

CO3.1: Educational attainment by gender

Definitions and methodology

This indicator measures the educational attainment of the adult population in terms of their successful completion of formal education programmes. Educational attainment is measured primarily through two main measures, both based on the [International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\) 2011](#) system for classifying educational programmes:

- *The percentage of population that has attained at least upper secondary education, by gender and age group*, that is, the percentage of the population that has attained qualifications corresponding to ISCED 2011 level 3 ('upper secondary education') or above. Where available, data are presented separately for men and women, and for three age groups: 25-64 year-olds, 25-34 year-olds (i.e. recent graduates) and 45-54 year-olds (i.e. those who would have been recent graduates 20-30 years ago). For some countries (Malaysia and Mongolia), due to limited data availability, data are presented for 25+ year-olds, rather than 25-64 year-olds.
- *The percentage of population that has attained tertiary education, by gender and age group*, that is, the percentage of the population that has attained any kind of tertiary qualification, including short-cycle tertiary and Bachelor's level qualifications (ISCED 2011 levels 5 and 6) and Master's or Doctoral level qualifications (ISCED 2011 levels 7 and 8). Data are again presented separately for men and women and for the age groups 25-64, 25-34 and 45-54, where available. Again, for some countries (Malaysia and Mongolia), data are presented for 25+ year-olds rather than 25-64 year-olds.

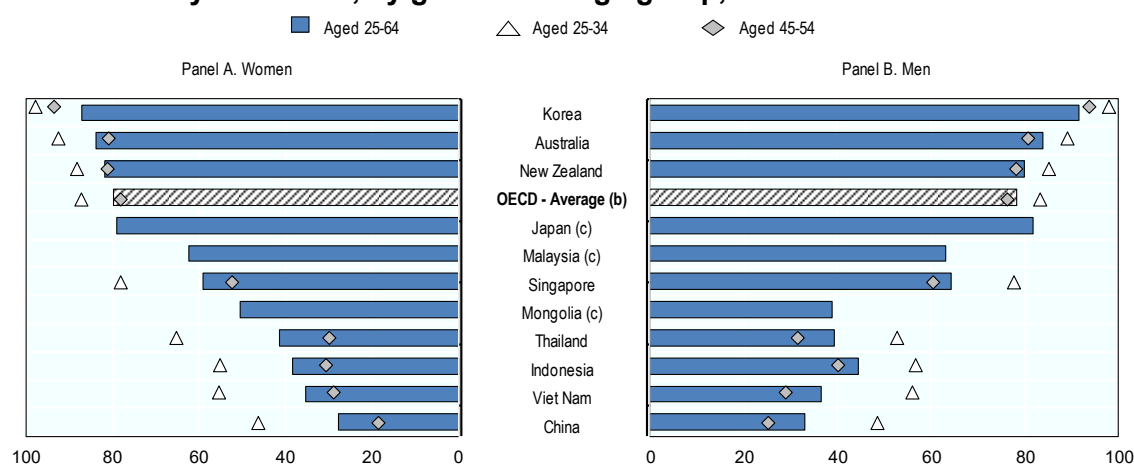
Key findings

Educational attainment differs considerably across the covered Asia/Pacific countries. Starting first with the attainment of at least upper secondary education, Chart CO3.1.A shows that there are large differences across countries in the share of the adult population that has attained education at least at the upper secondary level (Chart CO3.1.A). In Korea, for example, 92% of men aged 25-64 and 87% of women aged 25-64 have achieved at least upper secondary education, whereas in China these rates are 33% and 28%, respectively. However, where available, data suggest that all covered countries are making progress; comparing younger cohorts with their older counterparts, most of the covered countries have seen large increases in the share of the population attaining at least upper secondary education. China, Thailand and Viet Nam stand out in particular. In Viet Nam, the share of 25-34 year old men that have attained at least upper secondary education (56%) is about 27 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old men (29%). In Thailand, the share of 25-34 year old women that have attained at least upper secondary education (65%) is over 35 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old women (30%).

<i>Other relevant indicators:</i> LMF1.6 Gender differences in employment outcomes; CO3.3 Literacy scores by gender at age 10; CO3.4 Literacy scores by gender at age 15; CO3.6 Proportion of immigrant students and their educational outcomes

Men are more likely than women to have attained at least upper secondary education across all the covered Asia/Pacific countries, but in some countries, this gender gap disappears or even reverses when looking only at the younger cohorts (Chart CO3.1.A). In Thailand, for example, the group of women age 25-34 who have completed at least upper secondary education is twice as large as the group of women age 45-54 who have attained education at least at the upper secondary level. Furthermore, the rate for women aged 25-34 is more than 12 percentage points higher than that for men aged 25-34 (53%). In Mongolia, women over 25 are now about 10 percentage points more likely to have attained at least upper secondary education than men over 25.

Chart CO3.1.A. Percentage of population that has attained at least upper secondary education, by gender and age group, 2020 or latest available^a



Note: Education and qualifications are classified based on ISCED 2011

a) Data for Viet Nam refer to 2018, Singapore to 2017, Malaysia to 2016, and for China to 2015.

b) The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO3.1 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

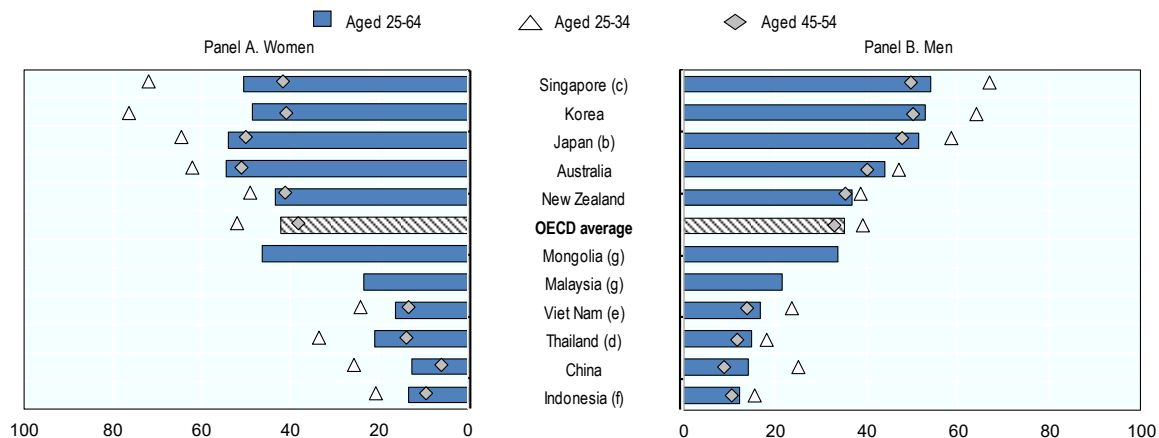
c) Data for Japan, Malaysia and Mongolia refers to 25 and over.

Sources: Australia, Korea and New Zealand: OECD (2021), Education at a Glance 2021; China : 1% National Population Sample Survey 2015, National Bureau of Statistics; Japan, Malaysia and Mongolia: UNESCO Institute for Statistics; OECD average: OECD Family Database Indicator 3.1; Singapore : Department of Statistics; Thailand : Labor Force Survey (Quarter 3) 2020; Vietnam: VHLSS 2018.

Patterns and trends in the attainment of university- (or tertiary-) level qualifications are largely similar to those for upper secondary attainment (Chart CO3.1.B). Again, there are large differences across countries in the share of the population that have attained tertiary qualifications. For 25-64 year olds, the highest attainment rates are in Singapore (54% for men and 51% for women), Korea (53% for men and 49% for women) and Japan (52% for men and 54% for women), while the lowest are in China (14% for men and 13% for women) and in Indonesia (12% for men and 13% for women). Attainment rates are also once again much higher among younger cohorts, with all countries with available data seeing the share attaining tertiary education increase between the 45-54 year old and 25-34 year old cohorts. Gains are especially large in Korea and Singapore, where the share of men age 25-34 who have attained tertiary education are about 14 and 17 percentage points higher than the share of men age 45-54 respectively. The share of women age 25-34 year who have attained tertiary-level qualifications are 35 and 30 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old women.

Gender differences in the attainment of tertiary education are, a little more favour in women across countries (Chart CO3.1.B). In some of the covered Asia/Pacific countries, like China, Indonesia and Viet Nam, the gender difference between women and men from the overall 25-64 year-old age group is small at less than 2 percentage points. In others (Australia, New Zealand, Mongolia and Thailand), the gender educational attainment gap for the age group 25-64 is more than 5 percentage points in favour of women. The largest gender differences in tertiary attainment among 25-34 year-olds in favour of women are in Korea (12 percentage points), New Zealand (10 percentage points), and especially Australia and Thailand, where the share of 25-34 year-old women who have attained tertiary education are around 15 percentage points higher than the share of men.

Chart CO3.1.B. Percentage of population that has attained tertiary education, by gender and age group, 2020 or latest available^a



Note: Education and qualifications are classified based on ISCED 2011

a) Data for Japan and Malaysia refers to 2019, Viet Nam to 2018, Singapore to 2017 and China to 2015.

b) For Japan, data include some upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (less than 5% of the adults are under this group).

c) For Singapore, tertiary includes diploma and professional qualification, university and above.

d) For Thailand, Tertiary includes post-secondary education, bachelor degree, master degree and doctoral degree.

e) For Vietnam, tertiary means bachelor and higher.

f) For Indonesia, Tertiary includes post-secondary education, bachelor degree, master degree and doctoral degree.

g) For Malaysia and Mongolia, Data refers to 25 and over, and tertiary includes post-secondary education.

Sources: Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and New Zealand: OECD (2021), Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators; China: "1% National Population Sample Survey 2015, National Bureau of Statistics, Table 4-1 China conducts decennial population census in years ending with 0, and the 1% population sample survey (also called 'Micro Census'), during the inter-censal years ending with 5"; Singapore: Department of Statistics; Thailand: Labor Force Survey (Quarter 3) 2020; Vietnam: VHLSS 2018; Malaysia and Mongolia: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Comparability and data issues

The data used in this indicator are collected from several different sources. For the OECD member countries plus Indonesia, data are taken from [OECD Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators](#), which itself also usually extracts attainment data from national labour force surveys or household surveys. The exceptions are Malaysia and Mongolia, for which data are taken from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) database on educational attainment. The data for Thailand are drawn from the Thai national labour force survey, while the data for China, Singapore, Viet Nam are from National Statistics. It should be noted that the data for Malaysia and Mongolia refer to 25+ year-olds, rather than 25-64 year-olds.

Educational qualifications are classified using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 classification system. There should be relatively few major comparability issues here as the ISCED 2011 classification system provides comprehensive guidelines and instructions on how to classify education programmes in a comparable manner across countries, though it remains possible on occasion that an education programme in one country could be classified differently in another. For more detail and notes for specific countries, see where relevant Indicator A.1 in [OECD Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators](#) and the accompanying notes in OECD (2021) Education at a Glance 2021 Annex 3 (<https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>) and the metadata available on the [UIS.Stat](#) UNESCO data warehouse.

Sources and further reading: OECD (2021), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>.