

Skills among foreign born in Sweden

The aim of the study ...

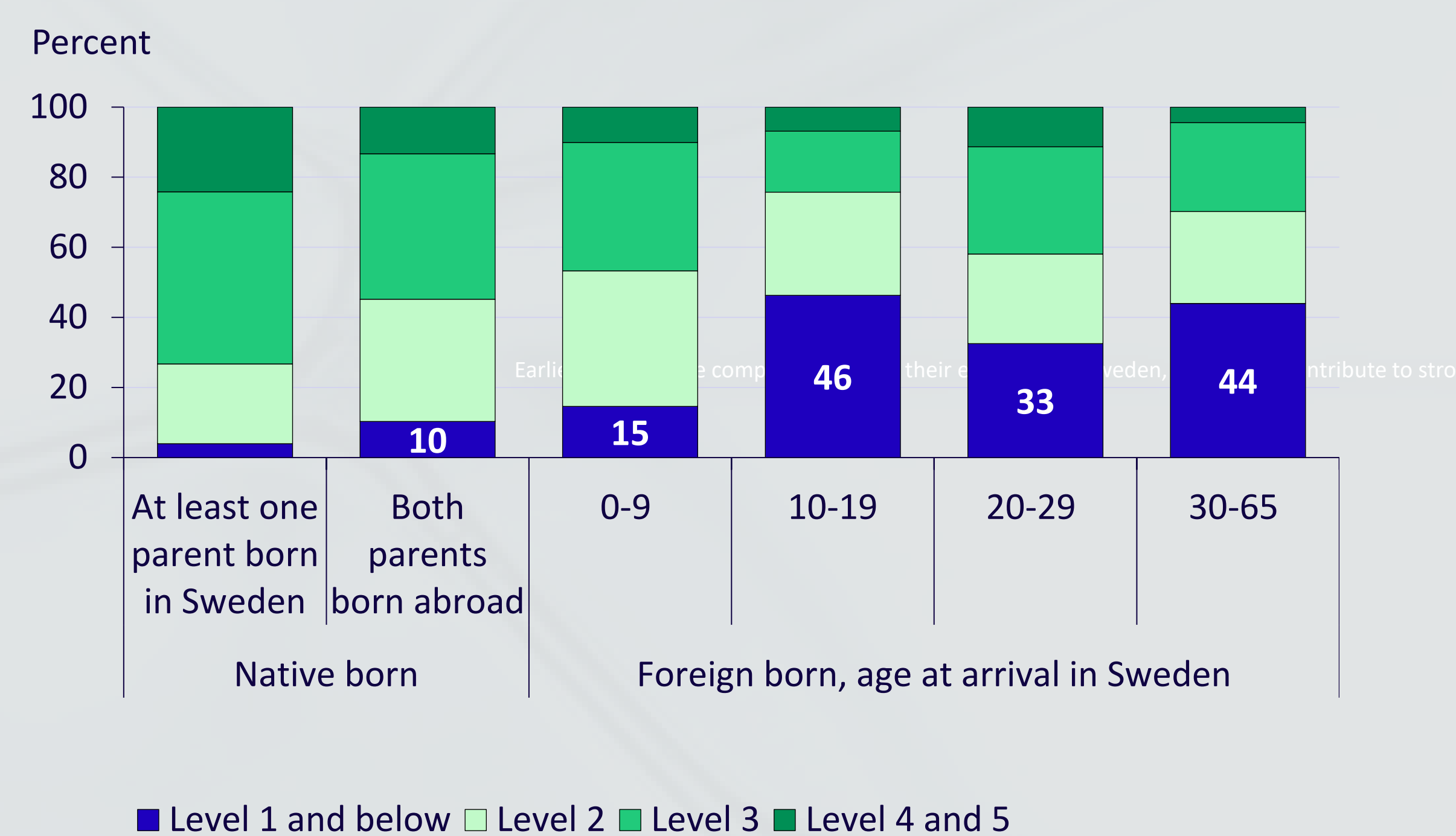
... is to identify and describe the factors associated with disparities in cognitive skills in the Swedish language among foreign-born adults in Sweden.

Native-born adults have significantly higher average skills, compared to foreign-born. The foreign-born population is highly heterogeneous, comprising individuals who migrated at different stages of life, for a variety of reasons, and with diverse educational and labour market backgrounds. These differences in background and education are likely to influence how skills are acquired, maintained and developed over time.

What do these findings suggest? ...

... that differences in literacy skills among foreign-born adults reflect both opportunities before migration and experiences after arrival in Sweden. Understanding how education, labour market participation, and language use interact over time may provide valuable insights into the development of literacy skills.

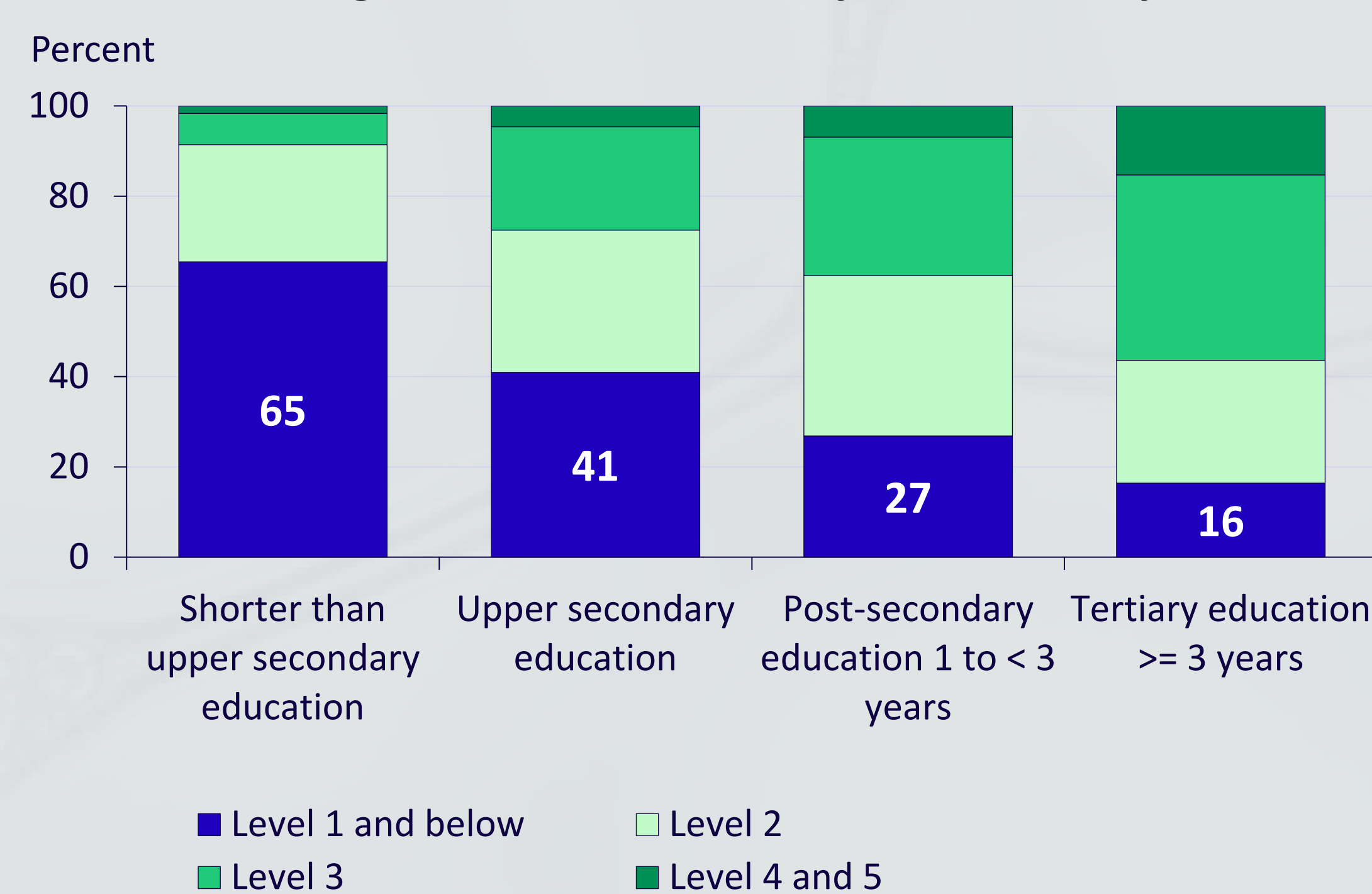
Shares within literacy skill levels by native/foreign born and age at arrival in Sweden



Age at immigration matters...

... since low literacy skills in Swedish were less common among those who arrived before age 10 and more common among those who arrived as adolescents or adults. The skill distribution of those who arrived before age 10 resembled that of second-generation immigrants.

Shares of foreign-born within literacy skill levels by education



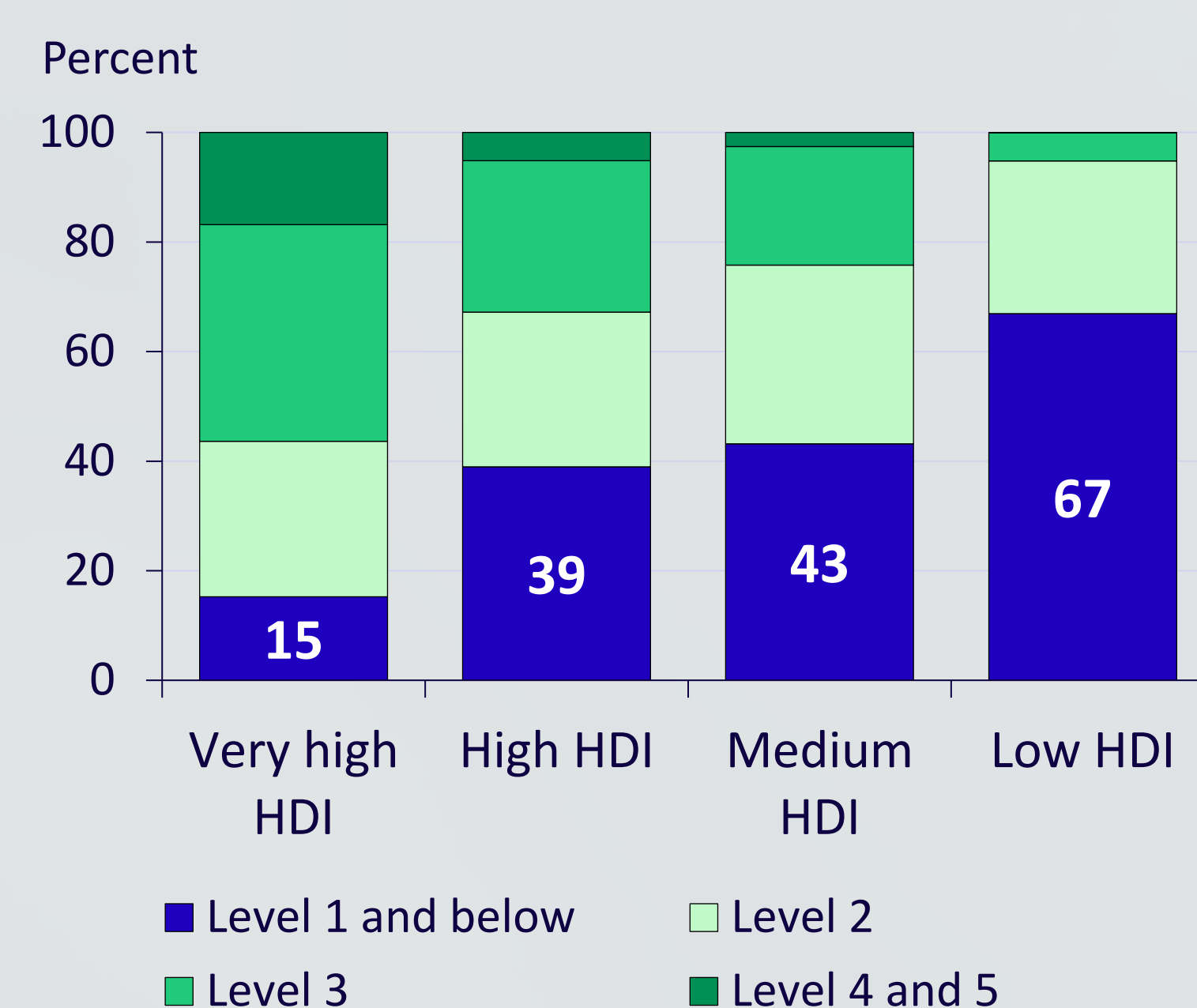
The share of low-skilled ...

... foreign-born adults declines as educational attainment increases. More than half of those with below upper secondary education are low-skilled. In contrast, higher skill levels are most common among those with at least three years of tertiary education.

A majority of adults ...

... born in low-HDI countries had low literacy skills in Swedish, while those born in very high-HDI countries more often demonstrated higher skill levels. This pattern may reflect differences in educational opportunities before migration.

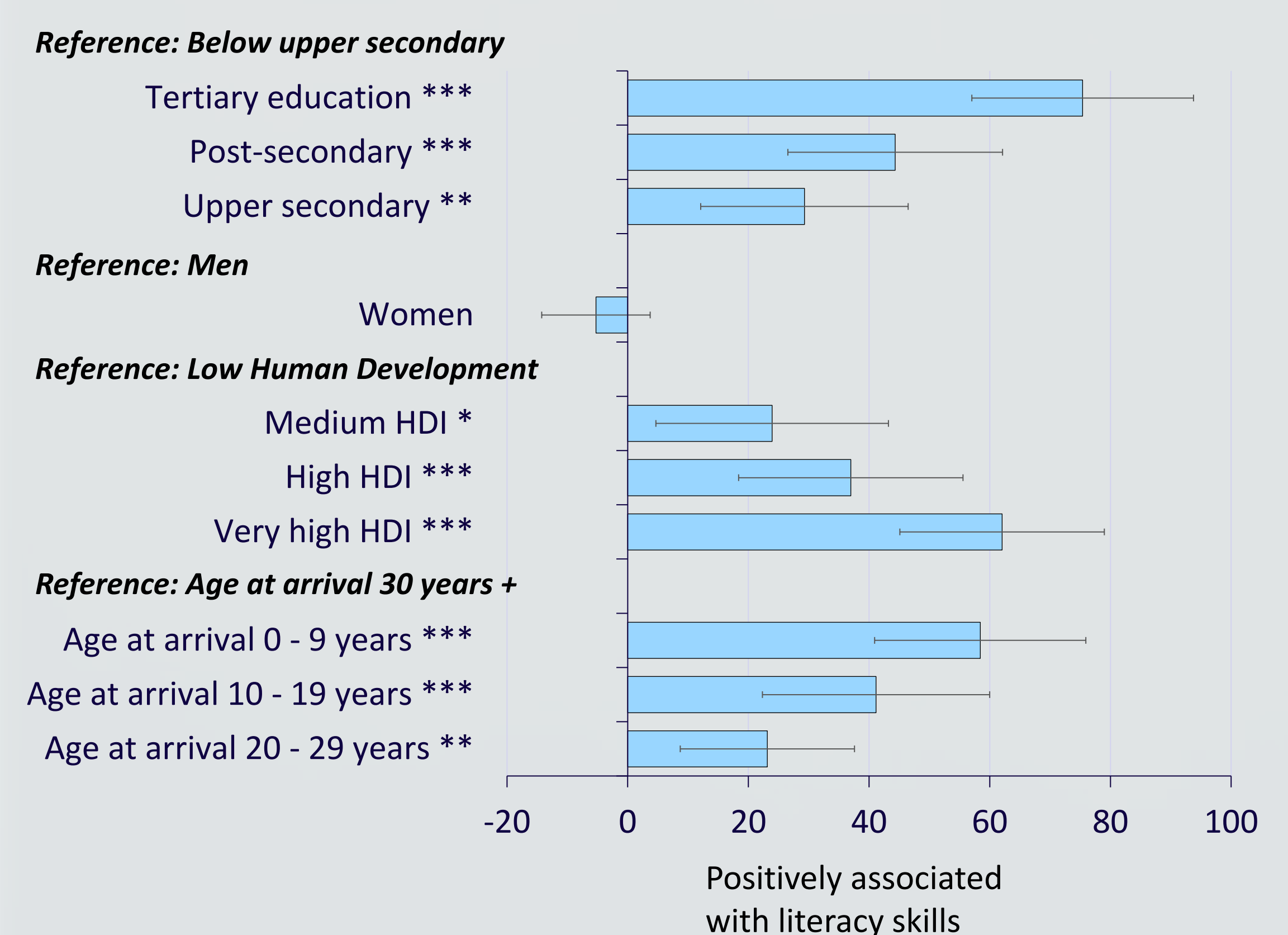
Shares within literacy skill levels by human development index (HDI) of birth countries



Educational background and migration history matters ...

... as higher education, earlier arrival in Sweden, and a higher HDI of the birth country were all associated with higher literacy skills in Swedish. These associations remained when all factors were considered simultaneously.

Background factors associated with development of literacy skills in the Swedish language, foreign born



The model explains 40 percent of the variation in literacy skills. Asterisks indicate statistical significance: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Source: International survey of adult skills (PIAAC 2023). Information on the Human Development Index (HDI) of birth countries was obtained from Statistics Sweden's population register.
Study population: Foreign-born residents of Sweden aged 16 – 65 years.
Publication: Swedish thematic PIAAC report *Skills, work and studies among foreign born*, Statistics Sweden
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