

12. Educational outcomes

Primary to tertiary school life expectancy in Asia and the Pacific varies significantly, from countries reaching averages of 18 years to those where particularly women have on average less than 6 year of education.

Primary to tertiary school life expectancy is defined as the average number of years that a child at age 4 can expect to spend in education levels, including repetition. It therefore indicates the average duration of schooling but not the number of grades reached. This indicator is commonly used to measure the retention of an education system. It should be noted, however, that retention is only one aspect of the overall quality of education.

In Asia and the Pacific, the average school life expectancy for men, at 11.2, is slightly higher than that for women, at 10.8 years. In ASEAN countries, school life expectancy is basically the same for women and men, at over 11 years, but in SAARC countries, women have a lower school life expectancy, at 6.9 years, compared with 8.3 for men.

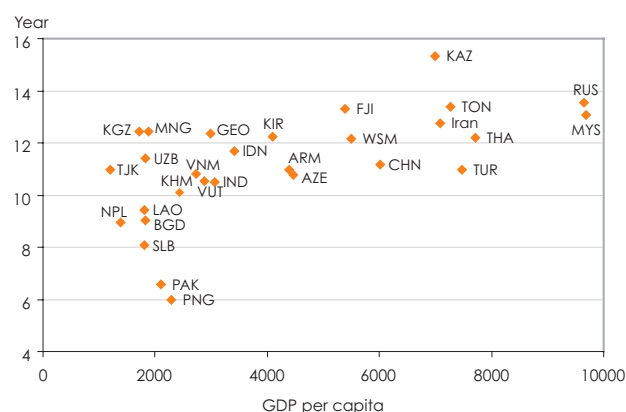
The variation between high and low-income economies is noteworthy. In low-income economies, women's primary to tertiary school life expectancy is half that of their peers in high-income economies, which stands at 15.6. For men, the differences between these income groupings are similar although the numbers are slightly higher: men in low-income economies have a school life expectancy of 9.1, compared with 16.3 for men in high-income economies.

This mixed picture is reflected in the experience of countries within these income groups. In 2004, a girl in Afghanistan could expect to be in the school system for only 3.8 years, while boys could expect to be in the school system for 9.4 years. In contrast, girls in New Zealand can expect to spend, on average, over 20.8 years in the school system, compared with 18.8 years for boys. School life expectancy levels in such Pacific islands as Nauru, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, at 8 years or less according to the latest estimates, are quite low for both sexes. It is important to note that school life expectancy is related not only to the wealth of the country but also to the duration of compulsory education, which varies from 5 to 12 years in Asia and the Pacific.

Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Solomon Islands have no compulsory education, while in the Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Vanuatu, going to school is compulsory only through the end of the primary

level. This may explain the short school life expectancy for some of these countries, as illustrated in figure 12.1.

Figure 12.1 School life expectancy by GDP per capita in developing countries/areas in Asia and the Pacific, 2005



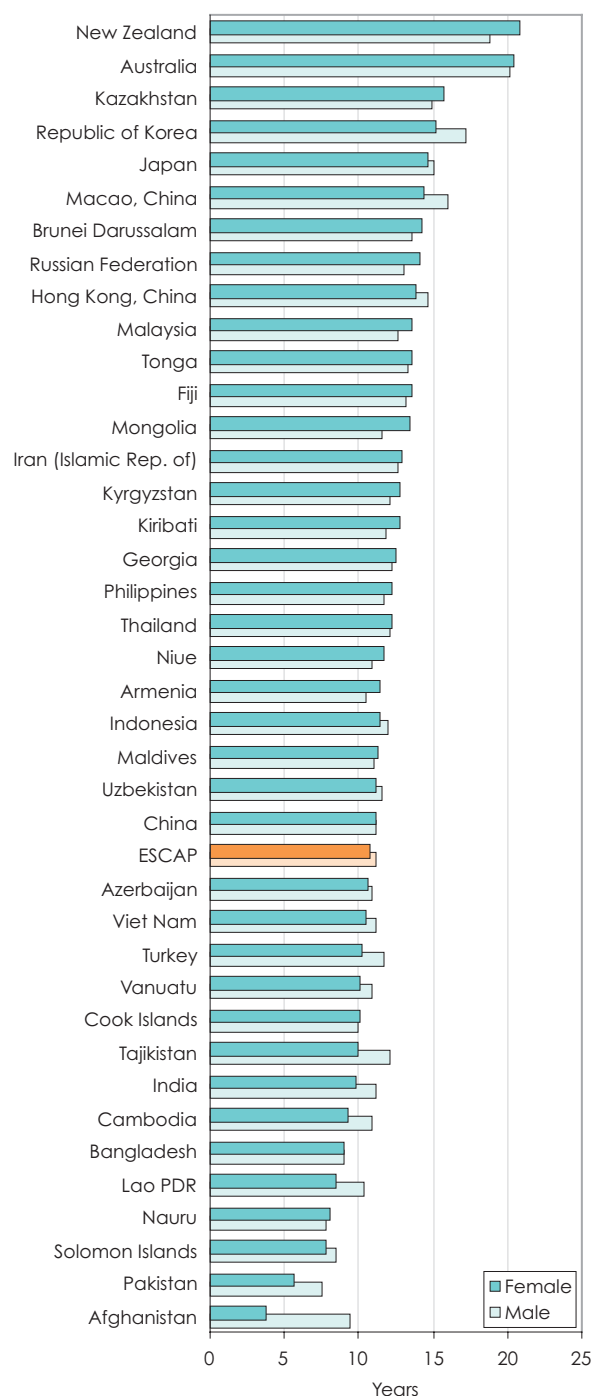
Although the region as a whole did not progress much between 1999 and 2005, some countries did. Mongolia, for example, added 3.8 years to the school life expectancy of girls and 3.7 to that of boys. Kazakhstan increased school life expectancy for girls by 3.6 years and by 3.1 years for boys. There were significant increases in school life expectancy in New Zealand and Macao, China. The only country for which trend data are available that actually registered a decrease in the values of this indicator was Niue, where school life expectancy declined for both girls and boys.

School life expectancy includes repeated grades. UNESCO estimates that 20 per cent of all primary school students in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal, and 16 per cent in the Republic of Korea, repeat at least one grade. The number of effective school years is therefore lower in these countries than what the school life expectancy numbers suggest.

School life expectancy differences between the sexes are striking in some countries. The biggest difference, over five years in favour of boys, is in Afghanistan. Nepal, Tajikistan and the Republic of Korea have a two-year gap favouring boys over girls, while the gap is significant also for Cambodia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan and Turkey. Mongolia, New Zealand and the Russian Federation, on the other hand, record a higher school life expectancy — by one year or longer — for girls than for boys (see figure 12.2 and table 12.1).

School life expectancy is linked to literacy, for literacy is the ability to identify, understand,

Figure 12.2 School life expectancy from primary to tertiary by gender in Asia and the Pacific, 2005



interpret, and communicate, implying a continuum of learning. This learning enables an individual to develop his or her knowledge and to participate fully in the wider society. The adult literacy rate is therefore a crucial measure of a country's human capital.

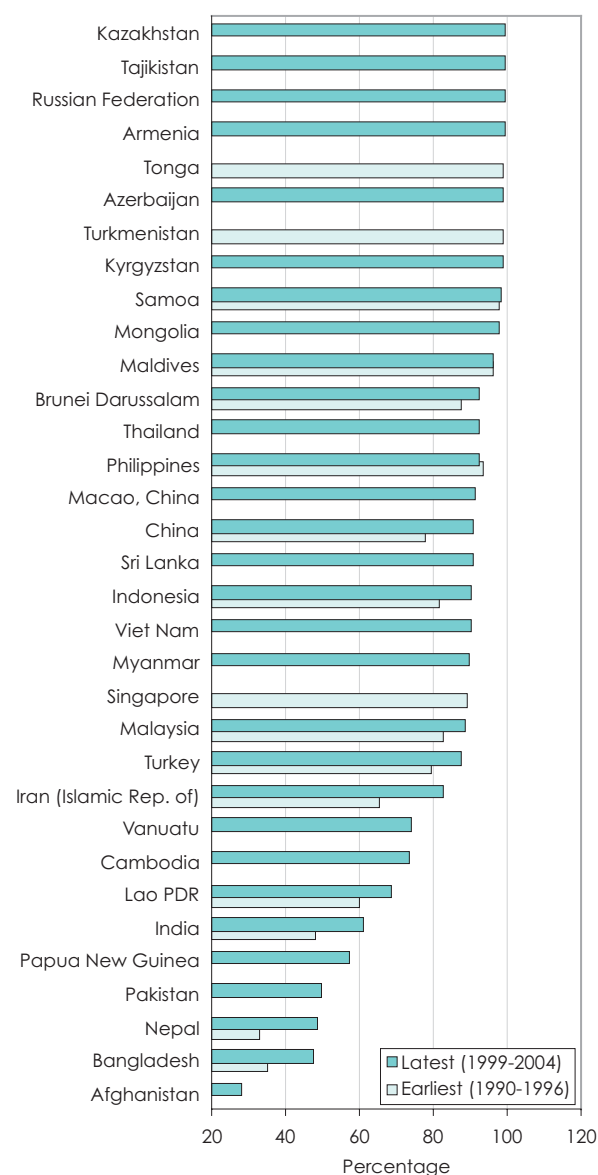
According to UNESCO (2007), there are about 781 million illiterate adults, over 60 per cent of whom are women. The majority lives in South Asia, East Asia and Africa.

Despite recent progress, many countries in South and South-West Asia still have large numbers

of illiterate adults. In Bangladesh and Nepal, for example, adult literacy rates increased from 35 and 33 per cent, respectively, in 1991 to 48 and 49 per cent by 2001. The Islamic Republic of Iran experienced the largest increase in adult literacy, by 17 percentage points, reaching a rate of 82 per cent. India also recorded a rise in literacy rates, from 48 to 61 per cent, during the same period.

In North and Central Asia, literacy rates are close to 100 per cent, and in South-East Asia they have steadily increased, reaching levels of over 90 per cent in Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. However, Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic have adult literacy rates of 74 and 69 per cent, respectively, and thus have yet to replicate the success of their neighbours.

Figure 12.3 Adult literacy rate (population 15 years and above) in Asia and the Pacific, earliest (1990-1996) and latest (1999-2004) years



School life expectancy from primary to tertiary for girls (years): The number of years a 4-year old girl is expected to spend in education from primary to tertiary level, including years spent on repetition. *Aggregates:* Averages are calculated using female population aged 4-5 as weight. *Source:* UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, (online database, accessed in August 2007).

School life expectancy from primary to tertiary for boys (years): The number of years a 4-year old boy is expected to spend in education from primary to tertiary level, including years spent on repetition. *Aggregates:* Averages are calculated using male population aged 4-5 as weight. *Source:* UNESCO

Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, (online database, accessed in August 2007).

Adult literacy rate (% of population aged 15 and above): The proportion of literate persons among adult population, expressed as a percentage of population aged 15 years and above. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life. It involves a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes also basic arithmetic skills. *Source:* UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, (online database, accessed in August 2007).

12.1 School life expectancy and literacy

	School life expectancy from primary to tertiary						Adult literacy rate	
	Girls			Boys			% of population aged 15 and above	
	Years							
	1999	2000	2005	1999	2000	2005	Earliest	Latest
East and North-East Asia								
China			11.1			11.2	77.8 (90)	90.9 (00)
DPR Korea								
Hong Kong, China			13.9			14.7		
Macao, China	11.9	12.2	14.4	12.4	12.6	16.0		91.3 (01)
Mongolia	9.6	10.1	13.4	7.8	8.3	11.5		97.8 (00)
Republic of Korea	14.1	14.3	15.2	15.8	16.2	17.2		
South-East Asia								
Brunei Darussalam	13.9	13.7	14.3	13.2	13.0	13.5	87.8 (91)	92.7 (01)
Cambodia		6.7	9.3 ¹		8.4	10.9 ¹		73.6 (04)
Indonesia			11.4			11.9	81.5	90.4 (04)
Lao PDR	7.4	7.5	8.5	9.4	9.5	10.3	60.3 (95)	68.7 (01)
Malaysia	12.4	12.6	13.6 ¹	12.1	12.0	12.6 ¹	82.9 (91)	88.7 (00)
Myanmar	6.9			6.8				89.9 (00)
Philippines	11.9		12.3	11.4		11.7	93.6 (90)	92.6 (03)
Singapore							89.1 (90)	
Thailand			12.2			12.2		92.6 (00)
Timor-Leste								
Viet Nam	9.8	9.9	10.4	10.7	10.8	11.1		90.3 (99)
South and South-West Asia								
Afghanistan			3.8 ¹			9.4 ¹		28.0 (00)
Bangladesh	9.1	9.2	9.0 ¹	9.3	9.2	9.0 ¹	35.3 (91)	47.5 (01)
Bhutan								
India		7.6	9.7		9.9	11.2	48.2 (91)	61.0 (01)
Iran (Islamic Rep. of)	10.9	10.9	12.8	12.1	12.0	12.7	65.5 (91)	82.4
Maldives	11.9	12.2	11.4 ¹	11.7	12.1	11.1 ¹	96.0	96.3 (00)
Nepal		7.5			9.9		33.0 (91)	48.6 (01)
Pakistan			5.6			7.5		49.9
Sri Lanka								90.7 (01)
Turkey			10.2			11.7	79.2 (90)	87.4 (04)
North and Central Asia								
Armenia		10.6	11.5		10.2	10.5		99.4 (01)
Azerbaijan	10.0	10.1	10.7	10.2	10.2	10.9		98.8 (99)
Georgia	11.6	11.8	12.5	11.5	11.8	12.2		
Kazakhstan	12.2	12.6	15.8	11.8	12.0	14.9		99.5 (99)
Kyrgyzstan	11.7	11.9	12.8	11.4	11.7	12.1		98.7 (99)
Russian Federation			14.1			13.0		99.4 (02)
Tajikistan	8.9	8.9	9.9	10.6	10.7	12.0		99.5 (00)
Turkmenistan							98.8 (95)	
Uzbekistan			11.2 ¹			11.6 ¹		
Pacific								
American Samoa								
Cook Islands	10.6	10.1	10.0 ¹	10.5	9.7	10.0 ¹		
Fiji			13.5			13.1		
French Polynesia								
Guam								
Kiribati	12.2	14.2	12.7	11.2	11.4	11.8		
Marshall Islands								
Micronesia (F.S.)								
Nauru		8.1	8.0 ¹		6.7	7.8 ¹		
New Caledonia								
Niue	12.4	11.6	11.7	11.5	11.3	10.9		
Northern Mariana Is.								
Palau		15.4			13.7			
Papua New Guinea	5.6			6.3				57.3 (00)
Samoa	12.5	12.4		12.1	11.8		98.1 (94)	98.6 (04)
Solomon Islands	6.6	6.2	7.7	7.5	6.9	8.4		
Tonga	13.5	13.4	13.6 ¹	13.0	13.0	13.3 ¹	98.9 (96)	
Tuvalu								
Vanuatu			10.1 ¹			10.9 ¹		74.0 (99)
ESCAP Developed Economies								
Australia	20.3	20.4	20.4	19.8	20.1	20.2		
Japan	14.3	14.4	14.7	14.6	14.7	15.0		
New Zealand	18.2	18.6	20.8	16.8	17.0	18.8		
ESCAP			10.7			11.2		
LLDC			8.6			11.0		
LDC	8.6	8.7	8.1	8.8	9.3	9.2		
SIDS								
ASEAN			11.5			11.8		
SAARC		8.9	6.9		9.4	8.3		
Central Asia			12.0			12.2		
Low-income		9.1	7.8		9.7	9.1		
Middle-income			11.5			11.6		
High-income	15.0	15.2	15.6	15.6	15.9	16.3		
Africa								
Latin America & Carib.	13.1	13.3	13.8	12.7	12.8	13.2		
North America		16.4	17.2		15.8	16.6		
Europe	15.1	15.3	15.9	14.7	14.9	15.1		
Other Asia-Pacific			9.9			11.8		

¹ 2004 data