SDG 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

**Metadata**

**Target 4.6**  By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

**4.6.2 Youth/adult literacy rate**

**Definition**
Literacy is the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short, simple sentence about one’s everyday life. This definition emphasizes basic literacy, focusing on two core skills: reading and writing. The concept of literacy has since evolved to embrace several skill domains, each conceived on a scale of different mastery levels and serving different purposes.

**Purpose**
Literacy represents a potential for further intellectual growth and contribution to economic, social, and cultural development of society. If disaggregated literacy rates help identify disparities within a population that hinder personal and social development allowing targeted interventions that promote social mobility and economic growth.

**Calculation method**
Percentage of the number of literate persons out of the total number of persons in the same age group, excluding persons with unknown literacy status.

\[
LR_{AG_i} = \frac{LP_{AG_i}}{P_{AG_i}}
\]

where:

\[
LR_{AG_i} = \text{literacy rate of population in age group } i.
\]
\[ LP_{AGi} = \text{literate population in age group } i. \]
\[ P_{AGi} = \text{population in age group } i, \text{ excluding persons with unknown literacy status.} \]
\[ i = \text{15 years and above (adults), 15 to 24 years old (youth), 25 to 64 years old, 65 years and above.} \]

**Interpretation**

Literacy rates serve to inform how well a country’s education system has been functioning, particularly at the primary level and/or literacy programmes. A strong correlation exists between literacy rates and a society’s overall development. High literacy rates are linked to a better-educated workforce and a stronger economy.

**Disaggregation**

Literacy rate is disaggregated by age groups (15 years and above, 15 to 24 years old, 25 to 64 years old; and 65 years and above); location (urban/rural), and wealth (poorest/richest quintiles).

**Data required**

Population in the relevant age group by literacy status (literate/illiterate).

**Data sources**

National population census, household or labour force surveys. Data on literacy are typically collected through self- or household-declaration in household surveys or population censuses that include a module on literacy. Some national household surveys and international household surveys programmes like the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS, [http://dhsprogram.com](http://dhsprogram.com)) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS, [http://mics.unicef.org](http://mics.unicef.org)) have transitioned from self- or household-declaration to simple assessments, where respondents are asked to read or write a simple sentence and perform basic arithmetic calculations.

Data are compiled through:
- Literacy questionnaire administered biennially by the UIS to Member States.
- Microdata: the indicator is calculated by the UIS and partners: the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) from microdata.

The UIS also applies the Global Age-specific Literacy Projections Model (GALP), to produce literacy estimates for years with missing data and to produce regional and global averages.

**Quality assurance**

The indicator by age groups should be produced based on consistent and comprehensive data on literate and illiterate populations according to national definition.
Limitations and comments

For most countries literacy is self-reported but there may be some challenges associated to changes over time in a given country and to differences in definition across countries.

Literacy should be differentiated from functional literacy. A person who is functionally literate can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his [or her] group and community and for enabling him [or her] to continue to use reading, writing, and calculating for his [or her] own and the community’s development.