

## LEVEL ONE PIAAC 2023 Germany

### Adults with low literacy skills in Germany

In Germany, the percentage of adults who are at low levels of German literacy (PIAAC Level 1 or below) has remained stable and was 20 percent in 2023 (18% in 2012). About a third of adults with low literacy skills (33%) are 55-65-year-olds, an increase from 27% in 2012. Older adults (ages 55-65) are the largest age group in the analysis. With gender parity in 2012, the proportion of males among adults with low skills in 2023 is higher than that of females. The proportion of males increased to 54 percent in 2023 (48% in 2012).

Proportions in nativity or language status of adults with low literacy have increased. Among this group, the proportion of adults not born in Germany increased in 2023 to 47 percent (30% in 2012), and those whose parents were also not born in Germany increased to 46 percent (28% in 2012). There was also an increase in the proportion of adults with low literacy skills whose native language was other than German (45% in 2023).

Among adults with low skills, the proportion of those with less than secondary level qualifications remained stable, while the proportion of those with more than secondary level qualifications increased to 13 percent. There was a decrease in the proportion of adults with low skills whose parents had secondary qualifications from 58 percent in 2012 to 49 percent in 2023.

There was no change in the proportions by employment status of adults with low literacy skills between the two time points, with 59% of them employed in 2023. Among working or recently employed adults with low literacy skills, lower proportions were employed in semi-skilled white-collar occupations (34% in 2012 and 25% in 2023). At similar to 2012 levels, 18 percent of adults with low skills were employed in elementary occupations in 2023.

The proportion of low-skilled adults participating in non-formal education remained at similar level of 25%. However, these results should be interpreted with caution because the formulation of the question in 2012 may have led to overreporting in non-formal education for that time point. The proportion of adults with low skills acquiring formal degrees remained stable (8% in 2023).

The share of adults with low literacy skills reporting excellent or good health have decreased from 77 percent in 2012 to 58 percent in 2023.

As a result of a change in the formulation of the questions between 2012 and 2023, measuring changes in percentages in social trust and political efficacy between the two time points is not recommended. In 2023, about a quarter of adults with low literacy (23%) say that most people could be trusted (social trust). Those with higher levels of literacy (Level 2 or above) have higher levels of social trust (46%), as well as political efficacy (33%). Seventeen percent (17%) of adults with low literacy skills and 33 percent of adults with high literacy skills report having a say in what the government does.

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DEU Table A-1. Percentage distribution of adults in **Germany** ages 16 to 65 overall and with proficiency level 1 or below (adults with low skills) and level 2 or above (adults with middle or high skills), by demographic and personal characteristics: 2012 and 2023

Characteristic	Total, all adults				Level 1 or below				Level 2 or above			
	2012		2023		2012		2023		2012		2023	
<b>All adults</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>†</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>†</b>	<b>17,8</b>	<b>(0,79)</b>	<b>20,4</b>	<b>(0,70)</b>	<b>82,2</b>	<b>(0,79)</b>	<b>79,6</b>	<b>(0,70)</b>
Age												
16-24	15,9	(0,17)	14,2	(0,17)	11,8	(1,19)	9,7	(1,05)	16,8	(0,33)	15,4	(0,31)
25-34	17,8	(0,26)	18,8	(0,31)	13,6	(1,30)	15,2	(1,16)	18,7	(0,40)	19,7	(0,46)
35-44	22,0	(0,32)	19,9	(0,34)	18,9	(1,48)	17,8	(1,57)	22,6	(0,46)	20,4	(0,45)
45-54	24,6	(0,31)	21,0	(0,28)	29,2	(1,64)	24,7	(1,63)	23,7	(0,48)	20,0	(0,45)
55-65	19,6	(0,22)	26,1	(0,23)	26,5	(2,02)	32,6	(1,74)	18,1	(0,48)	24,4	(0,50)
Gender												
Male	50,5	(0,12)	50,4	(0,11)	47,5	(2,06)	54,4	(1,86)	51,2	(0,47)	49,3	(0,48)
Female	49,5	(0,12)	49,6	(0,11)	52,5	(2,06)	45,6	(1,86)	48,8	(0,47)	50,7	(0,48)
Language: German												
Non-native	12,3	(0,56)	18,3	(0,43)	28,0	(2,03)	45,3	(1,68)	8,9	(0,56)	11,4	(0,50)
Native	87,7	(0,56)	81,7	(0,43)	72,0	(2,03)	54,7	(1,68)	91,1	(0,56)	88,6	(0,50)
Nativity status												
Born in Germany	86,1	(0,63)	80,9	(0,19)	69,8	(2,21)	52,7	(1,56)	89,7	(0,64)	88,1	(0,41)
Born outside of Germany	13,9	(0,63)	19,1	(0,19)	30,2	(2,21)	47,3	(1,56)	10,3	(0,64)	11,9	(0,41)
Immigrant status												
Foreign-born of foreign-born parents	12,4	(0,60)	18,1	(0,23)	27,6	(2,31)	45,7	(1,55)	9,2	(0,60)	11,0	(0,39)
Foreign-born of mixed heritage	1,2	(0,18)	0,7	(0,12)	2,5	(0,71)	1,0	(0,35)	1,0	(0,18)	0,7	(0,13)
Foreign-born of native-born parents	0,2	(0,07)	0,3	(0,09)	!!	!!	!!	!!	0,2	(0,08)	0,2	(0,08)
Native-born of foreign-born parents	6,5	(0,39)	6,9	(0,39)	6,8	(1,01)	6,5	(1,00)	6,5	(0,44)	7,0	(0,44)
Native-born of mixed heritage	11,6	(0,51)	11,2	(0,63)	8,3	(1,24)	8,5	(1,13)	12,2	(0,58)	11,9	(0,71)
Native-born of native-born parents	68,0	(0,93)	62,9	(0,75)	54,6	(2,48)	37,8	(1,69)	70,9	(0,99)	69,3	(0,86)

## Educational attainment

Less than secondary	17,3	(0,47)	16,7	(0,57)	35,3	(2,16)	34,8	(2,16)	13,4	(0,45)	12,0	(0,50)
Secondary degree	53,1	(0,71)	49,1	(0,79)	54,8	(2,26)	51,8	(2,10)	52,7	(0,69)	48,4	(0,86)
Above secondary degree	29,7	(0,55)	34,3	(0,67)	9,9	(1,19)	13,5	(1,26)	33,9	(0,63)	39,6	(0,78)

## Parental highest educational attainment

Less than secondary	10,8	(0,60)	10,7	(0,50)	25,9	(2,65)	30,9	(1,78)	7,9	(0,56)	6,0	(0,47)
Secondary degree	55,5	(0,79)	48,3	(0,79)	58,3	(2,59)	49,2	(1,98)	55,0	(0,84)	48,0	(0,85)
Above secondary degree	33,7	(0,82)	41,1	(0,73)	15,8	(2,00)	19,9	(1,54)	37,1	(0,87)	46,0	(0,88)

## Employment Status

Employed	75,4	(0,57)	76,3	(0,14)	62,7	(1,92)	59,5	(1,70)	78,2	(0,63)	80,6	(0,48)
Unemployed	4,2	(0,33)	2,5	(0,10)	6,5	(0,98)	5,0	(0,65)	3,7	(0,35)	1,8	(0,18)
Out of the labor force	20,4	(0,56)	21,2	(0,12)	30,8	(1,78)	35,5	(1,70)	18,1	(0,63)	17,6	(0,47)

Occupation<sup>1</sup>

Skilled occupations	36,9	(0,65)	49,0		12,0	(1,74)	16,8		41,6	(0,79)	55,2	
Semi-skilled white-collar occupations	31,1	(0,70)	27,6		33,7	(2,15)	25,3		30,6	(0,73)	28,0	
Semi-skilled blue-collar occupations	23,1	(0,64)	18,2		35,2	(2,19)	39,9		20,8	(0,69)	14,1	
Elementary occupations	9,0	(0,47)	5,1		19,1	(1,90)	18,0		7,0	(0,53)	2,7	

## Job satisfaction

Satisfied	78,2	(0,66)	78,6	(0,66)	76,9	(2,15)	77,1	(2,01)	78,4	(0,74)	78,9	(0,72)
Not Satisfied	21,8	(0,66)	21,4	(0,66)	23,1	(2,15)	22,9	(2,01)	21,6	(0,74)	21,1	(0,72)

## Life satisfaction

Satisfied	--	--	84,0	(0,60)	--	--	73,1	(1,84)	--	--	86,8	(0,59)
Not Satisfied	--	--	16,0	(0,60)	--	--	26,9	(1,84)	--	--	13,2	(0,59)

## Health

Excellent to good	88,7	(0,51)	73,2	(0,74)	77,0	(1,73)	58,2	(1,82)	91,2	(0,52)	77,0	(0,75)
Fair or poor	11,3	(0,51)	26,8	(0,74)	23,0	(1,73)	41,8	(1,82)	8,8	(0,52)	23,0	(0,75)

## Most people could be trusted

Agree	x	x	41,4	(0,72)	x	x	23,0	(1,65)	x	x	46,1	(0,82)
Disagree	x	x	58,6	(0,72)	x	x	77,0	(1,65)	x	x	53,9	(0,82)

## People like me have a say in the government

Agree	x	x	29,9	(0,68)	x	x	17,4	(1,54)	x	x	32,9	(0,72)
Disagree	x	x	70,1	(0,68)	x	x	82,6	(1,54)	x	x	67,1	(0,72)

## Formal education in the last 12 months

Not participated	81,6	(0,36)	83,2	(0,39)	89,7	(1,34)	91,7	(0,93)	79,8	(0,46)	81,0	(0,48)
Participated	18,4	(0,36)	16,8	(0,39)	10,3	(1,34)	8,3	(0,93)	20,2	(0,46)	19,0	(0,48)

## Non-formal education in the last 12 months

Not participated	50,9	(1,00)	53,8	(0,86)	73,5	(2,04)	75,4	(1,66)	45,9	(1,19)	48,1	(1,04)
Participated	49,1	(1,00)	46,2	(0,86)	26,5	(2,04)	24,6	(1,66)	54,1	(1,19)	51,9	(1,04)

## Formal or Non-formal education in the last 12 months

Not participated	41,6	(0,87)	45,2	(0,84)	66,4	(2,16)	69,7	(1,64)	36,3	(1,03)	39,0	(1,00)
Participated	58,4	(0,87)	54,8	(0,84)	33,6	(2,16)	30,3	(1,64)	63,7	(1,03)	61,0	(1,00)

† Not applicable.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

!! Not reportable. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is 50 percent or above.

-- Data not collected

x Data not comparable

<sup>1</sup> Estimates for 2023 are taken from upcoming Massing, N. (2025); Standard errors will be available at a later date before the publication.

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Educational attainment is based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011, grouped into below upper secondary (ISCED 1, 2 and 3 short), upper secondary (ISCED 3 and 4) and tertiary (ISCED 5, 6, 7 and 8). Occupation skill-level is based on an OECD measure that classifies occupations into four broad skill-levels: (1) skilled occupations (e.g. legislators, senior officials and managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals); (2) semi-skilled white-collar occupations (e.g. clerks, service workers, and shop and market sales workers); (3) semi-skilled blue-collar occupations (e.g. skilled agricultural and fishery workers, craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers); and (4) elementary occupations (e.g. cleaners, kitchen assistants) (OECD 2013). Social Trust was asked in a question: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please answer using this card, where 0 means 'you can't be too careful' and 10 mean 'Most people can be trusted'. The estimation here divides the scale into 0-5 as Disagree and 6-10 as Agree. Political efficacy was asked in a question: How much would you say the political system in #CountryName allows people like you to have a say in what the government does? Please answer using this card, where 0 means 'not at all' and 10 means 'completely'. The estimation here divides the scale into 0-5 as Disagree and 6-10 as Agree. The way non-formal education participation was asked in 2012 may have facilitated over-reporting, therefore caution is requested when interpreting the trend results.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), 2012 and 2023.