



# International Literacy Day 2024

Promoting multilingual education:

Literacy for mutual understanding and peace



## Youth and adult literacy



At least **765 million** young people and adults aged 15+ **lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills** in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

Literacy rates increased from **85.6%** to **87%** between 2015 and 2022.<sup>1</sup>



**Progress has been uneven**, with **63%** of adults lacking basic literacy skills being **women** — that's **481 million**. This proportion has remained unchanged for decades.<sup>1</sup>

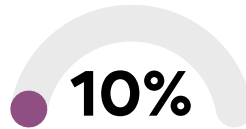


**108.4 million** forcibly displaced people face challenges of **literacy and digital divides**.

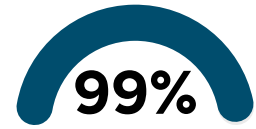
Only **30%** of young people living in crisis-affected countries are literate.<sup>2</sup>



**Multiple factors**, such as **gender, age, location, income level, and disability, affect literacy challenges**.<sup>1</sup>



In 2022, literacy rates were as low as **10%** for elderly women in some sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>1</sup>



While **99%** of male youth and adults in several European and North American countries were literate.<sup>1</sup>

## Children's literacy



Children and adolescents **with disabilities** are **42%** less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills.<sup>3</sup>



**Reading and math proficiency (grade 2 or 3 in 2019)**

**Reading proficiency: 36%** in sub-Saharan Africa, **68%** in Latin America and the Caribbean, and **94%** in Oceania.<sup>1</sup>

**Math proficiency: 51%** in sub-Saharan Africa, **65%** in Latin America, and **71%** in Oceania.<sup>1</sup>



**250 million** children are **out of school**.<sup>4</sup>

### Sources

- 1. UIS.Stat
- 2. UNHCR, 2024 and IOM, 2024
- 3. UNICEF, 2021
- 4. Global Education Monitoring Report and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2023

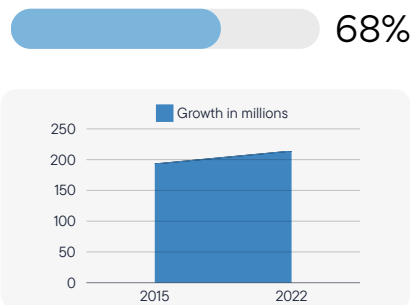
## Literacy in Africa



In sub-Saharan Africa, **adult literacy rates** (15+) rose from **64% to 68%** between **2015 and 2022**.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this, the number of **illiterate** young people and adults (15+) grew from **193 million to 214 million** due to population growth.<sup>5</sup>

In 2022, **three out of ten** young people and adults lacked basic literacy skills.<sup>5</sup>



## Literacy in multilingual contexts



More than half of the world's population is **bilingual**, using **at least two** languages or dialects daily.<sup>6</sup> Yet, **40%** lack access to education in a language they speak or understand.<sup>7</sup>



Over **31 million** young people who have fled **war** or **crises** are learning in a language that differs from the official language of their country of origin.<sup>6</sup>



In our world, which has around **7,000 living languages** **unevenly spread across some 200 countries**—with greater diversity in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and the Pacific—multilingualism is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon.<sup>8</sup>

## Literacy for mutual understanding and peace

“ Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savour their songs. ”

*Nelson Mandela*

## Financing for literacy



**57%** of the **102 countries** that responded to a UNESCO survey spent less than **4%** of their **national education budget** on adult literacy and education.<sup>9</sup>

### Sources

5. [UIS.Stat](#)
  6. [UNESCO webpage, 2024](#)
  7. [UNESCO webpage, 2023](#)
  8. [UNESCO, 2019](#)
  9. [UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022](#)
- Icons: Canva.com