SDG 4.6.2 – Measuring and Monitoring Literacy at the UIS

Silvia Montoya, UNESCO Institute for Statistics

The 2025 SDG Indicator Review: Enhancing the Global Monitoring Framework for Greater Impact

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 emphases 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

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
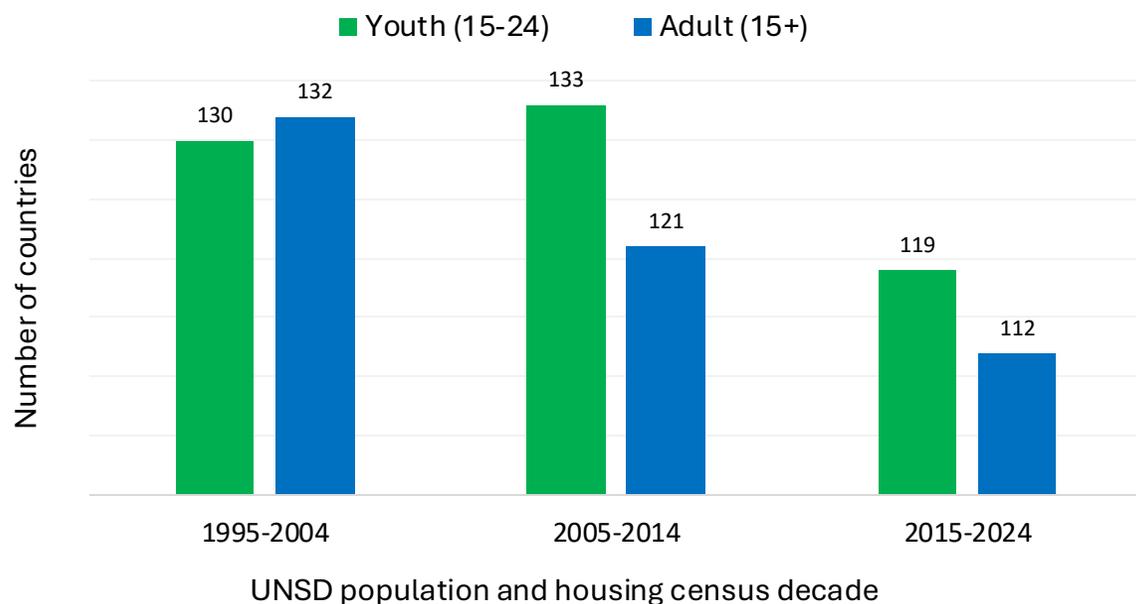
Literacy data coverage by age group, percentage
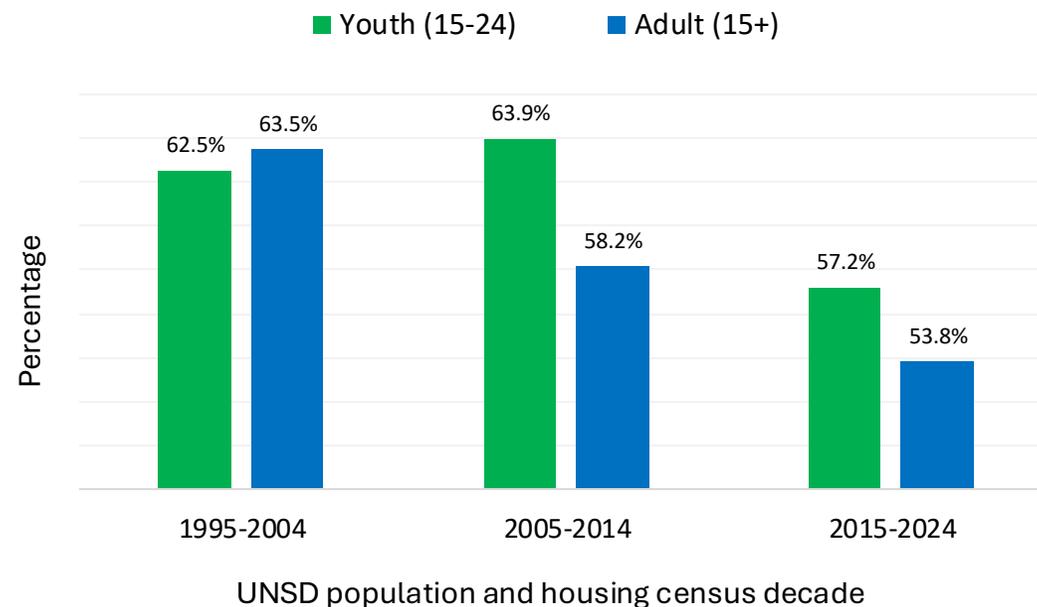
Data availability on youth literacy rates (15-24), by SDG regions

Legend: 1995-2004 (green) | 2005-2014 (blue) | 2015-2024 (grey)

Y-axis: Percentage

Northern Africa and Western Asia: 76.0% / 76.0% / 68.0%
Latin America and the Caribbean: 46.9% / 53.1% / 51.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa: 80.4% / 76.5% / 72.5%
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia: 72.2% / 88.9% / 72.2%
Oceania: 12.0% / 16.0% / 28.0%
Europe and Northern America: 33.9% / 30.4% / 16.1%
Central and Southern Asia: 85.7% / 85.7% / 78.6%
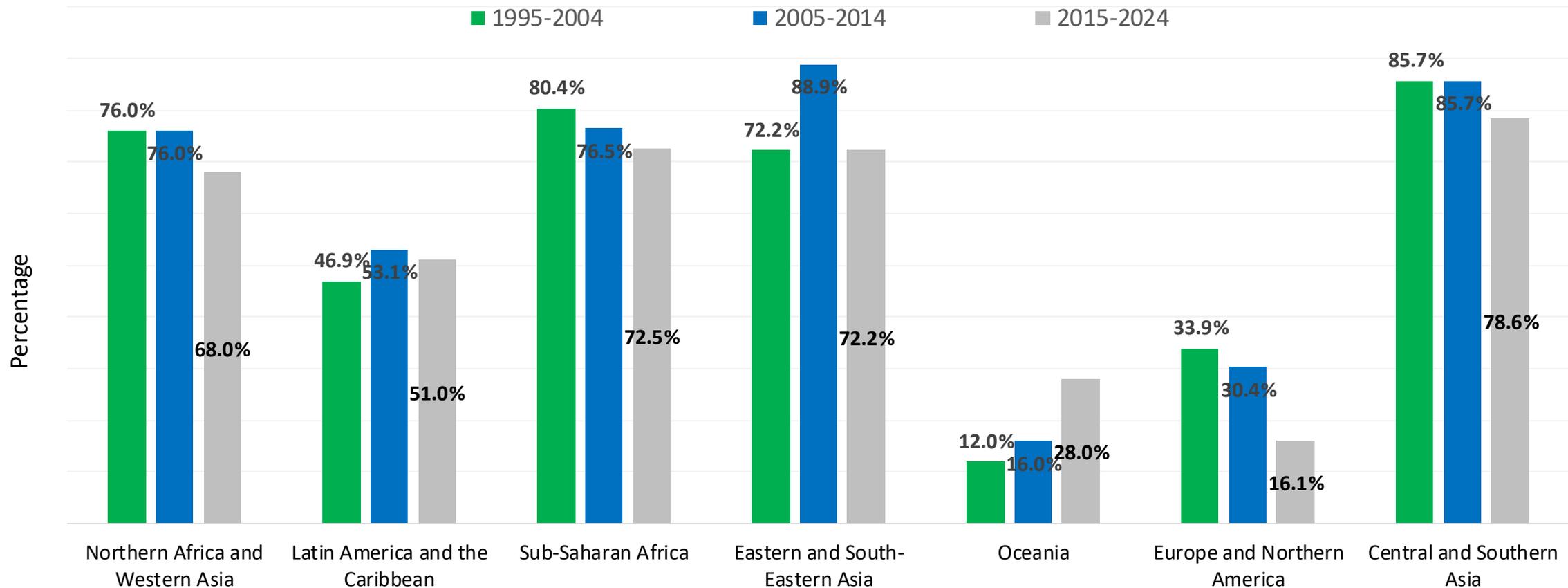
Data availability on adult literacy rates (15+), by SDG regions

Legend: ■ 1995-2004 ■ 2005-2014 ■ 2015-2024

Northern Africa and Western Asia: 76.0%, 76.0%, 64.0%
Latin America and the Caribbean: 44.9%, 44.9%, 40.8%
Sub-Saharan Africa: 80.4%, 60.8%, 72.5%
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia: 77.8%, 88.9%, 72.2%
Oceania: 20.0%, 16.0%, 28.0%
Europe and Northern America: 33.9%, 30.4%, 16.1%
Central and Southern Asia: 85.7%, 85.7%, 71.4%
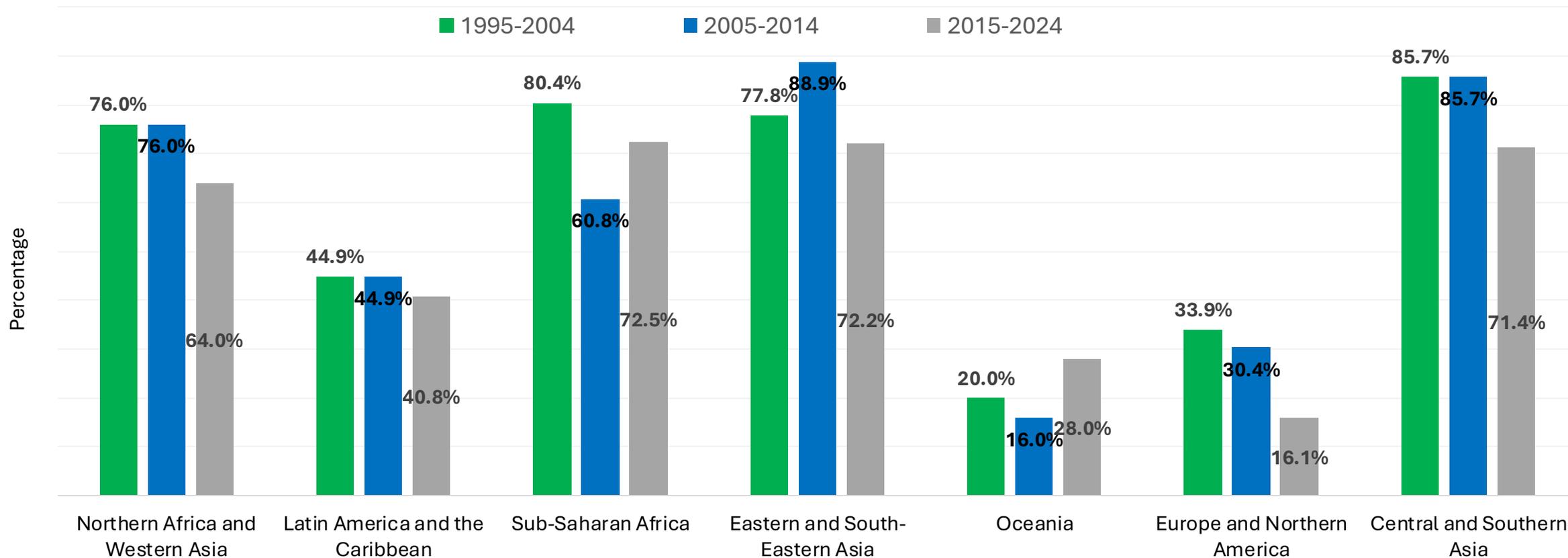
Youth/adult literacy rate – Global Indicator

Rationale
- Literacy as a prerequisite for sustainable development and social participation.
- Links to improved health, gender equality, and poverty reduction.

Global monitoring
- Custodian agency: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).
- Regular consultations with Member States for data validation and alignment.

Validation processes
- Rigorous data review to ensure adherence to SDG 4.6.2 standards.
- Consultation with National Statistical Offices for metadata verification/validation.

Harmonization and adjustments
- Standardization across diverse data sources to enhance comparability.

THANK YOU

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