

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 (Singapore and Viet Nam), 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 (Singapore and Viet Nam), data are presented for 25+ year-olds rather than 25-64 year-olds.

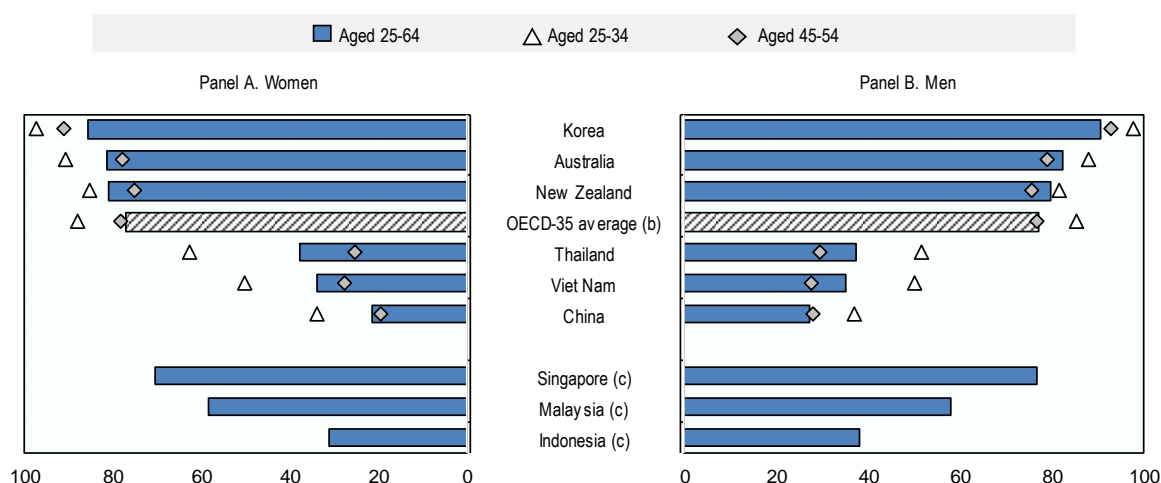
Key findings

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, 91% of men aged 25-64 and 86% of women aged 25-64 have achieved at least upper secondary education, whereas in China these rates are 27% and 22%, 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. 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 (above 50%) is about 22 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old men (28%). In Thailand, the share of 25-34 year old women that have attained at least upper secondary education (63%) is over 38 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old women (26%).

Other relevant indicators: 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 Australia, for example, while men from the overall 25-64 year-old age group are still more likely than women to have attained education at least at the upper secondary level, the rate for women aged 25-34 (91%) is now almost 3 percentage points higher than that for men aged 25-34 (88%). In Thailand, young women aged 25-34 are now about 10 percentage points more likely to have attained at least upper secondary education than young men aged 25-34.

Chart CO3.1.A. Percentage of population that has attained at least upper secondary education, by gender and age group, 2018 or latest available^a



Note: Education and qualifications are classified based on ISCED 2011

a) Data for Viet Nam refer to 2009, for China to 2010, for Malaysia and Viet Nam to 2016, and for Thailand to 2017.

b) The OECD-35 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.

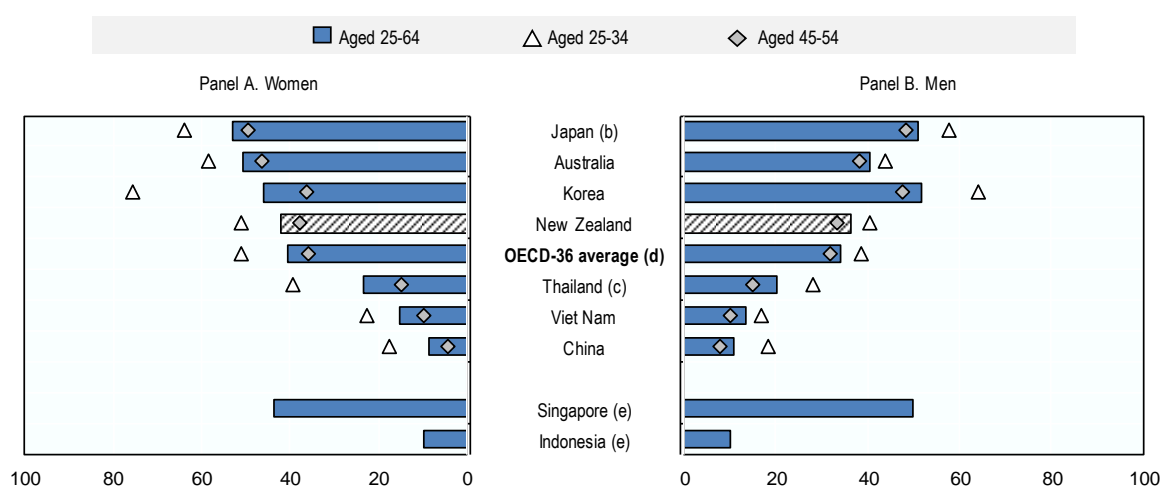
c) Data for Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore refer to 25+ year-olds (i.e. 25 and over).

Sources: [Australia, China, Korea and New Zealand: OECD \(2019\), Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators](#); [OECD-35 average: OECD Family Database Indicator 3.1](#); Thailand: Labor Force Survey; Viet Nam: VHLSS 2016; [Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore: UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

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 Japan (51% for men and 53% for women), Australia (40% for men and 51% for women), Korea (52% for men and 46% for women) and Singapore (50% for men and 44% for women), while the lowest are in China (11% for men and 9% for women) and in Indonesia (10% for men and 10% 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, where the share of 25-34 year old men that have attained tertiary education (64%) is about 17 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old men (47%), while the share of 25-34 year old women that have attained tertiary-level qualifications (76%) is almost 39 percentage points higher than the share of 45-54 year old women (36%).

Gender differences in the attainment of tertiary education are, however, a little more mixed across countries (Chart CO3.1.B). In some of the covered Asia/Pacific countries, like China and Korea, men from the overall 25-64 year-old age group are still more likely than women to have attained a tertiary-level qualification. In others (Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Viet Nam) the gender gap runs in the opposite direction, with women aged 25-64 now more likely than men to have attained tertiary education. However, all covered countries other than China see clear a clear gender gap in favour of girls among the younger 25-34 year-old cohort. The largest gender differences in tertiary attainment among 25-34 year-old men and women are in Korea (12 percentage points), Thailand (11 percentage points), and especially Australia, where the share of 25-34 year-old women that have attained tertiary education (59%) is 15 percentage points higher than the share of men (44%).

Chart CO3.1.B. Percentage of population that has attained tertiary education, by gender and age group, 2018 or latest available^a



Note: Education and qualifications are classified based on ISCED 2011

a) Data for China to 2010, for Singapore to 2019, for Thailand for 2017.

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 Thailand, 'tertiary education' includes post-secondary non-tertiary education, bachelor degrees, master degrees and doctoral degrees.

d) The OECD-36 average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO3.1 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

e) Data for Indonesia and Singapore refer to 25+ year-olds (i.e. 25 and over).

Sources: [Australia, China, Korea and New Zealand: OECD \(2019\), Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators](#); [OECD-36 average: OECD Family Database Indicator 3.1](#); [Thailand: Labor Force Survey](#); [Viet Nam: VHLSS 2016](#); [Indonesia and Singapore: 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 China, data are taken from [OECD Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators](#), which itself also usually extracts attainment data from national labour force surveys or household surveys. The exception is China, for which data are taken from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) database on educational attainment. The data for Thailand are drawn from the Thailand National Labour Force survey, for Viet Nam from the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey, and the data for Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore come directly from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) database on educational attainment. It should be noted that the data for the latter three countries refer to 25+ year-olds, rather than 25-64 year-olds, and should not be compared directly with the data for the remaining countries.

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 2019: OECD Indicators](#) and the accompanying notes in OECD (2016) Education at a Glance 2019 Annex 3 (<http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>), and the metadata available on the [UIS.Stat](#) UNESCO data warehouse.

Sources and further reading: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2019-en>