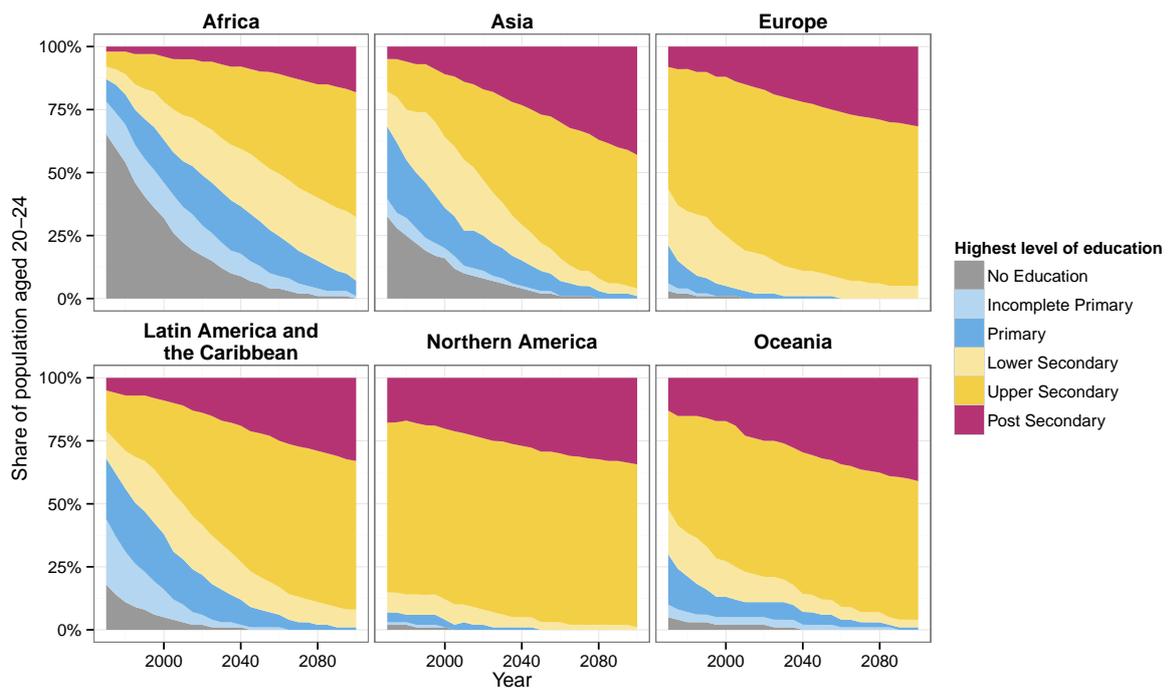


Global trends in primary, secondary and post-secondary educational attainment

Summary

Education is widely recognised as an important human ‘[capability](#)’, enabling individuals to lead productive and satisfying lives. Levels of educational attainment vary widely around the world, though as part of the United Nations’ Millenium Development Goals, a [target](#) was set to ensure that all children complete a full course of primary schooling. Achievements in secondary and post-secondary education are also important for building human capabilities and economic development. In this *Data Byte* we examine historical and future projections of the distribution of educational attainment around the world.



What does the chart show?

The chart shows the distribution of the highest level of educational attainment among individuals aged 20 to 24 for six global regions. The data include historical projections of educational attainment between 1970 and 2010, as described by [Springer et al. \(2015\)](#), and predicted levels of attainment to 2100 under a scenario representing the most likely path for each of the 195 countries studied. This so-called ‘SSP2’ scenario captures trends in fertility, mortality, migration, and education.

The data are available for download from the [Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital](#) and were first published as part of a major international study on global population and human capital (Lutz et al., 2014).

Why is the chart interesting?

The chart highlights two important trends. The first is that great progress has been made toward the goal of universal primary education. Globally 36% of individuals aged 20-24 had either no education or incomplete primary education in 1970. However by 2015, this had fallen to 14% and, under the illustrated scenario, this is expected to fall to 1% by 2100.

Secondly the share of the population aged 20-24 with (upper or lower) secondary education has grown from 36% in 1970 to 58% in 2015. However only modest additional increases in the rates of secondary education are expected, rising to 64% by the end of the century. The global average share of the population aged 20-24 with post-secondary education is forecast to grow significantly from 6% in 1970 to 32% in 2100.

The chart also shows variations by region. The study suggests that, by 2100, Asia, Europe, Northern America, and Oceania will have, on average, 96% of their populations obtaining Upper Secondary education or higher. At the same time approximately two-thirds of the population aged 20-24 in Africa will have achieved this standard. Another notable difference is the rapid rise of post-secondary educational attainment in Asia. In 1970, only 5% of Asia's 20-24 year old population had post-secondary education; this is forecast to rise to 43% by 2100, the highest of any world region.

Further information

For additional information on the data presented here and the accompanying source report, please see:

- Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, (2015). *Wittgenstein Centre Data Explorer Version 1.2*. Available at: <http://www.wittgensteincentre.org/dataexplorer>.
- Lutz, W., Butz, W.P., Samir, K.C. (eds.) (2014) *World Population and Human Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford University Press. ([Link to Executive Summary](#))