

## DATA AT A GLANCE

# ASEAN's Improvements in Human Development Level

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Since 1990, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (<http://hdr.undp.org/>) has been ranking the world's countries annually according to the level of human development (HD). The rank score, from 0.0 to 1.0, suggests that the higher the score, the higher the level of HD. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) appears to take pride in the HD level of their member-countries as the rank implies, among others, regional and global competitiveness. Understandably, some researchers would like to know—in a cursory manner—the prevailing HD level of the member-countries of the ASEAN as well as the improvements in their HD levels over the years, if any. Human development should be very relevant to the bloc, given its stature as a global powerhouse (and said to be the world's largest economy by 2030).

The results of our re-analysis of the UNDP's human development index data in 2009 and in 2015 are shown in Table 1. In 2015, of the 10 member-countries, two had a very high HD level (i.e., Singapore and Brunei), two had a high HD level (i.e., Malaysia and Thailand), while the rest had a medium HD level. The absolute positive changes in the HD scores of these countries (range: 0.096-0.207 in Column 3), which were obtained by subtracting the 1990 HD scores from the 2015 HD scores, indicate that all member-countries had improved their HD levels over 15 years.

Closer scrutiny of the % changes in the HD scores among these countries suggests, however, that while the improvements are dramatic for the most part, they are not uniform. Four countries had a particularly high level of improvement in their HD level ( $\geq 43.2\%$  for Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam), four countries had a medium level of improvement (22.7%-30.5% for Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia), and two countries, with glaringly

contrasting socioeconomic conditions, had a low level of improvement ( $\leq 16.4\%$  for Brunei and the Philippines). These data are instructive, as they tend to reflect the intensity and strength of the political will and competitiveness of the member countries.

**Table 1**

*Changes in the Level of Human Development (HD) of ASEAN Member-Countries, 1990-2015*

Countries/2015 HD Rank/Level Score	1990 HD Rank/Level Score	HD Level Score: Absolute Change, 1990-2015	HD Level Score: % Change, 1990-2015
Singapore (5/very high, 0.925)	0.718	0.207	28.8
Brunei (30/very high, 0.865)	0.782	0.083	10.6
Malaysia (59/high, 0.789)	0.643	0.146	22.7
Thailand (87/high, 0.740)	0.574	0.166	28.9
Indonesia (113/medium, 0.689)	0.528	0.161	30.5
Vietnam (115/medium, 0.683)	0.477	0.206	43.2
Philippines (116/medium, 0.682)	0.586	0.096	16.4
Laos (138/medium, 0.586)	0.397	0.189	47.6
Cambodia (143/medium, 0.563)	0.357	0.206	57.7
Myanmar (145/medium, 0.556)	0.353	0.203	57.5

Source: United Nations Development Program (2016)

## Reference

United Nations Development Program. (2016). *Human development index*. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/>