



## 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:

$LR_{AG_i}$  = literacy rate of population in age group  $i$ .

$LP_{AG_i}$  = literate population in age group  $i$ .

$P_{AG_i}$  = population in age group  $i$ , excluding persons with unknown literacy status.

$i$  = 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>) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS, <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.