



unesco

Institute for Statistics

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

The youth literacy rate is defined by the percentage of the population aged 15 to 24 years that can read and write. It is typically measured according to the ability to comprehend a short simple statement on everyday life. Generally, literacy also encompasses numeracy, and measurement may incorporate a simple assessment of arithmetic ability. The literacy rate and number of literates should be distinguished from functional literacy, a more comprehensive measure of literacy assessed on a continuum in which multiple proficiency levels can be determined.

The adult literacy rate is defined by the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over that can read and write. It is typically measured according to the ability to comprehend a short simple statement on everyday life. Generally, literacy also encompasses numeracy, and measurement may incorporate a simple assessment of arithmetic ability. The literacy rate and number of literates should be distinguished from functional literacy, a more comprehensive measure of literacy assessed on a continuum in which multiple proficiency levels can be determined.

Purpose

To show the accumulated achievement of primary education and literacy programmes in imparting basic literacy skills to the population. Literacy represents a potential for further intellectual growth and contribution to economic, social and cultural development of society.

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 to 24 years old (youth), 15 years and older (adults).

Interpretation

A high literacy rate suggests the existence of an effective primary education system and/or literacy programmes that have enabled a large proportion of the population to acquire the ability of using the written word (and making simple arithmetic calculations) in daily life and to continue learning. It is common practice to present and analyse literacy rates together with the absolute number of adult illiterates as improvements in literacy rates may sometimes be accompanied by increases in the illiterate population due to a changing demographic structure.

Type of data source

National population census; household and/or labour force surveys.

Disaggregation

By sex, urban/rural location, and the following age groups: 15 and above; 25-64; 65 and above. The options for disaggregation may be limited by the sample size in a survey.

Data required

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

Data sources

National data on literacy are typically collected through self- or household-declaration in household surveys or population censuses that rely on the 'able to read and write a simple statement' definition of literacy, although the questions asked in surveys vary between countries. Household surveys like the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS, <http://dhsprogram.com>) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS, <http://mics.unicef.org>) have moved from self- or household-declaration to simple assessments in the form of a reading test, in which respondents are asked to read a simple sentence written in their language.

Quality assurance

The indicator for each age group should be based on consistent and comprehensive data on literate and illiterate populations according to the national definition. This definition may vary across countries and across surveys within the same country. The UIS maintains the

global database used to produce this indicator. To facilitate data interpretation and use, the UIS defines standards protocols for data and metadata reporting by countries.

Limitations and comments

Some countries apply definitions and criteria for literacy which are different from the international standards defined above, or equate persons with no schooling to illiterates, or change definitions between censuses. Some assessments of literacy may also rely on self-reporting, possibly reducing accuracy. In countries where nearly all individuals have completed basic education, the literacy rate provides limited information on the variance of literacy skills in the population.