

International Educational Attainment

The percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned a bachelor's or higher degree was higher in 2012 than in 2001 in the United States (33 vs. 28 percent) and across OECD countries (24 vs. 15 percent).

In 2012, some 26 out of 32 countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)¹ reported that 70 percent or more of their adult populations (ages 25 to 64) had completed high school.² The OECD is an organization of 34 countries whose purpose is to promote trade and economic growth. Among OECD countries, the percentages of high school completers ranged from under 40 percent in Turkey, Mexico, and Portugal

to over 90 percent in the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. Additionally, 21 out of 34 OECD countries reported that 20 percent or more of their adult populations had completed a bachelor's or higher degree. Among OECD countries, the percentages of bachelor's degree completers ranged from 15 percent or less in Chile, Austria, and Slovenia to more than 30 percent in the United Kingdom, Iceland, the Netherlands, Israel, the United States, and Norway.

Table 1. Percentage of the population that had completed high school in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by age group: 2012

OECD country	25 to 34 years old	55 to 64 years old	Difference
OECD average	83	65	17 ▲
Korea, Republic of	98	48	51 ▲
Portugal	58	20	38 ▲
Greece	83	50	33 ▲
Ireland	86	55	31 ▲
Italy	72	42	29 ▲
Spain	64	35	29 ▲
Belgium	82	56	26 ▲
Turkey	46	21	25 ▲
France	83	59	24 ▲
Australia	87	64	23 ▲
Netherlands	83	61	22 ▲
Mexico	46	25	21 ▲
Slovenia	94	74	20 ▲
Luxembourg	86	69	18 ▲
New Zealand	80	64	16 ▲
Finland	90	74	16 ▲
United Kingdom	85	69	16 ▲
Austria	89	74	15 ▲
Iceland	75	61	14 ▲
Poland	94	81	13 ▲
Israel	90	77	13 ▲
Hungary	88	75	13 ▲
Sweden	91	79	11 ▲
Denmark	82	71	11 ▲
Slovak Republic	94	86	8 ▲
Canada	92	84	8 ▲
Switzerland	89	82	8 ▲
Czech Republic	94	87	7 ▲
Germany	87	84	2 ▲
Norway	82	82	0 ◇
United States	89	90	-1 ◇
Estonia	86	88	-2 ◇
Chile	—	—	— —
Japan	—	—	— —

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

— Not available.

NOTE: Educational attainment data in this table refer to degrees classified by the OECD as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3 for high school. The OECD average refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. Calculations based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 2014. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, table 603.10.

In most OECD countries, higher percentages of the youngest adult age group (ages 25 to 34) than of the oldest adult age group (ages 55 to 64) had completed high school in 2012. Across these countries, the average percentage of those completing high school was higher for 25- to 34-year-olds (83 percent) than for 55- to 64-year-olds (65 percent). In only three countries, Norway, the United States, and Estonia, did the youngest and oldest

age groups have high school completion percentages that were not measurably different. In each of these countries, the high school completion rates for both of these age groups were above 80 percent. Six other countries also had 80 percent or more of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school: Poland, Switzerland, Canada, Germany, the Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic.

Table 2. Percentage of the population with a bachelor's or higher degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by age group: 2012

OECD country	25 to 34 years old	55 to 64 years old	Difference
OECD average	30	17	13 ▲
Korea, Republic of	40	11	29 ▲
Poland	41	13	28 ▲
Finland	39	15	24 ▲
Luxembourg	36	17	19 ▲
Ireland	33	15	19 ▲
United Kingdom	40	22	18 ▲
Norway	44	27	18 ▲
Portugal	28	11	17 ▲
Japan	35	19	16 ▲
Iceland	36	20	15 ▲
Czech Republic	28	13	15 ▲
Sweden	34	19	15 ▲
Netherlands	40	25	15 ▲
New Zealand	33	18	15 ▲
France	27	13	14 ▲
Australia	37	23	14 ▲
Hungary	29	15	14 ▲
Slovenia	22	8	14 ▲
Slovak Republic	26	12	13 ▲
Belgium	25	12	13 ▲
Switzerland	32	19	12 ▲
Spain	27	15	12 ▲
Denmark	35	24	11 ▲
Mexico	23	12	11 ▲
Italy	22	11	11 ▲
Turkey	21	10	11 ▲
Austria	18	8	10 ▲
Canada	32	22	9 ▲
Chile	16	9	7 ▲
Greece	21	15	6 ▲
Germany	19	15	4 ▲
Estonia	27	23	3 ◇
United States	34	31	3 ▲
Israel	33	30	2 ▲

▲ The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with a bachelor's or higher degree is higher than the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds with a bachelor's or higher degree.

◇ The percentages of 25- to 34-year-olds and 55- to 64-year-olds with a bachelor's or higher degree are not significantly different.

NOTE: Educational attainment data in this table refer to degrees classified by the OECD as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 5A or 6 for bachelor's or higher degrees. The OECD average refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. Calculations based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 2014. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, table 603.20.

The same general pattern of higher percentages of the youngest age groups attaining higher levels of education also applied to bachelor's or higher degrees in 2012. In all OECD countries, except Estonia, a significantly higher percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds than of 55- to 64-year-olds had a bachelor's or higher degree in 2012. On average, 30 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds had a bachelor's

or higher degree in 2012, compared with 17 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds. In the United States, 34 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds and 31 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds had a bachelor's or higher degree. The United States and Israel had the highest percentages of 55- to 64-year-olds with a bachelor's or higher degree in 2012.

Table 3. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old that had completed high school in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries: 2001 and 2012

OECD country	2001	2012	Difference
OECD average	64	76	12 ▲
Poland	46	90	44 ▲
Luxembourg	53	78	26 ▲
Portugal	20	38	18 ▲
Australia	59	76	18 ▲
Greece	51	68	17 ▲
Ireland	58	75	17 ▲
Mexico	22	37	16 ▲
United Kingdom ¹	63	78	15 ▲
Spain	40	55	15 ▲
Korea, Republic of	68	82	14 ▲
Iceland	57	71	14 ▲
Italy	43	57	14 ▲
Belgium ²	59	72	13 ▲
Hungary	70	82	12 ▲
Finland	74	85	11 ▲
Turkey	24	34	10 ▲
France ¹	64	73	9 ▲
Netherlands ^{1,2}	65	73	8 ▲
Austria ²	76	83	7 ▲
Canada	82	89	7 ▲
Sweden	81	88	7 ▲
Slovak Republic	85	92	7 ▲
Czech Republic	86	92	6 ▲
Germany	83	86	4 ▲
United States	88	89	2 ▲
Switzerland	87	86	-1 ▼
New Zealand	76	74	-2 ▼
Denmark	80	78	-2 ▼
Norway ²	85	82	-3 ▼
Japan	83	—	—
Estonia	—	90	—
Slovenia	—	85	—
Israel	—	85	—
Chile	—	—	—

▲ The 2012 percentage is higher than the 2001 percentage.

▼ The 2012 percentage is lower than the 2001 percentage.

— Not available.

¹ Data in 2001 column include some short secondary (ISCED 3C) programs.

² Data from 2000 reported for 2001.

NOTE: Educational attainment data in this table refer to degrees classified as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3. ISCED level 3 corresponds to high school completion in the United States. ISCED 3C short programs do not correspond to high school completion; these short programs are excluded from this table except where noted. The OECD average refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. Calculations based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 2002 and 2014. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, table 603.10.

The percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed a high school education was higher in 2012 than in 2001 in each OECD country, with the exceptions of Switzerland, New Zealand, Denmark, and Norway, where high school completion rates in 2012 were between 1 and 3 percentage points lower than they were in 2001.³ The OECD average percentage of the adult population completing a high school education increased by 12 percentage points, from 64 percent in 2001 to

76 percent in 2012. The percentage of adults in the United States who had completed high school increased from 88 to 89 percent during this period.

The OECD percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with a high school education was 9 percentage points higher in 2012 than in 2001, while the percentage of U.S. young adults was 1 percentage point higher.

Table 4. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old with a bachelor's or higher degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries: 2001 and 2012

OECD country	2001	2012	Difference
OECD average	15	24	8 ▲
Luxembourg	11	26	15 ▲
United Kingdom	18	31	13 ▲
Poland ¹	12	25	13 ▲
Iceland	19	31	12 ▲
Portugal ²	7	19	12 ▲
Finland	15	26	11 ▲
New Zealand	14	25	11 ▲
Korea, Republic of	17	28	11 ▲
Ireland	14	25	11 ▲
Netherlands	21	32	11 ▲
Australia	19	30	11 ▲
Switzerland	16	26	10 ▲
Sweden	17	27	10 ▲
Norway	28	36	9 ▲
Czech Republic ¹	11	19	8 ▲
Denmark	22	29	8 ▲
Canada	20	28	7 ▲
Slovak Republic	10	18	7 ▲
Hungary ³	14	21	7 ▲
Japan	19	26	7 ▲
France	12	19	7 ▲
Turkey ¹	9	15	6 ▲
Austria	7	13	6 ▲
Spain	17	23	6 ▲
Belgium	13	18	6 ▲
Greece	12	18	5 ▲
Italy ³	10	15	5 ▲
United States	28	33	4 ▲
Mexico	13	17	4 ▲
Germany	13	17	4 ▲
Chile ⁴	9	12	— —
Israel	—	33	— —
Estonia	—	25	— —
Slovenia	—	15	— —

▲ The 2012 percentage is higher than the 2001 percentage.

— Not available.

¹ Data include vocational degrees.

² Data for 2012 include vocational degrees.

³ Data for 2001 include vocational degrees.

⁴ Data from 2000 reported for 2001. Data from 2011 reported for 2012.

NOTE: Educational attainment data in this table refer to degrees classified by the OECD as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 5A or 6 for bachelor's or higher degrees. The OECD average refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally. Calculations based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance, 2002 and 2014*. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, table 603.30.

All countries with data reported that the percentages of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed a bachelor's or higher degree were higher in 2012 than they were in 2001. The OECD average percentage of the adult population with a bachelor's or higher degree increased by 8 percentage points between 2001 and 2012, from 15 to 24 percent. During the same period, the percentage of U.S. adults with a bachelor's or higher degree increased from 28 to 33 percent.

For 25- to 34-year-olds, the OECD average percentage with a bachelor's or higher degree rose from 18 percent in 2001 to 30 percent in 2012, an increase of 12 percentage

points. The comparable percentage for young adults in the United States increased by 4 percentage points, from 30 to 34 percent. As a result of the relatively larger increases in bachelor's or higher degree attainment among young adult populations in several other OECD countries, the gap in attainment at this level of education between the U.S. and the OECD average percentages decreased between 2001 and 2012. In 2001, the rate of attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree among 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States was 12 percentage points higher than the OECD average; by 2012, this difference had decreased to 4 percentage points.

Endnotes:

¹ In 2012, Chile and Japan did not report data on high school completion rates.

² Attainment data in this indicator refer to comparable levels of degrees, as classified by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

³ In 2001, Estonia, Slovenia, Israel, and Chile did not report data on high school completion rates. In 2012, Chile and Japan did not report data on high school completion rates.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, tables 603.10, 603.20, and 603.30

Related indicators: Educational Attainment (indicator 1), Education Expenditures by Country (indicator 22), International Assessments (indicator 26), Trends in Employment Rates by Educational Attainment [*The Condition of Education 2013 Spotlight*]

Glossary: Bachelor's degree, Educational attainment, High school completer, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)