

International Educational Attainment

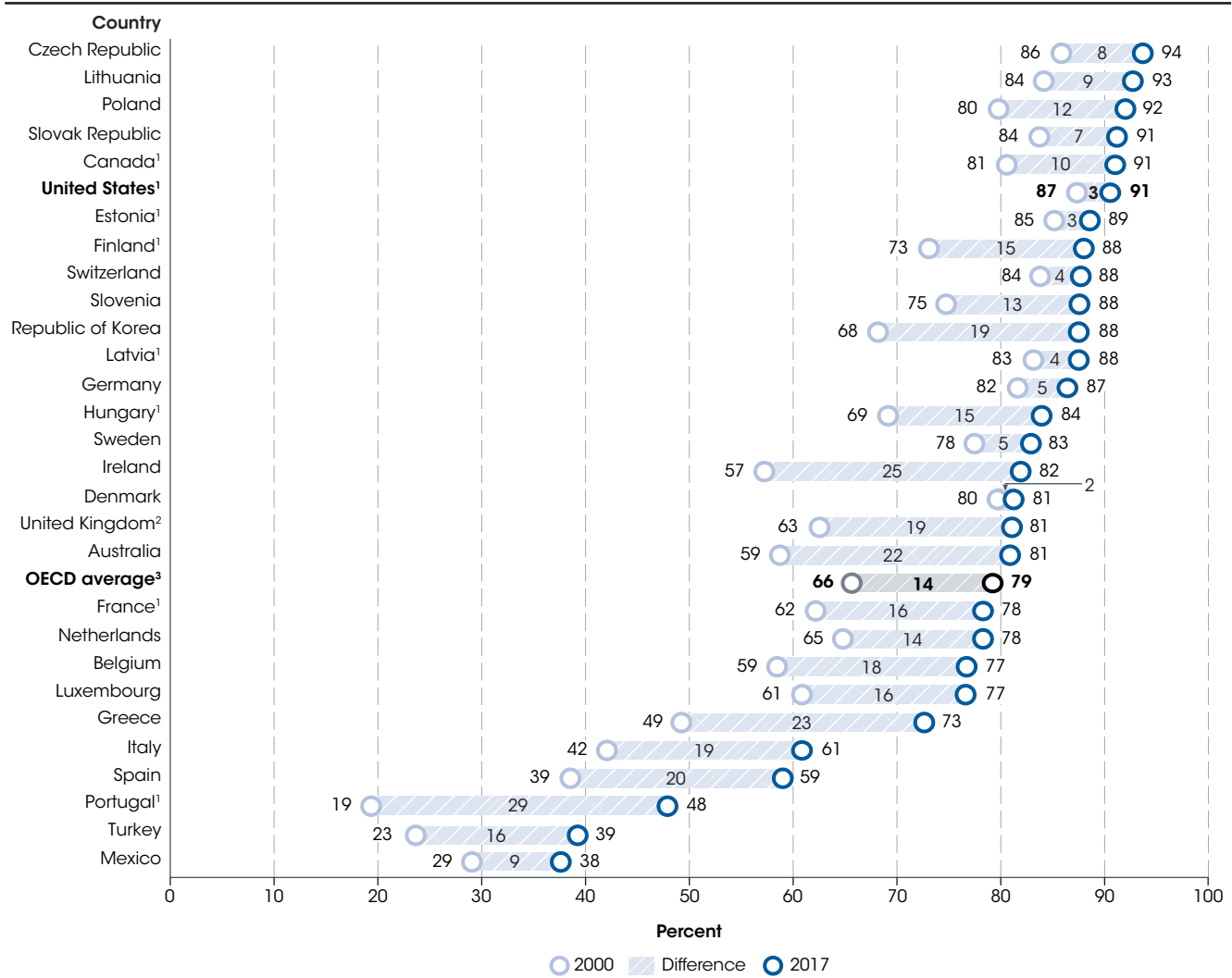
Across OECD countries, the average percentage of the adult population with any postsecondary degree was 37 percent in 2017, an increase of 15 percentage points from 2000. During the same period, the percentage of U.S. adults with any postsecondary degree increased 10 percentage points to 46 percent.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a group of 36 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*.¹ 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. “Attainment of any postsecondary degree” refers to individuals who have been awarded an associate’s or higher degree.²

Among the 34 countries³ for which the OECD reported 2017 data, the percentages of the adult populations

(ages 25 to 64) who had completed high school ranged from under 40 percent in Mexico and Turkey to 90 percent or more in the United States, Canada, the Slovak Republic, Poland, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic.⁴ Twenty-two countries reported that more than 80 percent of their adult populations had completed high school as of 2017. Additionally, of the 35 countries⁵ for which the OECD reported 2017 data on postsecondary attainment rates, the percentages of adults earning any postsecondary degree ranged from less than 20 percent in Mexico and Italy to more than 50 percent in Israel, Japan, and Canada. Twenty-six countries reported that more than 30 percent of their adult populations had earned any postsecondary degree as of 2017.

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: 2000 and 2017

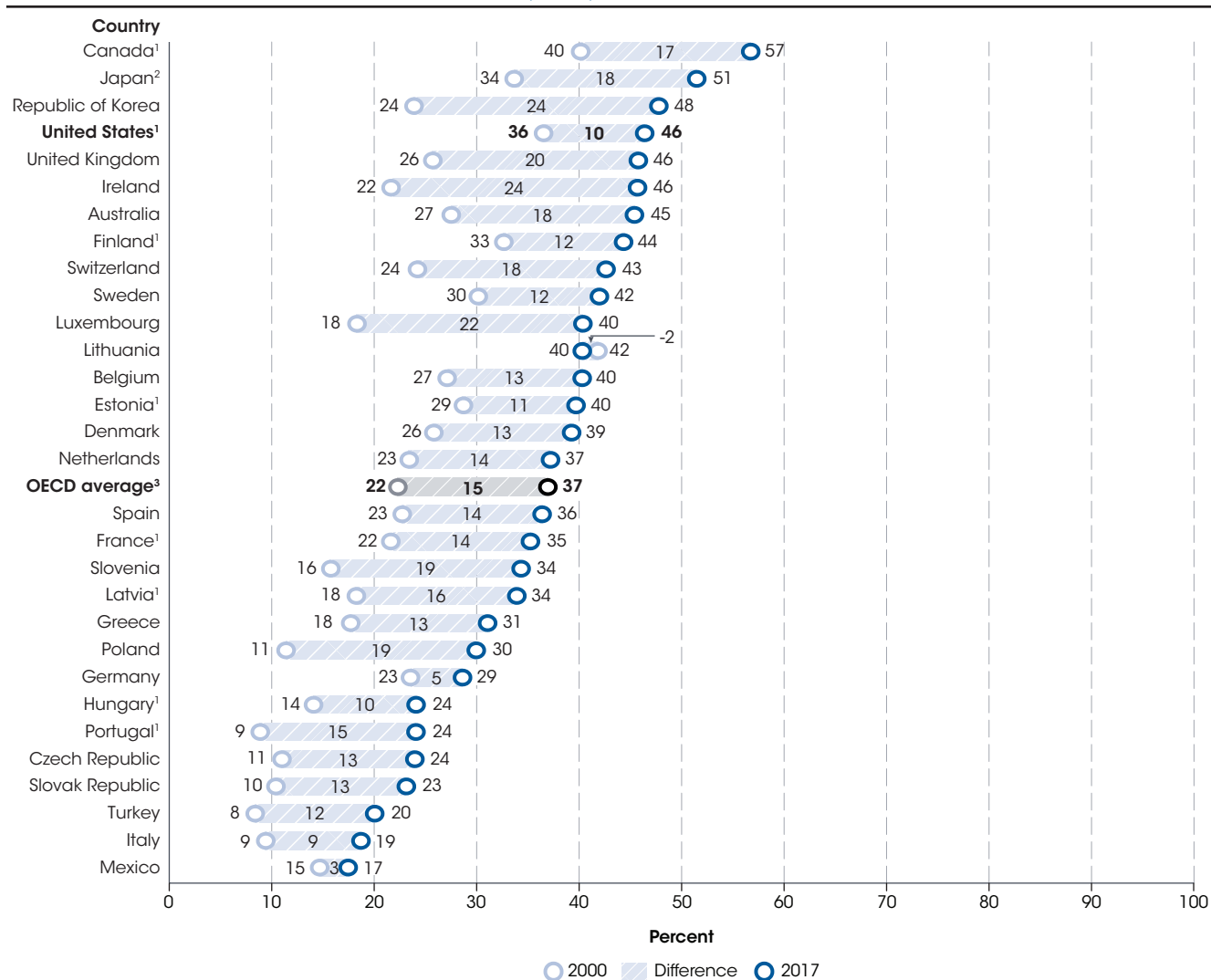


¹ The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was revised in 2011. Although data for 2000 were originally calculated using the 1997 version of ISCED, the footnoted countries revised their 2000 data to align with the 2011 version of ISCED.
² Data include some persons who completed a 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, 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 36 OECD countries, 29 are included in this figure. Austria, Chile, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and Norway are excluded because data are not available for these countries for either 2000 or 2017. 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 2017 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 13, 2018, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 603.10.

In each of the 29 countries⁶ for which the OECD reported data on high school completion rates in both 2000 and 2017, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed a high school education was higher in 2017 than in 2000. The OECD average percentage⁷ of the adult population with a high school education rose from 66 percent in 2000 to 79 percent in 2017. Meanwhile, the percentage of adults in the United States who had completed high school rose from 87 to 91 percent during this period.

For 25- to 34-year-olds, the OECD average percentage with a high school education rose from 76 to 85 percent between 2000 and 2017, while the corresponding percentage for U.S. 25- to 34-year-olds increased from 88 to 92 percent. The high school attainment gap between the United States and the OECD average was narrower in 2017 than in 2000. In 2017, the rate of high school attainment in the United States was 7 percentage points higher than the OECD average, while the gap in 2000 was 12 percentage points.

Figure 2. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old who had attained any postsecondary degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries: 2000 and 2017

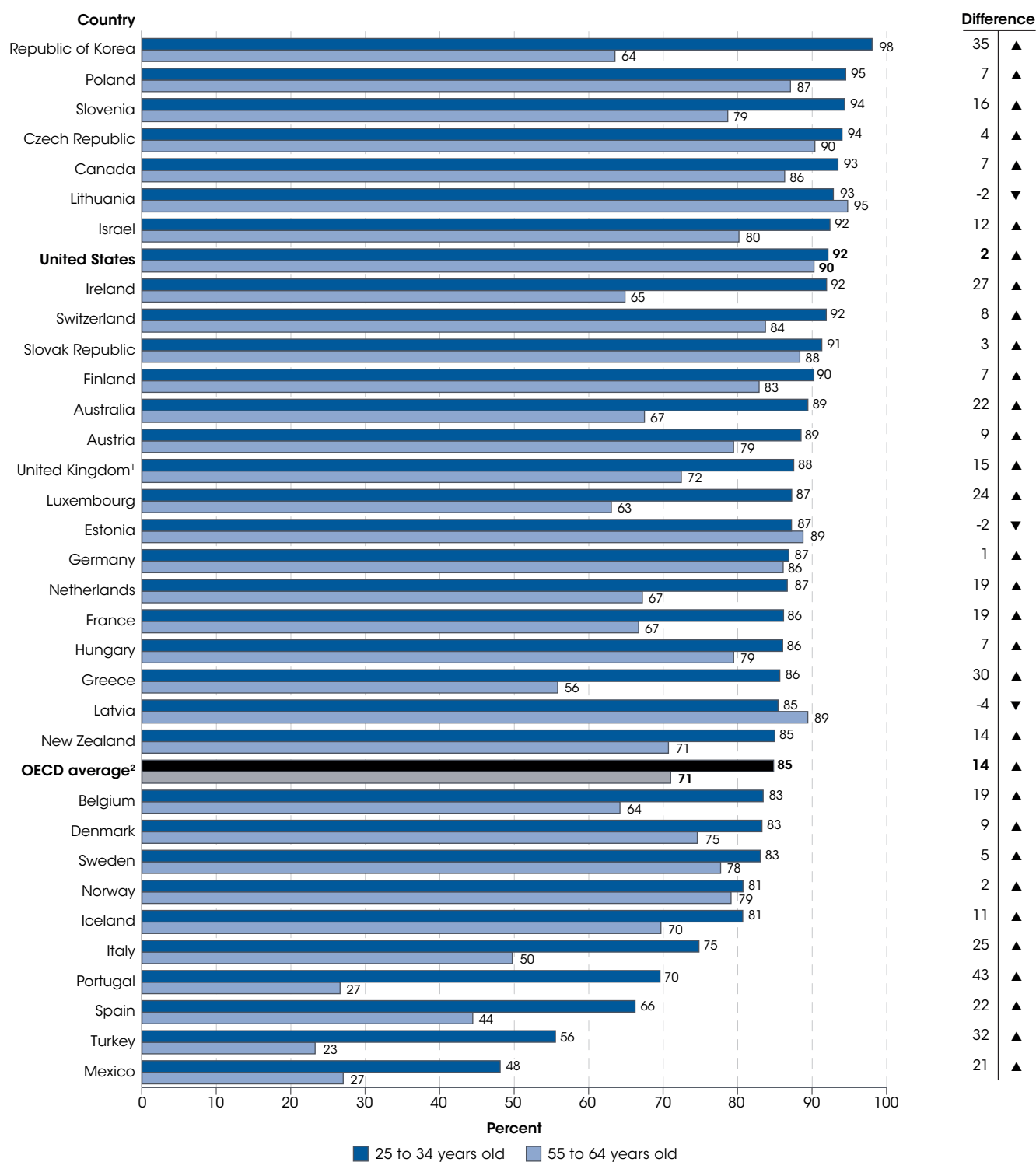


¹ The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was revised in 2011. Although data for 2000 were originally calculated using the 1997 version of ISCED, the footnoted countries revised their 2000 data to align with the 2011 version of ISCED.
² Data for both years include some postsecondary 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, 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 36 OECD countries, 30 are included in this figure. Austria, Chile, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, and Norway are excluded from this figure because data are not available for these countries for either 2000 or 2017. 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 doctor’s or equivalent degree). ISCED 2011 was used to calculate data for 2017 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 19, 2018, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 603.20.

In 29 of the 30 countries⁸ for which the OECD reported data on postsecondary attainment rates in both 2000 and 2017, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree was higher in 2017 than in 2000. Lithuania was the only country that did not follow this pattern. In Lithuania, the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree was 2 percentage points lower in 2017 than in 2000. During this period, the OECD average percentage of the adult population with any postsecondary degree increased by 15 percentage points to 37 percent in 2017, while the corresponding percentage for U.S. adults increased by 10 percentage points to 46 percent.

For 25- to 34-year-olds, the OECD average percentage with any postsecondary degree rose from 26 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2017. The corresponding percentage for 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States rose from 38 to 46 percent. The postsecondary attainment gap between the United States and the OECD average decreased between 2000 and 2017 among the 25- to 34-year-old population as a result of the relatively larger increases in postsecondary degree attainment across the OECD countries. In 2000, the rate of attainment of any postsecondary degree among 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States was 12 percentage points higher than the OECD average; by 2017, this gap had decreased to 3 percentage points.

Figure 3. Percentage of the population who had completed high school in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by selected age groups: 2017

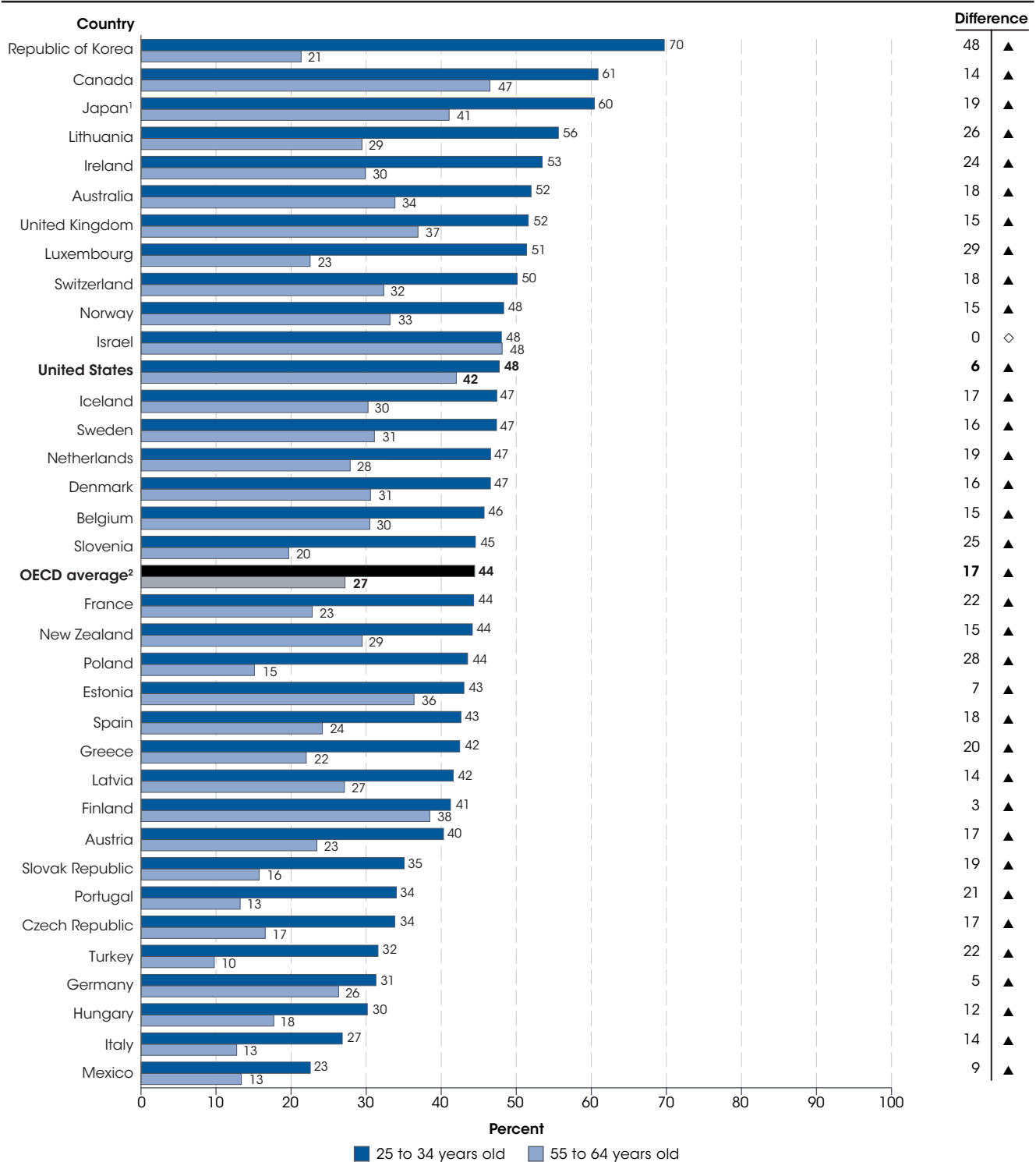


▲ The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had completed high school is higher than the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school.
 ▼ The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had completed high school is lower than the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school.
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, 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 36 OECD countries, 34 are included in this figure. Chile and Japan are excluded because 2017 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 13, 2018, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 603.10.

In 31 of the 34 countries for which the OECD reported 2017 data on high school completion rates, higher percentages of 25- to 34-year-olds than of 55- to 64-year-olds had completed high school. Across OECD countries, the average high school completion percentage was higher for 25- to 34-year-olds (85 percent) than for 55- to 64-year-olds (71 percent). The three exceptions were Latvia, where the high school completion rate for 55- to 64-year-olds was 4 percentage points higher than the high school completion rate for 25- to 34-year-olds, and

Lithuania and Estonia, where the high school completion rates for 55- to 64-year-olds were 2 percentage points higher. In 29 countries, including the United States, 80 percent or more of 25- to 34-year-olds had completed high school in 2017. In comparison, the percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds who had completed high school was at least 80 percent in 12 countries (Israel, Finland, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Estonia, Latvia, the United States, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania).

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: 2017



▲ 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.

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

² 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.

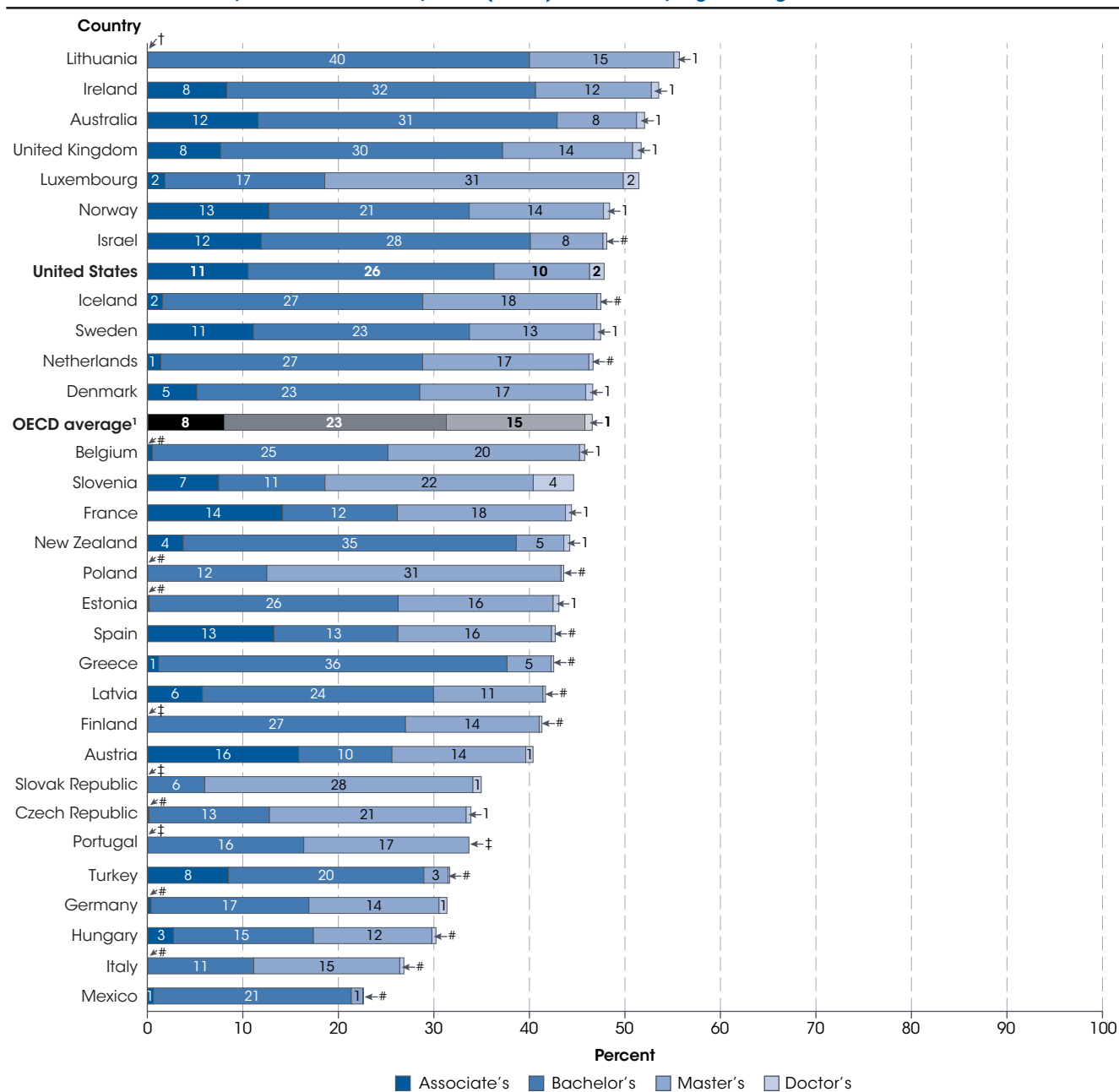
NOTE: Of the 36 OECD countries, 35 are included in this figure. Chile is excluded from the figure because data are not available for 2017. All data in this figure were calculated using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 classification of tertiary (postsecondary) degrees. 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 doctor'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 19, 2018, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 603.20.

Similarly, postsecondary attainment rates were higher among 25- to 34-year-olds than among 55- to 64-year-olds in all but one of the 35 countries for which the OECD reported 2017 data. The exception was Israel, where the postsecondary degree attainment rates for 25- to 34-year-olds and 55- to 64-year-olds were not measurably different. The OECD average percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had earned any postsecondary degree (44 percent) was higher than the corresponding percentage

of 55- to 64-year-olds (27 percent). In the United States, 48 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds and 42 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds had earned any postsecondary degree. Japan (41 percent), Canada (47 percent), and Israel (48 percent) were the only other countries where more than 40 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds had earned any postsecondary degree. In comparison, there were 27 countries in which 40 percent or more of 25- to 34-year-olds had earned any postsecondary degree.

Figure 5. Percentage of the population 25 to 34 years old who had attained a postsecondary degree in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, by highest degree attained: 2017



† Not applicable.

Rounds to zero.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

¹ 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 36 OECD countries, 31 are included in this figure. Data for Canada, Chile, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Switzerland are excluded from the figure because separate data are not available for all attainment levels. 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 (bachelor's or equivalent degree), level 7 (master's or equivalent degree), and level 8 (doctor'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 20, 2018, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 603.30.

The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who had attained specific postsecondary degrees (e.g., associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctor's degrees) varied across OECD countries in 2017. Among the 31 countries⁹ for which the OECD reported 2017 data for all attainment levels, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds whose highest degree attained was an associate's degree ranged from less than 1 percent in Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Belgium, and Mexico to 16 percent in Austria. The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds whose highest degree attained was an associate's degree in the United States (11 percent) was higher than the OECD average (8 percent). Meanwhile, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds whose highest degree attained was a bachelor's degree ranged from 6 percent in the Slovak Republic to 40 percent in Lithuania, while the

percentage whose highest degree attained was a master's degree ranged from 1 percent in Mexico to 31 percent in Poland and Luxembourg. In the United States, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds whose highest degree attained was a bachelor's degree (26 percent) was higher than the OECD average (23 percent). In contrast, the percentage of U.S. 25- to 34-year-olds whose highest degree attained was a master's degree (10 percent) was lower than the OECD average (15 percent). The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who attained a doctor's degree did not vary as widely across OECD countries: with the exception of the United States and Luxembourg (both 2 percent) and Slovenia (4 percent), all countries reported that 1 percent or less of 25- to 34-year-olds had attained this level of education.

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 to calculate data for all years prior to 2014. ISCED 2011 was used to calculate data for 2014 and later years and may not be directly comparable to ISCED 1997.

² 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 doctor's or equivalent degree).

³ Chile and Japan are excluded because 2017 data on high school completion rates are not available for these countries.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Chile is excluded because 2017 data on postsecondary attainment rates are not available.

⁶ Austria, Chile, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and Norway are excluded because data are not available for these countries for either 2000 or 2017.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Austria, Chile, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, and Norway are excluded because data are not available for these countries for either 2000 or 2017.

⁹ Canada, Chile, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Switzerland are excluded from this analysis because separate data are not available for these countries at all attainment levels.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, tables 603.10, 603.20, and 603.30

Related indicators and resources: [Education Expenditures by Country](#); [Educational Attainment of Young Adults](#); [Enrollment Rates by County](#); [International Comparisons: Reading Literacy at Grade 4](#); [International Comparisons: Science, Reading, and Mathematics Literacy of 15-Year-Old Students](#); [International Comparisons: U.S. 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-Graders' Mathematics and Science Achievement](#)

Glossary: Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Doctor's 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