

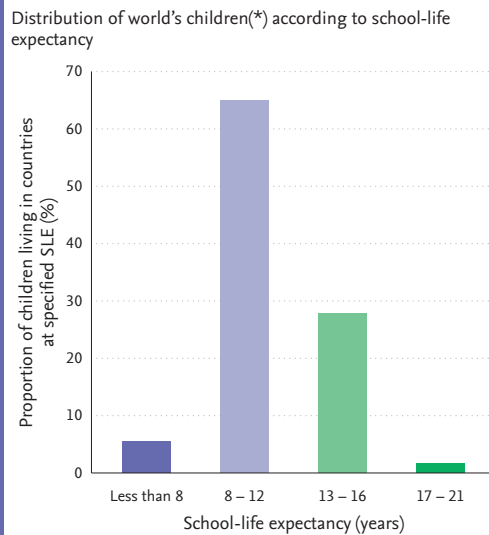
# Trends in school-life expectancy

School-life expectancy (SLE) describes the average number of years that a child is likely to spend in the educational system of his or her country. Specifically, SLE is defined as the total number of years of schooling that a child entering the school system could expect to receive in the future, assuming that the probability of his or her enrolment is equal to prevailing participation rates. SLE indicates the average duration of schooling in years, not the number of grades reached. It is not necessarily a measure of actual or current attainment but rather of what the next cohort entering the schooling system may achieve.

SLE is a useful metric for several reasons. Because it uses a common scale – number of years of schooling – it allows comparisons across countries with widely varying populations, types of programmes and combinations of primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. SLE also allows comparisons of post-secondary programmes, which are diverse in many respects, including the lack of a common duration period. Finally, SLE offers a measure of overall participation in a country's education system, primary through tertiary.

The good news regarding SLE is that it has been increasing consistently around the globe. For the world as a whole SLE increased between 1990 and 2009 from 8.3 to 11.0 years for females and from 9.6 to 11.4 years for males. Parallel increases were observed in all eight regions.

Figure 6.1.1 Most children living in countries with modest SLE rates



Note: (\*) The school age population from primary to tertiary education  
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Map 6.1.1 offers a picture of how school-life expectancy varies across 166 countries. Nearly half (47 percent) of all countries have an SLE of 12 years or less, including nine countries with an SLE of less than 8 years. Forty-five percent of countries have SLEs in the 13 to 16-year range. Students can be expected to be in school for 17 to 21 years in 13 countries, or one in twelve.

These data, however, overstate the overall picture because the vast majority of children live in countries with only modest SLE rates. As shown in Figure 6.1.1, even though only 42 percent of countries have SLEs in the 8 to 12-year range, such countries are home to nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of the world's children. By contrast, the majority (53 percent) of countries with SLEs of 13 years or above are home to only 30 percent of the school-age population.

Map 6.1.1 School-life expectancy rates vary across different regions

School-life expectancy from primary to tertiary education

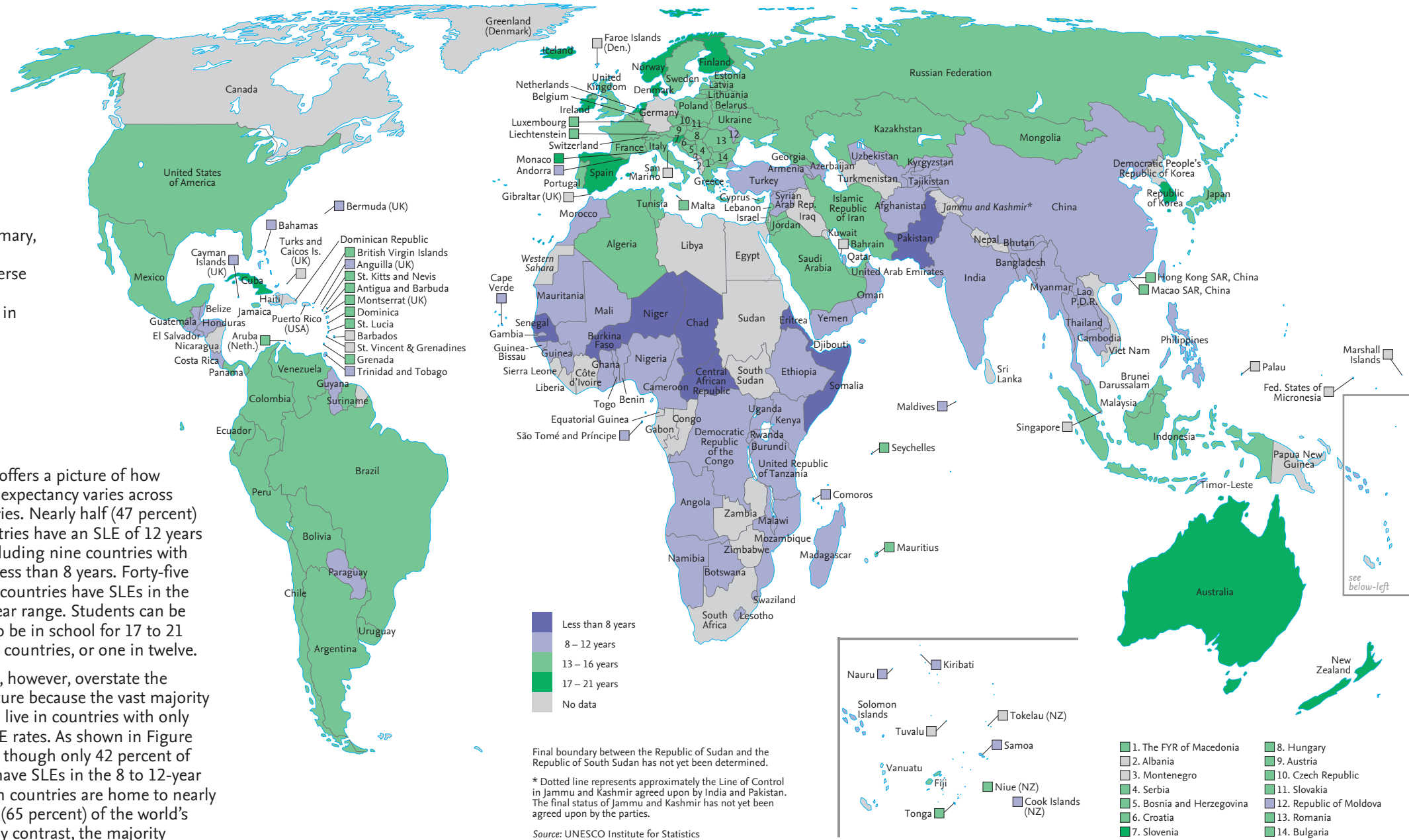
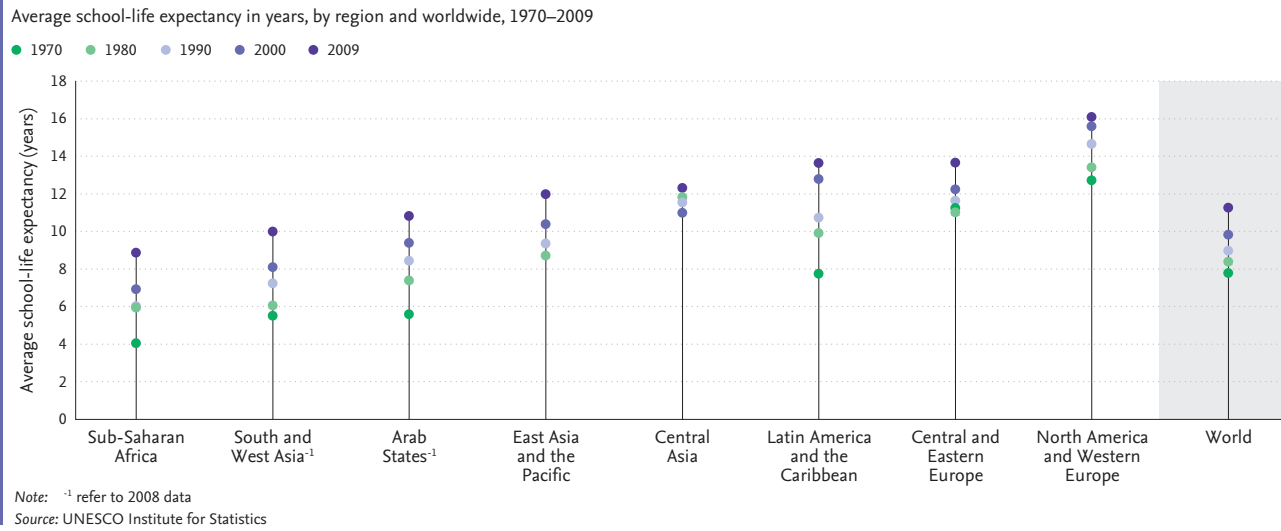


Figure 6.1.2 Gains in school-life expectancy reflected in all regions



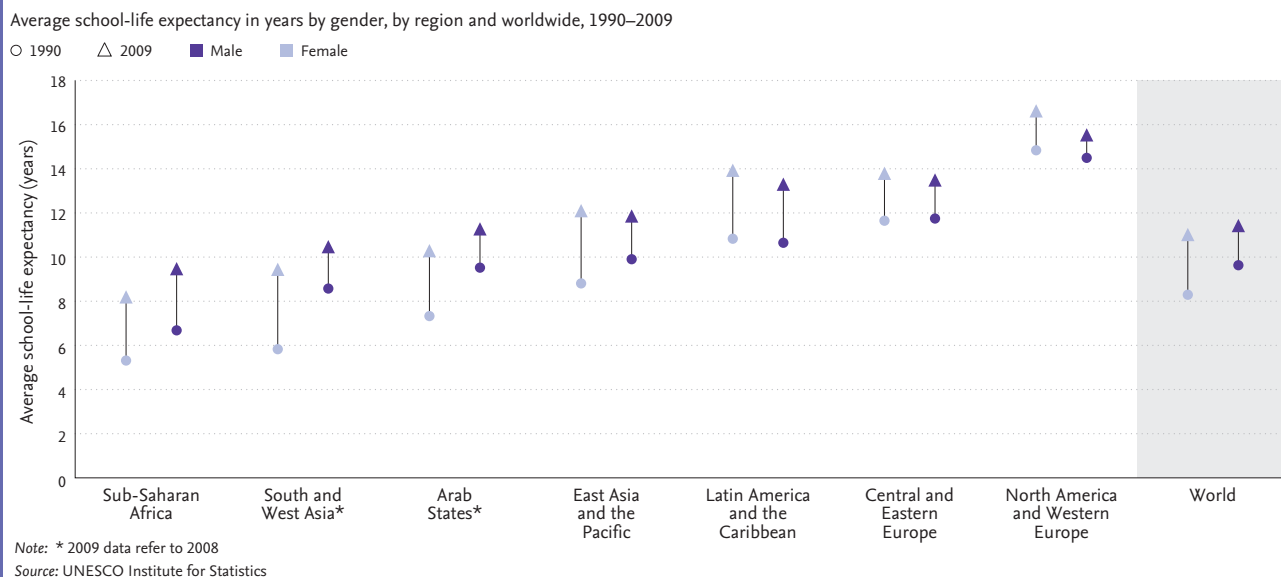
Global SLE rates are on the rise. The global average increased from 7.8 years in 1970 to 11.2 years in 2009, and, as seen in Figure 6.1.2, every region of the world shared in this growth, although the magnitude of the gains differs among regions. Sub-Saharan Africa ranked at the bottom of the regions in 1970 and, despite more than doubling its SLE from 4.0 to 8.9 years, it remained the lowest performing region in 2009. North America and Western Europe was the top-performing region in 1970 and remained so by a comfortable margin in 2009. With a SLE of 16.1, it is the only region with a rate above 14.

The smallest gain was observed in Central Asia (0.4 years), where the SLE actually declined between 1980 and 2000 before rebounding and increased by 1.3 years

between 2000 and 2009. The largest gains were registered in Latin America and the Caribbean, which showed a gain from 7.7 to 13.6 years. Its relative rank rose from fourth place to a tie with Central and Eastern Europe.

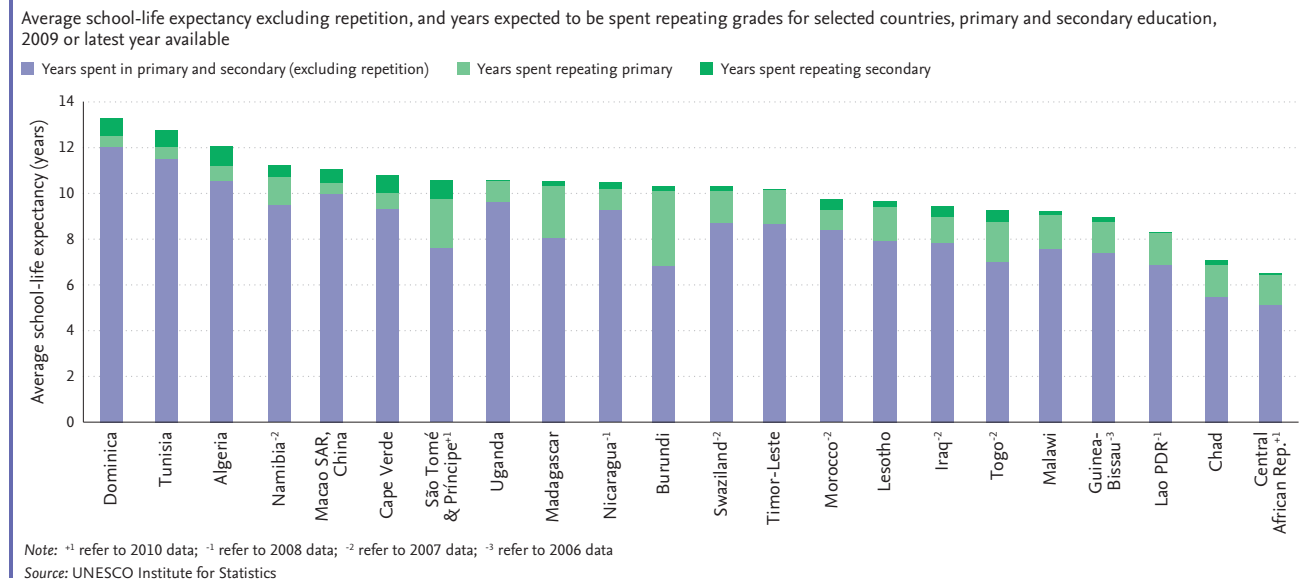
Whereas males have a slight overall edge in SLE for the world as a whole (11.4 versus 11.0), Figure 6.1.3 shows that the various regions are fairly evenly divided between the four where females have higher rates and three where the male rates are higher. The largest gains over the two decades were registered among females in Latin America and the Caribbean (3.1 years), females in East Asia and the Pacific (3.3 years) and females in South and West Asia (3.7 years).

Figure 6.1.3 Increase in school-life expectancy seen among both sexes



Note: \* 2009 data refer to 2008. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Figure 6.1.4 Grade repetition: A major impediment to school-life expectancy



Note: <sup>1</sup> refer to 2010 data; <sup>2</sup> refer to 2008 data; <sup>3</sup> refer to 2007 data. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

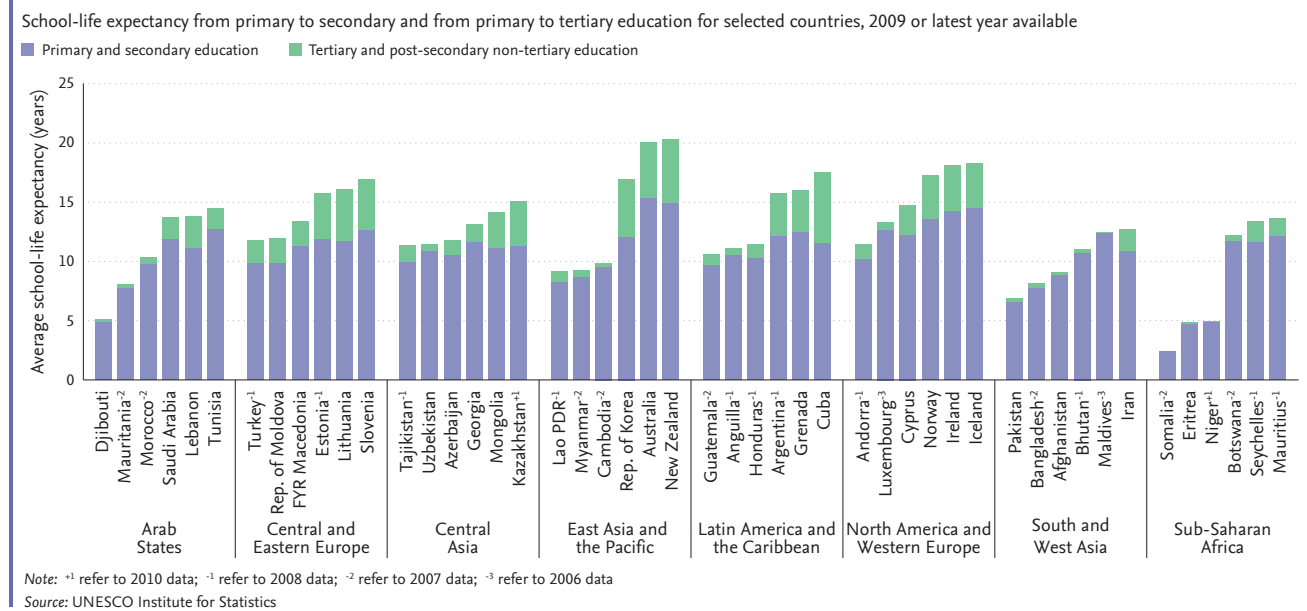
School-life expectancy is reduced when students repeat grades. Figure 6.1.4 shows how the number of years that students spend repeating primary and secondary school affects total school-life expectancy in 22 selected countries. In most countries the bulk of the repetition occurs during primary school.

The primary repetition rate is particularly high in Burundi, where, in addition to 6.8 years of schooling, students typically spend 3.3 years repeating grades in primary school and another 0.2 years at the secondary level. In some countries, however, including Dominica,

Cape Verde and Tunisia, repetition is higher at the secondary level.

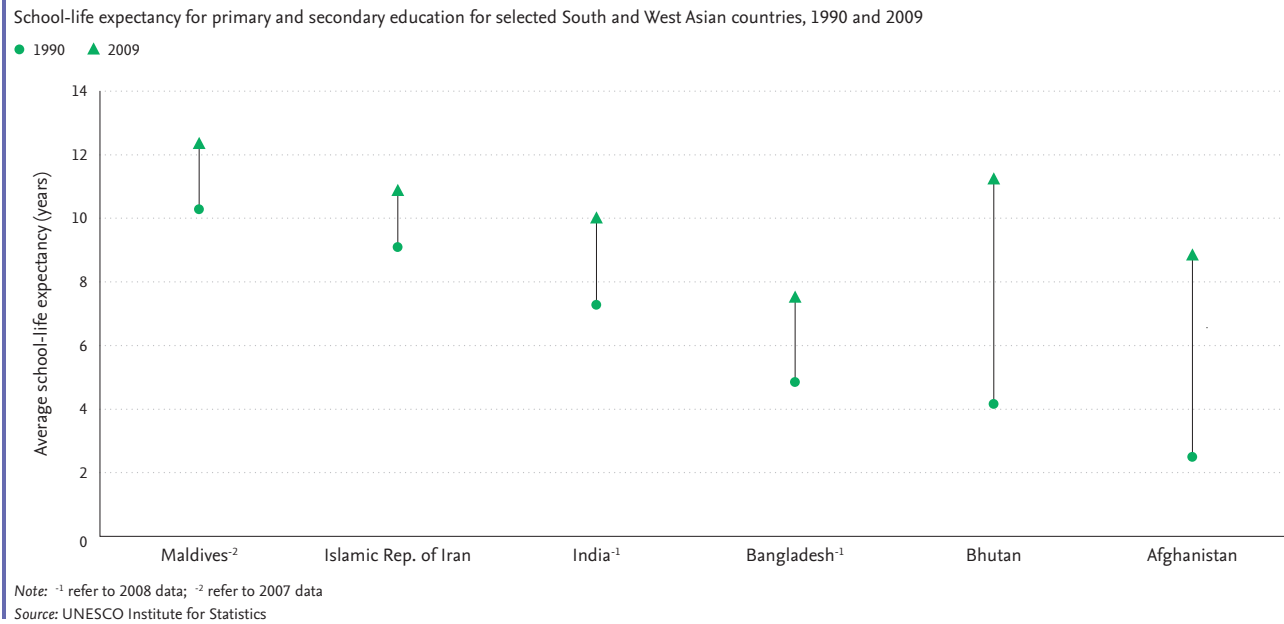
Figure 6.1.5 shows how SLE patterns at the secondary and tertiary levels contribute to the overall SLE rates for six countries in each of eight regions. The greatest SLE rates are in Australia and New Zealand, where strong higher education systems extend total SLE rates by 4.7 and 5.4 years respectively. Post-secondary participation leads to the smallest gains in SLE among countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 6.1.5 Patterns of school-life expectancy differ among countries and regions



Note: <sup>1</sup> refer to 2010 data; <sup>2</sup> refer to 2008 data; <sup>3</sup> refer to 2006 data. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Figure 6.1.6 Dramatic gains seen in school-life expectancy in Afghanistan and Bhutan



Progress in increasing school-life expectancy rates has varied widely both among regions and among countries within regions. Figure 6.1.6 shows how SLE has increased in selected countries in South and West Asia. The most dramatic gains were registered by Afghanistan and Bhutan, where SLE nearly tripled between 1990 and 2009. Although its overall SLE rate more than doubled over the last four decades – from 4.0 to 8.9 years – sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest-performing of the eight regions.

Figure 6.1.7 presents similar data for 34 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, all of which showed gains in SLE between 1990 and 2009. The highest SLE is in Mauritius, which had a SLE of 12 years in 2009. The largest numerical gains were registered in Guinea-Bissau, Uganda, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Mali, Guinea and Burundi. The lowest SLE is found in Eritrea, which almost doubled its SLE during this period but still has a rate of only 4.7 years.

Figure 6.1.7 Despite gains, sub-Saharan African countries still face challenges in school-life expectancy

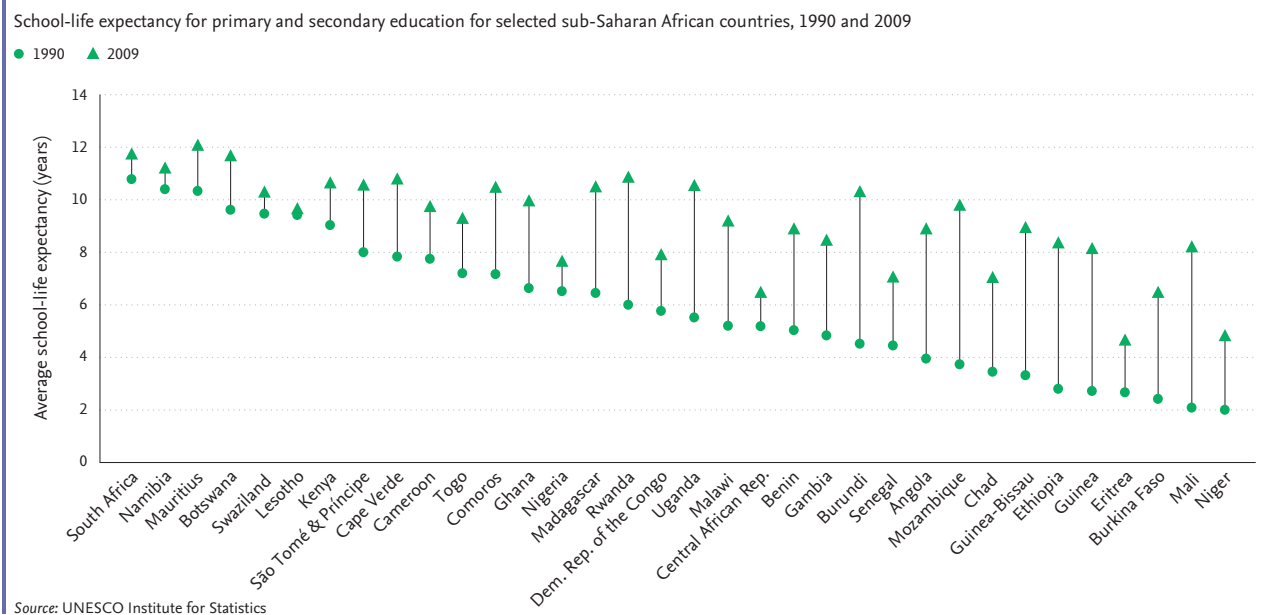


Figure 6.1.8 Gender disparities a persistent problem in some developing countries



Gender disparities based on socio-economic factors and geographical location are a persistent problem, especially in developing countries. Figure 6.1.8 looks at four such countries – Bangladesh, Guatemala, Kenya and Morocco – and depicts how the proportion of the population with at least five years of schooling has increased. Solid lines represent males and dashed lines represent females in each of four categories: rich, poor, urban and rural.

over females, rich over poor among both sexes, and urban over rural among both sexes. The general trend line in all eight categories was upward, and in Guatemala and Morocco males maintained their edge over females with the single exception that urban females in Morocco caught up with urban males. By contrast, females in Bangladesh reached parity with or surpassed their male counterparts in all four categories of rich, poor, urban and rural.

In all four countries the percentage of the population born in 1950 with five years of schooling favoured males