

The level of education of the population gives an indication of its stock of human capital. A higher stock of human capital means higher labour productivity and hence higher income-generating capacity. The average number of years spent in education among the working-age population is the most readily available and cross-nationally comparable measures of on educational attainment across the Asia/Pacific region.

At close to 12 years of schooling on average, working-age populations in the Asian OECD countries have the highest level of educational attainment in the region (Figure 5.8, Panel A). The average level of educational attainment in the Asia/Pacific region remains well below that across the OECD, as in some countries – Pakistan, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, India, Papua New Guinea, Myanmar and Nepal – the number of years spent in education is less than five years on average.

That said, in many Asia/Pacific economies the average years spent in education ranges from nine to eleven years and many of these economies, especially Fiji, Singapore and Malaysia, are rapidly catching up (Figure 5.8, Panel B).

Future educational attainment levels in the Asia/Pacific region are to increase further relative to the OECD, if the performance of students in competency tests is anything to go by (Figures 5.9 and 5.10): **students in the Asia/Pacific region outscored students from OECD countries in mathematics and reading competency tests of the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).** Students from Shanghai and Hong Kong (China) and Singapore did particularly well as they had the highest average PISA test scores in both mathematics and reading literacy. The performance of students in Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Thailand was comparable with their peers in Chile and Mexico with scores well below the OECD average.

Definition and measurement

Given the variety of economies across the Asia/Pacific region at different stages of development and the variation in age groups within primary and secondary education, and the related differences in compulsory schooling age, cross-national data on education attainment here reflect the average years spent in education. Data on the average years of education is taken from the Barro-Lee dataset (Barro and Lee, 2010), which provides gender disaggregated data in five-year intervals from 1950. The data is compiled using a combination of i) administrative data on enrolment and attainment for five-year age groups and, where lacking, ii) estimates for missing data points using forward/backward extrapolations of observed data on enrolment and attainment by five-year age groups with an appropriate time lag. The estimates are based on the assumption that educational attainment of a person remains unchanged between the ages of 25 to 64.

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data was taken from the OECD PISA 2012 Database. PISA assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students have acquired key knowledge on reading, mathematics, science and problem solving. It not only ascertains whether students can reproduce what they have learned, but it also examines how well they can extrapolate from what they have learned and apply that knowledge in unfamiliar settings, both inside and outside of school (www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm).

Further reading

- Barro, R. and J.W. Lee (2010), “A New Data Set of Educational Attainment in the World: 1950-2010”, *NBER Working Paper No. 15902*, Cambridge, United States, www.nber.org/papers/w15902.
- OECD (2014), *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can do: Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science (Vol. I)*, Revised edition, February, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2012-results-what-students-know-and-can-do-volume-i-revised-edition-february-2014_9789264208780-en.

Figure 5.8. Education levels and changes

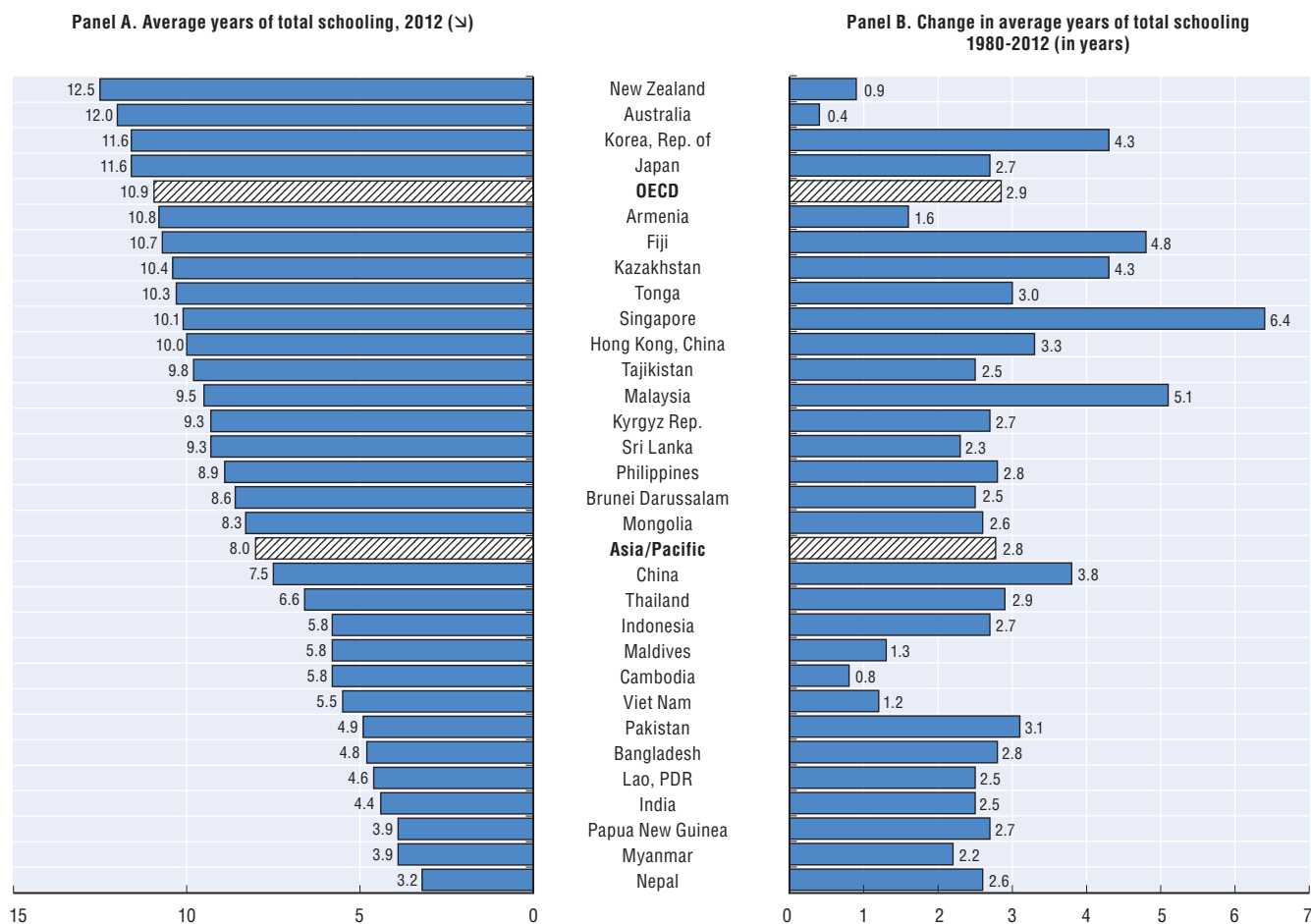


Figure 5.9. Mean PISA score in mathematics

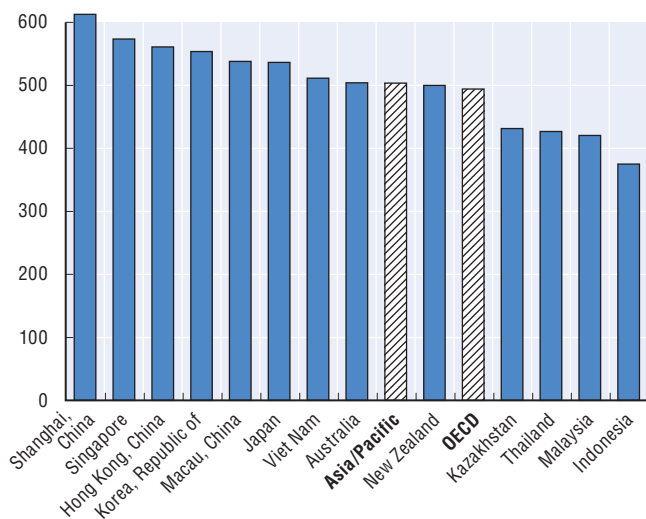
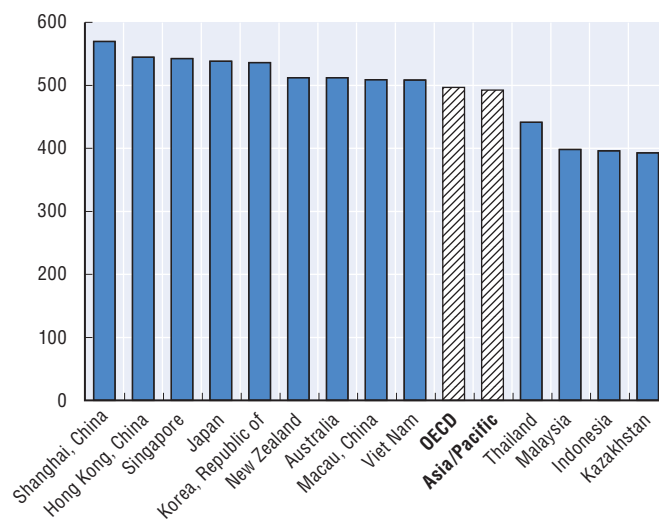
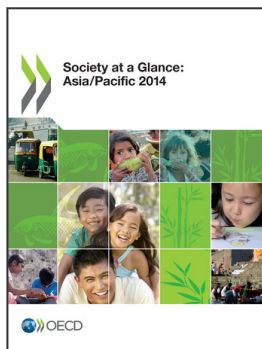


Figure 5.10. Mean PISA score in reading



Source: UNDP Education Indicators (<https://data.undp.org/dataset/Mean-years-of-schooling-of-adults-years-/m67k-vi5c>); Barro and Lee (2010), Version 2.0, July 2010 (www.barrolee.com); and OECD PISA 2012 Results (<http://pisa2012.acer.edu.au>).

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