CO3.2: Gender differences in university graduates by fields of study

Definitions and methodology

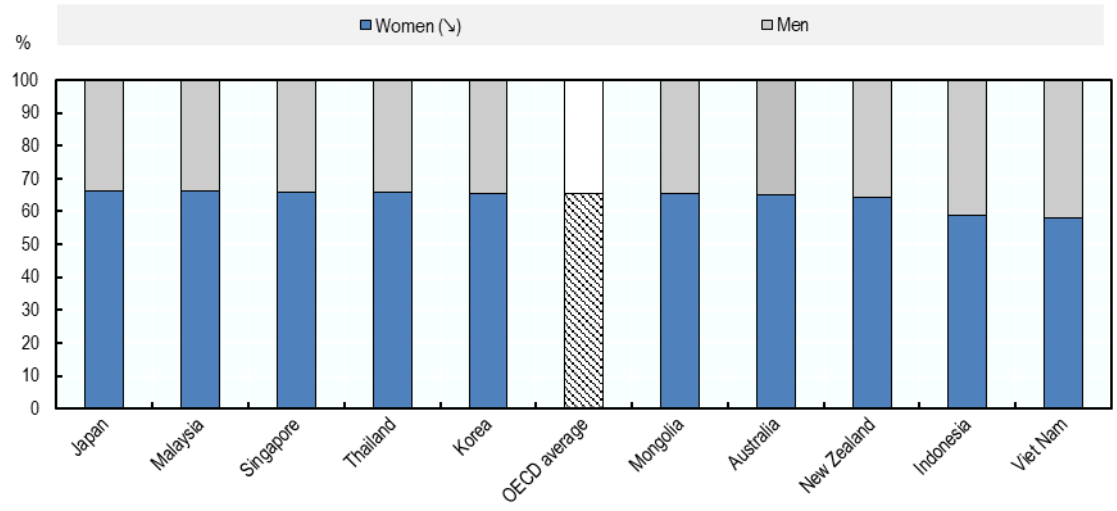
This indicator provides information on the subjects that male and female students tend to study at university by looking at the gender distribution of graduates in certain subjects. This gives an insight into the skills and expertise that men and women then bring to the labour market, and into how differences in subjects studied at university affect future career and family income patterns.

Data on graduates by field of study are collected through the OECD Education Statistics and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, as well as national statistics for some countries. Graduates are classified as having successfully followed and completed a university programme and graduated in the specified year; this is then further disaggregated by gender and subject.

Key findings

In Asia-Pacific countries, as also across all OECD countries, most tertiary graduates in arts and humanities subjects are women (Chart CO3.2.A). Looking across the Asia-Pacific countries included here women's shares of arts and humanities graduates in 2023 ranged from around 58-59% in Indonesia and Viet Nam to 64-66% in the other eight countries.

Chart CO3.2.A. **Men's and women's shares of degrees awarded in humanities and arts subjects**
Distribution (%) of tertiary degrees awarded in humanities and arts qualifications by sex, 2023 or lates year available



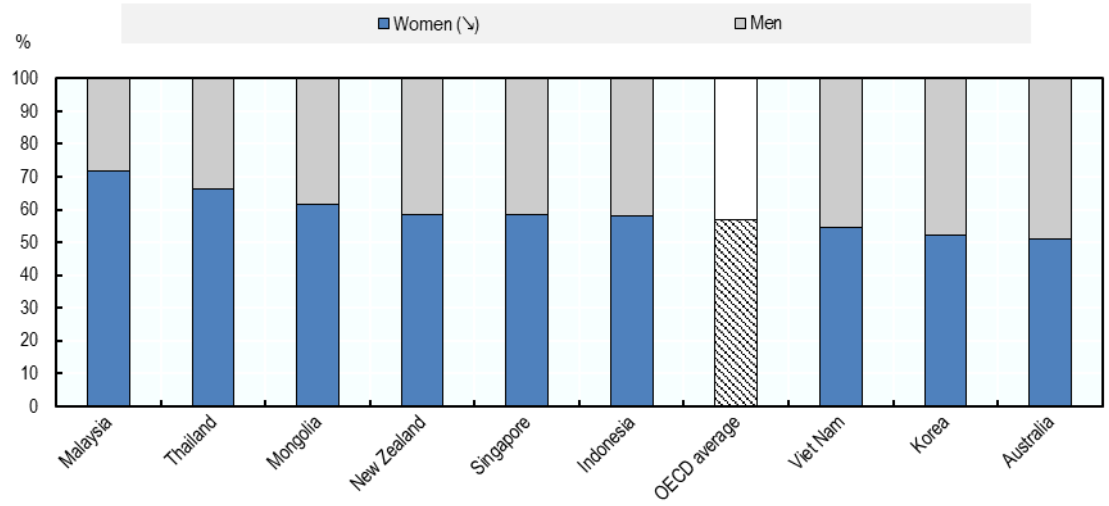
Note: Data for Indonesia refer to 2018, Malaysia to 2021, Viet Nam to 2022, and Mongolia to 2024. Qualifications classified under ISCED 11 levels 5-8, only. For Mongolia, the data refer to tertiary students rather than tertiary graduates. For Singapore, the values refer to university first degrees and include not only applied arts and humanities but also social sciences.
Sources: Australia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and OECD average: OECD Education at a Glance 2025; Indonesia: OECD Education at a Glance 2021; Malaysia: Malaysia Educational Statistics, Quick Facts 2022; Mongolia: Higher Education Report for the 2024-2025 Academic Year; Singapore: Ministry of Statistics (2025). Graduates from University First Degree Courses by Type of Course and Sex, Annual; Thailand: Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, 2023.

Other relevant indicators: Employment profiles over the life course (LMF1.4); Educational attainment by gender (CO3.1); and, Literacy scores by gender at age 15 (CO3.4).

In many of the Asia-Pacific countries included here most graduates in business, administration, and law were women in 2023 (Chart CO3.2.B). In Australia, Indonesia, Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Viet Nam around 51-62% of graduates in business, administration, and law in 2023 were women; and in Malaysia and Thailand women made up over two-thirds (66-72%) of graduates in this area. The exception is Japan (38%), where women made up less than half of graduates in business, administration, and law in 2023.

Chart CO3.2.B. **Men's and women's shares of degrees awarded in business, administration, and law**

Distribution (%) of tertiary degrees awarded in business, administration, and law by sex, 2023 or latest year available



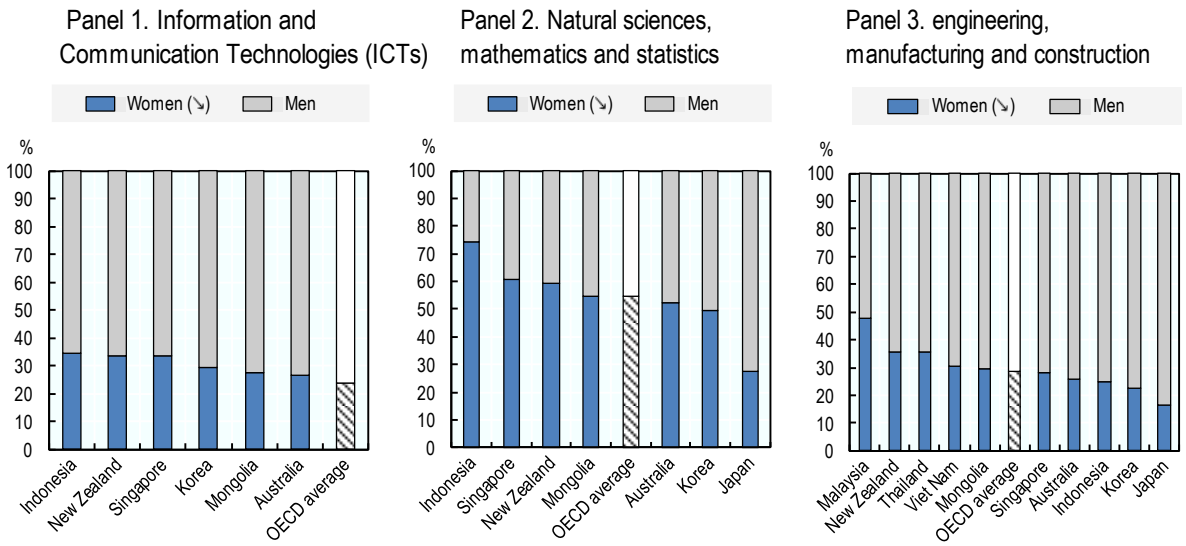
Note: Data for Indonesia refer to 2018, Malaysia to 2021, Viet Nam to 2022, and Mongolia to 2024. Qualifications classified under ISCED 11 levels 5-8, only. For Malaysia, the data is for Social Sciences, Business and Law. For Mongolia, the data refer to tertiary students rather than tertiary graduates.
Sources: See Chart CO3.2.A.

Across the Asia-Pacific countries included here, degrees awarded in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects are less likely to concern women except in natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics (Chart CO3.2.C). Women's share of tertiary graduates in STEM varies across the covered countries, and fields of study. For example, in Singapore women made up 61% of all graduates in the field of natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, in 2023 while in Japan this was only 28%. In Korea 49% of graduates in the field of natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics were women in 2023, but Korean women made up just 23% of the graduates in engineering, manufacturing, and construction. The OECD average of women's share of degrees in STEM subjects in 2023 was around 24-29% depending on the subject, while it was 55% of the degrees awarded in field of natural sciences, mathematics and statistics.

Comparability and data issues

There should be few major issues with the cross-national comparability of data in this area. The UOE data collection manual gives detailed instructions to national correspondents on the mapping of subjects and fields of study. For more details and notes for specific countries, see the notes for Indicator B.4 provided in OECD (2025) Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes and on UNESCO UIS.Stat.

Chart CO3.2.C. **Men's and women's shares of degrees awarded in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)**
Distribution (%) of tertiary degrees awarded in STEM by sex, 2023 or latest year available



Note: Data for Indonesia refer to 2018, Malaysia to 2021, Viet Nam to 2022, and Mongolia to 2024. Qualifications classified under ISCED 11 levels 5-8, only. For Mongolia, the data refer to tertiary students rather than tertiary graduates. For Singapore, Panel C refers to engineering sciences.

Sources: See Chart CO3.2.A.

Sources and further reading: *OECD Education Database* and OECD (2025), *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators,* OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en*;* OECD (2025), *Gender Equality in a Changing World: Taking Stock and Moving Forward*, Gender Equality at Work, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/e808086f-en; OECD (2023), *Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding us Back?,* OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/67d48024-en; OECD (2017), *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle,* OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en