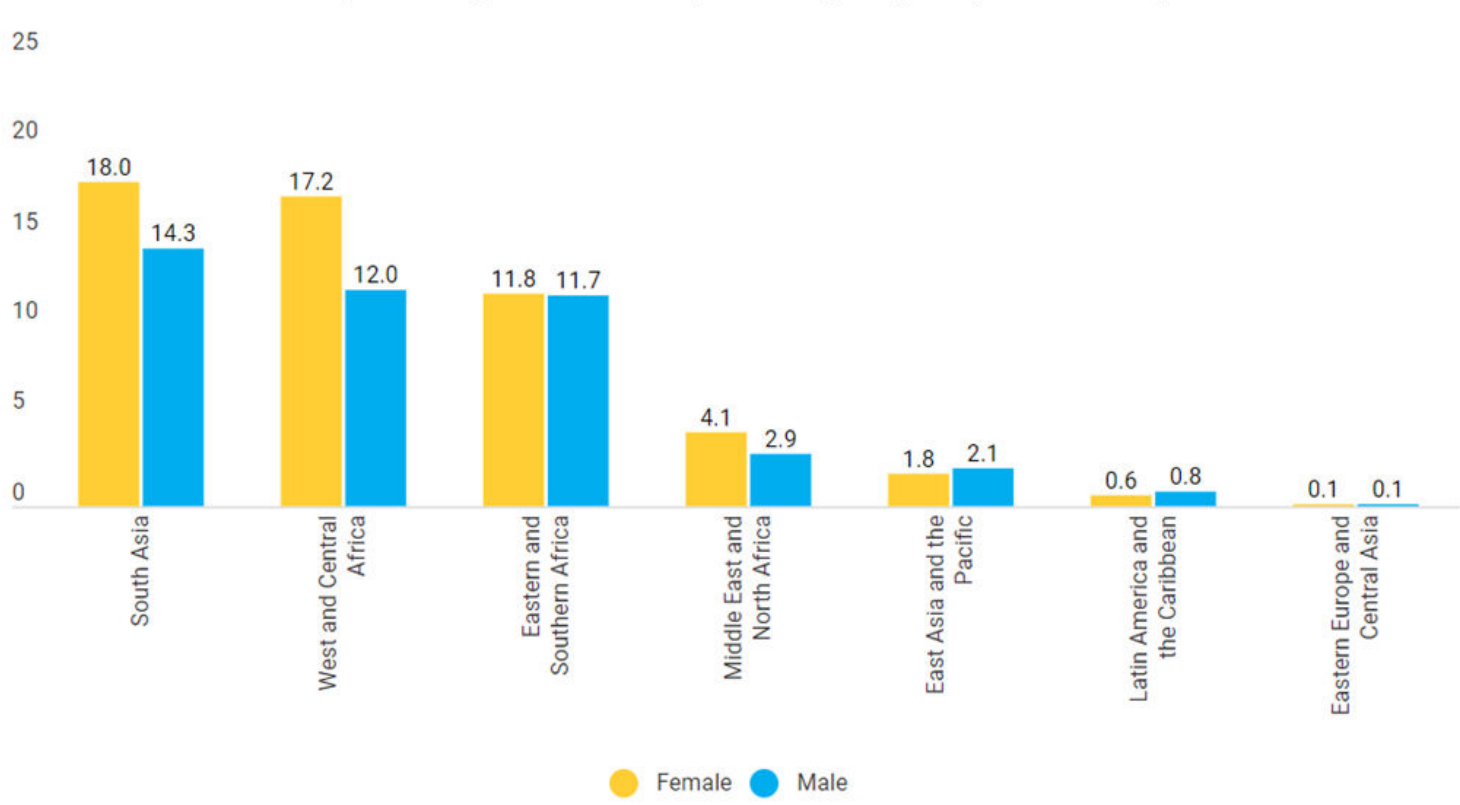


Learning Poverty

Education is a basic human right, and it is also central to unlocking human capabilities—so it is essential to ensure that the right to education is fulfilled in a meaningful way for all children.

Number of illiterate youth aged 15 to 24 years, by region (in millions), 2020



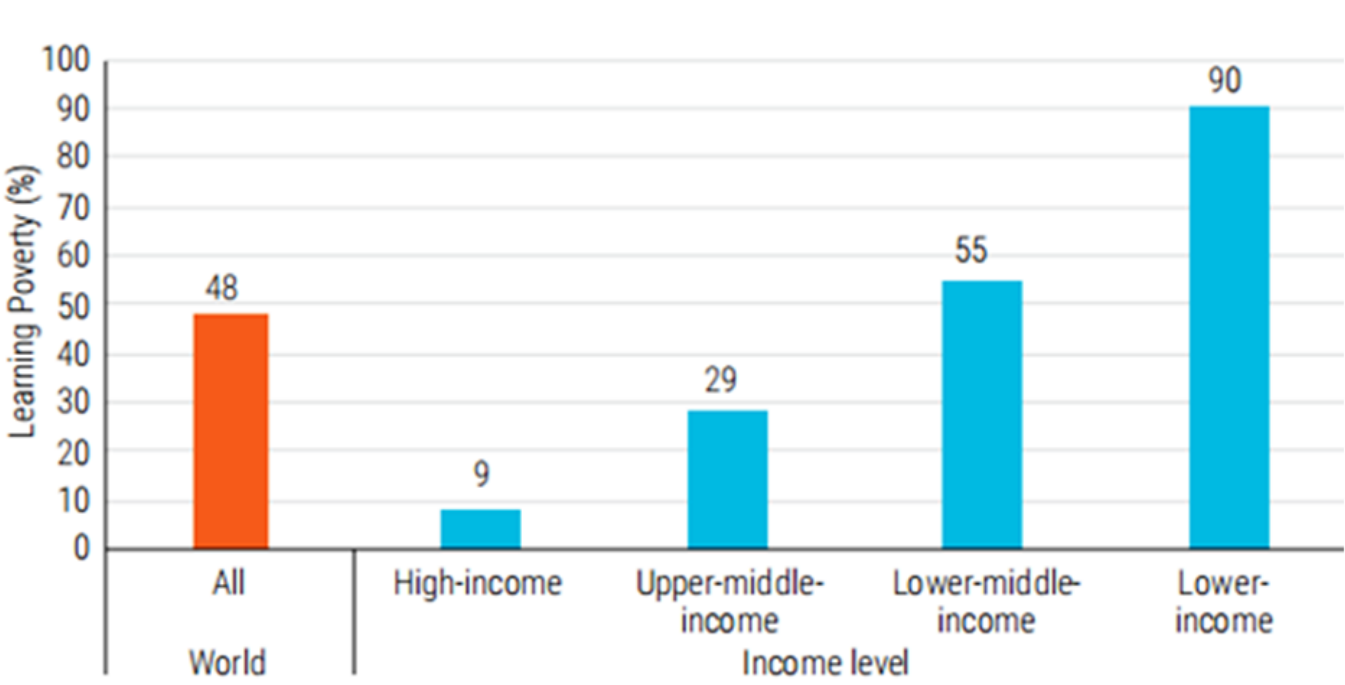
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Global Database, 2021.

All children should be able to read by age 10. Reading is a gateway for learning as the child progresses through school – and conversely, an inability to read slams that gate shut. Age 10, when children are expected to be in fourth grade, is when many children finish mastering “the mechanics” of basic reading in high-performing systems.

We are experiencing a global learning crisis. The 2019 data shows that 53% of all children in low- and middle-income countries suffer from learning poverty. Progress in reducing learning poverty is far too slow to meet the SDG aspirations. Even if countries reduce their learning poverty at the fastest rates we have seen so far in this century, the goal of ending it will not be attained by 2030.

The term “learning poverty” underlines just how important achieving at least a minimum proficiency in reading ability is as a vehicle to a productive, fulfilling life in the modern world. In low- and middle-income countries, various metrics show that roughly half of students are going through school without acquiring the foundational skills they need. The lack of focus on assuring literacy and numeracy in many countries implies that millions of children leave school without these most basic cognitive skills.

Percent of children who are learning-poor, by country groups



The new target: Cut learning poverty at least by half. By 2030, reduce by at least half the share of 10-year-olds who cannot read.

Source: Azevedo and others (2019) using the Global Learning Assessment Database (<https://github.com/worldbank/GLAD>); UIS Enrollment Data; and UN Population numbers.

A Call to Action:
Meeting the Learning Poverty Target won’t be easy, but we can’t back down from the challenge. We owe it to the children of this world to set our sights high, so they can too.