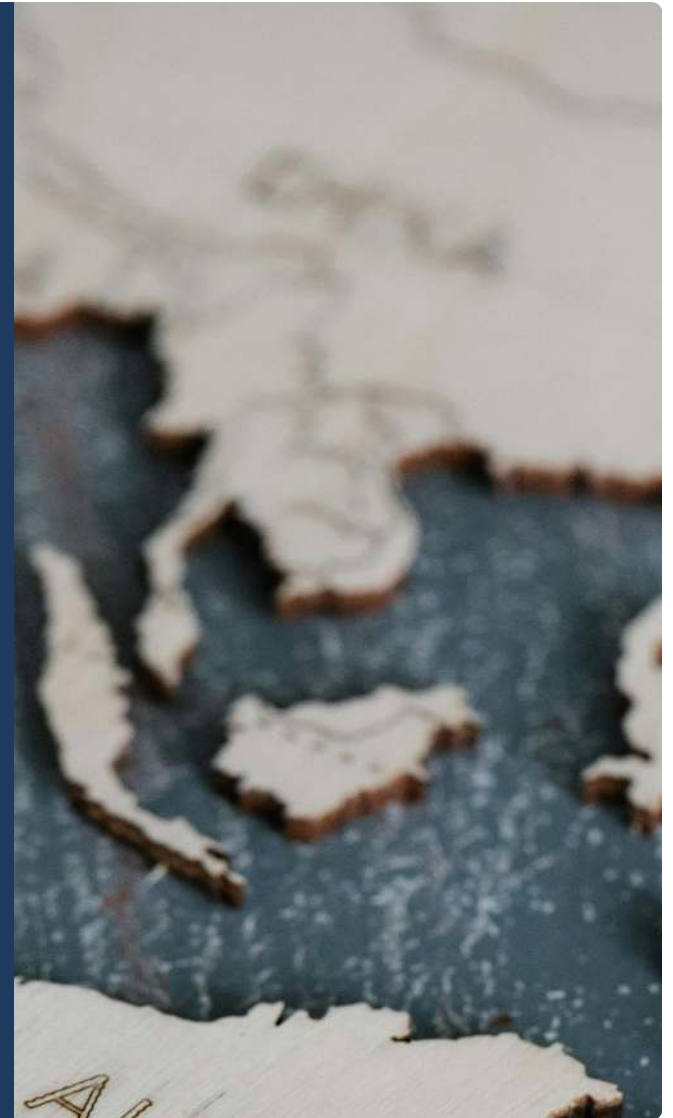


# Mapping Higher Education in Asia

*Contexts, characteristics and capabilities*

Melbourne, Australia

May 2026



## Executive Briefing

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- This briefing aims to spur a more contemporary way of thinking about higher education in Asia and how it is shaping a new order and transforming global relations.
- The briefing highlights key sector characteristics, situating them within broader national, regional, and international contexts.
- After grounding the analysis, we traverse the statistical contours of selected higher education systems and their surroundings.
- This benchmark analysis stirs ideas that frame suggestions about what lies ahead.
- As a baseline piece of work, this briefing has deployed a broad brush to glean and compile relevant insights into higher education in Asia. It is focused on a sample of 16 territories in Asia.
- It is pitched at individuals with a deep and enduring interest in the region and sector, as well as those with limited exposure and knowledge.

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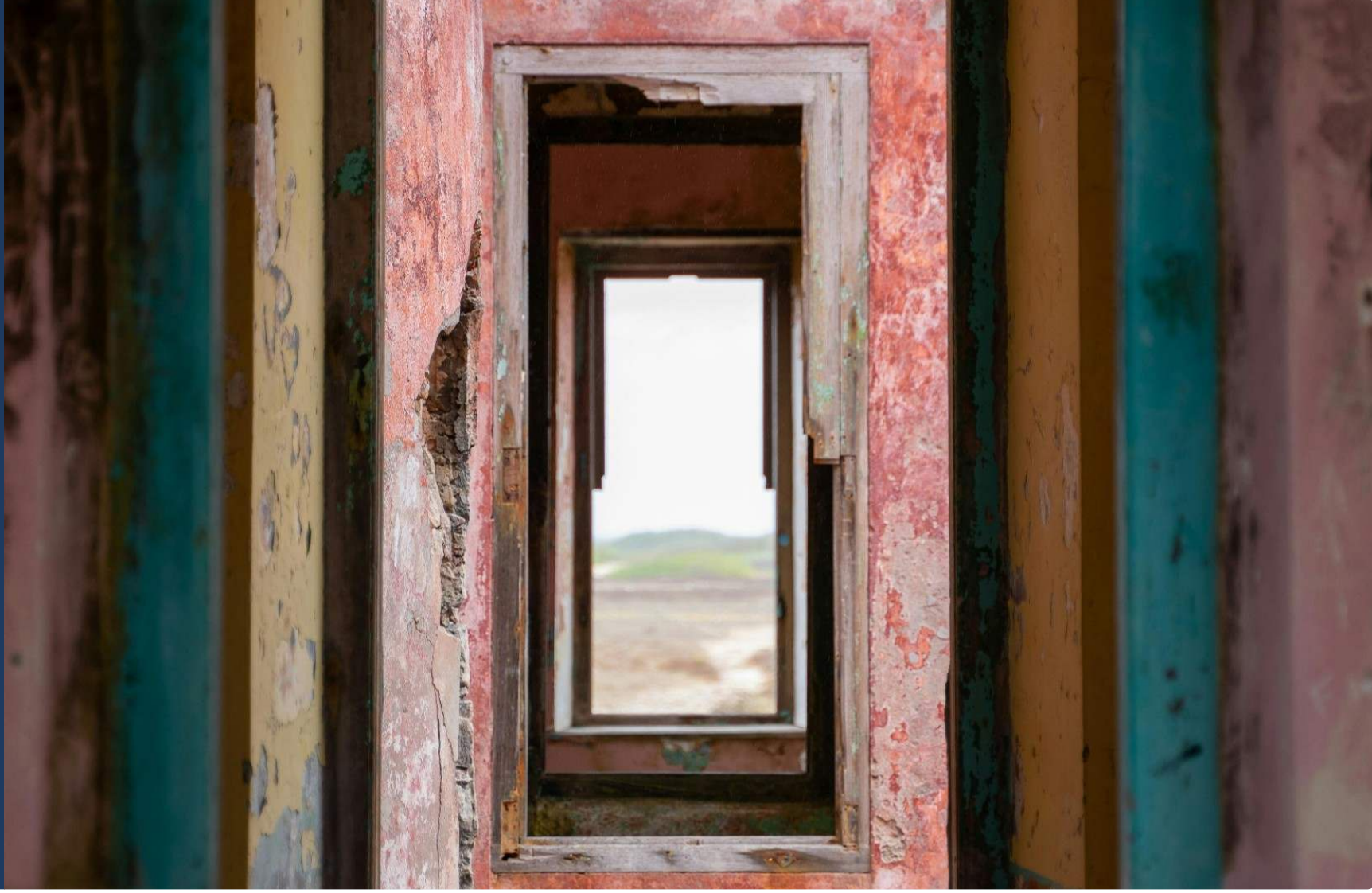
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## FRAMING PERSPECTIVES

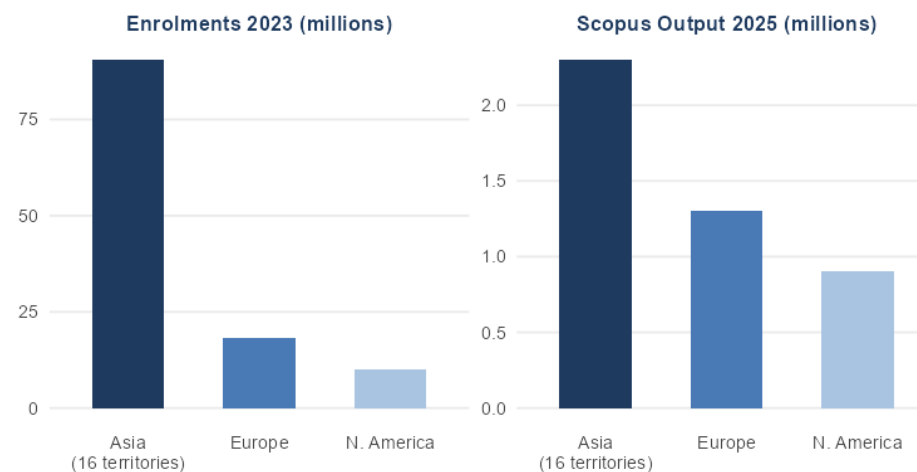


## Illuminating Asia

Over the past forty years, Asia has surpassed North America and Europe in the number of students enrolled in university and built the world's largest higher education ecosystem. The innovation has been so thriving and profound that it is hard to even picture what sort of university today's doctoral graduates might in future lead. Profound imagination and foresight will be necessary to curate future steps, as well as basic information about what is happening.

Herein lies a problem, for far too little is known about higher education in Asia, particularly in comparison to other parts of the world. The region has invested in designing and making rather than monitoring and evaluating universities.

Besides national statistics, university rankings, and commercial data on potential tuition flows, most public data has been collated by agencies based in Europe and North America. Collaboration among countries and universities has been patchy, precarious, and often politically motivated. In many respects, Asia has hitherto played a subordinate or 'back-office' role, sending people for research and education to other parts of the world.



It is hard to imagine Asia being the silent premise in global higher education for too many more years to come. As Table 1 shows, higher education in Asia compares to that in other major world regions. Rather than taking the region for granted, it is therefore essential to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening.

**Table 1: Number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and key characteristics of the 16 Asian territories, compared with the whole of Europe and North America**

Region	Institutions 2024	Enrolments 2019	Enrolments 2023	Scopus Output 2019	Scopus Output 2025	Researchers 2019 (/million)	Researchers 2022/3 (/million)
Asia (16 territories)	12,600 est.	77.6m	90.5m	1.4m	2.3m	2,297	2,746
Europe	3,500 est.	17.2m	18.1m	1.2m	1.3m	3,650	4,025
North America	6,000 est.	10.0m	10.1m	0.9m	0.9m	4,415	5,006

## Mapping the territory

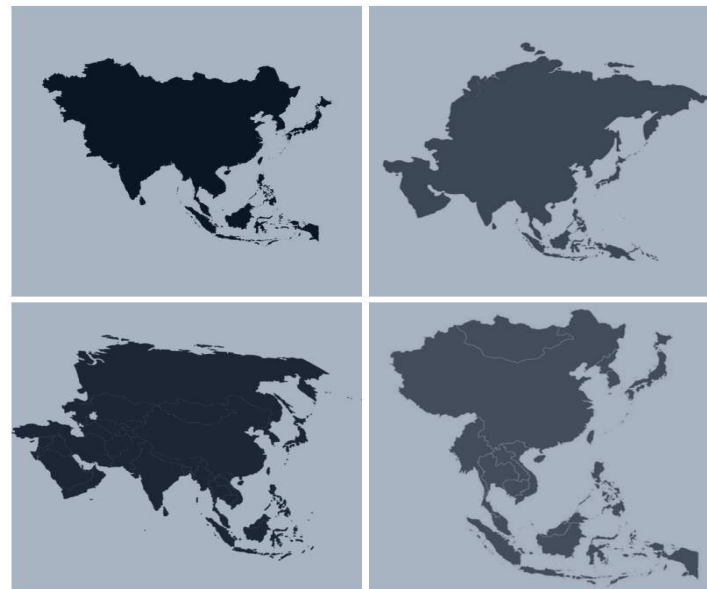
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**Asking students in a class to draw 'Asia' produces an array of fantastic and bewildering configurations.** Professorial minds overlay theories, directions, powers, projections and caveats. Businesspeople see endless wealth arising from having 60% of the world's population within a few hours' flight of major aviation hubs. **Defining Asia depends as much on impression as it does on information or expertise.**

**This analysis is shaped by pragmatism rather than territorial or contextual complexity, or any clutch for region-wide authority.** We sampled 16 from around 50 territories with an eye to diversity and coverage. Nonetheless, the group is sufficient to articulate the framework, reveal characteristics, and provoke insights.

**As with geography, there is no single means to frame the empirical analysis of higher education in Asia.** Traditionally, reference was made to national education systems and established European and American brands. The limited information available around the turn of the millennium spurred the development of benchmarking systems, which evolved into rankings that have had an outsized influence in shaping not just sectoral and institutional development but also career, research, and academic trajectories. Rankings sprinkle tingling aspirations and vibes and have shifted the sector beyond good ideas and handshakes. But there is so much more to know and reveal.

Taking our lead from the conventional **Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental** framework, we map socioeconomic contexts, including education and research characteristics. All indicators are sourced from established open international repositories, utilising the most recent figures available. Descriptive insights are made, with substantive inferences relegated to the final section.



**The years 2019 and 2023-25 offer excellent periods to observe the changes taking place in these countries.** The five-year gap enables analysis of sectoral changes, skips beyond pandemic-related volatility, and move beyond statistical variability. Neighboring years have been selected for certain indicators.

**This is the very first stab at mapping Asian higher education.** It omits countries, makes assumptions about indicators and presentation, and is likely to contain (hopefully limited) errors of fact and interpretation. **There are ample missing indicators and missing data.** We present data from selected years to highlight both historical trends and recent activity. **Exposing gaps is part of the point.**

We hope the analysis stimulates more questions than answers and lays robust foundations for future replications.

# POLITICS AND COMMERCE



## Political characteristics

All universities operate within national contexts, even those that purport to be 'global'.

It is instructive to examine national settings as a first step into understanding higher education in Asia.

Finding internationally accepted measures of political characteristics is inherently complex.

To assist interpretation of tables, selected countries have been grouped in three broad categories relative to size of economy.

Table 2 reports data on the political characteristics of the 16 statistical territories embraced in this brief.

The five countries in the top group are Asia's most powerful houses. China (mainland), Japan and South Korea have built up strong higher education systems. India and Indonesia are strengthening their systems and on par to stand out globally.

The middle group of countries are spurring momentum and the third are making sustained progress.

There is no obvious link between political and higher education characteristics. This challenges many assumptions about higher education contexts, governance and futures.

**Table 2: Political characteristics**

Country	Political Characteristics
China	Communist party-led state
India	Federal parliamentary republic
Indonesia	Presidential republic
Japan	Parliamentary constitutional monarchy
South Korea	Presidential republic
Bangladesh	Parliamentary republic
Kazakhstan	Presidential republic
Malaysia	Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy
Singapore	Parliamentary republic
Pakistan	Federal parliamentary republic
Thailand	Constitutional monarchy
Vietnam	Communist party-led state
Cambodia	Parliamentary constitutional monarchy
Myanmar	Military regime
Nepal	Federal parliamentary republic
Sri Lanka	Presidential republic

## Political environment

The 2025 **Corruption Perceptions Index** (CPI) by Transparency International ranks 180 countries and territories worldwide. Results range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The sampled Asian countries range across this spectrum.

Reporters Without Borders publishes the **World Press Freedom Index**. There is alignment with academic work. The data shows the country's rank out of 180 assessed countries.

The Edelman Trust Barometer publishes the **Trust Index** with a higher score implying greater trust. There is much missing data but this provides an alternative and interesting picture of trust in government.

The World Bank publishes the **Control of Corruption**, which estimates the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain. Presented in standard normal scores, which centre on zero and have two-thirds of all observations  $\pm 1$ . There are three score clusters.

The World Bank **Government Effectiveness** score captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. Results align with Corruption Control.

Most political indicators are conceptualised, calibrated and published in Europe or North America. Asia would do well to develop its own indices and data.

This public data as shown in Table 3 presents information of relevance to understand national contexts in which higher education unfolds. The history of higher education reveals only a weak relationship between political and university arrangements, and certainly one which has evolved over time.

**Table 3: Political environment**

Country	CPI 2025 (score)	Press Freedom 2025 (rank)	Edelman Trust 2026 (score)	Corruption Control 2024	Gov. Effectiveness 2024	Academic Freedom 2024 (index)
China	43	178	80	50	69	0.07
India	39	151	74	42	59	0.16
Indonesia	34	127	73	36	55	0.59
Japan	71	66	38	75	92	0.76
South Korea	63	61	46	65	81	0.83
Bangladesh	24	149	—	25	39	0.21
Kazakhstan	38	141	—	47	54	0.36
Malaysia	52	88	71	58	69	0.30
Singapore	84	123	64	88	96	0.42
Pakistan	28	158	—	26	40	0.35
Thailand	33	85	65	37	56	0.46
Vietnam	41	173	—	43	56	0.32
Cambodia	20	161	—	23	46	0.21
Myanmar	16	169	—	23	21	0.03
Nepal	34	90	—	35	34	0.76
Sri Lanka	35	139	—	40	46	0.72

## Ease of doing business

Higher education is inherently growth-oriented and internationally focused, and metrics on the business environment provide clues as to the operating climate.

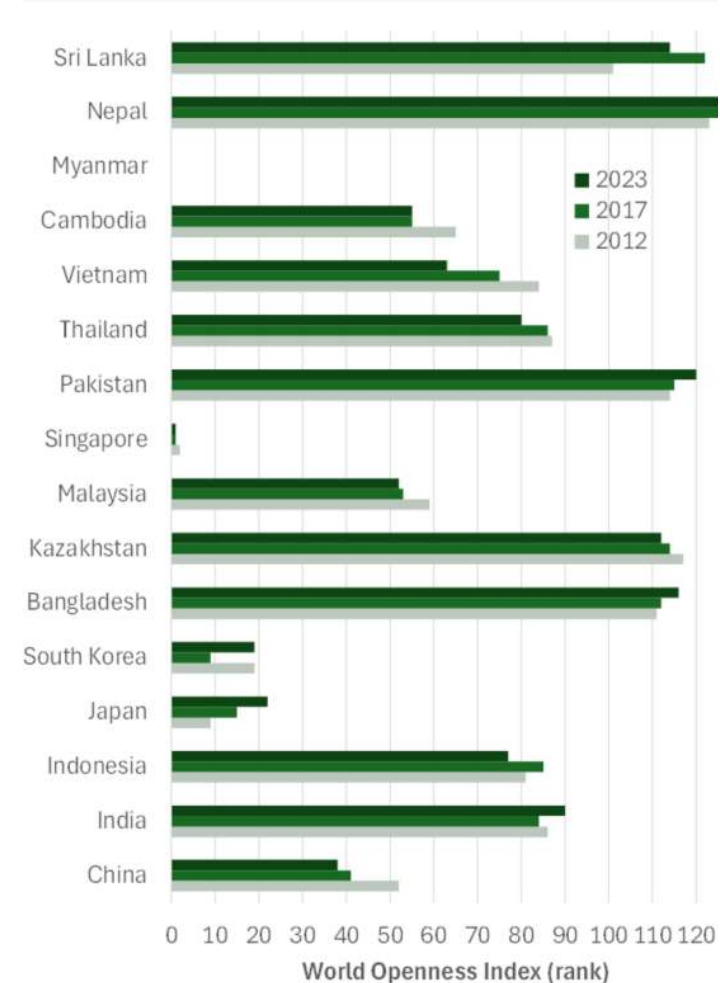
Many Asian countries rank highly in terms of the ease of doing business, with most in the top two-thirds of all 190 countries (see Table 4). Likewise, in most countries, a business can be started in a few weeks or under a month.

**The World Openness Index is one of the few composite indicators designed in Asia.** It was first launched in 2021 and provides a panoramic picture of the world's 'opening up' in recent years and measures the progress or retreat of 129 economies.

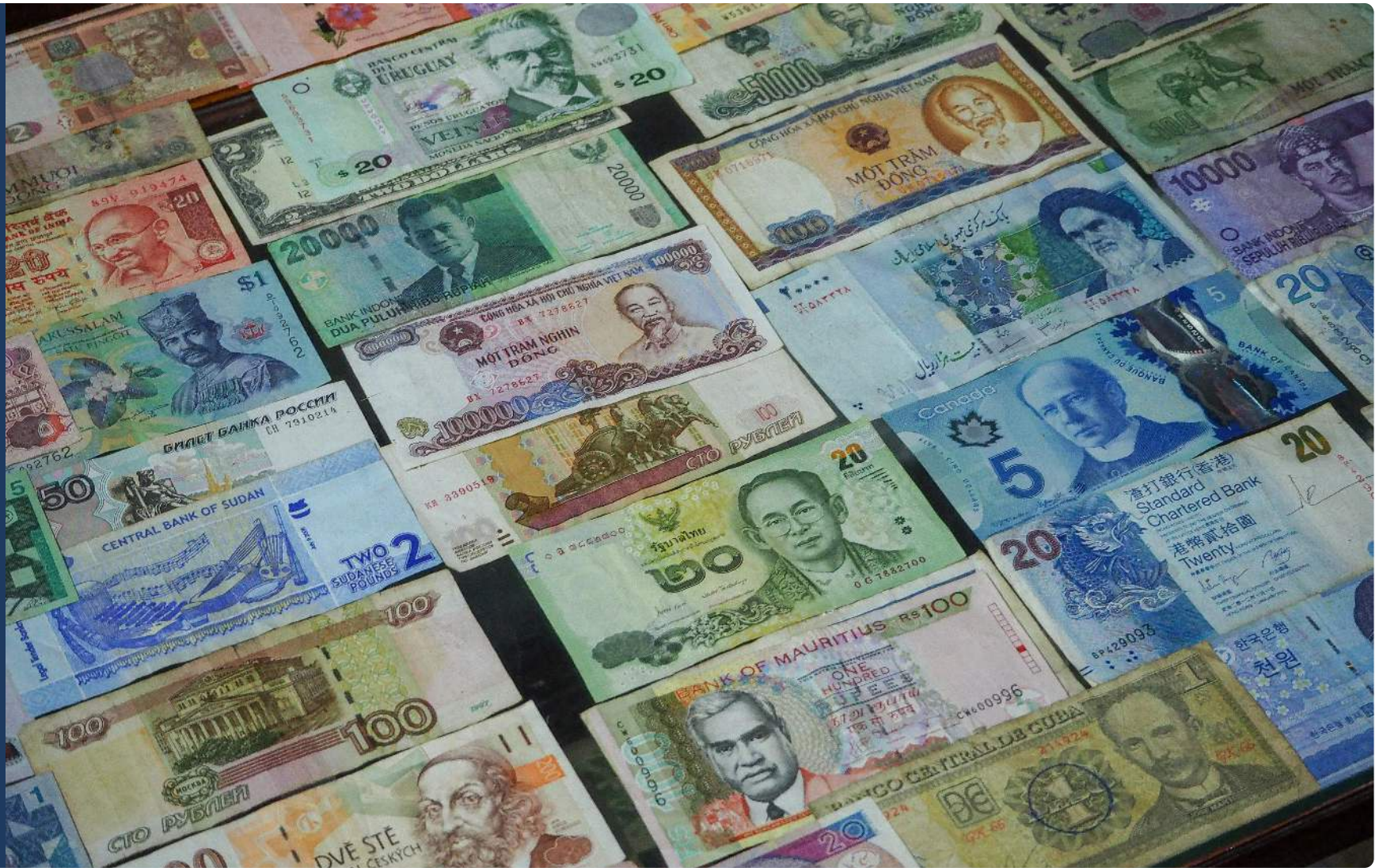
Trend data spanning a decade shows that countries can be grouped in terms of their average rank and also in terms of change. In terms of change, Vietnam, China and Cambodia have increased the most, while Sri Lanka, Japan and Pakistan have decreased the most.

**Table 4: Health of business activity**

Country	Ease of Doing Business 2019 (rank)	Time to Start a Business 2019 (days)	World Openness Index 2023 (rank)
China	31	9	38
India	63	18	90
Indonesia	73	13	77
Japan	29	11	22
South Korea	5	8	19
Bangladesh	168	20	116
Kazakhstan	25	5	112
Malaysia	12	18	52
Singapore	2	2	1
Pakistan	108	17	120
Thailand	21	6	80
Vietnam	70	16	63
Cambodia	144	99	55
Myanmar	165	7	—
Nepal	94	23	126
Sri Lanka	99	8	114



ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT



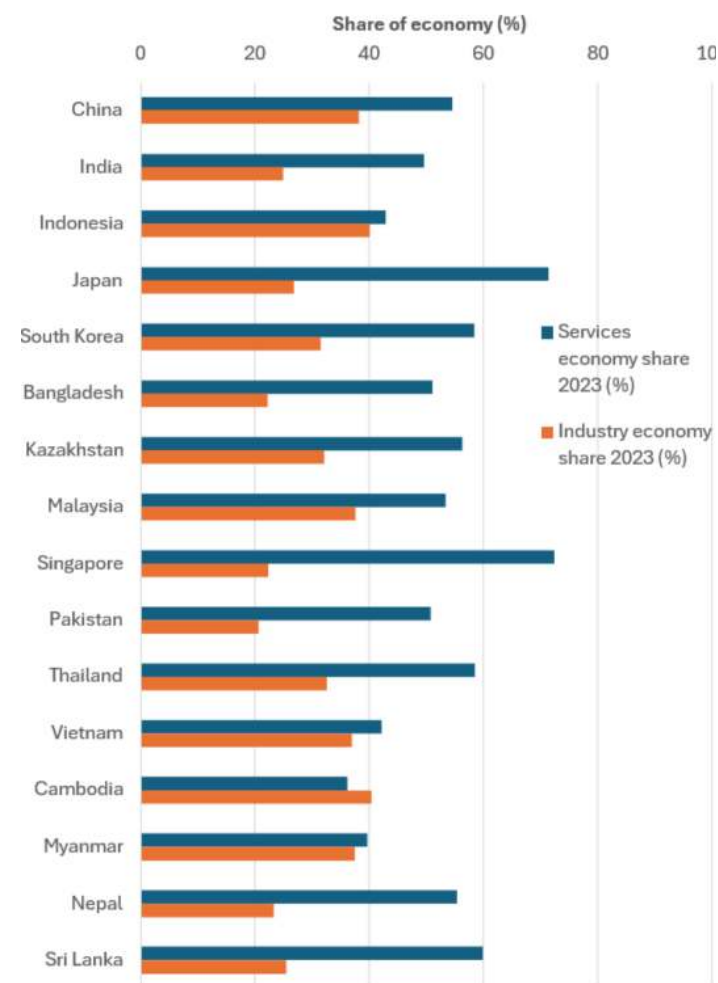
## Economy size and composition

Gross domestic product (GDP) figures show that most economies are growing in spite of the recent pandemic. Aggregating GDP data across even these sampled Asian countries reveals scale compared with the Euro Area and North American regions (see Table 5).

The countries differ in terms of the composition of their economy, which is directly relevant to higher education. The combined share is over two-thirds in every sampled country, with services having over half of the economy in three-quarters of the countries. Singapore and Japan are services-oriented economies whilst Cambodia and Indonesia are more industry-oriented economies.

**Table 5: GDP in 2019 and 2024**

Country	GDP 2019 (US\$B)	GDP 2024 (US\$B)
China	14,560	18,744
India	5,118	3,910
Indonesia	1,119	1,396
Japan	5,118	4,028
South Korea	1,751	1,875
Bangladesh	351	450
Kazakhstan	182	291
Malaysia	365	422
Singapore	376	547
Pakistan	321	372
Thailand	544	527
Vietnam	334	476
Cambodia	37	46
Myanmar	75	74
Nepal	34	43
Sri Lanka	89	99
East Asia & Pacific	27,427	32,017
South Asia	3,318	4,512
Euro Area	13,590	16,485
North America	23,132	31,004



## Health and education expenditures

There is far more to social environments than politics alone. Information on health and education expenditure gives a measure of social infrastructure (see Table 6).

Health expenditure (including public and private) has remained constant or grown in most countries in the two reporting periods. The same cannot be said for education (public) expenditure as a share of GDP, which has fallen in half the sampled countries and risen only marginally in the others, with the exception of Kazakhstan.

GDP (Gross domestic product) measures the monetary value of goods and services that are exchanged in the market. GDP also includes some nonmarket production such as education services provided by governments. However, GDP does not cover production that is not exchanged in the market. GDP does not measure the overall standard of living of a country or changes in inequality of income.

**Table 6: Health and education expenditures**

Country	Health Exp 2019 (% GDP)	Health Exp 2023 (% GDP)	Education Exp 2019 (% GDP)	Education Exp Latest (% GDP)
China	5.27	5.94	1.89 (1999)	4.00 (2023)
India	2.95	3.34	3.90	4.10 (2022)
Indonesia	2.88	2.40	0.96	1.28 (2023)
Japan	10.97	10.74	3.16	3.34 (2021)
South Korea	7.69	8.57	4.68	5.81 (2022)
Bangladesh	2.13	2.17	1.13	2.03 (2024)
Kazakhstan	2.87	3.77	2.86	4.85 (2023)
Malaysia	3.84	3.96	4.16	3.51 (2023)
Singapore	4.41	4.49	2.73	2.19 (2024)
Pakistan	2.85	2.52	2.21	1.95 (2023)
Thailand	3.79	4.54	3.02	2.52 (2023)
Vietnam	4.97	4.56	3.08	2.88 (2022)
Cambodia	5.06	4.62	2.13	2.18 (2023)
Myanmar	3.81	4.46	2.00	—
Nepal	4.45	6.16	3.89	3.69 (2024)
Sri Lanka	3.70	3.68	1.56 (2020)	1.83 (2023)
East Asia & Pacific	6.63	6.80	3.08	3.51 (2023)
South Asia	2.91	3.26	3.89	2.86 (2024)
Euro Area	10.16	10.31	4.78	4.96 (2022)
North America	16.13	16.29	4.87	4.88 (2023)

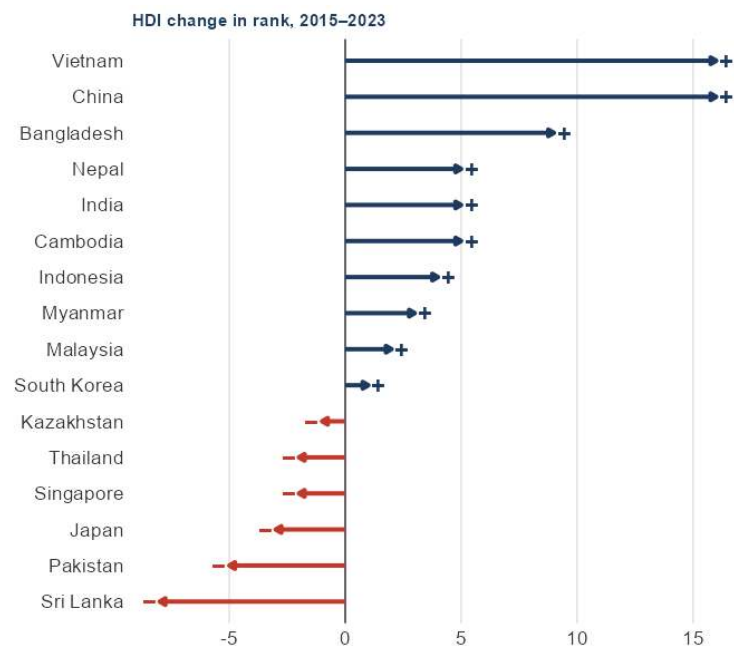
## Human development and growth

Of course, economics and finance drive much in higher education and determine university resources and conditions.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of health, knowledge, and living standard.

Table 7 reports ranked results for the 16 Asian territories. Japan, Singapore and Korea have among the highest HDI ranks in the world, and China, Vietnam and Bangladesh have all increased the most from the considered countries since 2015.

The HDI ranks countries not only based on GDP per capita but aims to account for other factors, such as life expectancy, literacy, and school enrollment.



**Table 7: Human Development Index, 2015 and 2023 rank and change**

Country	HDI 2015 value	HDI 2015 rank	HDI 2023 value	HDI 2023 rank	HDI change 2015–2023
China	0.750	94	0.797	78	16
India	0.633	135	0.685	130	5
Indonesia	0.701	117	0.728	113	4
Japan	0.917	20	0.925	23	-3
South Korea	0.914	21	0.937	20	1
Bangladesh	0.621	139	0.685	130	9
Kazakhstan	0.819	59	0.837	60	-1
Malaysia	0.800	69	0.819	67	2
Singapore	0.935	11	0.946	13	-2
Pakistan	0.527	163	0.544	168	-5
Thailand	0.788	74	0.798	76	-2
Vietnam	0.717	109	0.766	93	16
Cambodia	0.562	156	0.606	151	5
Myanmar	0.566	153	0.609	150	3
Nepal	0.575	150	0.622	145	5
Sri Lanka	0.769	81	0.776	89	-8

## Cross-border capital flows

Foreign direct investment, reflecting net capital movement across borders, and personal remittances are two measures of capital movement.

Table 8 shows remittances are low in high- and middle-income economies and high in low-income economies. Inflows of workers' remittances indicate relative dependence on foreign income. This income contributes to economic growth and livelihood.

In the case of Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, China, and Kazakhstan, reliance on workers' remittances is not present, compared to Cambodia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Countries that have experienced strong economic growth see reduced dependency on workers' remittances. Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and India are examples of countries with a decreased reliance on workers' remittances. However, Nepal is an example of a country that heavily relies on workers' remittances, and foreign direct investment has decreased and is significantly less effective in boosting economic growth.

Heavy reliance on remittances can create a culture of dependency in receiving countries and can lead to reduced labour force participation. In the past thirty years, workers' remittances have exceeded government assistance, and more recently, workers' remittances have exceeded foreign direct investment.

**Table 8: Foreign direct investment and personal remittances, 2019 and 2024**

Country	FDI 2019 (\$M)	FDI 2024 (\$M)	Net Inflows 2019 (% GDP)	Net Inflows 2024 (% GDP)	Remittances 2019 (% GDP)	Remittances 2024 (% GDP)
China	-50,260	153,688	1.29	0.10	0.13	0.17
India	-37,470	-2,891	1.78	0.69	2.94	3.52
Indonesia	-20,531	-15,853	2.23	1.74	1.04	1.15
Japan	218,324	191,046	0.78	0.40	0.09	0.12
South Korea	25,605	33,363	0.55	0.81	0.41	0.40
Bangladesh	-1,885	-1,491	0.54	0.29	5.23	6.11
Kazakhstan	-5,904	-3,899	2.05	0.68	0.28	0.08
Malaysia	-1,627	-2,555	2.51	3.69	0.44	0.38
Singapore	-37,357	-96,684	28.33	27.76	—	0.00
Pakistan	-2,319	-2,579	0.70	0.72	6.93	9.40
Thailand	4,629	-6,947	1.02	2.72	1.43	1.80
Vietnam	-15,635	-19,570	4.82	4.23	3.26	3.36
Cambodia	-3,561	-4,223	9.99	9.48	7.24	6.10
Myanmar	-1,736	—	2.31	1.48	3.4	1.55
Nepal	-186	-57	0.54	0.13	24.12	26.23
Sri Lanka	-666	-651	0.84	0.77	7.58	6.79

## Key macroeconomic indicators

The final broad economic measures relate to inflation and employment as shown by Table 9.

Inflation adversely impacts by increasing student debt, tuition fees as well as operational costs for universities.

Unemployment drives increased higher education enrolment as individuals seek to upgrade skills and wait for improved labour market conditions. However, if unemployment persists for graduates, it may lead to students dropping out of university.

As with many parts of the world, inflation shot up during this period in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Kazakhstan. In most Asian countries, however, inflation remained stable.

The same was broadly true of unemployment, although there were minor increases in Malaysia, Nepal, Japan, and Sri Lanka, and more notable declines in India, Indonesia, and South Korea.

**Table 9: Key macroeconomic indicators**

Country	Inflation 2019 (%)	Inflation 2024 (%)	Unemployment 2019 (%)	Unemployment 2025 (%)
China	2.9	0.2	5	5
India	3.7	5	7	4
Indonesia	3.0	2.2	4	3
Japan	0.5	2.7	2	2
South Korea	0.4	2.3	4	3
Bangladesh	5.6	10.5	5	4
Kazakhstan	5.3	8.8	5	5
Malaysia	0.7	1.8	3	4
Singapore	0.6	2.4	3	3
Pakistan	10.6	12.6	5	5
Thailand	0.7	1.4	1	1
Vietnam	2.8	3.6	2	2
Cambodia	1.9	0.8	0	0
Myanmar	8.8	—	0	3
Nepal	5.6	4.7	10	10
Sri Lanka	3.5	-0.4	5	4
East Asia & Pacific	1.7	2.4	4	4
South Asia	3.6	3.7	6	4
Euro Area	1.4	2.2	8	6
North America	1.9	2.7	4	5

## Environmental insights

Macro data on sustainability development offers insights into each country's alignment with broader socioeconomic endeavours.

There is large variation, from high-ranking countries such as Japan and South Korea, to countries with much lower ranks including Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. As a guide, overall SDG index scores range between 63 and 83 (see columns 1 to 2 in Table 10).

Everyone needs to breathe as they study, and the quality of air has become a proxy for many other aspects of living quality. Government agencies use the mean annual exposure (micrograms per cubic meter or PM2.5 levels) to issue health warnings, recommending that sensitive groups (e.g., children, elderly, asthmatic) stay indoors when levels are high.

In these sampled Asian countries, the PM2.5 air quality measure ranges upwards from zero, with scores closer to 100 reflecting poor air quality (see last two columns in Table 10). The average PM2.5 score declined very slightly from 31 to 30 across the sampled countries. China, India and Malaysia showed the greatest improvement in air quality, and South Korea and Pakistan the greatest deterioration.

Conversely, the top source countries of international students (Australia, Canada, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom) have maintained relatively low mean levels compared to the sampled Asian economies.

**Table 10: Sustainability development and air quality**

Country	SDG Index 2019 (score)	SDG Index 2025 (rank)	PM2.5 2022	PM2.5 2023
China	73	49	36.7	31.9
India	64	99	52.0	47.3
Indonesia	68	77	22.3	20.1
Japan	80	19	11.8	11.7
South Korea	77	34	22.6	25.1
Bangladesh	63	114	66.3	67.4
Kazakhstan	72	70	18.3	16.5
Malaysia	68	84	23.2	18.6
Singapore	68	69	21.9	19.2
Pakistan	56	140	52.5	54.7
Thailand	73	43	23.7	25.3
Vietnam	71	61	27.7	27.9
Cambodia	63	101	19.2	21.1
Myanmar	61	116	35.2	36.1
Nepal	67	85	45.3	43.5
Sri Lanka	67	93	22.6	20.5

# SOCIAL SETTINGS



## Population characteristics

A country's social situation is an important backdrop to higher education. After all, education needs people to learn, teach and research.

Several sampled countries have life expectancies around or above the global or regional averages, which signal development and highlight the need for higher education to reform and provide education across increasingly long lifespans. Japan, South Korea and Singapore have the highest life expectancy of all, whilst Myanmar, Pakistan, Nepal and Cambodia have the lowest.

Several countries in the sample continue to experience population growth, including India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Myanmar. South Korea shows very slow growth, while China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Nepal exhibit slight population decline.

Asia is growing. It is also mostly young, with an average age in 2026 of around 33 years (see Table 11). Young people are important for higher education. Pakistan, Cambodia and Bangladesh have the lowest median age, while Japan and South Korea have the highest median age in the region.

**Table 11: Population age characteristics**

Country	Life Expectancy 2023 (yrs)	Pop. Growth 2024 (%)	Median Age 2025 (yrs)
China	78.0	-0.12 ▼	40.10
India	72.0	0.89 ▲	28.80
Indonesia	71.2	0.81 ▲	30.40
Japan	84.0	-0.44 ▼	49.80
South Korea	83.4	0.07 ▲	45.60
Bangladesh	74.7	1.21 ▲	26.00
Kazakhstan	74.4	1.28 ▲	29.70
Malaysia	76.7	1.22 ▲	31.00
Singapore	82.9	1.99 ▲	36.20
Pakistan	67.7	1.51 ▲	20.60
Thailand	76.4	-0.05 ▼	40.60
Vietnam	74.6	0.63 ▲	33.40
Cambodia	70.7	1.23 ▲	26.20
Myanmar	66.9	0.67 ▲	30.10
Nepal	70.4	-0.15 ▼	25.40
Sri Lanka	77.5	-0.55 ▼	33.34

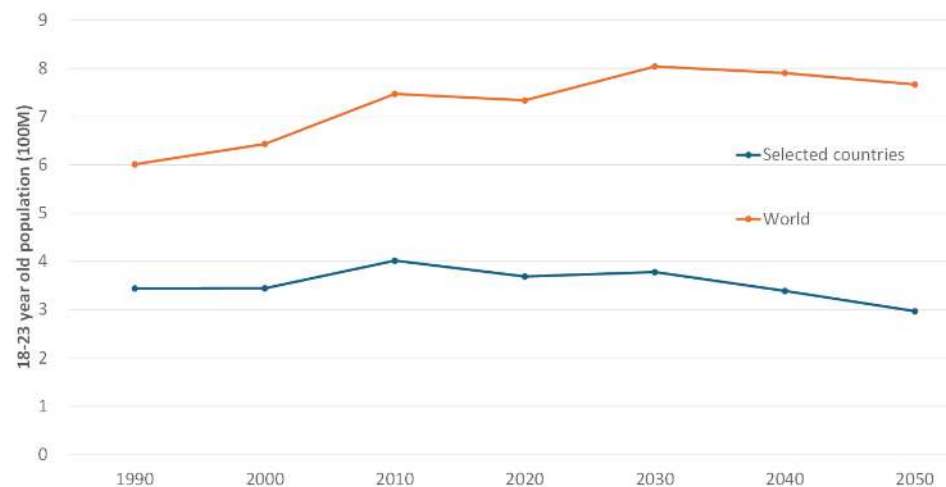
## Young people

Traditionally, higher education focuses on 18-to-23-year-olds. Projecting this population over the next 25 years reveals much about the sector's prospects — see Table 12.

Globally, the 18–23 cohort is expected to rise over the next decade and then decline.

Populations in this age bracket in the two largest countries (China and India) are estimated to fall in the next 25 years, as they are in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, South Korea and Vietnam. Other countries are projected to remain stable.

**Coupled with lengthening life expectancy, Asian higher education will continue to grow over the next decade, then decline or pivot to educate other age cohorts or international students thereafter.**



**Table 12: Country populations aged 18–23 (million), 2025–2050**

Country	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
China	95.3	103.2	107.2	82.1	52.2	48.9
India	154.6	149.9	143.9	136.6	132.4	130.2
Indonesia	27.0	28.5	28.3	26.6	25.8	25.3
Japan	7.2	7.2	6.7	5.9	5.3	5.2
South Korea	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.1	1.7	1.8
Bangladesh	20.0	19.7	18.4	18.7	19.5	18.8
Kazakhstan	1.6	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.3
Malaysia	3.6	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.1	3.1
Singapore	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
Pakistan	29.4	33.4	34.9	35.6	36.9	38.5
Thailand	5.5	5.3	4.9	4.2	3.8	3.7
Vietnam	8.1	9.3	10.2	8.6	7.8	7.4
Cambodia	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.0
Myanmar	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.0	4.8
Nepal	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.0
Sri Lanka	2.1	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8
World	758.9	804.0	824.6	790.5	760.5	766.7

## Lifelong learners

Increasingly, lifelong learners (i.e. those aged between 24 and 55) will surely prove important for Asian countries seeking to diversify student intakes in the face of declining traditional age (18–23) cohorts.

**With increasing lifespans and longer careers, it makes sense to engage in further formal rather than fickle forms of higher education.** For around a decade Singapore has already been charting growth in such direction.

Across the sampled Asian countries lifelong learning cohorts are on the rise. Populations in the 24–55-year-old age cohort are on the rise in 10 of the 16 sampled countries (see Table 13). This population is on the march globally, rising by around 600 million in the next 25 years.

Universities will have to create substantial redesigns to cater for such demand, which will require different services to school-leaver cohorts. Understanding these diverse learner cohorts will also be important.

**Table 13: Country populations aged 24–55 (million), 2025–2050**

Country	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
China	654	609	598	586	541	480
India	666	712	744	761	762	753
Indonesia	75	82	88	91	93	95
Japan	7	8	9	9	9	9
South Korea	129	133	136	138	139	140
Bangladesh	47	43	40	39	37	36
Kazakhstan	8	9	9	10	10	10
Malaysia	17	19	20	20	20	20
Singapore	25	26	26	26	26	26
Pakistan	12	13	15	15	16	16
Thailand	93	105	119	133	145	157
Vietnam	3	3	3	3	3	2
Cambodia	24	22	21	19	17	15
Myanmar	10	10	10	10	10	10
Nepal	33	31	30	29	28	26
Sri Lanka	47	47	47	48	46	44
World	3,506	3,627	3,784	3,915	3,976	4,001

## Quality of cities and happiness

Broader social indicators provide further insights into social conditions — see Table 14.

The 2026 **QS Best Student Cities** ranking offers an index of the world's top cities for students. The ranking offers a lens into the sentiments of both prospective and former students.

Scores and ranks of capital cities in selected countries show that of the 150 ranked cities 30 are from the countries covered in this analysis. Overall, QS includes 39 cities from Asia. By this metric, Asia has some of the world's better cities for students.

The **World Happiness Report** is produced as a partnership of Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and the WHR's Editorial Board. Happiness is on the march in Asia, with increases in 10 of the 16 countries and notable decreases only in three.

**Table 14: Quality of life indicators — QS Best Student Cities and Happiness Score**

Country	QS Score 2026	QS Rank 2026	QS Cities Count 2026	Happiness Score 2019	Happiness Score 2024
China	89.7	13	8	5.19	5.97
India	61.6	98	4	4.02	4.05
Indonesia	56.9	116	4	5.19	5.57
Japan	99.9	2	4	5.89	6.06
South Korea	100	1	3	5.90	6.06
Bangladesh	50.7	136	1	4.46	3.89
Kazakhstan	63.5	91	2	5.81	6.19
Malaysia	90.3	12	2	5.34	5.98
Singapore	90.6	11	1	6.26	6.52
Pakistan	—	—	—	5.65	4.66
Thailand	74.4	55	1	6.01	5.98
Vietnam	—	—	—	5.18	6.04
Cambodia	—	—	—	4.70	4.34
Myanmar	—	—	—	4.36	4.35
Nepal	—	—	—	4.91	5.16
Sri Lanka	—	—	—	4.37	3.90

## ACADEMIC CHARACTERISTICS



## Education settings

Secondary and tertiary level enrolment and graduation ratio are important attributes of the higher education system. The graduation ratio indicates the number of graduates from a first tertiary degree expressed as a percentage of the population of the theoretical graduation age of the most common first degree. These proxy measures reflect education participation (see Table 15).

Secondary school enrolment has increased across the board, except for countries with very high enrolment rates. The average rate is rising across the two sampled time periods, though it lags Europe and North America by about 15%. In almost all countries, over 80% of young people are enrolled in secondary education.

Tertiary flows from secondary education. With minor exceptions (Kazakhstan and Malaysia), this has increased for all sampled countries. Rates vary, however, from 11 per cent in Pakistan to 100 per cent in South Korea, with a steady rise from South Asia, through Southeast Asia, to East Asia. China and Vietnam show the most tremendous growth between 2018 and 2023. There are similar trends for first tertiary degree graduation ratios, though here three Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia) showed the most significant growth.

**Education is on the rise across Asia. It appears to be set to continue and grow in traditional age cohorts as well as lifelong learners.**

**Table 15: Key educational measures — secondary enrolments, gross enrolment ratio (tertiary) and graduation ratio from first tertiary degree**

Country	Sec. Enrol. 2019 (%)	Sec. Enrol. 2022/3 (%)	Tertiary GER 2019 (%)	Tertiary GER 2023 (%)	Grad. Ratio 2019 (%)	Grad. Ratio 2023 (%)
China	—	—	57	75	35	47
India	76	79	29	34	28	28
Indonesia	95	96	37	45	21 (2018)	29
Japan	103	102	62	64	47	49
South Korea	98	96	94	107	50	56
Bangladesh	65	66	23	24	—	—
Kazakhstan	97	95	57	55	52	—
Malaysia	75	79	41	37	15 (2021)	15
Singapore	105	103	91	97	61	71
Pakistan	39	42	11	10	—	—
Thailand	82	93	45	45	—	30
Vietnam	95	—	30	33	22	—
Cambodia	50	57	13	17	—	—
Myanmar	—	—	20 (2018)	—	—	—
Nepal	80	90	14	19	10 (2018)	—
Sri Lanka	—	88	19	97	10	12
East Asia & Pacific	89	92	49	62	31	38
Southeast Asia	—	—	34	41	21	23
South Asia	75	78	25	29	23	23
Euro Area	108	108	74	80	46	48
North America	101	98	86	82	—	—
World	76	77	39	43	24	26

## Education spending

Government expenditure on tertiary education varies enormously across Asian countries.

There is lots of missing data as seen in Table 16, reflecting complexities with definitions, collection and reporting what may be sensitive information.

India, South Korea and China invest a lot, though Singapore the most in terms of actual dollars. In 2023 the average was around 0.5 per cent of GDP. This falls below the global average for high-income countries of around 1.5%.

Such figures are always notoriously difficult to conceptualise and report for a host of reasons including complexities around measurement and even the definitions of institutions and systems.

These figures also mask real-world settings related to taxation, financing schemes, the cost of education provision, and other living-related measures.

**Table 16: Expenditure on tertiary education and government funding**

Country	Tertiary Exp. 2019 (% GDP)	Tertiary Exp. 2023 (% GDP)	Govt Funding/Student 2019 (PPP\$)	Govt Funding/Student 2023 (PPP\$)
China	—	0.82	—	4,918
India	1.33	—	4,305	—
Indonesia	—	0.16	—	—
Japan	0.64	—	—	—
South Korea	0.77	—	7,064	—
Bangladesh	0.39	—	1,180	—
Kazakhstan	0.31	0.39	3,219	—
Malaysia	0.95	0.57	9,015	6,391
Singapore	0.79	0.05	28,798	20,236
Pakistan	0.12	1.07	—	5,632
Thailand	0.60	0.58	—	—
Vietnam	—	—	—	—
Cambodia	—	—	—	—
Myanmar	—	—	—	—
Nepal	—	0.21	—	—
Sri Lanka	—	—	—	—

## Higher education institutions

Surprisingly little is known about the number of higher education institutions in each country. The figures reported in Table 17 come with huge caveats and assumptions. These numbers have been sourced from a raft of national and international sources.

The definitions of what constitutes a higher education institution vary, let alone different sub-categories in each country. One institution may have many thousands of students and be highly research intensive, and be counted the same as any much smaller institution. As well, most countries distinguish between different types of higher education providers, ownership and financial/tax circumstances. Wide margins of uncertainty notwithstanding, the lack of such information is astounding and calls for the promulgation of foundation figures.

By current estimates there are upwards of 12,600 higher education institutions in the 16 sampled countries alone. Of this, around 35 per cent are public, defined as government owned, subsidised, and not-for-profit. Around 65 per cent can be defined in some way as private institutions. This varies across countries, with a median of 60 per cent, rates under 40 per cent in Vietnam, China, Pakistan and India, and at least two out of every three institutions private in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia.

Still, in most countries, public universities shoulder most of the enrolment load indicating that they are larger, the exceptions of note being India, Japan and South Korea. Cambodia, Myanmar and Nepal are hardly represented in raw numbers.

**Table 17: Number of higher education institutions — public and private, and enrolment share in private institutions**

Country	Total HEIs	Public Institutions	Private Institutions	Private Enrolment Share 2023 (%)
China	3,119	2,316	803	15
India	1,043	647	396	56
Indonesia	4,351	206	4,145	48
Japan	812	188	624	79
South Korea	422	57	365	80
Bangladesh	173	57	116	35
Kazakhstan	113	48	65	54 (2024)
Malaysia	536	162	374	41
Singapore	321	15	306	20
Pakistan	145	94	51	23
Thailand	156	84	72	19
Vietnam	243	176	67	24 (2022)
Cambodia	132	48	84	—
Myanmar	172	163	8	—
Nepal	792	15	777	33
Sri Lanka	73	27	46	14

## Institution performance

The performance of institutions across Asia is registered in international rankings data (see Table 18).

It is revealing to present the number of institutions in each country included in the three main global rankings and a regional ranking. Rankings measure different things (e.g., reputation, research impact and 'world class' status) and appeal to different audiences.

Despite criticisms made against the simplicity of rankings, varying methodologies, rankings are increasingly being used as a tool for transparency and accountability. Rankings continue to expand, and new rankings have emerged in the past three years.

Rankings largely reflect past performance and tend to favour universities from English-speaking countries. Unsurprisingly, China, India, Japan and South Korea have the largest quantity of institutions with data in the region.

In terms of proportional representation, the countries that stand out include Pakistan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Japan. Either way, no system in Asia has more than a fifth of its institutions represented in these global databases, indicating ample scope for data strengthening, development, and sharing.

**Table 18: Number of top 500 and total ranked institutions — QS (2026), Times Higher Education (2025) and ARWU (2025)**

Country	QS Top 500 (2026)	QS Total (2026)	THE Top 500 (2025)	THE Total (2025)	ARWU Top 500 (2025)	ARWU Total (2025)
China	33	72	35	97	101	222
India	10	54	4	128	0	15
Indonesia	5	26	0	35	—	—
Japan	13	47	9	115	13	29
South Korea	13	43	14	41	12	30
Bangladesh	0	15	0	19	—	—
Kazakhstan	3	20	1	5	—	—
Malaysia	10	32	7	27	0	4
Singapore	2	4	2	2	2	2
Pakistan	2	18	1	48	0	4
Thailand	2	15	0	21	0	3
Vietnam	1	10	0	11	—	—
Cambodia	—	—	—	—	—	—
Myanmar	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nepal	—	—	0	1	—	—
Sri Lanka	0	4	0	6	—	—

## Tertiary students and teachers

Nine of the 16 sampled countries have over one million students in their systems, with India and China being the biggest, followed by Indonesia, Bangladesh, Japan, Pakistan, Vietnam and South Korea. In the four years between the reports below, India, China, and Indonesia added over 13 million additional students to their higher education systems. This can be compared with 600 and 100 thousand in the Euro and North American areas. These are raw figures, unadjusted for population size or national quality.

India has by far the largest reported number of teachers, followed by Japan, and then South Korea. Though broad brush, considered relative to students, Japan, then Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea have the most. These remain clearly the most globally pronounced systems, affirming the sustained importance of teachers for education.



**Table 19: Number of enrolments in tertiary education, number of teachers and proportion of female teachers**

Country	Enrolment 2019	Enrolment 2023	Teachers 2023	Female Teachers 2023 (%)
China	24,075,436	29,591,284	—	—
India	30,550,056	36,487,764	1,664,172	44
Indonesia	6,659,889	8,274,061	296,495	45
Japan	2,690,900	2,710,117	562,090	—
South Korea	2,061,922	2,012,137	227,052	38
Bangladesh	2,919,335	3,494,443	107,922	28
Kazakhstan	542,458	—	45,312	65
Malaysia	680,068	670,803	83,666	56
Singapore	116,356	121,198	14,115	41
Pakistan	2,391,520	2,538,768	158,160	30
Thailand	1,529,049	1,580,698	104,987	55
Vietnam	1,707,025	2,036,689	82,441	52
Cambodia	179,258	237,243	17,120	24
Myanmar	884,272	—	26,244	85
Nepal	376,016	513,784	10,916	—
Sri Lanka	229,789	246,913	13,624	55
Euro Area	17,181,212	18,072,012	—	—
North America	9,999,433	9,970,570	—	—
Asia 16	86,057,492	116,044,651	—	—

## Internationalisation

Variations in the quantum and relativity of inbound and outbound students signal the size and nature of a higher education system's international engagement.

India, Pakistan, and then Bangladesh had by far the most significant outbound increase, especially India. Conversely, South Korea, Malaysia and Kazakhstan had the least. South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and China had the largest growth in inbound students, with the lowest growth in Japan, India and Sri Lanka.

Internationalisation of the student body remains relatively low in the sampled Asian countries compared with Anglo-European or Western countries (see Table 20). In most countries, less than one per cent of the student body is classified as international.

The notable exceptions are Malaysia, Japan, and South Korea. Malaysia and South Korea showed growth across the pandemic years. There is ample scope for the expansion of intra-Asia internationalisation of the student body.

**Table 20: International student mobility — outbound and inbound tertiary education students**

Country	Outbound 2019	Outbound 2023	Inbound 2019	Inbound 2023	Inbound Rate 2019 (%)	Inbound Rate 2023 (%)
China	1,062,965	1,076,015	201,177	200,892	0.43	0.37
India	466,597	833,835	47,424	45,700	0.13	0.11
Indonesia	56,913	70,174	—	—	—	—
Japan	32,246	33,542	202,907	181,821	5.24	4.68
South Korea	101,388	89,693	98,857	127,624	3.26	4.62
Bangladesh	44,364	76,328	—	2,281 (2022)	—	0.06 (2022)
Kazakhstan	89,238	75,396	22,728	—	3.32	0.06 (2022)
Malaysia	60,649	47,047	81,953	109,036	6.73	9.60
Singapore	23,327	20,488	53,030	71,239	—	—
Pakistan	58,251	114,849	—	—	—	—
Thailand	33,790	32,646	—	29,928	1.24 (2020)	1.44
Vietnam	125,660	128,186	7,250	7,760 (2022)	0.37	0.08
Cambodia	7,013	8,489	—	—	—	0.26 (2021)
Myanmar	12,912	16,360	—	—	—	—
Nepal	93,519	108,273	—	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	28,674	41,661	1,529	1,773	0.47	0.49

## Research resources

Research has been the broad preoccupation of many countries and universities across Asia. Yet it varies greatly in so many aspects across the region (see Table 21). The concentration of researchers per million people in the population reveals a huge diversity across the region.

South Korea, Singapore and Japan are well above global and regional averages, having above 5,000 researchers per million population. Meanwhile, Thailand and China have just below 2,000 per million. The remaining countries with measures have below 2,000. Of course, India and China are the two most populous countries in the world, and this sample includes five of the top ten largest countries.

The same patterns exist for the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) invested in research and development (R&D), with China, Japan, and South Korea as notable standouts.

**Table 21: Research resources — researchers per million inhabitants and gross domestic expenditure on R&D**

Country	Researchers 2019 (/million)	Researchers 2023 (/million)	R&D Exp. 2019 (% GDP)	R&D Exp. 2023 (% GDP)
China	1,483.86	2,107.27	2.2	2.6
India	259 (2020)	—	0.7	0.7 (2020)
Indonesia	387.17	395 (2020)	0.3	0.3 (2020)
Japan	5,376.12	5,608.63	3.2	3.4
South Korea	8,328.97	9,471.83	4.4	4.9
Bangladesh	—	—	—	—
Kazakhstan	619.65	693.06	0.1	0.1
Malaysia	712 (2020)	1,218 (2022)	1.0 (2018)	1.0 (2022)
Singapore	7,509.61	8,782 (2022)	1.9	1.8 (2022)
Pakistan	362.38	473.72	0.2	0.2 (2023)
Thailand	1,744.16	1,591.97	1.1	0.9 (2023)
Vietnam	754.62	836.11	0.4	0.4 (2023)
Cambodia	—	—	—	—
Myanmar	30.41	28.01	0.1	0.0 (2023)
Nepal	—	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	—	—	0.1 (2018)	0.1 (2022)
East Asia & Pacific	1,716.74	2,127.10	2.2	2.3 (2021)
Southeast Asia	855.59	872.97	1.0	1.1 (2021)
South Asia	301.11	347.27	0.6	0.6 (2021)
Euro Area	3,649.50	4,025.47	2.0	2.0 (2021)
North America	4,414.52	5,006.38	3.1	3.3 (2021)
World	1,298.76	1,486.18	1.8	1.9 (2021)

## Research infrastructure

Broadband internet access has become a widely recognised indicator of technological sophistication. This phenomenon has grown in all countries, and there are three clear groups. In South Korea, China and Japan, over a third of the population has broadband access. This falls to between 15 and 30 per cent in Singapore, Vietnam, Kazakhstan and Thailand. The remaining ten countries have lower levels of access.

The percentage of a country's high-tech exports offers a final indicator of technological sophistication. Five countries excel in this regard, notably Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea and Kazakhstan, all of which have over a third. A handful of other countries have exported 10–30 per cent of their goods in this category, while the remaining six countries have levels below 10 per cent.

Combined, these figures reveal three broad country groups. Certain countries have latent research potential, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The next group consists of research risers: Kazakhstan, India, Thailand, and Vietnam. Finally, this sample includes several research powerhouses: China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea (see Table 22).

**Table 22: Fixed broadband subscribers and high-tech exports**

Country	Broadband 2019 (/100 people)	Broadband 2022/3 (/100 people)	High-tech Exports 2019 (% mfg)	High-tech Exports 2024 (% mfg)
China	31.6	44.7	30.8	26.28
India	1.4	2.7	10.2	18.57
Indonesia	3.8	4.8	8.1	8.71
Japan	33.5	38.6	17.0	17.55
South Korea	42.0	46.6	32.4	36.26
Bangladesh	4.9	7.9	—	—
Kazakhstan	13.1	14.3	29.3	42.20
Malaysia	8.9	13.0	51.6	58.63
Singapore	26.5	27.4	51.8	59.43
Pakistan	0.9	1.4	2.3	2.44
Thailand	14.1	15.7	24.1	28.31
Vietnam	15.2	22.7	40.4	44.26 (2023)
Cambodia	1.1	3.6	1.2	5.26
Myanmar	0.9	2.8	2.8	5.20
Nepal	3.6	4.8 (2022)	1.1	0.62 (2022)
Sri Lanka	7.4	8.8	1.1	1.54
East Asia & Pacific	24.4	33.1	34.0	34.68
Southeast Asia	—	—	—	—
South Asia	1.7	3.5	9.8	18.06
Euro Area	37.8	40.9 (2022)	16.8	21.24
North America	34.5	38.6	18.4	22.91
World	14.7	18.6	20.7	24.73

## Research output

Research quantity measures have been sophisticated over the last two decades and are best reflected in the count of papers (see Table 23).

China is the standout country as regards the production of scientific articles. China's article output growth over the three years to 2022 was almost on par with the next two countries (India and Japan) combined. China accounts for around a quarter of the world's output. Next, India almost doubled its output in this period. Japan and South Korea round out a very clear 'top four'. The next five countries (Singapore, Thailand, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia) all produce between 10,000 and 30,000 articles per year.

The Scopus bibliometric index captures a more refined suite of academic contributions. An even more refined measure of quality — articles published in the purported 'top quartile' (Q1) of journals — reveals a more even spread. Ten of the sampled countries had 40 per cent or more in such journals, with the rate growing in all but four countries between 2019 and 2024.

**Table 23: Key research output measures — journal articles, citeable documents and Scopus output**

Country	Scopus Articles 2019	Scopus Articles 2022	Scimago Citable Docs 2024	Scopus Output 2019	Scopus Output 2025
China	617,494	898,949	1,190,419	732,035	1,362,530
India	132,820	207,390	302,793	206,777	383,247
Indonesia	31,005	31,947	62,345	49,378	67,275
Japan	104,006	103,723	129,428	140,204	144,692
South Korea	70,702	76,936	105,406	93,984	114,976
Bangladesh	5,205	7,056	14,966	8,054	19,228
Kazakhstan	2,413	3,551	8,794	5,348	10,927
Malaysia	21,652	26,506	46,625	38,692	55,842
Singapore	12,086	12,700	28,604	24,437	33,929
Pakistan	15,378	22,643	39,558	26,186	46,195
Thailand	13,620	18,491	29,284	20,477	35,826
Vietnam	6,113	10,530	20,873	13,015	25,363
Cambodia	146	203	659	536	997
Myanmar	289	163	544	779	563
Nepal	1,054	1,699	3,553	2,126	4,585
Sri Lanka	1,707	2,483	4,092	2,848	4,840
Southeast Asia	—	—	—	147,543	217,552
South Asia	140,853	218,780	—	244,215	451,716
East Asia	—	—	—	994,966	1,655,437
Euro Area	453,705	485,477	—	1,215,619	1,294,176
North America	516,121	526,483	—	879,944	896,899
World	2,807,631	3,338,192	—	3,640,501	4,624,239

## Research impact and quality

Measuring research quality is inherently complex and challenging, although several indicators have been identified as contributing factors (see Table 24).

Patents serve as one indicator, revealing that China, Japan, Singapore, and India lead the group. Additionally, a middle tier exists (including Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam), followed by countries with fewer such outcomes.

The Scopus field weighted citation index (FWCI) offers an alternative measure of quality, comparing the number of citations received by a publication with the average number of citations received by similar publications. On this measure, Cambodia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh stand out.

In terms of publications in top 10 per cent of journals, Singapore, South Korea, China and Cambodia stand out. International authorship collaborations are highest in Cambodia, Myanmar, Singapore, Pakistan and Nepal.

**Table 24: Key research impact and quality measures — patents, field weighted citation impact, top 10% publications and international collaboration**

Country	Patents 2019	Patents 2024	FWCI 2019	FWCI 2024	Top 10% journals 2019 (%)	Top 10% journals 2025 (%)	Intl. Collab. 2019 (%)	Intl. Collab. 2025 (%)
China	1,327,180	1,796,738	1.1	1.1	27	37	22	17
India	31,375	76,470	0.9	0.8	14	15	17	24
Indonesia	3,141	2,164	0.8	0.6	3	11	16	30
Japan	453,122	420,991	0.9	0.9	24	24	30	33
South Korea	248,426	296,037	1.1	1.1	28	36	29	37
Bangladesh	90	116	1.4	1.1	20	22	50	56
Kazakhstan	—	975	0.9	1.1	9	19	56	53
Malaysia	2,044	1,708	1.1	1.0	12	20	42	62
Singapore	7,155	10,333	1.9	2.0	44	52	66	76
Pakistan	405	528	1.3	1.2	16	22	52	71
Thailand	1,709	1,553	1.0	1.1	18	25	40	47
Vietnam	835	1,392	1.4	1.0	20	20	65	42
Cambodia	1	11	1.2	1.1	33	32	94	87
Myanmar	—	—	1.1	1.0	21	26	71	75
Nepal	—	—	1.4	1.0	20	18	63	64
Sri Lanka	412	323	1.2	0.9	23	24	48	52
Southeast Asia	—	—	1.1	1.1	16	23	37	46
South Asia	—	—	0.9	0.9	14	16	22	29
East Asia	—	—	1.1	1.1	26	35	23	20
Euro Area	363,900	365,200	1.2	1.2	28	31	41	46
North America	658,000	633,700	1.4	1.2	35	35	35	39
World	3,232,900	3,552,100	1.0	1.0	24	28	20	21

## SUMMARY INSIGHTS



## Summary Insights

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### Framing and mapping education in Asia

As 'a' and maybe 'the' major world region for higher education, it is vital to know more about higher education in Asia.

This means defining Asia, looking beyond existing governmental and commercial information, and stepping back to craft unique perspectives and reports.

This initial briefing has taken a broad-brush approach to mapping higher education in Asia.

It has looked at macro, meso and micro angles with the intention of articulating a broad explainer for audiences who are deeply engaged in Asia and stakeholders who have yet to visit.

### Growth, resilience and global significance

Altogether it is clear that higher education is thriving in Asia, regardless and often in spite of contexts, with plenty of significant growth to come.

This has implications for Asia, which seems likely to keep growing as a global region for innovation and development. Asia needs to step forward and lead its own development.

It is also relevant for other parts of the world, for as Asia matures, the balance and flow of ideas and people will keep changing.

### Development stages and data challenges

Looking across the countries, three stages of growth can be discerned — established, progressing, and emerging. Development is not always smooth or uniform. Countries do fluctuate depending on the nature of the phenomenon under study.

Clearly, as this baseline analysis has shown, there is an urgent need for Asia to define indicators for Asian higher education itself. Casual suggestions touch on distinctive regional attributes such as development speed, cultural diversity, working conditions and family arrangements.

There is a related need to broaden the scope and timeliness of data, and of regional projections. More localised data exists but lacks generalisability and acceptance.

### Future directions and research priorities

The analysis conveys that it is feasible to situate APAC in the world as a region. Asia is a very important growth engine for global higher education. To fully bring this out there is a need to chart Asia-specific innovations, indicators, characteristics, institutions and insights.

As with all initial forays, major questions remain outstanding. Where will highly skilled graduates work for the next 50 years? What are connections with other world regions and Africa in particular? What future growth and development seems likely?

Future research needs to extrapolate data trends, chart emerging national and regional scenarios, position APAC in the world, and articulate Asia-specific innovations.

## Researchers

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**Muhammad Hali Aprimadya**

Lecturer in Public Policy and Public Administration at Flinders University, Australia.



**Soth Meas**

Doctoral scholar at the Australian National University, Australia.



**Hamish Coates**

Professor of public policy affiliated with the Australian National University and Tsinghua University. Designs and strengthens higher education systems, institutions and leadership.



**Angel Calderon**

Director of Strategic Insights at RMIT University, brings years of experience in institutional research, planning, and strategy across leading Australian universities. Recognised for expertise in global university rankings, higher education policy, institutional strategy, internationalisation, assessment, and governance.



**Kenneth Moore**

Leading expert in tertiary education data architecture and analytics. Researcher of education policy & performance. Co-founder and Strategic Advisor at AptoNow - an innovative higher ed consultancy and service provider.

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The Higher Education Futures Lab (HEFL) resets the higher education research and innovation agenda, setting course for a fresh wave of impactful dialogue and design. It stimulates discussion around large and significant issues, looking beyond contemporary challenges at longer-term opportunities and contributions.

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## Data sources

Slide	Source
4	Multiple government ministries; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Enrolment in tertiary education ISCED 6 programmes, Researchers per Million Inhabitants; Elsevier SciVal Benchmarking Module — Scholarly Output
7	Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Factbook — Type of Government
8	Transparency International — Corruption Perceptions Index; Reporters Without Borders (RSF) — World Press Freedom Index; Edelman Trust Barometer; World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators — Control of Corruption, Government Effectiveness; Academic Freedom Index (AFI)
9	World Bank — Ease of Doing Business Rankings; Our World in Data — Time Required to Start a Business; World Openness Report 2024
11	World Bank Open Data — GDP (current US\$); International Labour Organization (ILO) ILOSTAT Data Browser — Economic Share
12	World Bank Open Data — Current Health Expenditure (% of GDP), Government Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)
13	UNDP Human Development Report Data Center — Human Development Index (HDI)
14	World Bank Open Data — FDI Net Inflows (current US\$), FDI Net Inflows (% of GDP), Personal Remittances Received (% of GDP)
15	World Bank Open Data — Inflation, Consumer Prices (Annual %), Unemployment Rate (% of Total Labour Force)
16	Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) — SDG Index Dashboard; Annual Mean Concentration of PM2.5
18	World Bank Open Data — Life Expectancy at Birth (Years), Population Growth (Annual %); World Health Organization (WHO) Data Platform — Median Age (Years)
19	United Nations World Population Prospects — Population Aged 18–23 (Millions)
20	United Nations World Population Prospects — Population Aged 24–55 (Millions)
21	QS World University Rankings — QS Best Student Cities Rankings, QS Cities; World Happiness Report
23	World Bank Open Data — Secondary School Enrollment (% Gross); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Tertiary Gross Enrollment Ratio, Gross Graduation Ratio at the Tertiary Level
24	UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Government Expenditure on Tertiary Education (% of GDP), Government Expenditure per Tertiary Student (PPP Constant US\$)
25	Multiple government ministries; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Private Enrollment in Tertiary Education (%)

## Data sources (continued)

Slide	Source
26	Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings; QS World University Rankings; ShanghaiRanking Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU); QS Asia University Rankings
27	UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Enrolment in tertiary education ISCED 6 programmes, Number of Teachers in Tertiary Education, Female Teachers in Tertiary Education (%)
28	UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Internationally Mobile Students (Outbound and Inbound), Outbound Internationally Mobile Students Ratio
29	UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Browser — Researchers per Million Inhabitants, Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (% of GDP)
30	World Bank Open Data — Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (per 100 People), High-Technology Exports (% of Manufactured Exports)
31	World Bank Open Data — Scientific and Technical Journal Articles; SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJR) — Citable Documents; Elsevier SciVal Benchmarking Module — Scholarly Output
32	World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) IP Statistics Data Center — Patents; Elsevier SciVal Benchmarking Module — Field Weighted Citation Impact, Publications in top 10%, International authorship collaboration