



INSIGHT PEAK
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ILLITERACY

How much progress have we made in
Colombia in recent years?

ILLITERACY

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Highlights

1.

In recent years, the illiteracy gap in the world has gradually narrowed, and Colombia has not lagged. Between 2005 and 2018, the country's illiteracy rate went from 8% to 5%.

2.

The reduction in illiteracy in Colombia was not homogeneous. The gap between regions, the urban-rural gap, and the gender gap reduced by more than half between 2005 and 2018.

3.

There are still pending challenges for the reduction of illiteracy in Colombia to guarantee inclusive development. In particular, in the peripheral areas of the country such as the Caribbean and Amazonia, and the most vulnerable populations such as the disabled and ethnic minorities.

Goal four of the SDGs focuses on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education, promoting learning opportunities for all. However, with the spread of Covid-19 globally, schools were forced to close their facilities, affecting 91% of school students, according to the United Nations.

In this Peak Vision we want to dedicate this space to analyze data of literacy in Colombia and how over the last 13 years we have managed to reduce the index by 2% in the country.

Before talking about illiteracy, it is necessary to clarify the concept. According to the UN, it is considered that a person is illiterate when they cannot read and write a short message related to their daily life. On the contrary, it is said that a person is literate if he/she can read, write and understand short texts.

According to UNESCO, these skills allow individuals to obtain basic information about the context where they live, such as looking at the menu in a restaurant or checking notifications on the cell phone. However, literacy also allows for more active participation in society, fosters poverty reduction, and offers more

significant personal development opportunities by allowing access to the educational system and the labor market.

In this sense, literacy is considered a sustainable development mechanism; it is even attributed as part of Fundamental Rights.

Outlook for illiteracy in Colombia

Colombia has made great efforts in recent years to reduce illiteracy. According to information from the National Population and Housing Censuses of 2005 and 2018, the illiteracy rate for the population aged 15 years and over went from 8% to 5%, reducing 3% percentage points during this period. In other words, as of 2018, only one in 20 Colombians is illiterate. Currently, the country has literacy levels similar to Mexico, Panama, and generally upper-middle-income countries. Still, it is below countries in the region, such as Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Chile, and Venezuela (World Bank, 2020).

However, the progress is significant considering that the average illiteracy rate for Latin America and the Caribbean is still slightly above 6%. There is no goal in the 2018-2022 National Development Plan, so it is necessary to think about literacy programs that allow reaching the country's most lagging populations.

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In 2018, the highest concentration of illiterate people was found in its oldest population (Figure 1). The illiteracy rate for people ending their working life (55 to 64 years) is 8.1%, and for older adults, the indicator rises up nine percentage points, reaching 17.1%. This last group accounts for 39.2% of all illiterate people in the country.

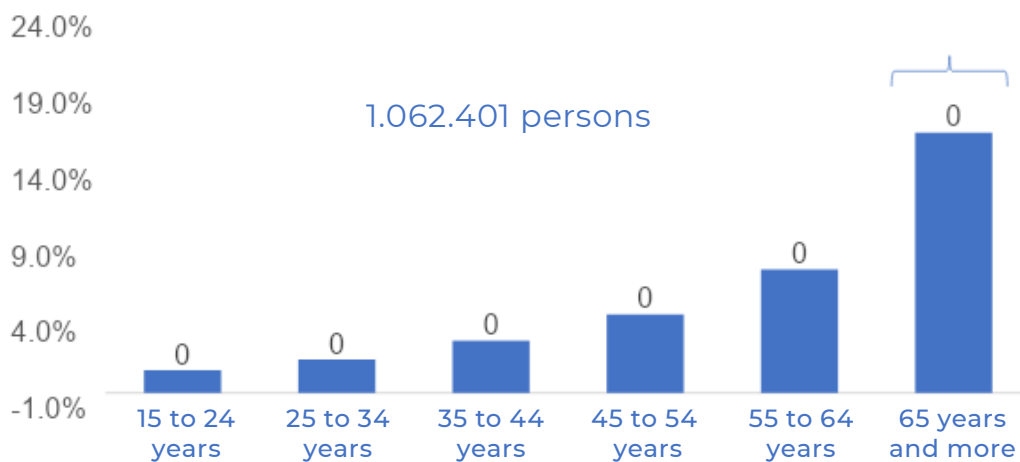


Figure 1 Illiteracy rate for people aged 15 years and over, by age range.

Illiteracy rate went from 12.0% to 5.0% for women and 13.3% to 5.4% for men, contributing to reducing the gender gap by one-third. However, the ethnic population has lower levels of literacy (11.5%) and, notably, the indigenous (17.2%) and the disabled (16.4%) have lagged compared to the rest of the country.

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At the rural level, in 2005 the available figures indicated that approximately one in five peasants could not read or write. For 2018, the figure drops to one in 8. Even so, the challenge in the countryside is greater, taking into account that, as of 2018, only one in 25 people in the urban areas of the country is illiterate.

Are there differences between regions?

Figure 2 presents the illiteracy rate for each country's region for the years 2005 and 2018. On the scale of each map, it can be observed that, in general, there was an improvement in the indicator in all the regions. This improvement materialized in reducing 2 percentage points in the average regional gap and a reduction by half of the interregional gap. The Caribbean region had the most remarkable advance, going from 14.4% to 8.7%; while the Seaflower region improved little (0.5 percentage points).

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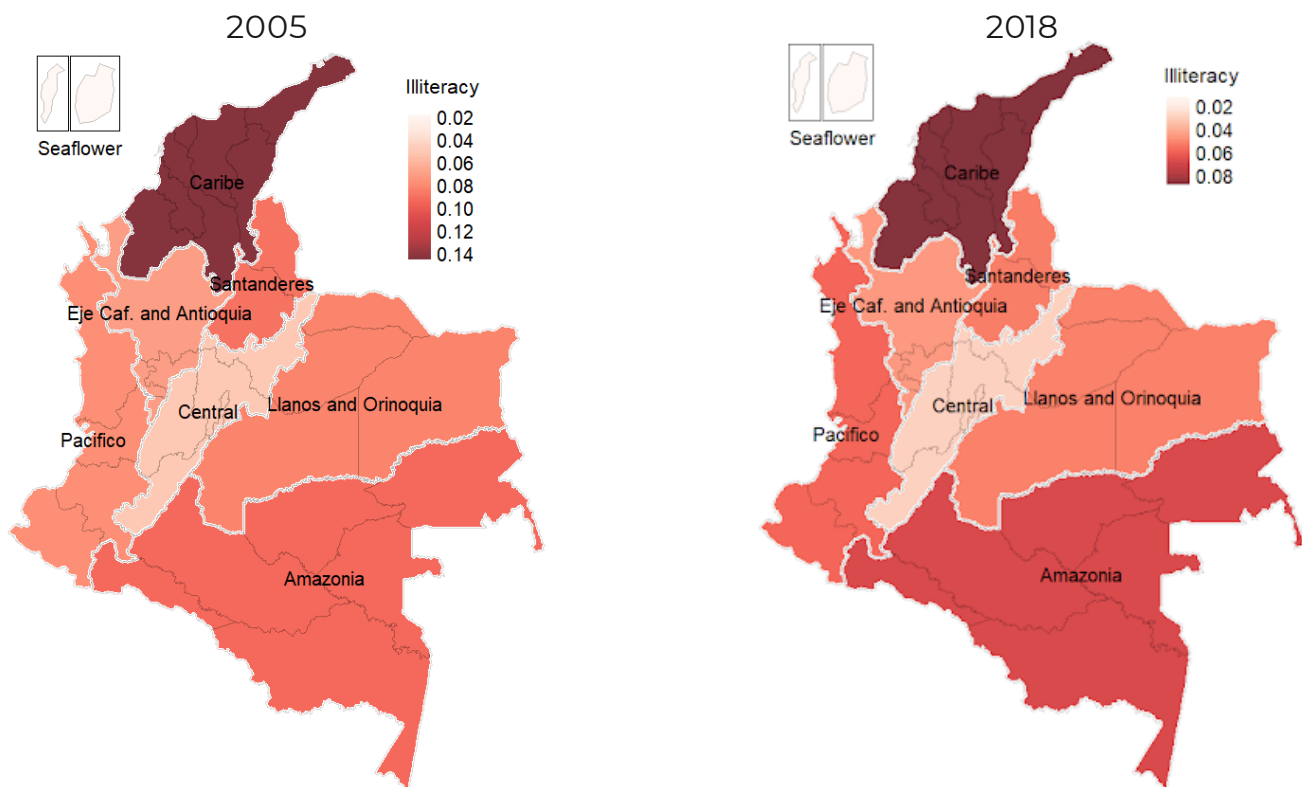


Figure 2 Illiteracy rate for people aged 15 and over, by region

Figure 3 shows how the illiterate population is distributed in the country. The Caribbean region concentrates more than a third of the illiterate. Together with the Pacific and Central areas, the participation increases to 70%; that is, seven out of every ten illiterate Colombians are in one of these three regions. San Andrés, Santa Catalina, Providencia and Amazonia regions, are the areas with minor participation, but those regions have the lower population in the country (48,299 and 864,057 inhabitants, respectively). However, it is necessary to pay special attention to the Caribbean and Amazon regions, the

indicator in 2018 is 2 points above the national average (close to 10%), and they contribute 37.6% of the country's illiterate.

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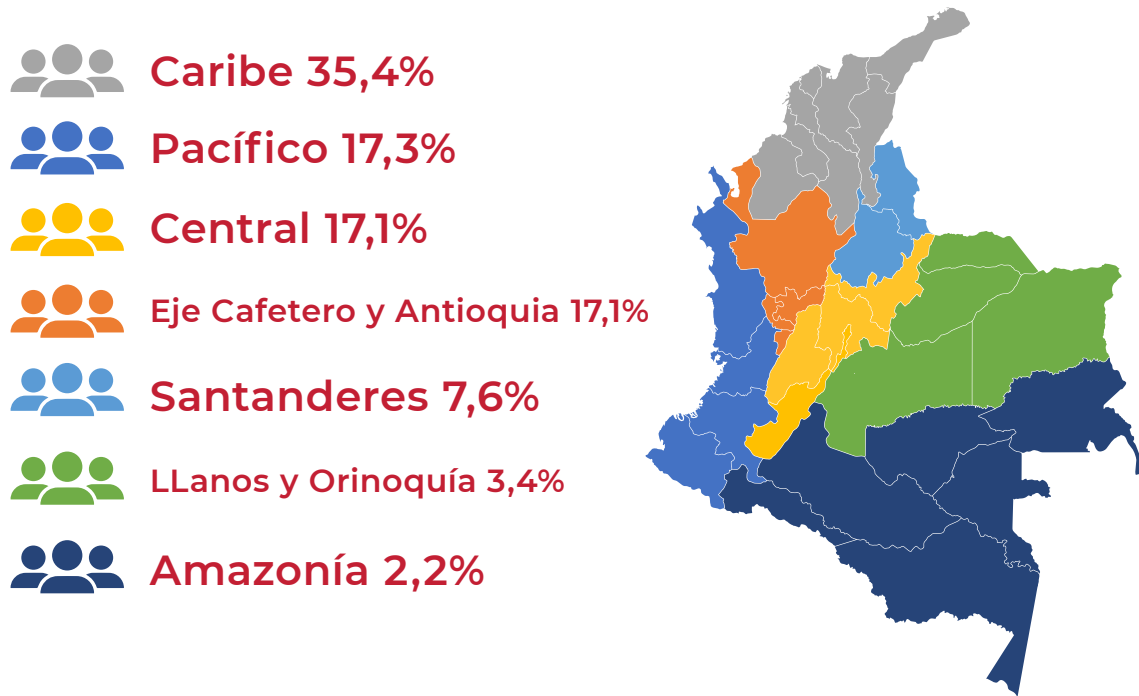


Figure 3 Distribution of the illiterate population in each region, 2018

How is the illiteracy rate in cities?

The illiteracy rate for the country's cities is 3.9% in 2018. Considering that the country's urban population represents 84.4% of the national population, it is necessary to pay special attention to the municipalities that are located far from the central mountain ranges, in which rates are much higher than the national average accounting for 5% (Figure 4). Additionally, within the country's large cities, there are also areas (mainly peripheral) with values much higher than 30% (Figure 5). This indicated the

need to design policies that allow social inclusion from a regional and intra urban perspective.

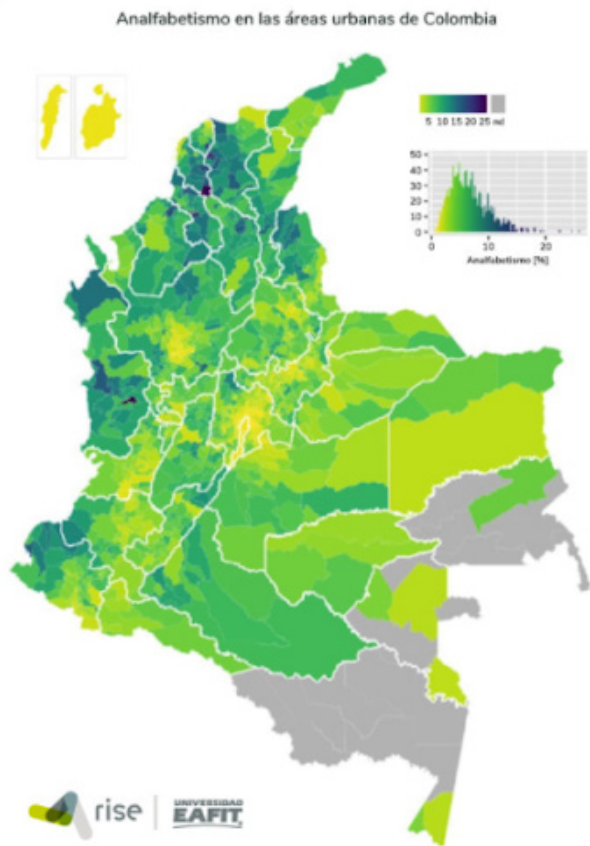


Figure 4 Illiteracy in urban areas of Colombia, 2018

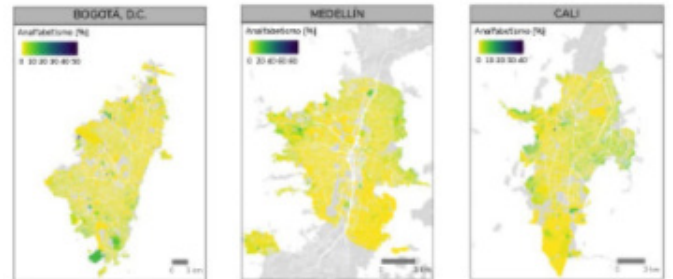


Figure 5 Illiteracy in the main cities of Colombia, 2018

Keywords

Illiteracy, gaps and inclusion.

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