

Figure 1 shows the range of expected number of years spent in primary, secondary and tertiary

A child in Finland, New Zealand or Norway can expect to receive over 17 years of education, almost twice as much as in Bangladesh or Myanmar, or four times as much as in Niger and Burkina Faso

education in six regions. Although this indicator is not available for many countries, due to the lack of tertiary education data, this figure provides some idea of the range of school expectancy across the world. Differences

within regions are considerable. In Africa, countries with the highest school life expectancy

levels are more than four times higher than in the countries with the lowest levels. Children in Burkina Faso, Djibouti and Niger can expect to receive less than four years of schooling compared to almost 13 years in South Africa and Tunisia. In Asia, the range in school life expectancy among countries is also large: schooling in the countries with the longest expectancy lasts on average twice as long as in those with the shortest.

Some of the most significant differences are found in the average amount of time spent in tertiary education. The average time that young people can expect in tertiary education (including those who never study) is more than 30 times

BOX 1. WHAT IS SCHOOL LIFE EXPECTANCY?

School Life Expectancy (SLE) is defined as the total number of years of schooling that a child at age 4 can expect to receive in the future, assuming that the probability of enrolment in school at any particular age is equal to the current enrolment rate for that age. It indicates the average duration of schooling, not the number of grades reached. It can also be defined as the average number of years which a child is likely to spend in the educational system. Since school life expectancy is an average, there is variation in the number of years of schooling; e.g. there are those children who never go to school and those who spend up to 14 years in the system.

The concept of school life expectancy is very similar to that of life expectancy. Life expectancy estimates the average number of years a person could expect to live if current mortality trends were to continue. In a similar manner, school life expectancy predicts the number of years of schooling children will experience, given current rates of enrolment. Although it does not directly forecast the educational attainment of the population, since it includes repetition and drop-out, it can suggest the potential educational attainment of the future adult population.

The indicator has two important features. First, it allows comparisons of the size of the student population by

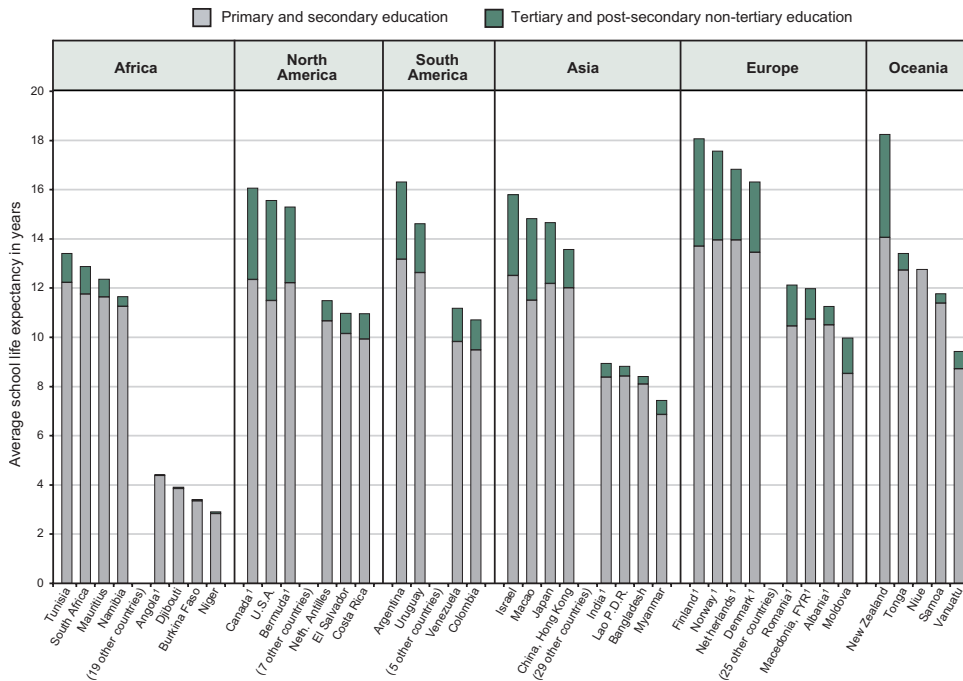
level of education using a common scale: the number of school years. This allows for comparisons across countries with different programme durations and combinations of education levels, e.g. primary, secondary and tertiary. Second, the indicator allows comparison of post-secondary programmes, where programmes are more diverse and a common duration period does not exist.

However, as with any average, school life expectancy masks differences within the population. This is important in countries where not all children participate in school, especially at secondary and tertiary levels, where participation is more limited.

Years spent repeating grades is also included in school life expectancy and should be taken into account when interpreting this indicator. Therefore, the indicator does not represent the average number of grade levels completed. In fact, in systems with high levels of repetition at the primary level, the SLE for primary alone can exceed the theoretical duration of the primary cycle. School life expectancy expresses the years spent in education, but not the number of grades successfully completed, nor does it imply learning achievement. The issue of repetition and its impact on school life expectancy indicators is discussed further in a subsequent section.

Figure 1. How long can children expect to stay in education, from primary to tertiary education?

Average school life expectancy in years for countries with the longest and shortest expectancy by region, 2001



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Table 4.

Notes: Countries are sorted in descending order within a region. Some OECD/IEU countries are excluded due to inclusion of adult education. For each region the number of countries with data, though not shown, is indicated on the horizontal axis.

1) Data refer to 2000.

greater in the ten countries with the highest participation rates compared to the ten with the lowest. In the high-performing countries, more than 2.5 years of an average school career is due to participation in tertiary studies. This is the case in Argentina, Bermuda, Canada, and the United States in the Americas; Israel, Japan and Macao (China) in Asia; Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain in Europe; New Zealand in Oceania; and in 20 other countries, not shown in Figure 1. An important exception to this is Africa, where the amount of time spent in tertiary education remains marginal even in countries with longer school life expectancy. Tunisia and South Africa are the only countries in the region where school life expectancy attributable to tertiary education exceeds one year.

Data on tertiary education, however, are not available for many countries. By looking at the expected

number of school years for primary and secondary levels alone, it is possible to improve coverage from 133 to 179 countries, which represents almost 94% of the world's population.

Overall, a child today can expect to spend on average 9.3 years in primary and secondary education

On average, a child entering school today can expect to spend 9.3 years in primary and secondary education (see Figure 2). The average number of years (weighted by population) that a child can expect to be enrolled at primary and secondary levels is above 12 years in Europe, South America and Oceania, and just over 11 years in North America. Children in

Asia can expect to spend less time in school; on average, nine years.

Figure 2. Average school life expectancy in years by region, 2001

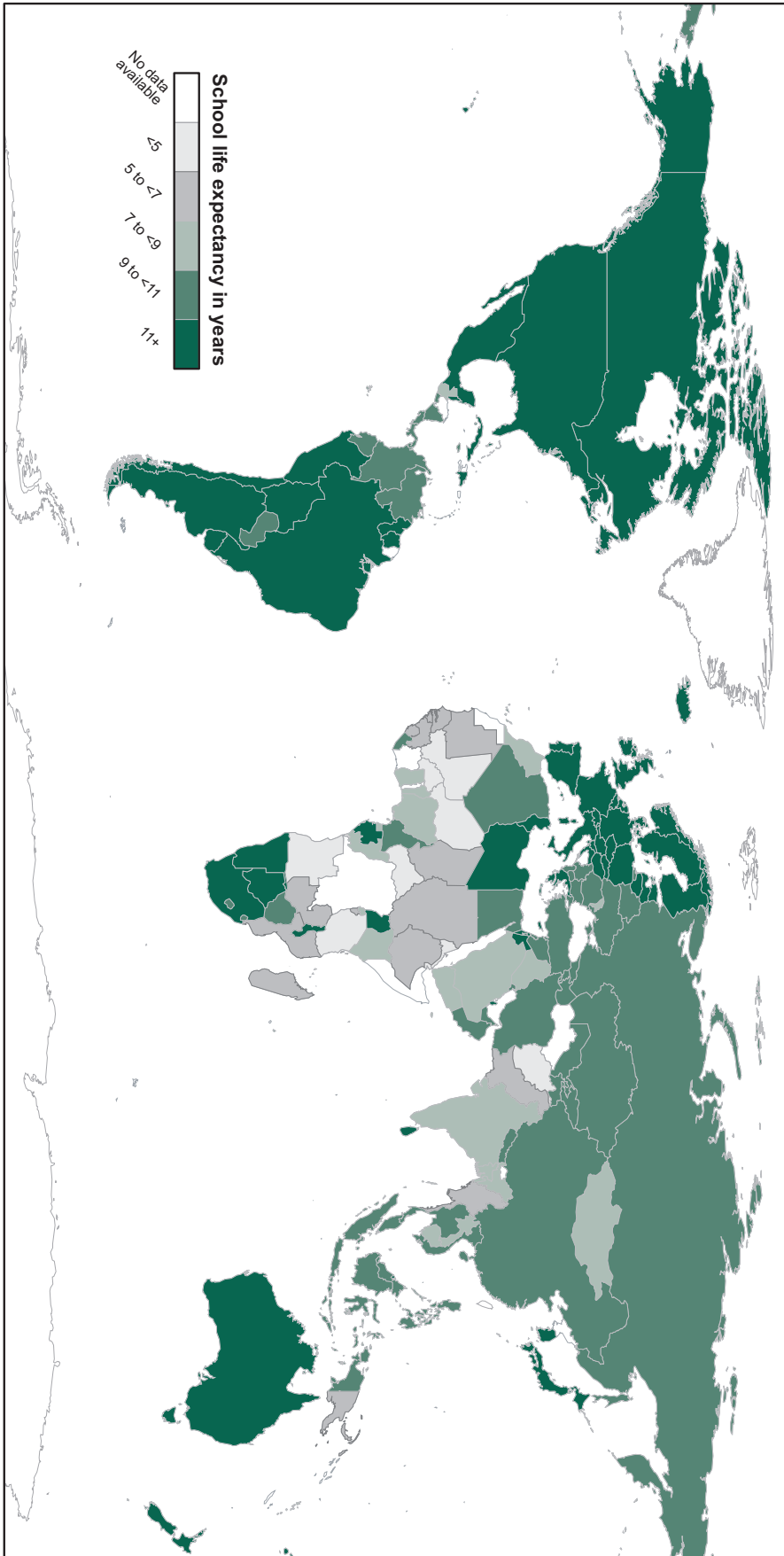
	Average school life expectancy (years)		Coverage			
	Primary-Secondary	Primary-Tertiary	Primary - Secondary		Primary - Tertiary	
			Countries	Population (%)	Countries	Population (%)
Africa	7.6	7.8	49 / 53	89.4	29 / 53	38.4
North America	11.2	14.3	27 / 31	95.4	13 / 31	86.2
South America	12.1	13.7	12 / 12	100.0	9 / 12	91.7
Asia	8.9	9.9	47 / 50	99.2	38 / 50	90.0
Europe	12.4	15.4	37 / 44	99.4	37 / 44	99.4
Oceania	12.4	m	9 / 17	95.0	7 / 17	61.5
World	9.3	10.8	179 / 207	93.6	133 / 207	80.0

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Table 4.

Notes: Data for 38 countries refer to 2000, and for 7 countries to 1999.

Regional averages are weighted by the population of children approaching primary school entry (5 years of age). Annex D provides the country groupings used to calculate regional averages.

Figure 3. How long can children expect to stay in school?
 Average school life expectancy in years for primary to secondary education by country, 2001



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Table 4.
 Notes: Data refer to 2001 for 133 countries, 2000 for 38 countries, and 1999 for 7 countries. For details see Table 4. For Central African Republic, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda and Yemen, UIS estimates were imputed with a margin of error sufficiently small for the presentation in this map, but too large for inclusion in Table 4.

Tertiary education has almost no impact on the overall school life expectancy in Africa. However, tertiary education adds over one year to school life expectancy in Asia and South America, and over two years in Europe and North America.

Figure 3 provides national data on the number of years that children can expect, on average, to spend

in primary and secondary education. The map reveals dramatic differences across and within geographic. The majority of countries with a short average

duration of primary and secondary education are found in Africa, with an average of 7.5 years. In other words, currently a child in Africa will receive on average 4.5 years

A child in Africa can expect to receive, on average, 4.5 fewer years of schooling than a child in Europe or the Americas

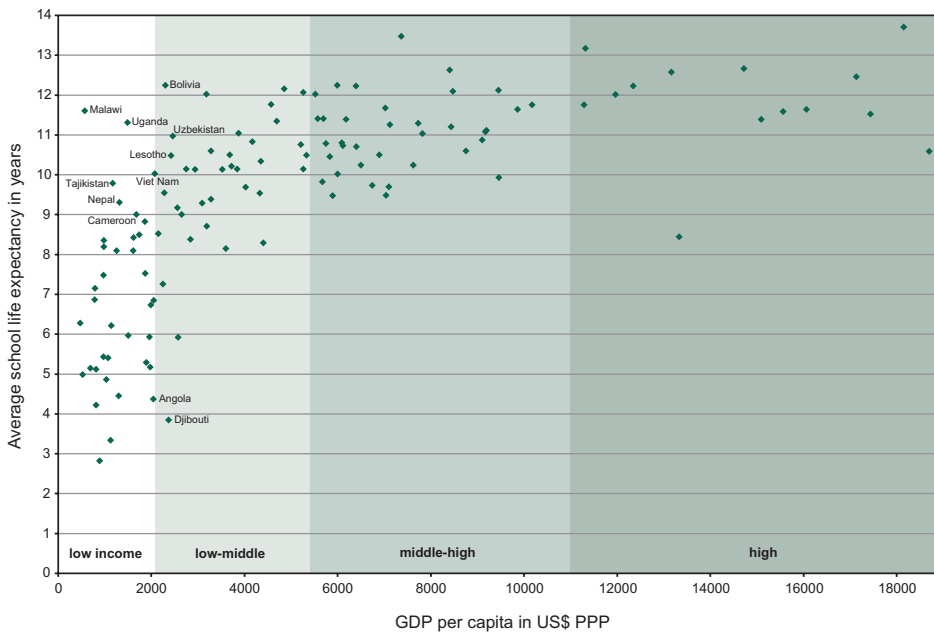
less of basic schooling than a child in Europe or the Americas, irrespective of the quality of education. These differences are further exacerbated when including tertiary education in the comparison. Furthermore, the gap grows even more when adjusting for the high rates of repetition found in many African countries.

In a small number of African countries, school life expectancy exceeds 11 years: Botswana, Cape Verde, Gabon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda. At the other end of the spectrum, there are countries with less than five years of school life expectancy, namely Angola, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Djibouti, Eritrea, Mali, Niger and the United Republic of Tanzania.

In Asia, the range extends from four countries with levels of school expectancy exceeding 12 years to countries with less than seven years (e.g. Myanmar and Pakistan). The lowest school life expectancy in the world of just over two years for the 2001/02 school year is for Afghanistan. It is notable that the variation in the expected number of years of schooling among the 47 countries in the Asian region is smaller than in other developing regions and more similar to that of Europe or the Americas.

Figure 4. How does the expected duration of schooling relate to national wealth?

Average school life expectancy for primary and secondary education and GDP per capita in US\$ PPP, 2001



Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Table 4. World Bank 2003.

Coverage: 147 countries, 94% of the world population (including high-income countries not shown).

Notes: Only countries with a GDP per capita under US\$ PPP 19,000 are shown. Countries are classified by income groups on the basis of GDP per capita in US\$ converted using purchasing power parity (PPP). Countries are grouped by income quartiles. The GDP per capita of low-income countries is below US\$ PPP 2,055, low-middle income countries fall between US\$ PPP 2,055 and 5,415, high-middle income countries fall between US\$ PPP 5,415 and 11,010 and high-income countries exceed this value. This grouping differs from the World Bank method, which is based on Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in US\$ converted using market exchange rates.

Only two low-income countries achieve 11 years of education, but almost every high-income country does

Figure 4 plots the expected number of school years of countries against the level of national wealth, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. The expected number of school years in