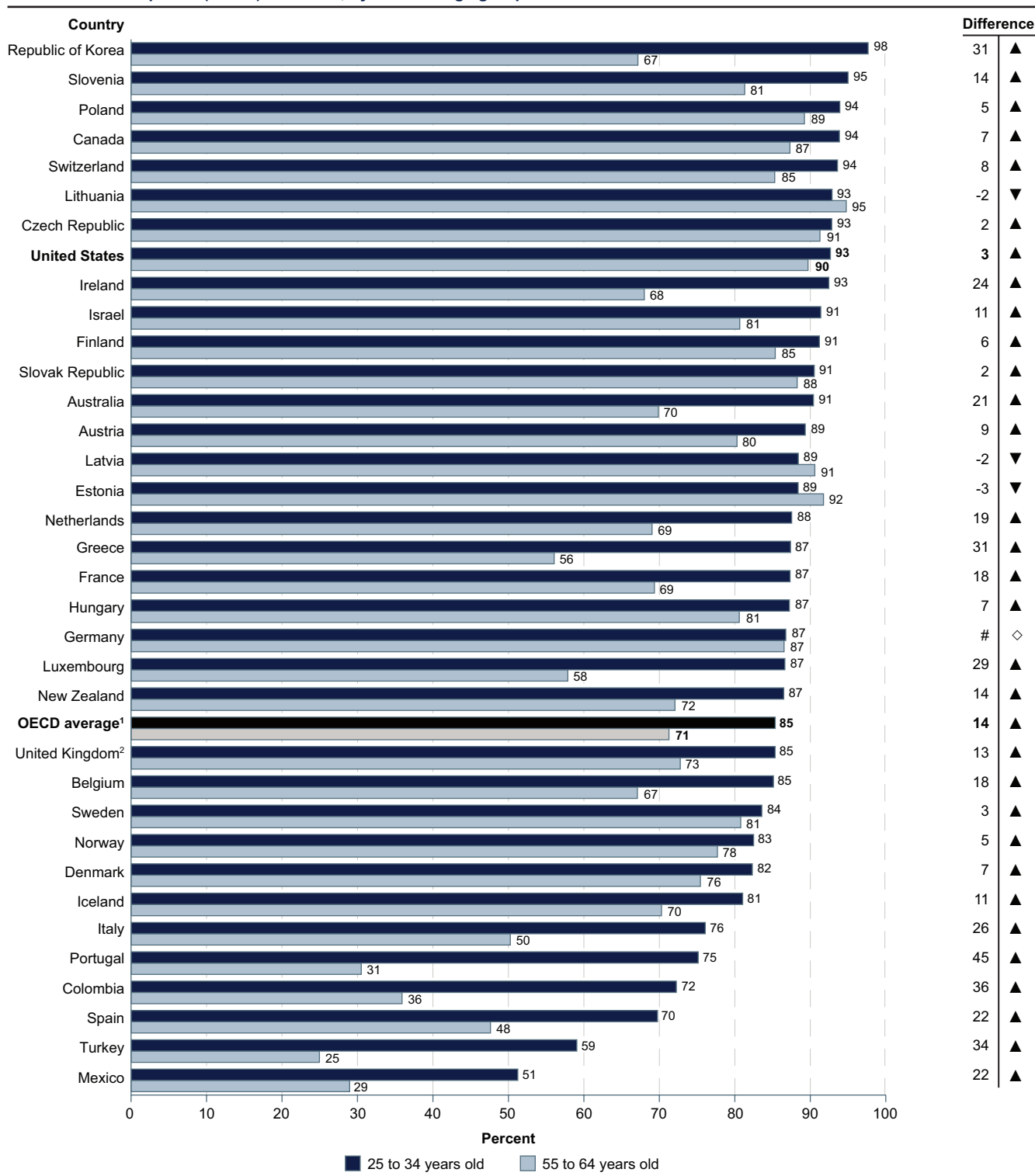


# Rounds to zero.  
<sup>1</sup> The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was revised in 2011. Although data for 2010 were originally calculated using the 1997 version of ISCED, the footnoted countries revised their 2010 data to align with the 2011 version of ISCED.  
<sup>2</sup> Data include some persons who completed a sufficient number of certain types of programs, any one of which individually would be classified as a program that only partially completes the high school (or upper secondary) level of education.  
<sup>3</sup> Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. The average includes all current OECD countries for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year. Countries not shown in this figure may be included in the OECD average.  
 NOTE: Of the 37 OECD countries, 35 are included in this figure. Data for Colombia and New Zealand are available only for 2019. Chile and Japan are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010 and 2019. Data in this figure refer to degrees classified under ISCED 2011 as completing level 3 (upper secondary education) or to comparable degrees under ISCED 1997. In the United States, "high school completion" refers to individuals who have been awarded a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, such as the GED. ISCED 2011 was used to calculate data for 2019 for all countries. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database, retrieved September 14, 2020, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 603.10.

In 31 of the 33 countries<sup>7</sup> for which the OECD reported data on high school completion rates in both 2010 and 2019, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school in 2019 was either higher than or not measurably different from the percentage in 2010. The OECD average percentage<sup>8</sup> of those with a high school education rose from 75 percent in 2010 to 80 percent in 2019. Meanwhile, in the United States the percentage who had completed high school rose from 89 to 91 percent during this period.

For 25- to 34-year-olds—that is, the younger age group whose educational attainment is likely to reflect more recent shifts in educational and economic systems—the OECD average percentage who had completed high school rose from 82 to 85 percent between 2010 and 2019, while the corresponding percentage for the United States increased from 88 to 93 percent. The gap in high school completion rates between the United States percentage and the OECD average percentage in 2019 was not measurably different from the gap in 2010 (7 percentage points).

**Figure 2. Percentage of the population who had completed high school in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by selected age groups: 2019**



# Rounds to zero.

▲ The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had completed high school is higher than the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school.

▼ The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had completed high school is lower than the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school.

◇ The percentages of 25- to 34-year-olds and 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school are not measurably different.

<sup>1</sup> Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. The average includes all current OECD countries for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year. Countries not shown in this figure may be included in the OECD average.

<sup>2</sup> Data include some persons who completed a sufficient number of certain types of programs, any one of which individually would be classified as a program that only partially completes the high school (or upper secondary) level of education.

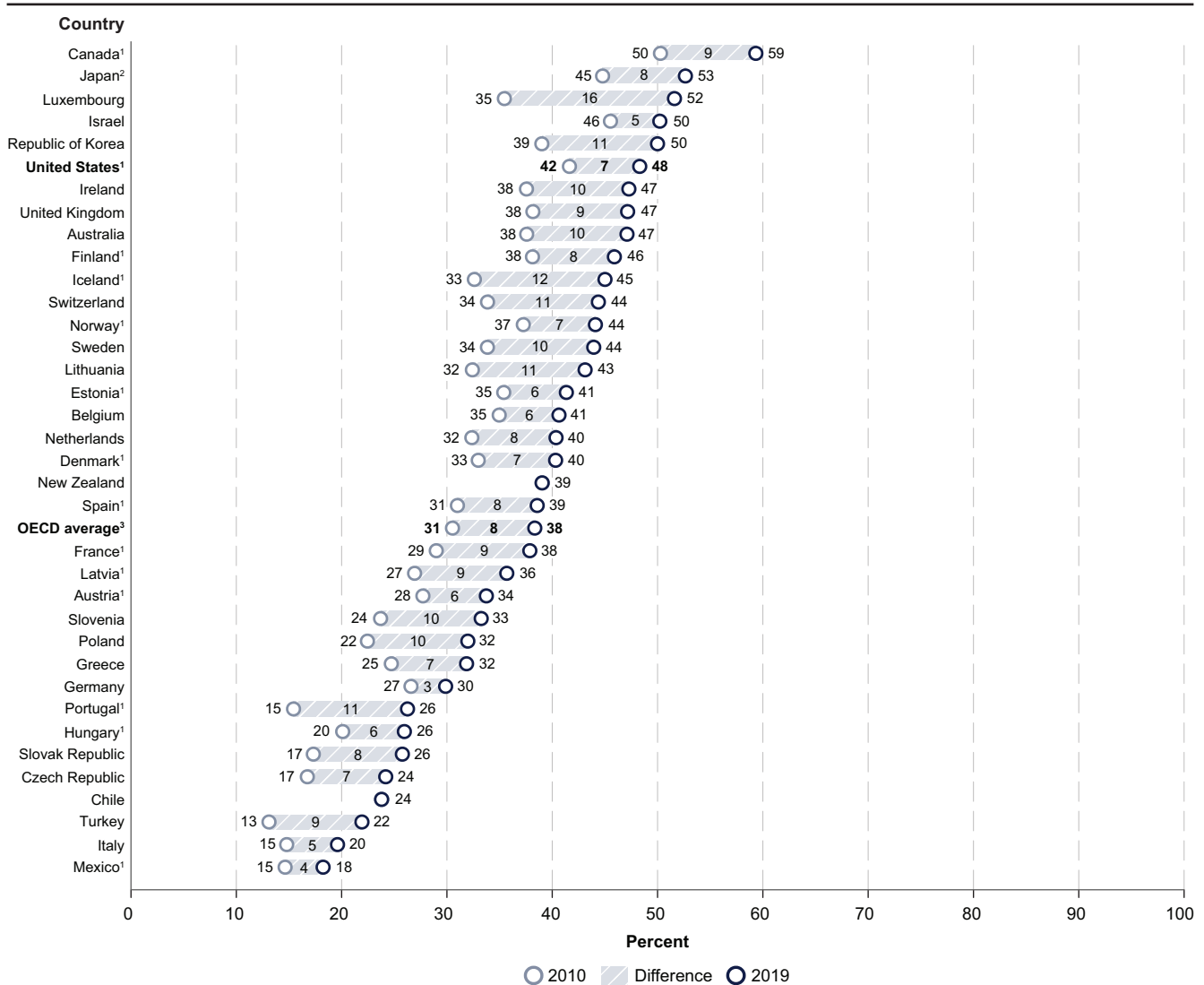
NOTE: Of the 37 OECD countries, 35 are included in this figure. Chile and Japan are excluded because 2019 data are not available for these countries. Data in this figure refer to degrees classified under the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 as completing level 3 (upper secondary education). In the United States, "high school completion" refers to individuals who have been awarded a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, such as the GED. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database, retrieved September 14, 2020, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 603.10.

In 32 of the 35 countries for which the OECD reported 2019 data on high school completion rates, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had completed high school was either higher than or not measurably different from the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school. Across these 32 OECD countries, the average high school completion percentage was higher for younger

ages (85 percent) than for the older ages (71 percent). The three exceptions were Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In 29 countries, including the United States, 80 percent or more of the younger age group had completed high school in 2019. In comparison, the percentage of the older age group who had completed high school was 80 percent or more in only 16 countries, including the United States.

**Figure 3. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old who had attained any postsecondary degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries: 2010 and 2019**



<sup>1</sup> The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was revised in 2011. Although data for 2010 were originally calculated using the 1997 version of ISCED, the footnoted countries revised their 2010 data to align with the 2011 version of ISCED.

<sup>2</sup> Data for both years include some postsecondary nontertiary awards (i.e., awards that are below the associate's degree level).

<sup>3</sup> Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. The average includes all current OECD countries for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year. Countries not shown in this figure may be included in the OECD average.

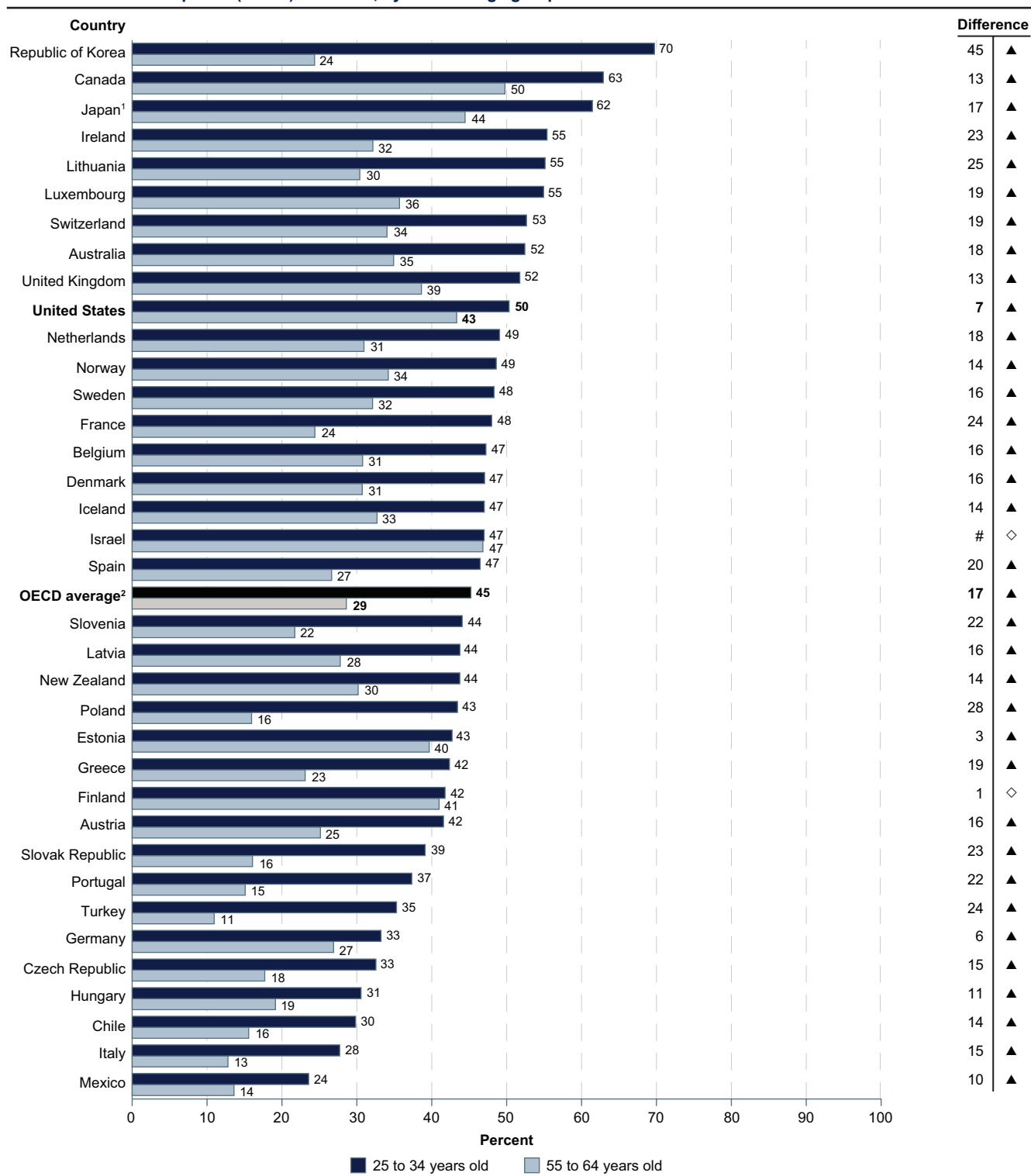
NOTE: Of the 37 OECD countries, 36 are included in this figure. Data for Chile and New Zealand are available only for 2019. Colombia is excluded because data are not available for 2010 and 2019. Data in this figure include all tertiary (postsecondary) degrees, which correspond to all degrees at the associate's level and above in the United States. Under ISCED 2011, tertiary degrees are classified at the following levels: level 5 (corresponding to an associate's degree in the United States), level 6 (a bachelor's or equivalent degree), level 7 (a master's or equivalent degree), and level 8 (a doctoral or equivalent degree). ISCED 2011 was used to calculate data for 2019 for all countries. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database, retrieved September 16, 2020, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 603.20.

In each of the 34 countries<sup>9</sup> for which the OECD reported data on postsecondary attainment rates in both 2010 and 2019, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree was higher in 2019 than in 2010. During this period, the OECD average percentage of those with any postsecondary degree increased by 8 percentage points to 38 percent, while the corresponding percentage for the United States increased by 7 percentage points to 48 percent.

The OECD average percentage for 25- to 34-year-olds who had any postsecondary degree rose from 38 percent in 2010 to 45 percent in 2019. The percentage for those in this age group in the United States rose from 42 to 50 percent over this period. The percentage gap in postsecondary attainment between the United States and the OECD average in 2019 was not measurably different from the gap in 2010 (5 percentage points).

**Figure 4. Percentage of the population who had attained any postsecondary degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by selected age groups: 2019**



# Rounds to zero.

▲ The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with any postsecondary degree is higher than the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds with any postsecondary degree.

◇ The percentages of 25- to 34-year-olds and 55- to 64-year-olds who had attained any postsecondary degree are not measurably different.

<sup>1</sup> Data include some postsecondary nontertiary awards (i.e., awards that are below the associate's degree level).

<sup>2</sup> Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. The average includes all current OECD countries for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year. Countries not shown in this figure may be included in the OECD average.

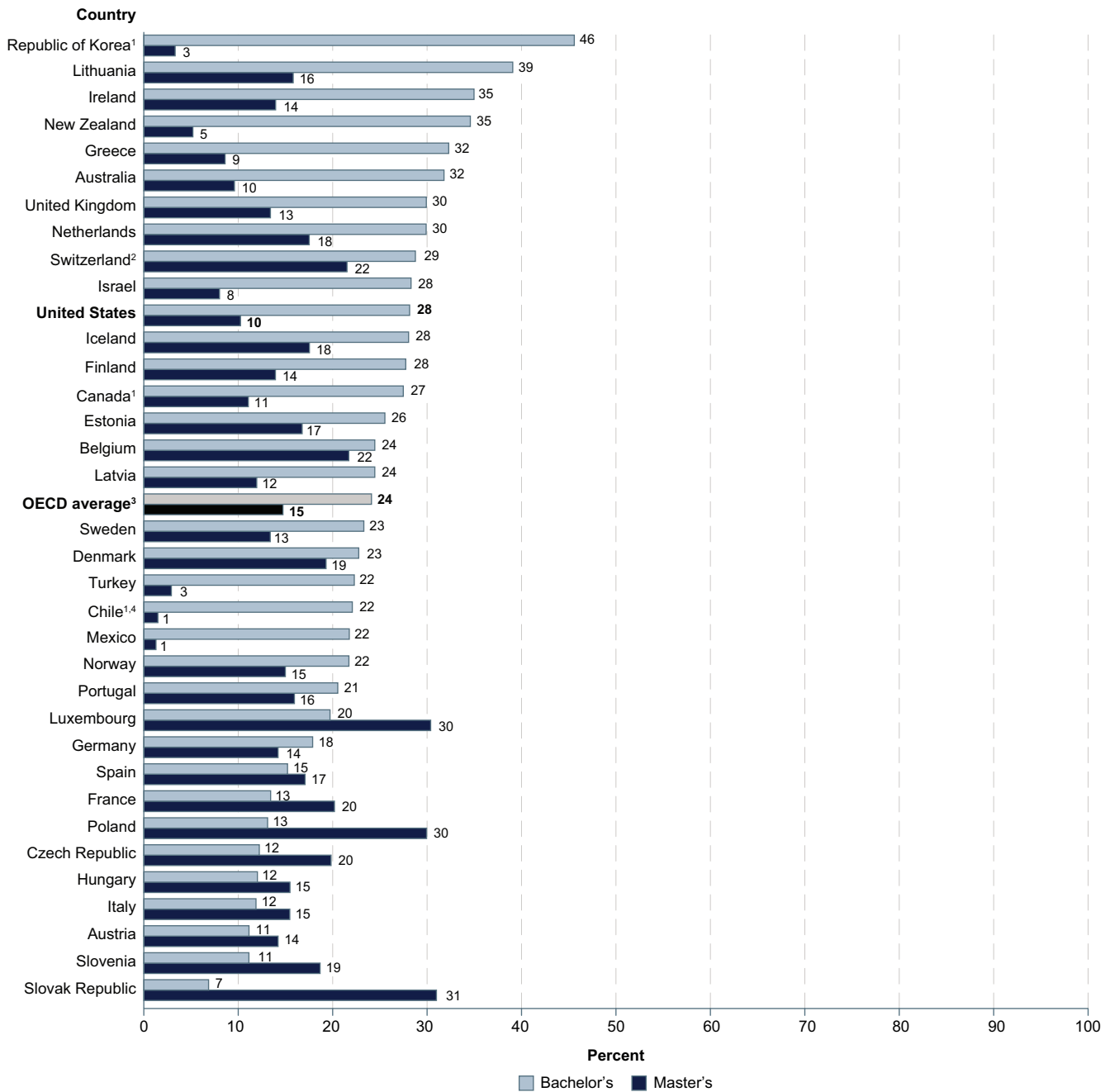
NOTE: Of the 37 OECD countries, 36 are included in this figure. Colombia is excluded from the figure because data are not available for 2019. All data in this figure were calculated using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 classification of tertiary (postsecondary) degrees. Under ISCED 2011, tertiary degrees are classified at the following levels: level 5 (corresponding to an associate's degree in the United States), level 6 (a bachelor's or equivalent degree), level 7 (a master's or equivalent degree), and level 8 (a doctoral or equivalent degree). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database, retrieved September 16, 2020, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 603.20.

Postsecondary attainment rates were higher among 25- to 34-year-olds than among 55- to 64-year-olds in 34 of the 36 countries for which the OECD reported 2019 data on postsecondary attainment rates. In Finland and Israel, the postsecondary attainment rates for these age groups were not measurably different from each other. The OECD average percentage for the younger ages who had earned any postsecondary degree (45 percent) was higher than the corresponding percentage for the older

ages (29 percent). In the United States, 50 percent of the younger age group had earned any postsecondary degree, compared with 43 percent of the older age group. Estonia, Finland, Japan, Israel, and Canada were the only other countries where 40 percent or more of the older age group had earned any postsecondary degree.<sup>10</sup> In comparison, there were 28 countries in which 40 percent or more of the younger age group had earned any postsecondary degree.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 5. Percentage of the population 25 to 34 years old who had attained a bachelor's degree or master's degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by highest degree attained: 2019**



<sup>1</sup> Doctoral or equivalent degree data are included in master's or equivalent degree.

<sup>2</sup> Associate's degree data are included in bachelor's or equivalent and master's or equivalent degree.

<sup>3</sup> Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. The average includes all current OECD countries for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year. Countries not shown in this figure may be included in the OECD average.

<sup>4</sup> Data are from 2017.

NOTE: Of all 37 OECD countries, 35 are included in this figure. Data for Colombia and Japan are excluded because data on master's degree attainment are not available for these countries. All data in this figure were calculated using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 classification of tertiary (postsecondary) degrees. Under ISCED 2011, tertiary degrees are classified at the following levels: level 6 (bachelor's or equivalent degree) and level 7 (a master's or equivalent degree). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database, retrieved September 16, 2020, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 603.30.



Looking at the highest postsecondary degree attained by 25- to 34-year-olds reveals significant variations in degree attainment across OECD countries in 2019. For example, the percentage of this younger age group whose highest degree attained was a bachelor's degree ranged from 7 percent in the Slovak Republic to 46 percent in the Republic of Korea. The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds whose highest degree attained was a master's degree ranged from 1 percent in Mexico and Chile to 31 percent in

the Slovak Republic. In the United States, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds earning a bachelor's degree was higher than the OECD average (28 vs. 24 percent), while the percentage earning a master's degree was lower (10 vs. 15 percent). Additionally, 10 percent of U.S. 25- to 34-year-olds had earned an associate's degree and 2 percent had earned a doctoral degree in 2019, both of which were higher than the OECD averages (8 percent and 1 percent, respectively).

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Attainment data in this indicator refer to comparable levels of degrees, as classified by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). ISCED was revised in 2011. The previous version, ISCED 1997, was used to calculate data for all years prior to 2014. Data using the ISCED 2011 classification may not be directly comparable to data using the ISCED 1997 classification.

For additional information, please see <https://www.oecd.org/education/isced-2011-operational-manual-9789264228368-en.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Data in this section refer to degrees classified as ISCED 2011 level 3, which generally corresponds to high school completion in the United States, with some exceptions.

<sup>3</sup> Under ISCED 2011, postsecondary degrees are classified at the following levels: level 5 (corresponding to an associate's degree in the United States), level 6 (a bachelor's or equivalent degree), level 7 (a master's or equivalent degree), and level 8 (a doctoral or equivalent degree). The structure of education differs across countries and not all countries have significant numbers of awards at each of these degree levels.

<sup>4</sup> Chile and Japan are excluded because 2019 data on their high school completion rates are not available.

<sup>5</sup> The OECD defines the adult population as 25- to 64-year-olds to capture the adult population after postsecondary education and prior to retirement from the labor force.

<sup>6</sup> Colombia is excluded because 2019 data on its postsecondary attainment rates are not available.

<sup>7</sup> Colombia and New Zealand are excluded because data are not available for these countries for either 2010 or 2019. Chile and Japan are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010 and 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this indicator, the "OECD average" refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. The average includes all current OECD countries for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year. Countries excluded from analyses in this indicator may be included in the OECD average.

<sup>9</sup> Chile and New Zealand are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010. Colombia is excluded because data are not available for 2010 and 2019.

<sup>10</sup> The estimate for Estonia (39.7 percent) is not significantly different from 40 percent.

<sup>11</sup> The estimate for the Slovak Republic (39.2 percent) is not significantly different from 40 percent.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 603.10, 603.20, and 603.30

**Related indicators and resources:** [Educational Attainment of Young Adults](#); [Education Expenditures by Country](#); [International Comparisons: Mathematics and Science Achievement at Grades 4 and 8](#); [International Comparisons: Reading Literacy at Grade 4](#); [International Comparisons: Science, Reading, and Mathematics Literacy of 15-Year-Old Students](#)

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**Glossary:** Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Doctoral degree; Educational attainment; Gap; High school completer; International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED); Master's degree; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Postsecondary education