



ILLITERACY FACTS AND FIGURES



ILLITERACY: WHAT DO WE MEAN? AGREEING ON TERMS

- Illiteracy means not being able anymore to read, write or add up in simple situations in everyday life, even though people suffering from illiteracy have attended school in France;
- Not to be confused with:
 - not having French as a mother tongue;
 - not having ever learned how to read and write (unschooled)

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN FRANCE ARE CONCERNED?

A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER

3,100,000 people, some 9% of those aged between 18 and 65 who have attended school in France, are illiterate (IVQ survey, 2004-2005 INSEE ANLCI);

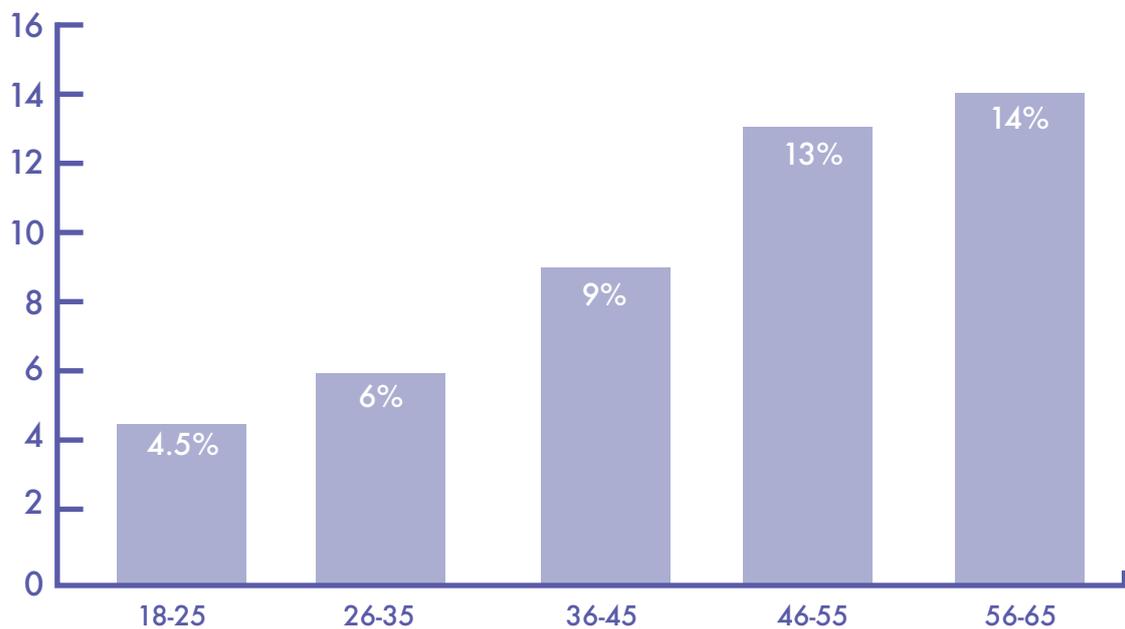
Every year, the tests taken during the defence and citizenship information day reveal that nearly 5% of boys and girls aged 17 are illiterate (JAPD 2009, Ministry of Defence).

An invisible problem



Long underestimated

3,100,000 PEOPLE COPING WITH ILLITERACY: DIFFICULTIES THAT INCREASE WITH AGE

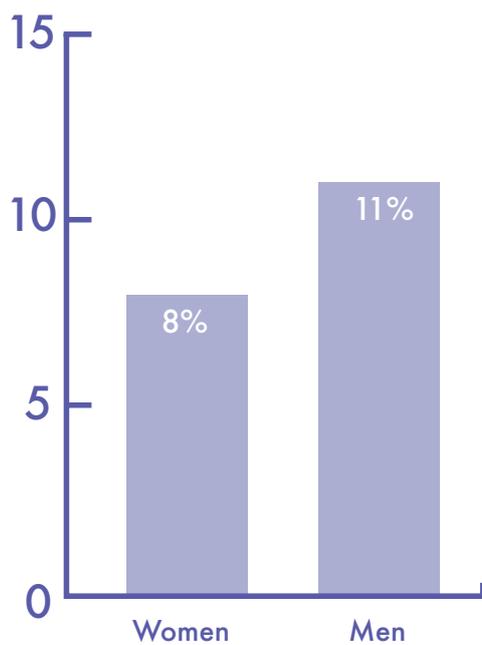


Source: ANLCI statistics

The proportion of people coping with illiteracy is higher in the older age groups;

More than half of illiterates, more than 1.5 million, are over 45.

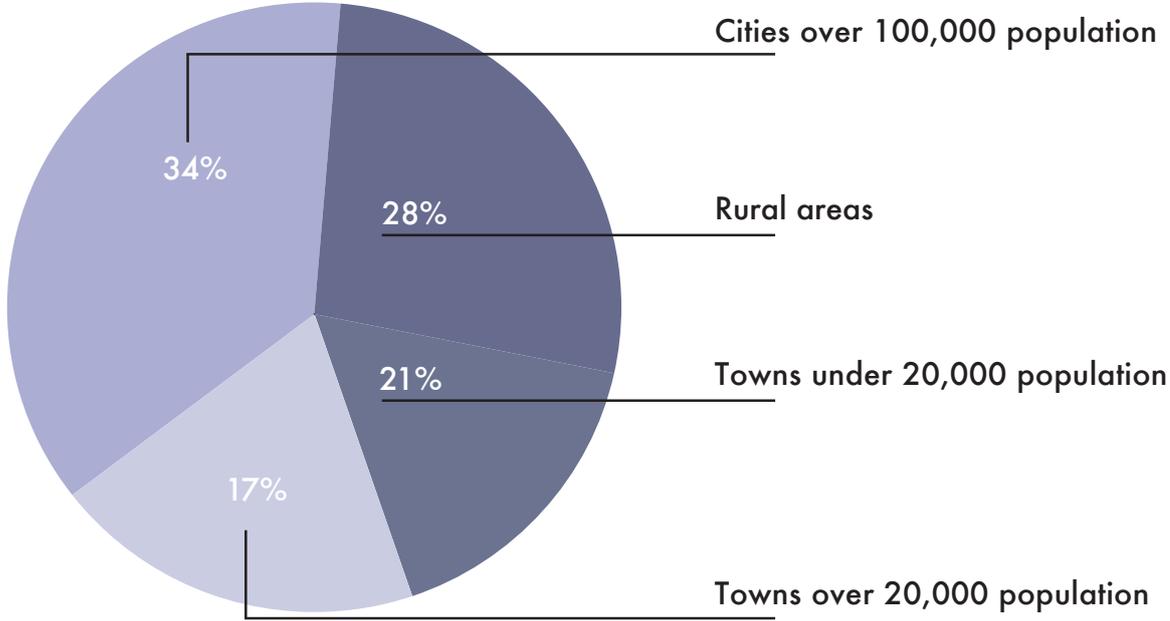
3,100,000 PEOPLE COPING WITH ILLITERACY: MORE MEN THAN WOMEN



More men (11%)
are faced with illiteracy than
women (8%)

Source: ANLCI statistics

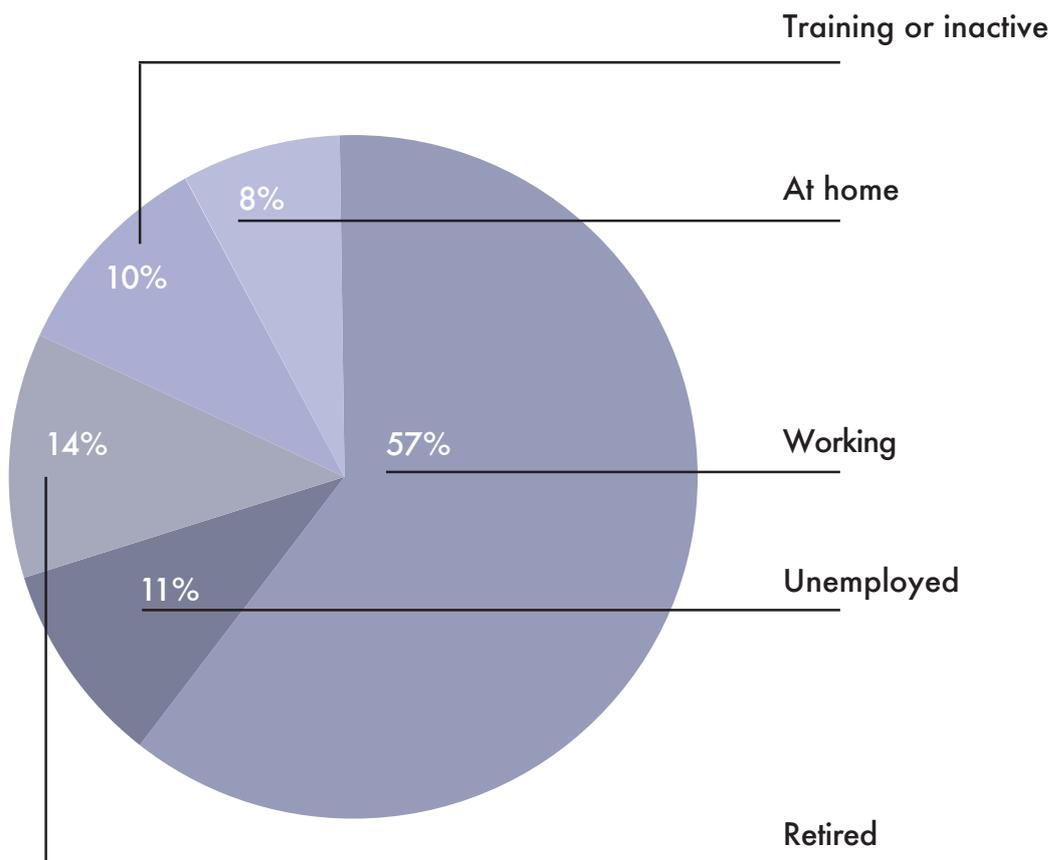
3,100,000 PEOPLE COPING WITH ILLITERACY: WHERE DO THEY LIVE?



Source: ANLCI statistics

Half of these illiterate people, roughly 1.5 million, live in rural or sparsely populated areas. The other half live in urban areas.

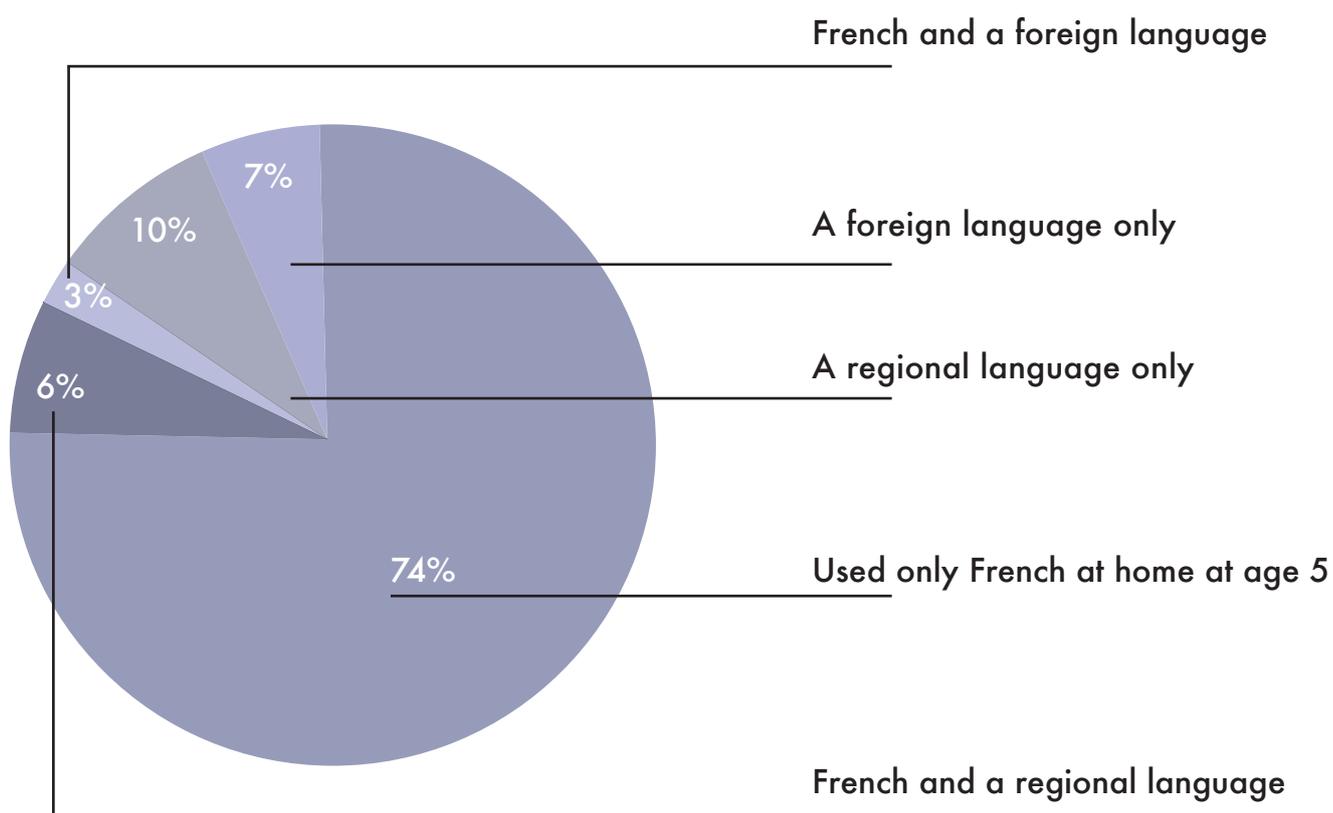
3,100,000 PEOPLE COPING WITH ILLITERACY: WHAT DO THEY DO FOR A LIVING?



Source: ANLCI statistics

More than half of these illiterate people, nearly 1.8 million, have jobs.

3,100,000 PEOPLE COPING WITH ILLITERACY: WHAT LANGUAGE DID THEY SPEAK WHEN THEY WERE CHILDREN?



Source: ANLCI statistics

Seventy-four per cent of illiterate people spoke only French at home at the age of 5. Only 10% spoke a foreign language.

TALKING ABOUT IT TO DISPEL COMMON MYTHS:

- **Illiteracy is invisible but not a minor matter:** the people involved do all they can to hide their problems, cope with their difficulties and pass unnoticed;
- **Illiteracy is not exclusively a problem of young people, but affects all age groups.** Men more than women. The older you are, the more skills you lose if you do not use them;
- **Illiteracy is not exclusively a problem of urban neighbourhoods,** but is found all over France, in town and country;
- **Illiteracy does not only concern the socially excluded.** Over half of these people have jobs;
- **Illiteracy does not mean incompetence,** lack of intelligence: men and women have acquired sets of skills without using the written word, but these skills are hard to maintain;
- **Illiteracy has nothing to do with immigration.** Combating illiteracy should not be confused with language policy for migrants.



ACTION TO BE TAKEN ACROSS THE BOARD

Prevent illiteracy:

- in childhood, for pre-schoolers, pupils and their families;
- in adolescence, with monitoring and remotivation for school dropouts.

Overcome illiteracy:

- with training for adults and relearning of basic skills.



PREVENTING ILLITERACY:

HOW? WHO IS TO DO IT?

- **Educational and cultural action before school, at school and outside of school** to familiarise very young children with words and books, help parents follow their children's school lives and support them over initial difficulties, create the right conditions for early learning, and avoid discouragement becoming illiteracy;
- **With the Ministry of Education, Youth and Voluntary Organizations, the Ministries of Culture and Defence, local and regional authorities, networks of voluntary bodies large and small, foundations,** each according to its own core competence and commitment.

OVERCOMING ILLITERACY:

HOW? WHO IS TO DO IT?

- Action for those with jobs in **public and private enterprises**, for jobseekers, based on working situations so as to regain confidence without being stigmatised;
- Action for all adults in **voluntary sector structures** and local cultural and social facilities;
- With **trade unions, enterprises, the Ministry** of Apprenticeship and Vocational Training, the Ministries of Justice, Towns and Overseas France, **local and regional authorities, national employment agency, voluntary associations, foundations, etc.**

All these players and policymakers in preventing and combating illiteracy are supporting members of the National Agency for the Fight against Illiteracy (ANLCI), whose role is to “bring people together for more effective action”.

ANLCI- L'AGENCE FRANCAISE DE LUTTE CONTRE L'ILLETTRISME

FRENCH NATIONAL AGENCY
TO FIGHT ILLITERACY

The French National Agency to Fight Illiteracy was created in October 2000 and mobilises and works with and on behalf of all those operating in institutions and on the ground to prevent and overcome illiteracy.

Its role is to bring together and synergise the enthusiasm, action and resources of all the policymakers and players to raise the visibility and effectiveness of their commitment, and produce what is lacking (statistics, organisation, instruments) if the task of combating illiteracy in this country is to be radically upscaled.

It is a **public interest grouping** (GIP) under French law, a flexible status that brings together public and private sector partners, and organises work-sharing between each partner's own skills and field of endeavour;

Its organisation structure reflects the desire to enable each body to take part in decision-making and common, concerted action. **It currently has 150 partner institutions.**

The common tools and material for information, decision-making and action collected or designed by the ANLCI are available to all and can be adapted. Everyone can use them for action.

www.anlci.gouv.fr

ILLITERACY IN EUROPE

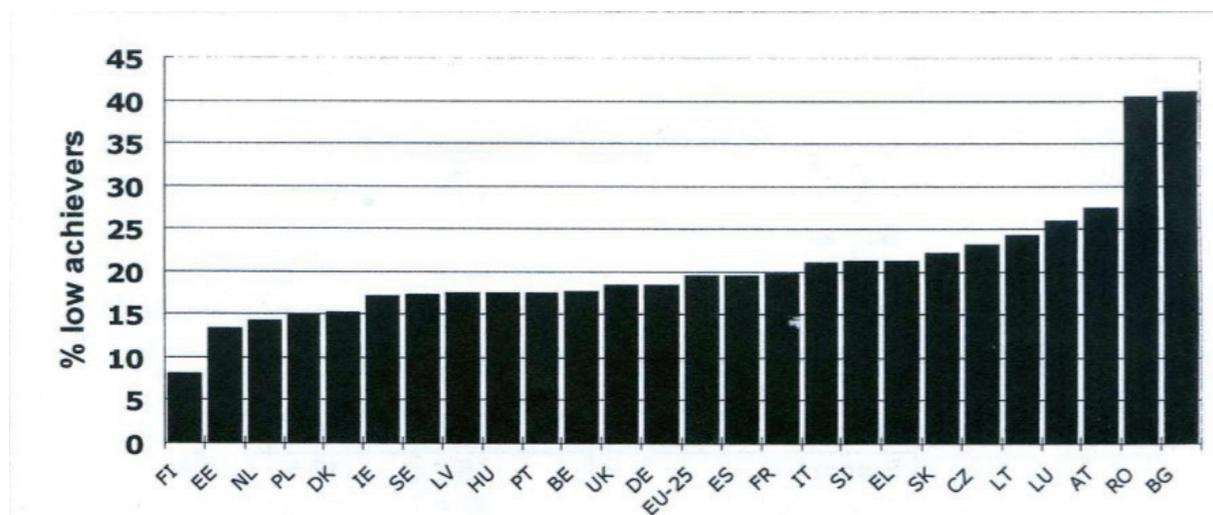
The number of **unqualified and poorly qualified adults in Europe** is estimated to be some **80 million**, one-third of the working population, whereas the proportion of highly qualified jobs is due to rise from its current level of 29% to 35% by 2020. Reading and writing skills are crucial, since they are determining factors in continuing education.

The most recent results of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), a global survey of **15-year-olds'** performance in reading, calculation and science, show that **one in five young people (20%) has problems with reading.**

These results are collated and published every three years by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and reveal a slight improvement in Europe since 2000.

ESTIMATE FIGURES BY COUNTRY

Percentage of pupils with poor reading results in European Union countries, 2009.



Source: OECD **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**

Pupils with poor reading results are pupils able only to complete the least complex reading tasks, such as locating a single item of information, identifying the main theme of a text or making a simple connection between the text and common everyday knowledge.

ACTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

In February 2011, the Commission formed a high-level expert group on literacy chaired by Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands.

This independent group of 11 experts in literacy from academia, politics and business will present policy proposals for improving literacy.

The objective laid down by EU ministers is to reduce to less than 15% by 2020 the proportion of pupils having difficulties with reading, mathematics and science.

To meet this objective, EU Member States need to increase their efforts.

Forthcoming stages:

The high-level group will submit its proposals to the Commission in mid-2012. On the basis of the group's proposals, **Ms Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, will make recommendations to education ministers in autumn 2012.** Member States and the Commission will then include the subject in their strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("**Education and Training 2020**").

For more information:

European Commission [Education & Training](#)
European Commission [Europe 2020](#)

AS SEEN BY UNESCO: ILLITERACY, A REALITY WHOSE EXTENT IS UNDERESTIMATED BY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

To varying degrees, **illiteracy is a recurring problem in most of the so-called developed countries.** An almost identical path runs from denying reality to timidly recognising and then frankly admitting that a vulnerable fringe of the population is being marginalised and excluded.

Illiteracy slips insidiously into these people's lives and poses **a major challenge for society, the economy and democratic governance.**

One might say that illiteracy is not as much a priority as, say, access to clean drinking water. But it is crucial to remember that **being able to read, write and calculate is the basis of general education, and the essential precondition for sustainable human development and the fulfilment of the individual, an inherent part of the right to education.**

In Unesco's opinion, reading and writing are:

- **A human right** and an essential tool for promoting gender equality, improving family health, ensuring protection of the environment, encouraging democratic participation and increasing employment opportunities.
- **A process that requires sustained learning and application:** during our lives we learn new ways of using literacy as we are faced with new requirements and new prospects.
- **A necessity:** in ethical, educational, cultural, civic and economic terms.

Unesco's role is to promote sustainable literacy by asserting its vital importance for the fulfilment of the individual and sustainable human development. To that end Unesco has developed a number of initiatives such as the **Education for All programme, and the Literacy Project website launched in 2001 with the ANLCI, LitCam and Google,** linking to literacy resources including hundreds of videos, research and references of all sorts.

Source: Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)