



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WOMEN AND ISLAMIC CULTURES

Women and Literacy Rates: Sub-Saharan Africa

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- ❖ Half of the adult population in Senegal is illiterate. The majority of illiterates are women. In 2010 UNESCO launched a two year campaign to improve access to education for 40,000 neo-literate, and preliterate women ages 15-55. Neo-literate refers to an adult or adolescent whose education was interrupted or who was unable to attain educational opportunities as a child and acquired literacy skills at a later age.¹
- ❖ According to UNESCO, about 38% of adults in Sub-Saharan Africa, or 153 million people lack the basic literacy skills needed to perform daily skills. This skill set includes both numeracy skills and writing and reading skills.
- ❖ Niger has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. UNESCO estimates that only 28.7% of adults in Niger are literate. In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 70.1% of children between the ages of 5 -15 in Niger were required to work. Primary school is compulsory; however, enrollment numbers are very low, especially for girls. An estimated 60% of children who finish primary school are male.²
- ❖ As of 2001 literacy in Somalia for females aged 15 and over who can read and write was at 25.8%.³ Seventy to eighty percent of internally displaced refugees in Somalia are women and children. A category which clearly inhibits educational pursuits.⁴
- ❖ In Sudan, a country that has been crippled by decades of violence, literacy rates for men and women are low. Both men and women have been denied basic educations due to the ongoing conflicts. Literacy rates for women in Northern Sudan are estimated to be at 52%. In Southern Sudan (the former center of the conflict) literacy rates for women are approximated to be 12%.⁵
- ❖ In Djibouti the percent of literate adult females (aged 15 onwards) is 47.5%. Literacy rates for youth and children in Djibouti are not available.⁶
- ❖ In Gambia education is compulsory and free. Due to lack of infrastructure and resources literacy rates still remain low in the region. Literacy rates for young women ages 15-24 are 58.1%. While the literacy rate for adult women (aged 15 onwards) in The Gambia are 34.3%.⁷

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/dakar/education/literacy/literacy-project-for-young-girls-and-women-in-senegal-pajef/>

² <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/tda2001/Niger.htm>

³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html>

⁴ <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/HDR/Arab%20States/HDR-Somalia-Factsheet-2012-E.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.unesco.org/uii/litbase/?menu=4&programme=99>

⁶ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/djibouti_statistics.html

⁷ <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/gambia/literacy-rate-adult-total-percent-of-people-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html>