

International Educational Attainment

Across OECD countries, the average percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds with any postsecondary degree increased from 30 percent as of 2010 to 40 percent as of 2021. In the United States, during the same period, the percentage increased from 42 to 50 percent.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a group of 38 countries (as of 2021) 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.^{1,2} It focuses on how the United States compared with other OECD countries, both in terms of its educational attainment rates as of 2021 and changes in the rates since 2010.³ In this indicator, for 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.⁴ Also, “attainment of any postsecondary degree” refers to individuals who have been awarded an associate’s or higher degree.⁵

Overall Educational Attainment Rates

Among the 36 countries⁶ for which the OECD reported 2021 data on high school completion rates, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds⁷ who had completed high school was

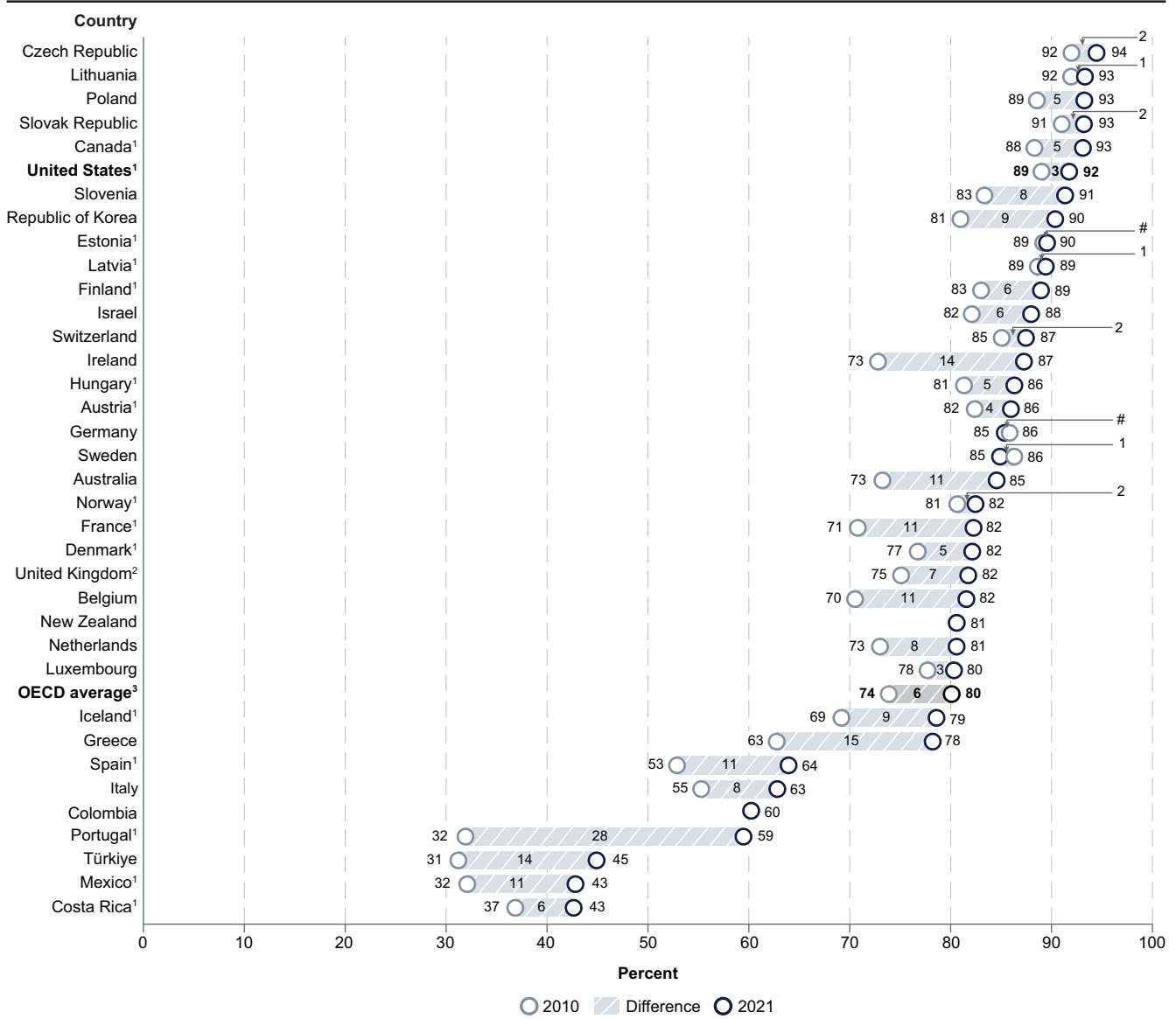
- 80 percent on average across OECD countries;
- lowest (43 percent) in Costa Rica and Mexico;
- highest (94 percent) in the Czech Republic; and
- 92 percent in the United States (higher than 30 countries).⁸

Additionally, among the 37 countries⁹ for which the OECD reported 2021 data on postsecondary attainment rates, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree was

- 40 percent on average across OECD countries;
- lowest (20 percent) in Italy and Mexico;
- highest (62 percent) in Canada; and
- 50 percent in the United States (higher than 29 countries).

High School Completion Rates Across OECD Countries

Figure 1. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old who had completed high school, by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country: 2010 and 2021



Rounds to zero.

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (including those that had been invited to become members and were under review, referred to as the accession process), to which each country reporting data contributes equally.

NOTE: Of the 38 OECD countries, 36 are included in this figure. Data for New Zealand and Colombia are available only for 2021. Chile and Japan are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010 and 2021. 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 2021 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 October 3, 2022, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 603.10.

In 32 of the 34 countries¹⁰ for which the OECD reported data on high school completion rates in both 2010 and 2021, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school as of 2021 was either higher than or not measurably different from the percentage as of 2010. During this period,

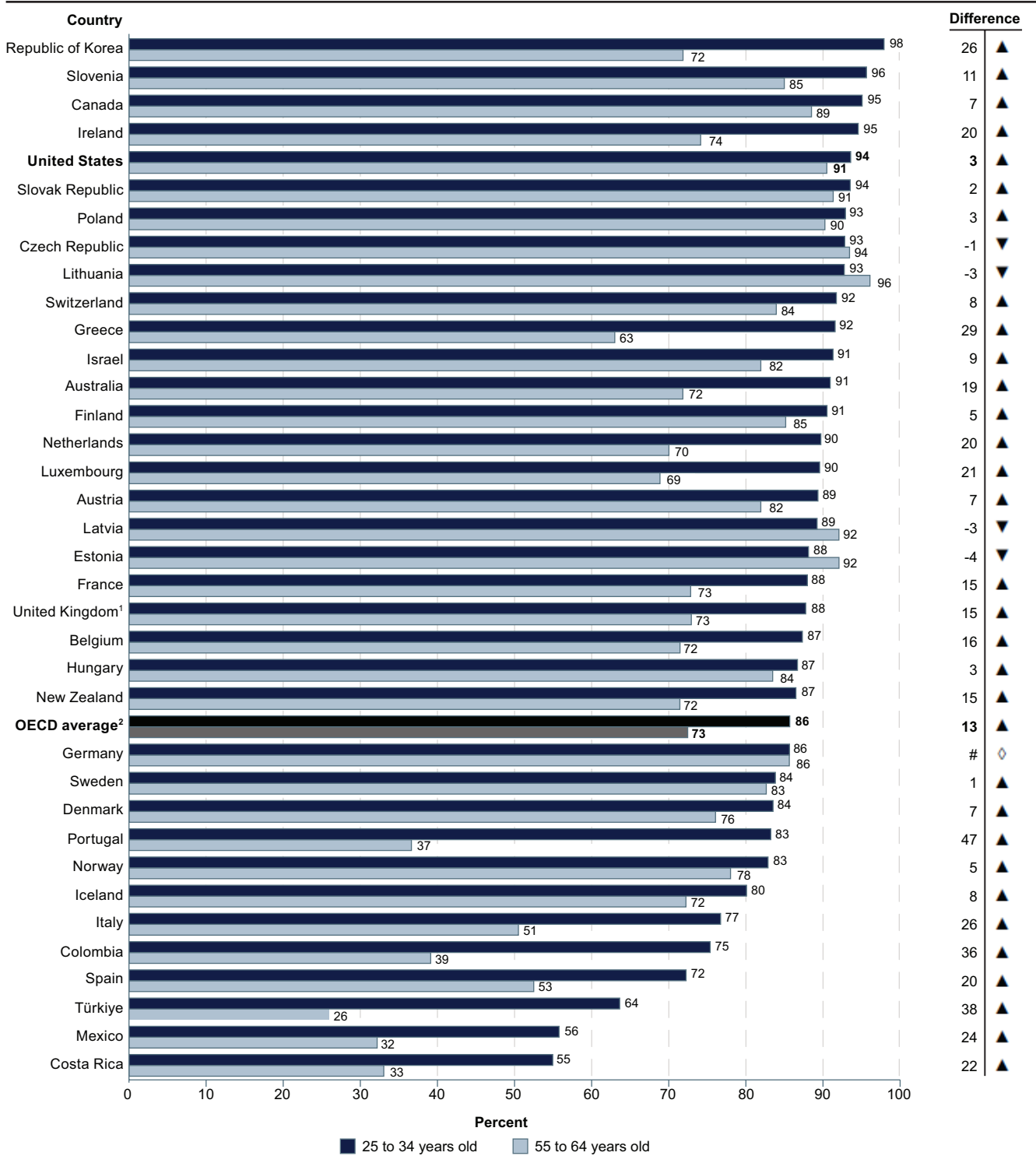
- the OECD average percentage¹¹ who had completed high school increased from 74 to 80 percent; and
- the corresponding percentage for the United States increased from 89 to 92 percent.

The age group whose educational attainment is likely to reflect more recent shifts in educational and economic systems is 25- to 34-year-olds. For this age group, during the period between 2010 and 2021,

- the OECD average percentage who had completed high school increased from 81 to 86 percent; and
- the corresponding percentage for the United States increased from 88 to 94 percent.

The difference in high school completion rates between the United States and the OECD average as of 2021 was not measurably different from the difference as of 2010 (8 percentage points in both years).

Figure 2. Percentage of the population who had completed high school, by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country and selected age groups: 2021



See notes on following page.

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.

¹ 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.

² Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (including those that had been invited to become members and were under review, referred to as the accession process), to which each country reporting data contributes equally.

NOTE: Of the 38 OECD countries, 36 are included in this figure. Chile and Japan are excluded because 2021 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.

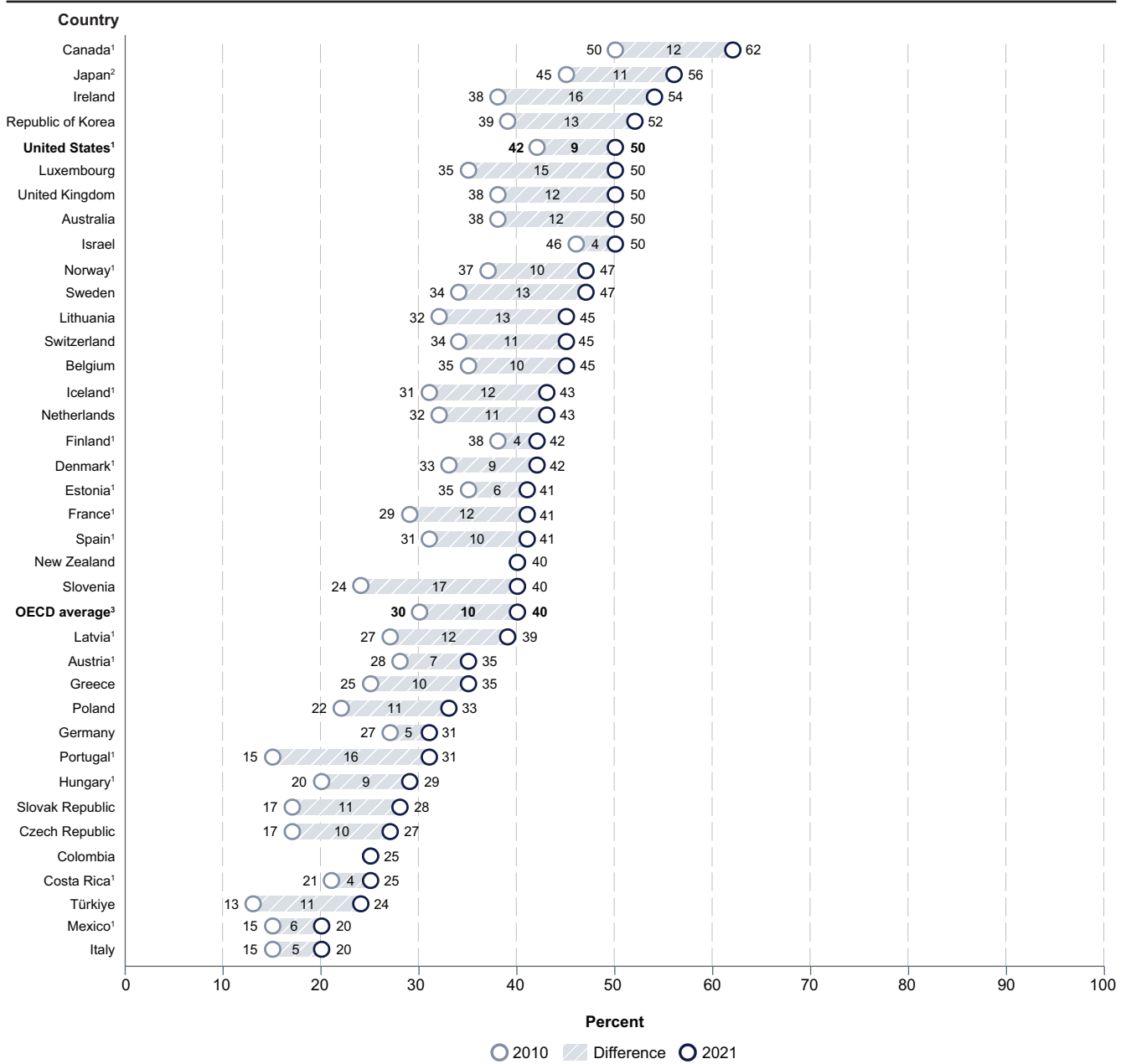
SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database, retrieved October 3, 2022, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 603.10.

Across the 36 OECD countries for which the OECD reported 2021 data on high school completion rates, the average high school completion percentage was higher for 25- to 34-year-olds (86 percent) than for 55- to 64-year-olds (73 percent). More specifically, 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 in 32 of these countries. The four exceptions were the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In 30 countries, including the United States, 80 percent or more of the younger age group had completed high school. 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.

Postsecondary Attainment Rates Across OECD Countries

Figure 3. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old who had attained any postsecondary degree, by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country: 2010 and 2021



¹ 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 footnote countries revised their 2010 data to align with the 2011 version of ISCED.

² Data include some postsecondary nontertiary awards (i.e., awards that are below the associate's degree level).

³ Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (including those that had been invited to become members and were under review, referred to as the accession process), to which each country reporting data contributes equally. NOTE: Of the 38 OECD countries, 37 are included in this figure. Data for New Zealand and Colombia are available only for 2021. Chile is excluded because data are not available for 2010 and 2021. Data in this figure refer to degrees classified under ISCED 2011 as 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 2021 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 October 3, 2022, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 603.20.

In each of the 35 countries¹² for which the OECD reported data on postsecondary attainment rates in both 2010 and 2021, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree was higher as of 2021 than as of 2010. During this period, these percentages increased

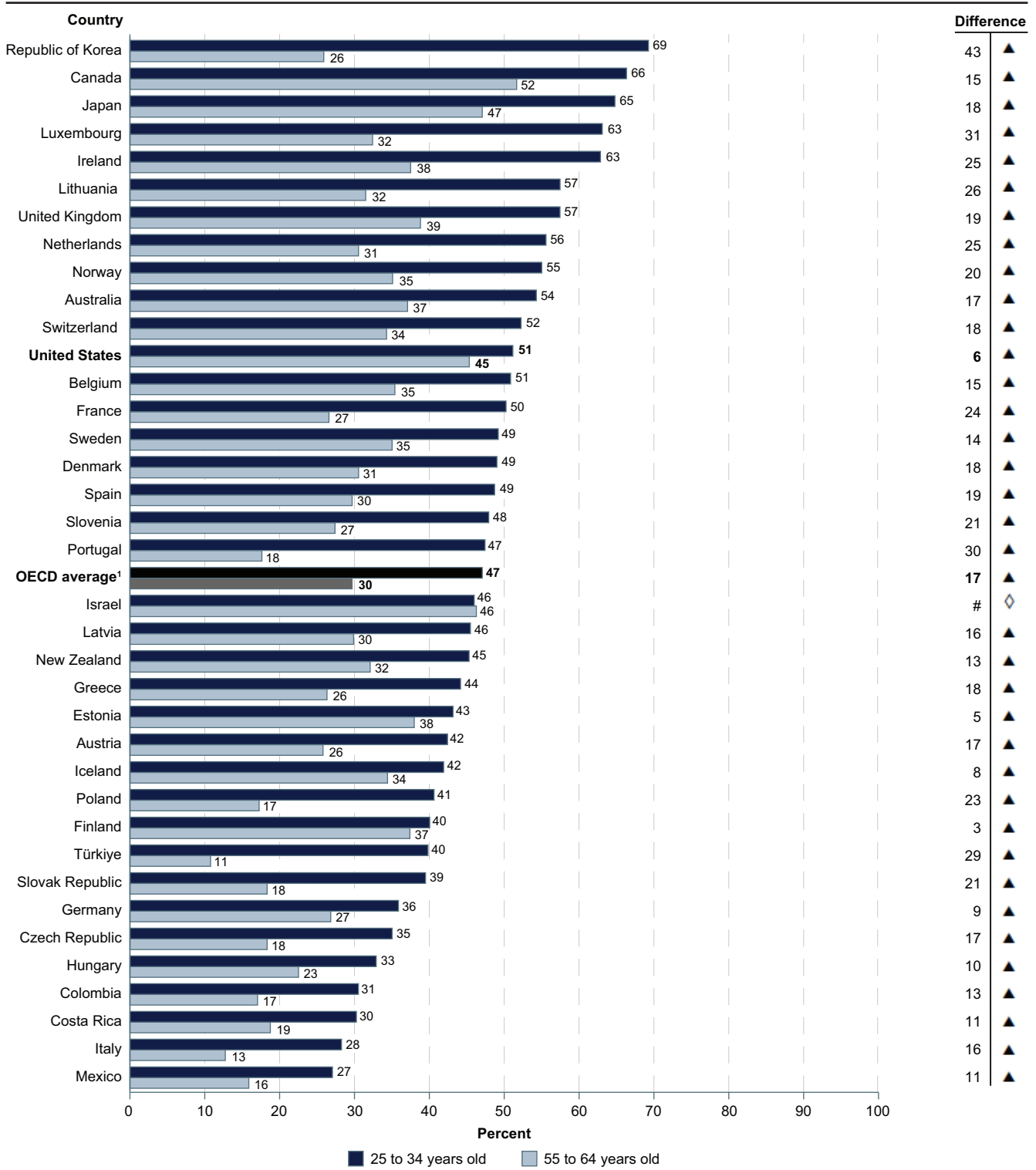
- from 30 to 40 percent across OECD countries on average; and
- from 42 to 50 percent in the United States.

Between 2010 and 2021, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree also increased

- from 37 to 47 percent across OECD countries on average; and
- from 42 to 51 percent in the United States.

The percentage difference in postsecondary attainment for 25- to 34-year-olds between the United States and the OECD average as of 2021 (4 percentage points) was not measurably different from the difference as of 2010.

Figure 4. Percentage of the population who had attained any postsecondary degree, by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country and selected age groups: 2021



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 completed high school are not measurably different.

¹ Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (including those that had been invited to become members and were under review, referred to as the accession process), to which each country reporting data contributes equally.

NOTE: Of the 38 OECD countries, 37 are included in this figure. Chile is excluded from the figure because data are not available for 2021. Data in this figure refer to degrees classified under the 2011 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as 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). Data for Japan include awards from some postsecondary nondegree programs (i.e., awards that are below the associate's degree level). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Online Education Database. Retrieved October 3, 2022, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 603.20.

International Educational Attainment

Postsecondary attainment rates were higher among 25- to 34-year-olds than among 55- to 64-year-olds in 36 of the 37 countries for which the OECD reported 2021 data on postsecondary attainment rates. Postsecondary attainment rates for the younger age group compared with the older age group were

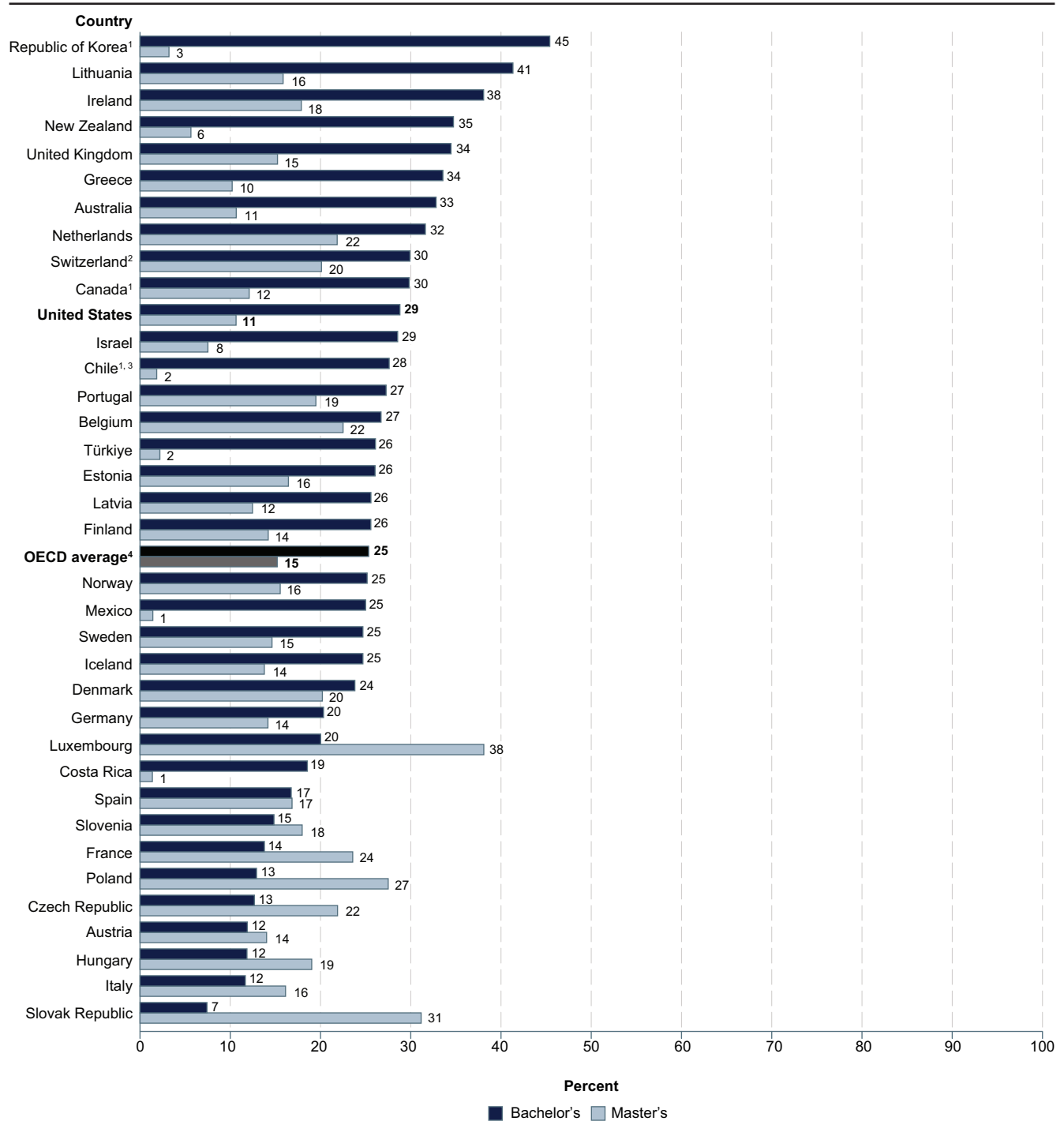
- 47 vs. 30 percent across OECD countries on average; and
- 51 vs. 45 percent in the United States.

Chapter: 5/International Comparisons

Section: Enrollment and Attainment

Canada, Israel, Japan, and the United States were the only countries where more than 40 percent of those in the older age group had earned any postsecondary degree. In comparison, there were 26 countries in which more than 40 percent of those in the younger age group had earned any postsecondary degree.¹³

Figure 5. Percentage of the population 25 to 34 years old who had attained a bachelor's degree or master's degree, by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country and highest degree attained: 2021



¹ Doctoral or equivalent degree data are included in master's or equivalent degree.

² Associate's degree data are included in bachelor's or equivalent degree and master's or equivalent degree.

³ Data are from 2020.

⁴ Refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (including those that had been invited to become members and were under review, referred to as the accession process), to which each country reporting data contributes equally.

NOTE: Of all 38 OECD countries, 36 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. Data in this figure refer to degrees classified under the 2011 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as 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 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 October 3, 2022, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 603.30.

Looking at the highest postsecondary degree attained by 25- to 34-year-olds reveals substantial variations in degree attainment across OECD countries as of 2021. For example, in this age group,

- bachelor's degree attainment rates ranged from 7 percent in the Slovak Republic to 45 percent in the Republic of Korea;¹⁴ and
- master's degree attainment rates ranged from 1 percent in Costa Rica and Mexico to 38 percent in Luxembourg.

In the United States, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had earned a bachelor's degree as their highest degree was higher than the OECD average (29 vs. 25 percent), while the percentage who had earned a master's degree as their highest degree was lower (11 vs. 15 percent). Additionally, 10 percent of U.S. 25- to 34-year-olds had earned an associate's degree as their highest degree and 1 percent had earned a doctoral degree as their highest degree as of 2021, percentages that were both higher than the corresponding OECD averages (8 and 1 percent, respectively).¹⁵

Endnotes:

¹ 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 for all years prior to 2014, unless a country revised its historical data to align with the 2011 version of ISCED. 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>.

² Attainment rates refer to the percentage of the population who had completed a certain level of education by the year of data collection, rather than the percentage who completed education in a particular year only.

³ Throughout this indicator, data are reported for all current Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (including those that had been invited to become members and were under review, referred to as the accession process) for which a given year's data are available, even if they were not members of the OECD in that year.

⁴ In this indicator, data on high school completion refer to degrees classified as ISCED 2011 level 3, which generally corresponds to high school completion in the United States, with some exceptions.

⁵ Under ISCED 2011, postsecondary, or 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). The structure of education differs across countries and not all countries have significant numbers of awards at each of these degree levels.

⁶ Chile and Japan are excluded because 2021 data on their high school completion rates are not available.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Throughout this indicator, counts of countries are based on statistical testing using unrounded data.

⁹ Chile is excluded because 2021 data on its postsecondary attainment rates are not available.

¹⁰ Colombia and New Zealand are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010. Chile and Japan are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010 and 2021.

¹¹ Throughout this indicator, the "OECD average" refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries (including those in the accession process), to which each country reporting data contributes equally. Countries excluded from analyses in this indicator may be included in the OECD average.

¹² Colombia and New Zealand are excluded because data are not available for these countries for 2010. Chile is excluded because data are not available for 2010 and 2021.

¹³ These 26 countries exclude Finland and Iceland, whose postsecondary degree attainment rates for 25- to 34-year-olds (40 and 42 percent, respectively) were not measurably different from 40 percent.

¹⁴ The bachelor's degree attainment rate for Japan was reported to be 47 percent, but it includes master's or equivalent degree and doctoral or equivalent degree.

¹⁵ Although both the U.S. percentage and OECD average percentage round to 1 percent, the unrounded U.S. percentage was higher than the unrounded OECD average (1.41 vs. 1.03 percent).

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 603.10, 603.20, and 603.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 603.10 and 603.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 603.10 and 603.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 603.10 and 603.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, tables 603.10 and 603.20

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](#)

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