



SDG 4.6.2 – Measuring and Monitoring Literacy at the UIS

Literacy rate measurement at UIS

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.

Data sources and challenges

Main sources of data

- UIS literacy survey (latest cycle was in 2023).
- Data sourced from national population censuses, sample household survey

Nature and challenges

- Timing: frequency – every ten years for demographic censuses, variable for sample survey (every 2 to 5 years), data release date
- Sample design, national coverage, population exclusion
- Survey primary focus may not be literacy
- Literacy definition used in data collection may change over time
- Data collection mechanism: self-declaration or literacy test

To help better use and interpret literacy data, UIS publishes them with metadata (definition used, coverage, source)

Literacy data collection and release - key achievements in 2024

Scope of data collection (2023 survey cycle)

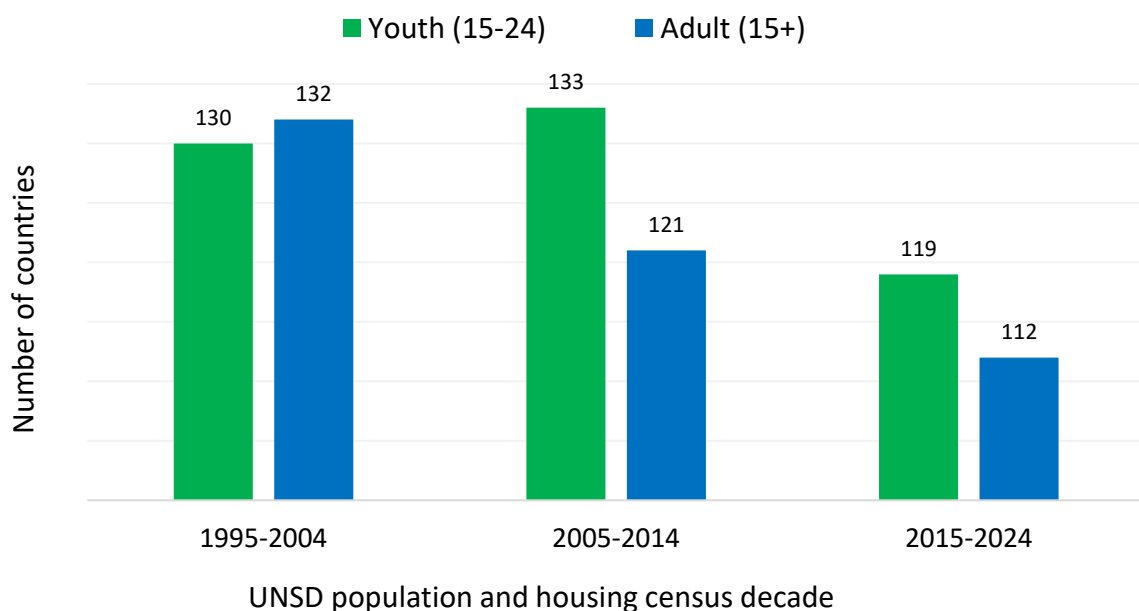
Literacy data for population aged 10 years and above by 5 years age-groups, by sex, and location.

Data coverage

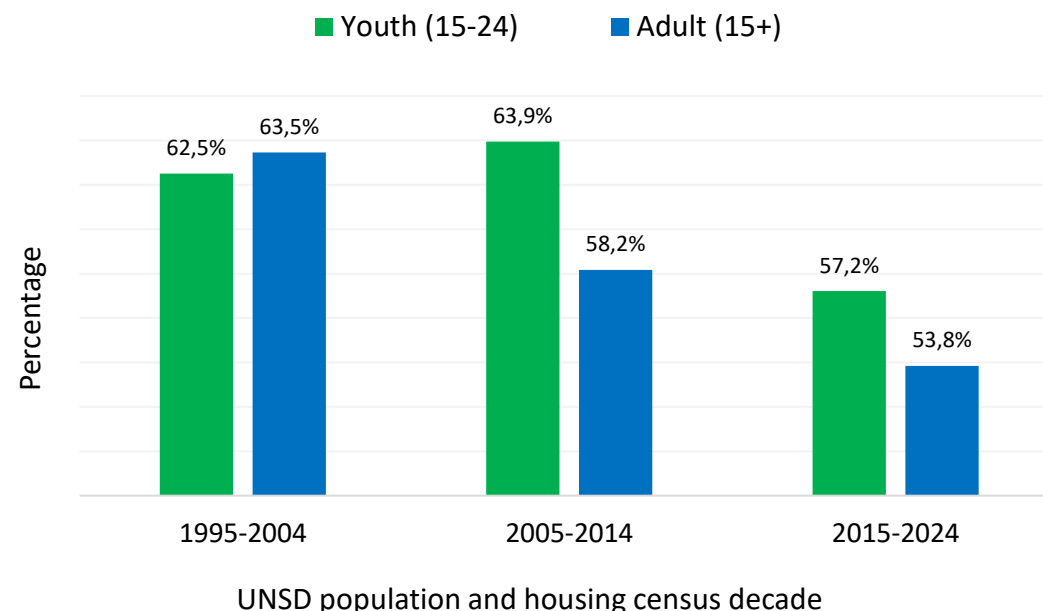
- National level data from over 130 countries (UIS September 2024 data release) ([UIS Data Browser](#))
- Regional and global literacy rate for SDG regions
- Insights about disparities (gender, location) influencing social and economic development

Data availability globally

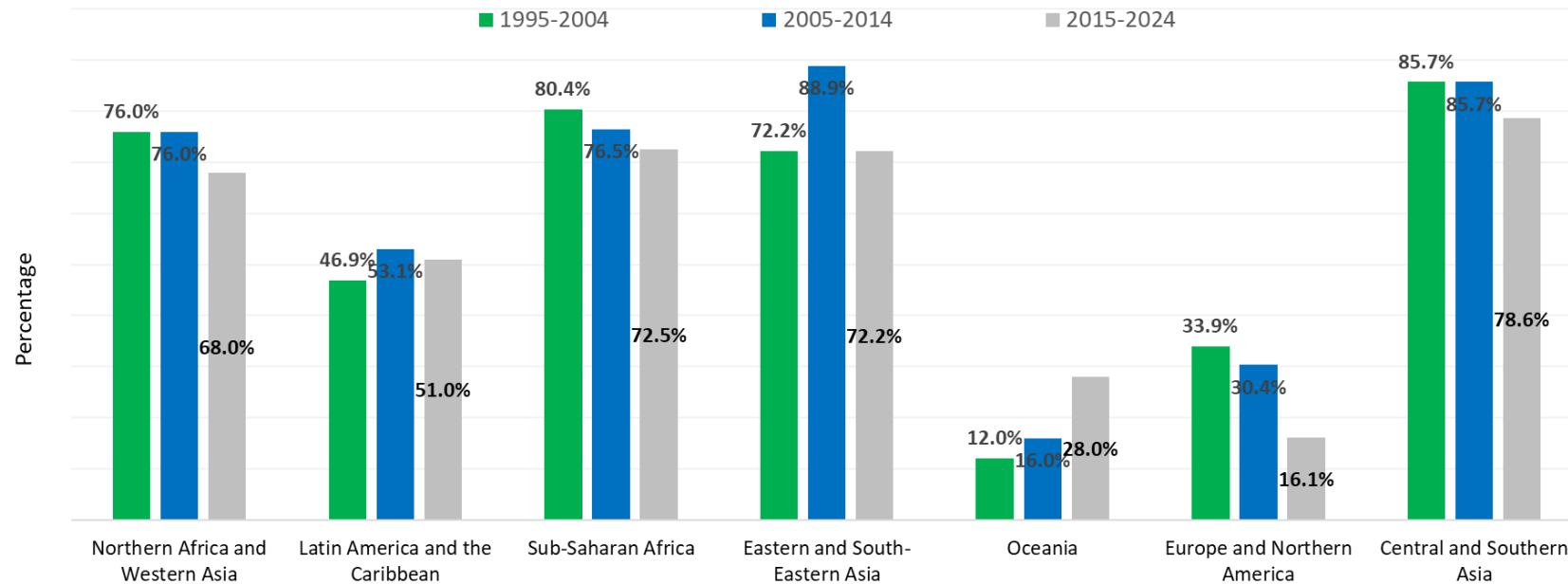
Literacy data coverage by age group, number



Literacy data coverage by age group, percentage

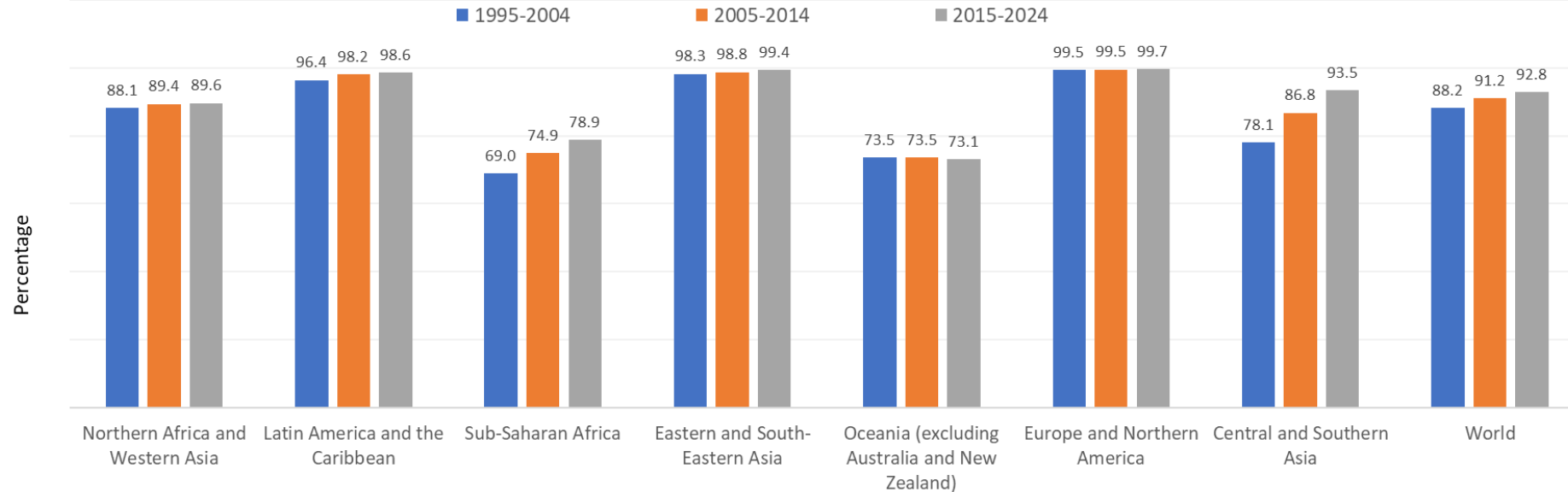


Data availability on youth literacy rates (15-24), by SDG regions



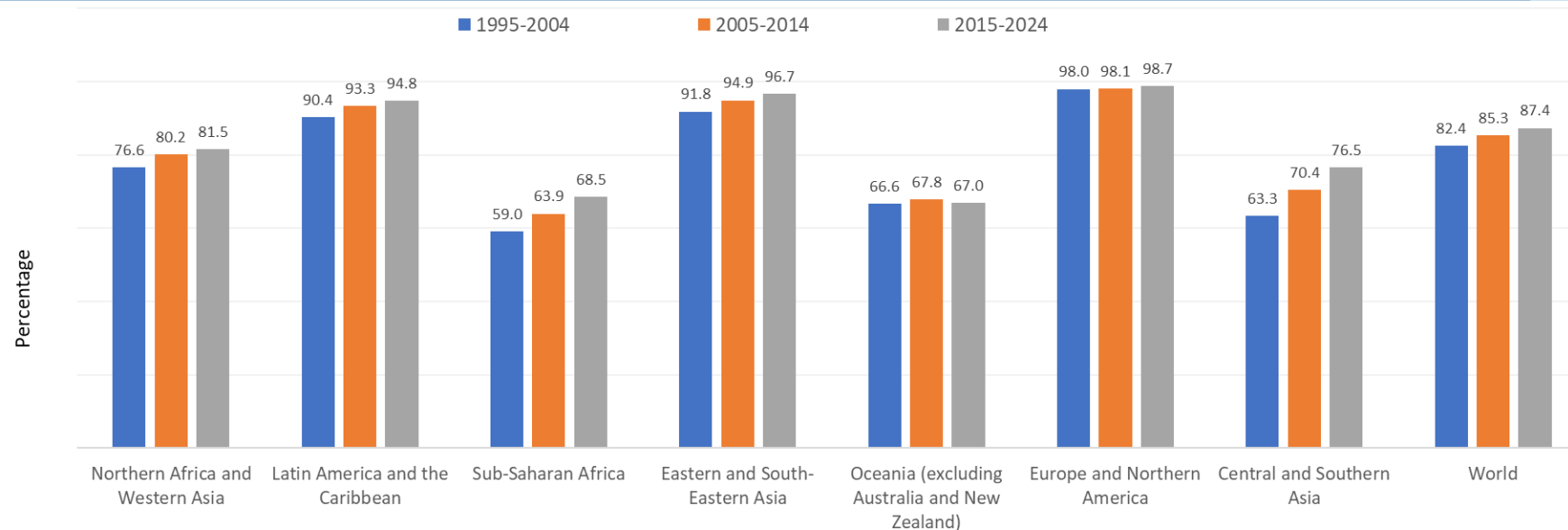
- **Several regions**, including Northern Africa and Western Asia (76.0% → 68.0%), Sub-Saharan Africa (80.4% → 72.5%), and Central and Southern Asia (85.7% → 78.6%), show a **decline in data availability over time**. This suggests **challenges in data collection or reduced reporting efforts**.
- Latin America and the Caribbean saw an **increase in data availability** from 46.9% (1995-2004) to 53.1% (2005-2014) but then experienced a **slight drop** to 51.0% (2015-2024). Similarly, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia **peaked** at 88.9% (2005-2014) before **declining** to 72.2% in the latest period.
- Oceania saw a **steady increase in data availability**, rising from 12.0% (1995-2004) to 28.0% (2015-2024), indicating **better data collection efforts**. In contrast, Europe and Northern America experienced a **continuous decline**, dropping from 33.9% to just 16.1%, the **sharpest decrease among all regions**.

Youth literacy rates by SDG regions



- The global youth literacy rate has **steadily increased** over the decades, from 88.2% (1995-2004) to 92.8% (2015-2024), reflecting **progress in education access worldwide**.
- Central and Southern Asia showed the **most significant improvement**, rising from 78.1% (1995-2004) to 93.5% (2015-2024) - an increase of 15.4 pp.
- Sub-Saharan Africa experienced **notable progress**, increasing from 69.0% to 78.9%, yet it remains the region with the **lowest youth literacy rates**.
- Unlike other regions, Oceania's youth literacy rate has remained **nearly unchanged** (73.5% in 1995-2004 vs. 73.1% in 2015-2024), indicating **persistent challenges in improving literacy levels**.
- Europe and Northern America continue to maintain the **highest literacy rates**, staying consistently above 99% across all periods.

Adult literacy rates by SDG regions



- The global adult literacy rate has **increased** from 82.4% (1995-2004) to 87.4% (2015-2024), showing **steady progress in literacy improvement worldwide**.
- Central and Southern Asia demonstrated the **largest increase**, rising from 63.3% to 76.5% over the three decades, an improvement of 13.2 p.p.
- Although Sub-Saharan Africa's adult literacy rate **increased** from 59.0% to 68.5%, it continues to have the **lowest literacy levels among all regions**.
- Oceania's adult literacy rate has seen **very little improvement**, moving from 66.6% (1995-2004) to 67.0% (2015-2024), highlighting **persistent challenges in adult education**.
- With rates consistently above 98%, Europe and Northern America have the **highest and most stable literacy levels, reflecting well-established education systems**.

THANK YOU

Learn more:

uis.unesco.org

@UNESCOstat

#25YearsOfDataInsights