

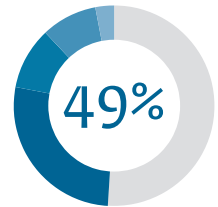
# International Adult Literacy Facts

## The Global State of Literacy

**773**  
Million

Despite the steady rise in literacy rates over the past 50 years, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) data shows that there are still **773 million illiterate adults around the world, most of whom are women.**<sup>1</sup>

**Southern Asia** is home to almost half of the global low literacy population (49%). In addition, 27% of all adults with low literacy skills live in **sub-Saharan Africa**, 10% in **Eastern and South-Eastern Asia**, 9% in **Northern Africa** and **Western Asia**, and about 4% in **Latin America** and the **Caribbean.**<sup>2</sup>



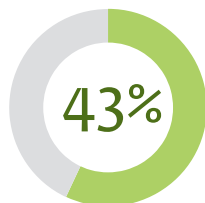
## Women in Literacy



More than half of all poor rural women in developing countries lack basic literacy skills.<sup>3</sup>

Girls who complete primary education are less likely to become teen mothers. Nearly 200,000 maternal deaths could be avoided if all girls completed primary education.<sup>5</sup>

Women comprise, on average, 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries and are key for food security and nutrition.<sup>4</sup>



## The Digital Divide



Internet Access

Nearly 87% of people had access to the internet in developed countries in 2019, compared with **47% in developing countries.**<sup>6</sup>

Gender disparities in the digital divide disproportionately affect women and girls. According to a 2018 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, **327 million fewer women than men worldwide have a smartphone and can access the mobile internet.**<sup>7</sup>



## Impact of the Pandemic

**290**  
Million

In 2016, about 263 million children, adolescents, and youth around the world were out of school.<sup>8</sup>

The number of children being left behind has grown exponentially due to the impact of the 2020 pandemic. UNESCO recently released a report that estimates that as a result of COVID-19, there are now 290 million students (children and youth) out of school.<sup>9</sup>



# International Adult Literacy Facts

## References

1. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. (2021, June). <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy>
2. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. (2017, September). *Literacy rates continue to rise from one generation to the next*. Fact sheet no.45. [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs45-literacy-rates-continue-rise-generation-to-next-en-2017\\_0.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs45-literacy-rates-continue-rise-generation-to-next-en-2017_0.pdf)
3. United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. (2020). *Rural women and girls 25 years after Beijing: Critical agents of positive change*. <http://www.fao.org/3/cb1638en/CB1638EN.pdf>
4. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2011). *The state of food and agriculture. Women in Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development*. <http://www.fao.org/3/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>
5. Global Washington. (2017, September 12). The transformative power of education, especially for girls. <https://globalwa.org/issue-brief/transformative-power-education-especially-girls/#:~:text=Girls%20who%20complete%20primary%20education,and%20gains%20in%20gender%20equity>
6. International Telecommunication Union. (2019, November). *Digital inclusion of all*. <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/digital-inclusion-of-all.aspx>
7. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2018). *Bridging the digital gender divide: Include, upskill, innovate*. <http://www.oecd.org/digital/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>
8. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2018, February). *One in five children, adolescents and youth is out of school*. Fact sheet no. 48. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs48-one-five-children-adolescents-youth-out-school-2018-en.pdf>
9. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2020, April 03). *290 million students out of school due to Covid-19*. <https://en.unesco.org/news/290-million-students-out-school-due-covid-19-unesco-releases-first-global-numbers-and-mobilizes>