



EF EPI

EF English Proficiency Index

A Ranking of 112 Countries and Regions by English Skills

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2021

Table of Contents

04	Executive Summary
06	EF EPI 2021 Ranking of Countries and Regions
08	EF EPI 2021 City Scores
10	EF EPI Facts and Figures
12	English and the Economy
13	English and Innovation
14	English and Work
16	English and Society
17	English and the Future
18	Europe
20	Asia
22	Latin America
24	Africa
26	Middle East
28	Conclusions
30	Recommendations
32	Appendix A: About the Index
34	Appendix B: EF EPI Proficiency Bands
35	Appendix C: CEFR Levels and Can-Do Statements
36	Appendix D: EF EPI Country and Region Rankings
38	Appendix E: Selected References

Executive Summary

Speaking English gives people access to a wider range of information, a more diverse network and more job opportunities than ever before.

In a globalized world, the adoption of a common language is inevitable. Communication enables connection, accelerates innovation and facilitates understanding. In short, we need a shared language to work together. English is not the only option. At the risk of stating the obvious, cross-border trade in Latin America is largely conducted in Spanish and the Middle East trades mostly in Arabic, but a worldwide lingua franca is still necessary. This explains the estimated 2.5 billion English speakers, of which only about 400 million were born into the language. People are learning English because it is useful to them.

For adults, English skills can be a driver for inclusion, enabling participation in professional development and leveling the playing field for those who come from different circumstances and backgrounds. It allows for international talent management and progression at an advanced level.

This report investigates how and where English proficiency is developing around the world. To create the 2021 edition of the EF English Proficiency Index, we have analyzed the results of two million adults who took our English tests in 2020.

Our key findings are:

Adult English proficiency continues to improve slowly

The worldwide average has not changed significantly since last year. However, 16 countries moved up a proficiency band, while only one moved down, and none experienced a significant decline in score (more than -20 points on an 800-point scale). The addition of 12 countries which were not in last year's index, as well as the high score density in the middle of the index, caused a larger-than-usual reshuffling in the rankings. Although rank changes tend to be highly-reported, these are relative rather than absolute measures of English proficiency.

Men have embraced English

Worldwide, men's English proficiency has outpaced women's for the first time since we began measuring it in 2014. This closing of the global gender gap has been driven by rising proficiency among men. Every region except Asia has the same trend: women's English remains stable as men's English improves. Africa is the only place where women are still ahead, but the gap is closing there too. Of all the indicators pointing to the rising status of English in the world, this is perhaps the most telling.

Adults over 30 are improving fastest

Since 2015, adults in their 30's have improved their English three times as much as those aged 21-25. This year, the worldwide average for adults over 40 places them in the Moderate Proficiency band for the first time. These trends run contrary to the perceived wisdom that there is a golden (youthful) age to learn languages after which progress becomes impossible. When adults are motivated by social and economic gains, and are regularly exposed to English in a variety of practical situations, they too can improve their skills.

English increases economic competitiveness

English is by far the most common language of information exchange across borders, making it a key component for accessing knowledge and expertise. We find strong and consistent correlations between English and various measures of innovation and competitiveness. This finding resonates with research showing that companies with an international management team earn more revenue from innovation than their less diverse competitors. English-speaking workplaces are able to attract more diverse talent and draw on ideas and information from a larger pool. They are also more likely to collaborate internationally with partners and within their own organizations.

In the workplace, English follows job function

There is strong evidence that English is increasingly a job requirement in all industries and at all seniority levels. The English skill gap between the highest and lowest proficiency industries has narrowed by 20% since 2012, and there is no longer any real proficiency difference between executives, managers, and staff. However, the gap in English skills between those in clerical and maintenance roles and those in marketing, strategy, and legal ones is as large as ever. Of course, not all jobs require the same level of English, but people do not usually want to stay in the same job forever. And when things change, professional mobility is a key determinant of resilience for individuals, companies and economies.

People in cities have better English

English proficiency is higher in almost every large city than in its surrounding region and capitals outperform their country as a whole. The economy is the most likely driver of this urban/rural divide. More jobs and better salaries draw ambitious individuals from the countryside. Once in the city, office jobs and a more international environment expose them to English more frequently. Although closing this gap is unlikely, countries can avoid deepening it by ensuring English instruction in rural schools is at least as good as in urban ones.

Places with higher English proficiency are fairer and more open

There is an increasingly clear relationship between a society's connectedness to the world, its level of equality and freedom, and its level of English. The simplest relationship to explain is between a country's level of outward focus and its English. It is a virtuous cycle. Places that engage heavily with the world (economically, scientifically, diplomatically, etc.) need English, so English becomes a priority. And through their engagement with the world, adults have more exposure to English, which in turn raises proficiency.

The more complex relationship is between English and fairness, and yet we find strong and consistent correlations between English and gender equality, social mobility, and freedom. Inequality appears to dampen English proficiency, perhaps by leaving a portion of the population behind when it comes to English learning opportunities.

English proficiency is high and rising in Europe

English proficiency in Europe remains higher than in any other region and has risen significantly since 2011. However, the gap between the average level in France, Spain and Italy, three of Europe's largest economies, and the EU average, is remarkably stable. Despite a significant improvement in the past decade in these three countries, none is improving fast enough to catch up to their neighbors.

Contradictory trends in Asia

The regional average in Asia has not changed since last year, but in such a vast zone, a regional average may not be the best indicator. Central Asia has made the clearest progress, gaining an average of eight points a year since it entered the index in 2018. East Asia is also trending up (and over a longer period) despite Japan's steady decline in English proficiency. South Asia and the ASEAN countries have mixed trends, with declining population-weighted averages despite several member countries improving their English.

Latin America continues to improve, mostly

Almost all countries in Latin America have improved their adult English proficiency over the past decade, and although progress has not always been dramatic, it has been regular. In order to consolidate these gains, women's English proficiency must be raised to the same level as men's. The ever-widening skill gap between genders in the region is not sustainable. Mexico's consistently-declining English proficiency, a drop of 69 points since 2011, is also worthy of attention and investment.

In Africa, English proficiency runs the gamut

For the first time this year, we have a more complete map of English proficiency in Africa. The picture that emerges is of a highly diverse range of English skills, the most diverse of any region, in fact, when measuring the gap between high and low scorers. North Africa stands out for its pace of change. Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia all moved up a proficiency band this year, and Algeria's score rose year-on-year by more than any other country in the world.

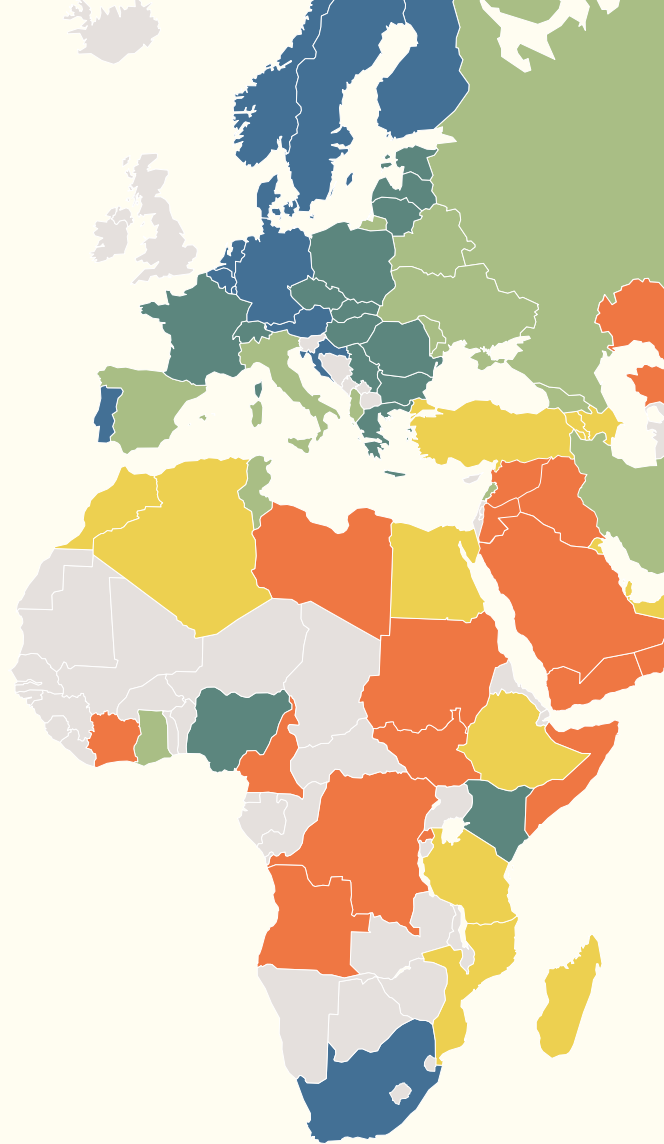
Progress is slow in the Middle East

Adult English proficiency remains far lower in the Middle East than in other regions. Although there has been a small amount of progress in the past decade, adults under 25 have not improved at all, which is worrisome given the region's youthful population. In addition, women's English proficiency is not keeping pace with men's. The workplace is key in building adult English proficiency both through direct training and through exposure. When women are left out of the workforce, their skills do not develop.

Languages connect people. They are the way we share ideas, preserve knowledge, and create culture. And languages with many speakers have an inherent magnetism: learning them open doors. English has the potential to be a powerful driver of diversity and inclusion over the coming decade, if only everyone gets an equal shot at learning it.

EF EPI 2021

Ranking of Countries and Regions



Proficiency Bands

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

Very High Proficiency

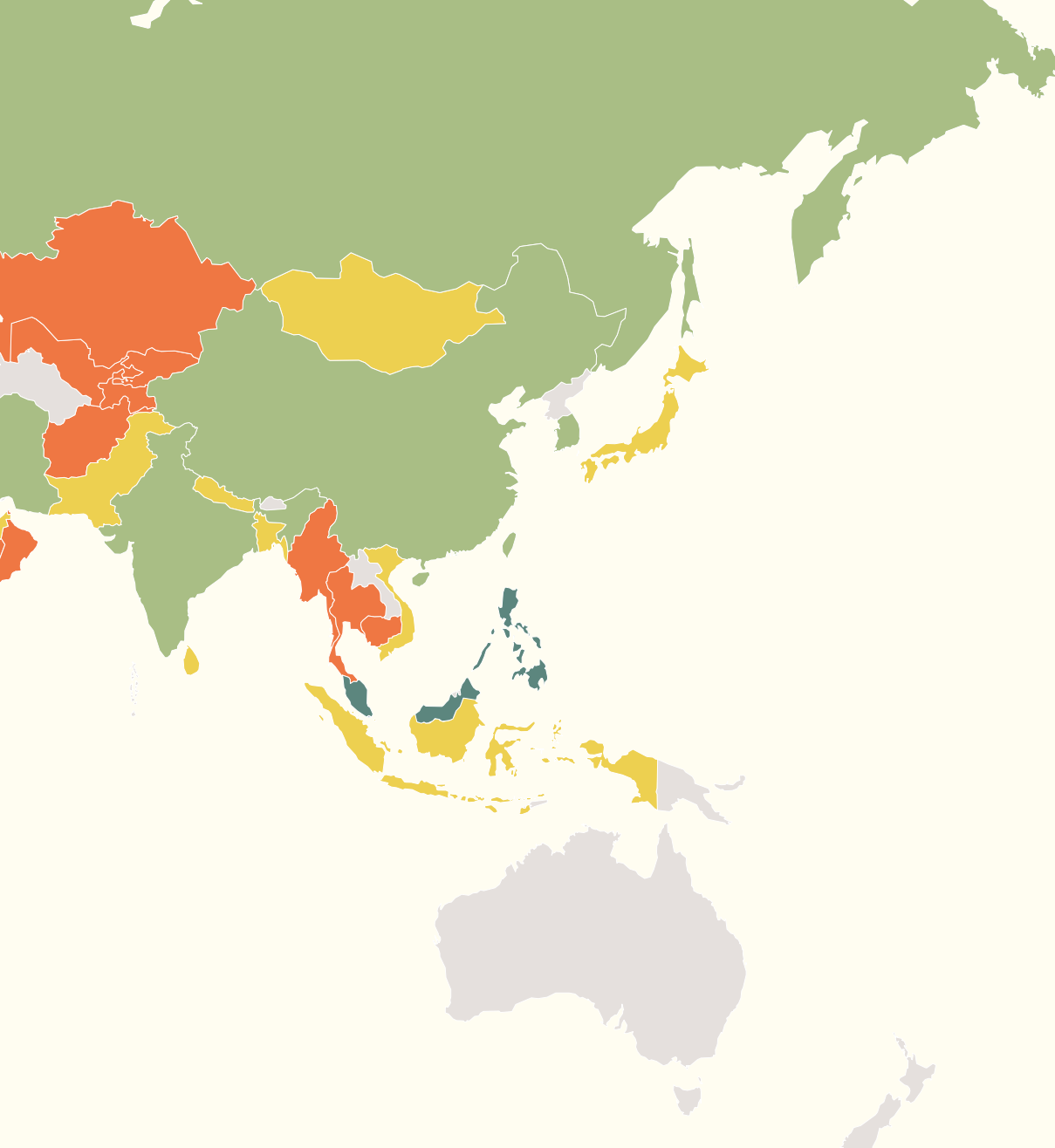
01	Netherlands	663
02	Austria	641
03	Denmark	636
04	Singapore	635
05	Norway	632
06	Belgium	629
07	Portugal	625
08	Sweden	623
09	Finland	618
10	Croatia	617
11	Germany	616
12	South Africa	606
13	Luxembourg	604

High Proficiency

14	Serbia	599
15	Romania	598
16	Poland	597
17	Hungary	593
18	Philippines	592
19	Greece	591
20	Slovakia	590
21	Kenya	587
22	Estonia	581
23	Bulgaria	580
24	Lithuania	579
25	Switzerland	575
26	Latvia	569
27	Czech Republic	563
28	Malaysia	562
29	Nigeria	560
30	Argentina	556
31	France	551

Moderate Proficiency

32	Hong Kong, China	545
33	Spain	540
34	Lebanon	536
35	Italy	535
36	Moldova	532
37	South Korea	529
38	Belarus	528
39	Albania	527
40	Ukraine	525
41	Bolivia	524
42	Ghana	523
43	Cuba	521
44	Costa Rica	520
44	Dominican Republic	520
44	Paraguay	520
47	Chile	516
48	India	515
49	China	513
50	Georgia	512
51	Russia	511
52	Tunisia	510
53	Uruguay	509
54	El Salvador	508
55	Honduras	506
56	Peru	505
57	Macau, China	504
58	Iran	501



Low Proficiency

59	Armenia	499
60	Brazil	497
61	Guatemala	493
62	Nepal	492
63	Ethiopia	491
63	Pakistan	491
65	Bangladesh	490
66	Vietnam	486
67	Tanzania	485
68	Mozambique	482
69	United Arab Emirates	480
70	Turkey	478
71	Morocco	477
72	Bahrain	476

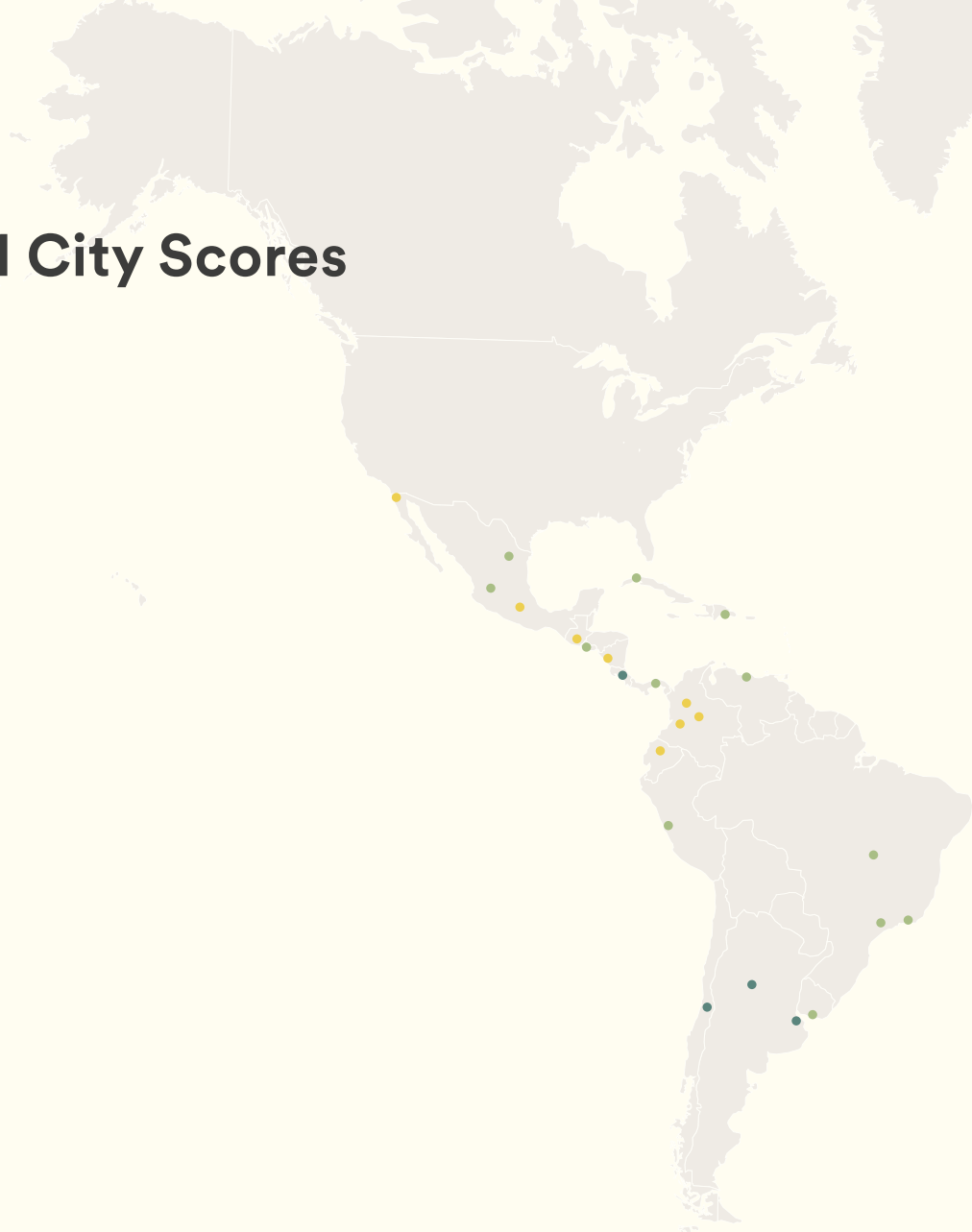
73	Panama	475
73	Venezuela	475
75	Algeria	474
76	Nicaragua	470
77	Madagascar	469
78	Japan	468
79	Qatar	467
80	Indonesia	466
81	Colombia	465
82	Sri Lanka	464
83	Mongolia	461
84	Kuwait	458
85	Egypt	455
86	Azerbaijan	451

Very Low Proficiency

87	Afghanistan	448
88	Uzbekistan	447
89	Syria	445
90	Ecuador	440
90	Jordan	440
92	Mexico	436
93	Myanmar	429
94	Angola	428
94	Cameroon	428
96	Kazakhstan	426
97	Cambodia	423
98	Sudan	421
99	Ivory Coast	420

100	Thailand	419
101	Kyrgyzstan	418
102	Oman	417
103	Tajikistan	405
104	Saudi Arabia	404
105	Haiti	403
106	Somalia	401
107	Iraq	399
108	Libya	390
109	Rwanda	389
110	Democratic Republic of the Congo	386
111	South Sudan	363
112	Yemen	360

EF EPI 2021 City Scores



Proficiency Bands

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

Very High Proficiency

Amsterdam	682
Copenhagen	668
Helsinki	659
Vienna	658
Stockholm	646
Porto	643
Johannesburg	641
Lisbon	638
Zagreb	635
Oslo	633
Budapest	628
Berlin	622
Hamburg	622
Warsaw	621
Athens	616
Zurich	616
Bucharest	612
Belgrade	604
Nairobi	601

High Proficiency

Bruxelles	598
Davao City	597
Kuala Lumpur	596
Manila	595
Paris	595
Bratislava	594
Sofia	591
Prague	590
Chennai	586
Mumbai	586
Lyon	580
Bangalore	579
Lagos	576
Milan	571
Seoul	571
Barcelona	569
Madrid	569
Buenos Aires	567
Córdoba	561
San José	553
Rome	552
Santiago	552

Moderate Proficiency

Ha Noi	548
Hyderabad	548
São Paulo	546
Hong Kong	545
Minsk	538
Saint Petersburg	537
Shanghai	537
Moscow	535
Santo Domingo	535
Accra	534
Lima	532
Kiev	531
Guadalajara	528
Havana	527
Delhi	524
Beijing	523
Tbilisi	523
Dar Es Salaam	522
Surabaya	522
Addis Ababa	521
Taipei	521

Tirana	520
Brasília	517
Tokyo	516
Montevideo	515
Shenzhen	515
Tunis	515
Tehran	514
Rio de Janeiro	513
Bandung	512
Dhaka	512
Monterrey	512
Dubai	511
Karachi	511
Kazan	511
San Salvador	510
Jakarta	506
Chengdu	505
Panama City	505
Caracas	504
Macau	504



Low Proficiency

Guangzhou	498	Managua	475
Wuhan	498	Mexico City	475
Guatemala City	497	Doha	472
Maputo	493	Bangkok	471
Algiers	492	Nur-Sultan	470
Ankara	489	Almaty	466
Medellín	489	Tijuana	464
Bogotá	486	Amman	460
Casablanca	482	Baku	459
Istanbul	482	Cali	458
Cairo	480	Ulaanbaatar	454
Ho Chi Minh City	480	Damascus	451
Quito	480		

Very Low Proficiency

Tashkent	446
Khartoum	441
Yangon	441
Kabul	440
Bishkek	437
Luanda	436
Riyadh	432
Baghdad	431
Jeddah	424
Mogadishu	423
Abidjan	421
Tripoli	421
Yaoundé	420
Dushanbe	412
Kigali	405
Kinshasa	403
Juba	375

English proficiency scores for over 400 regions and cities, as well as country and regional gender, age, and industry data, are available for download at www.ef.com/epi.

EF EPI Facts and Figures

Who are the test takers?

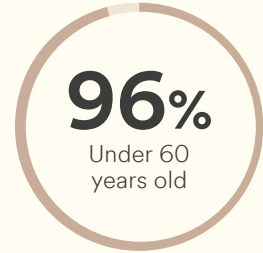
2.0M

Total Test Takers



53%

Female



47%

Male

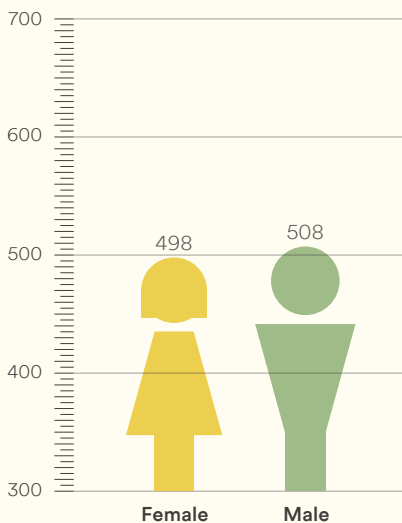
26 Years old

Median Age

How do gender and age affect English proficiency?

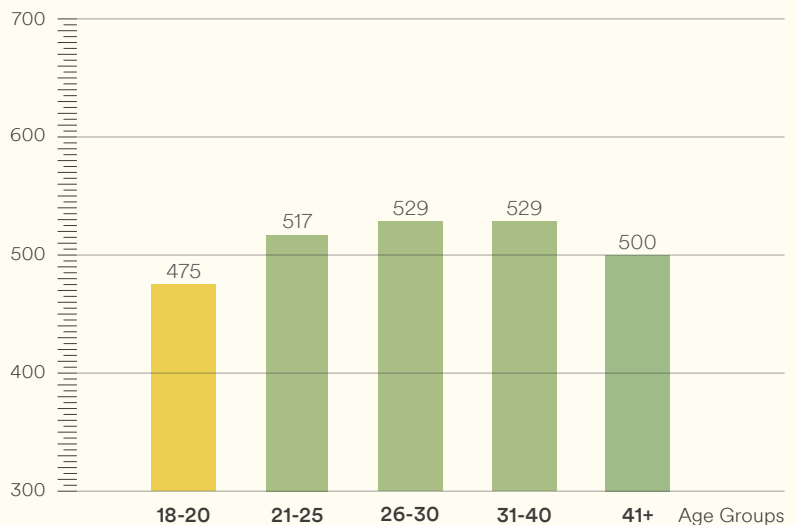
Global Gender Gap

EF EPI Score



Global Generation Gap

EF EPI Score



Proficiency Bands

● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

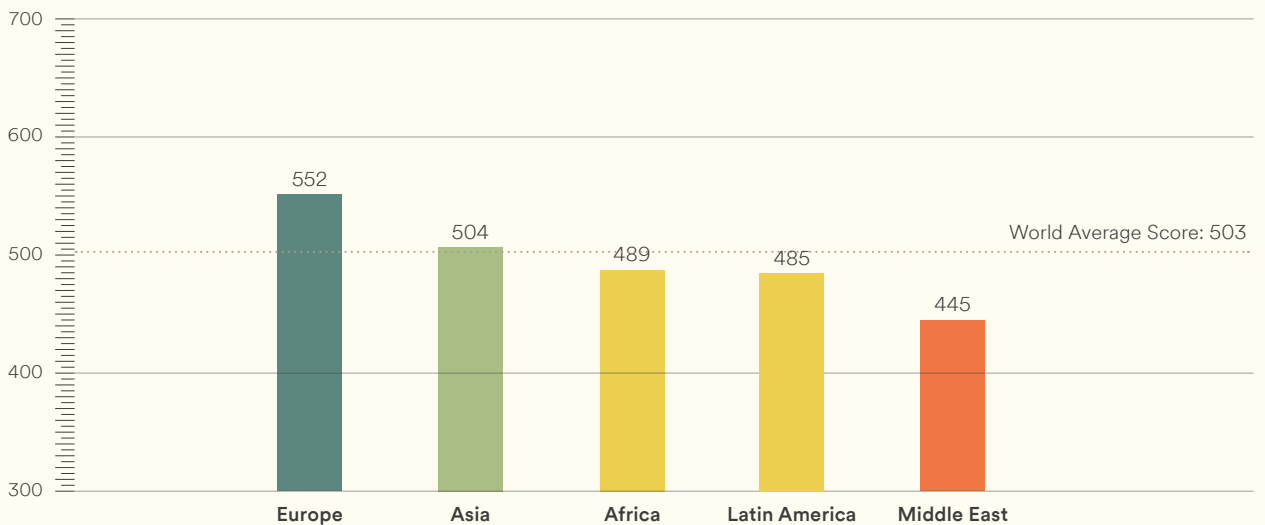
EF EPI 2021 regional trends

	Europe	Asia	Africa	Latin America	Middle East
Highest Score	Netherlands 663	Singapore 635	South Africa 606	Argentina 556	Lebanon 536
Lowest Score	Azerbaijan 451	Tajikistan 405	South Sudan 363	Haiti 403	Yemen 360
Improved Band (countries or regions)	2	3	4	6	1
Declined Band (countries or regions)	0	0	0	0	1

EF EPI 2021 regional scores

EF EPI Regional Averages

EF EPI Score

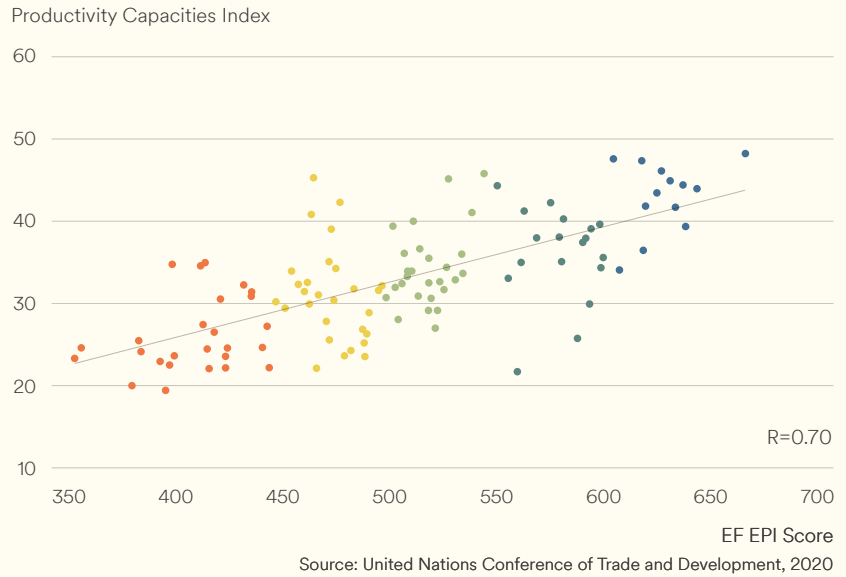


Proficiency Bands ● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

English and the Economy

Over the past decade we have found consistent correlations between English proficiency and GDP, income per capita, and a range of other economic indicators. English has become a fundamental skill in forming a modern workforce. It enables service exports, improves competitiveness, facilitates international trade, and broadens individual horizons. English has become such an essential skill that from 2025, the OECD will add it to its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) alongside reading, math, and science.

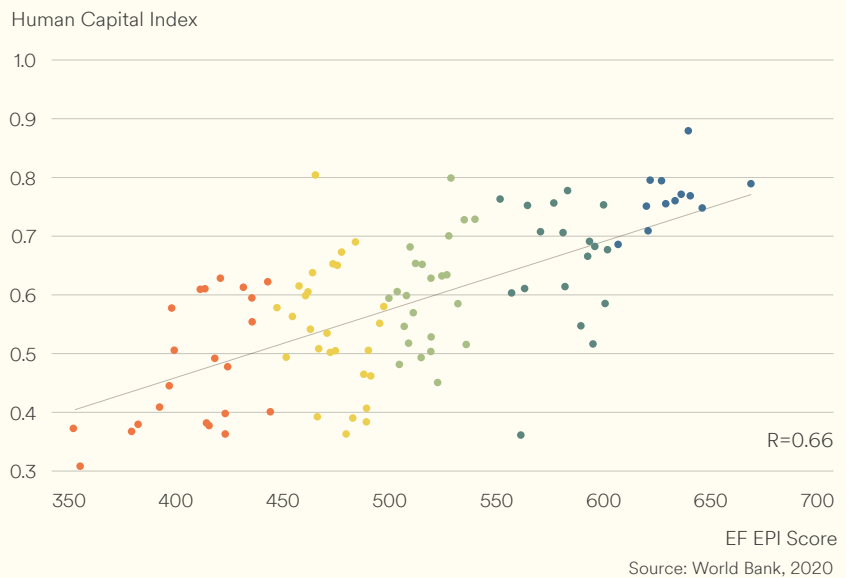
GRAPH A
English and Productivity



Proficiency Bands

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

GRAPH B
English and Human Capital



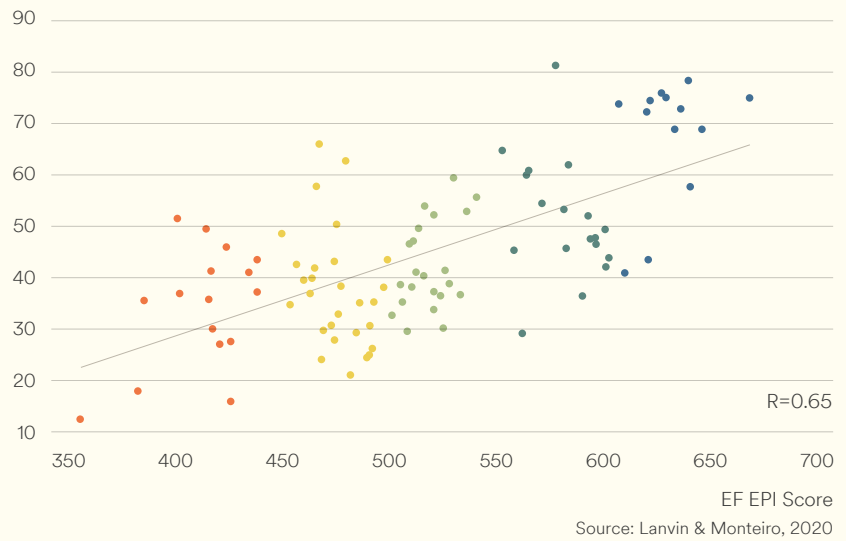
English and Innovation

Innovation depends on the flow of technology and ideas from labs, companies, and universities to public forums where they can mingle and evolve. English is the most common medium for this exchange. There is nothing inherently more innovative or scientific about the English language, but the fact that so many people speak it has created a network effect: the more people use English, the more useful it becomes.

GRAPH C

English and Talent Competitiveness

Global Talent Competitiveness Index



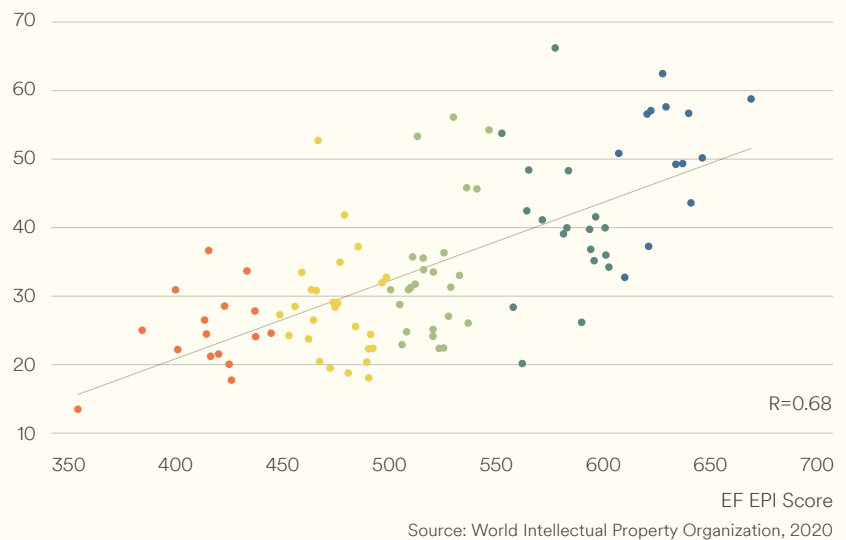
Proficiency Bands

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

GRAPH D

English and Global Innovation

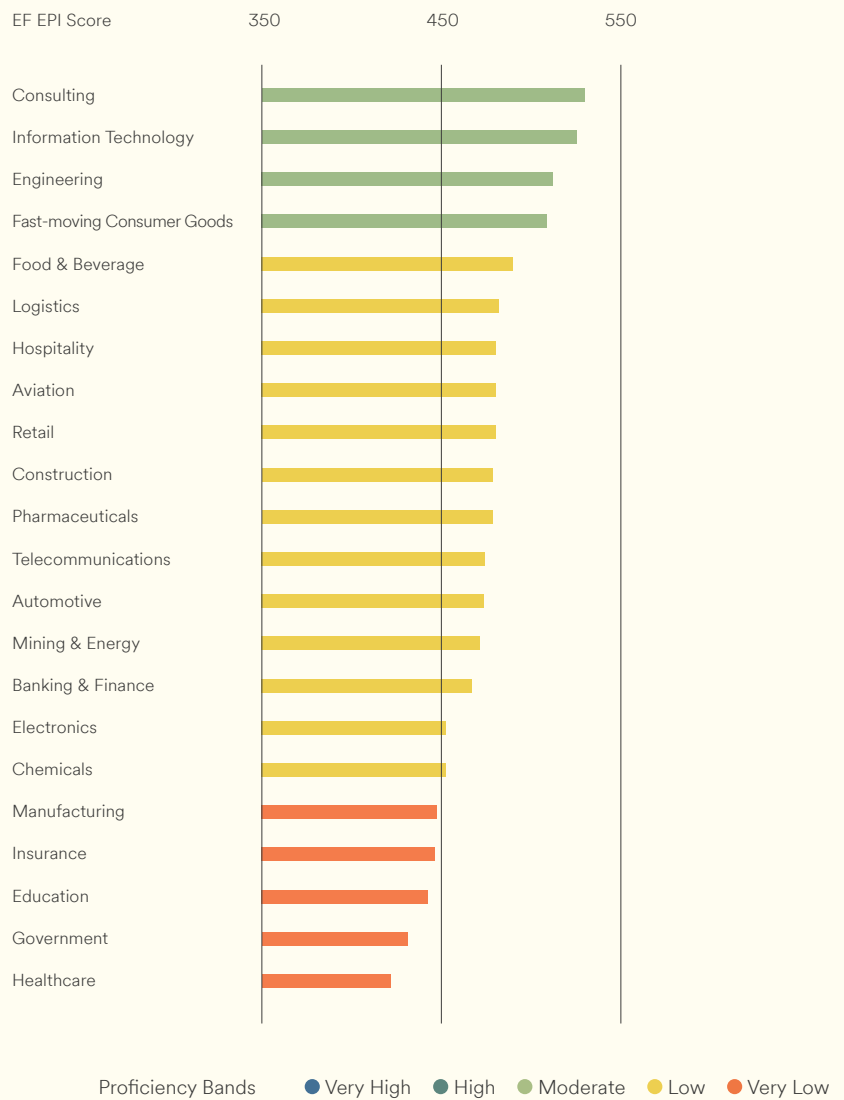
Global Innovation Index



English and Work

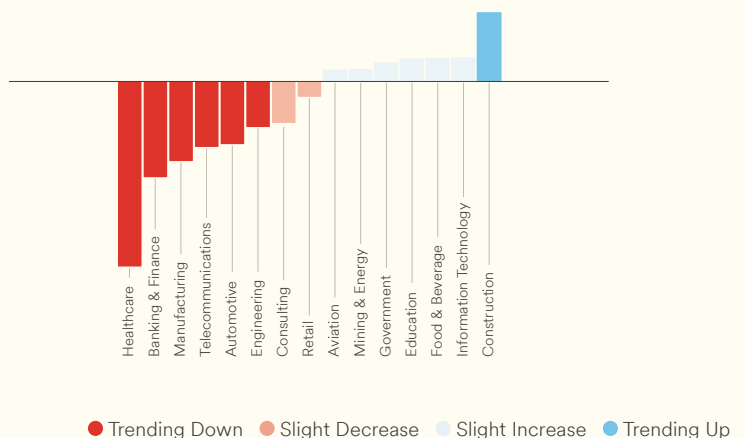
On average, the majority of industries have levels of English lower than they would need to work optimally (Moderate Proficiency or higher). Of course, this is not the case in every company. However, very few companies work in a bubble. Day to day, this means time lost to miscommunication, inefficient knowledge sharing, imprecise specifications, more laborious negotiations, and numerous other sources of drag on corporate momentum.

EF EPI by Industry



On average, English proficiency in the workplace has remained stable since 2012, but the gap between industries has narrowed by almost 20%. This supports the theory that English is increasingly a universal job requirement. Equalizing English skills across the economy is a positive trend, as it allows for more flexibility on both an individual and a structural level. The fact that English levels are not rising in the workplace, however, indicates there are still plenty of opportunities to boost organizational efficiency.

EF EPI 2012 to 2021 Industry Trends



Modern businesses are increasingly non-hierarchical with borderless teams and an emphasis on agility and innovation. When professionals lack the English skills they need to evolve into new roles, their career development is curtailed. For their employers, the result is structural inefficiency. With ever more rapidly evolving business needs, a company's ability to reskill and upskill becomes key to its competitiveness. English should be a driver of inclusion rather than a barrier for career progression.

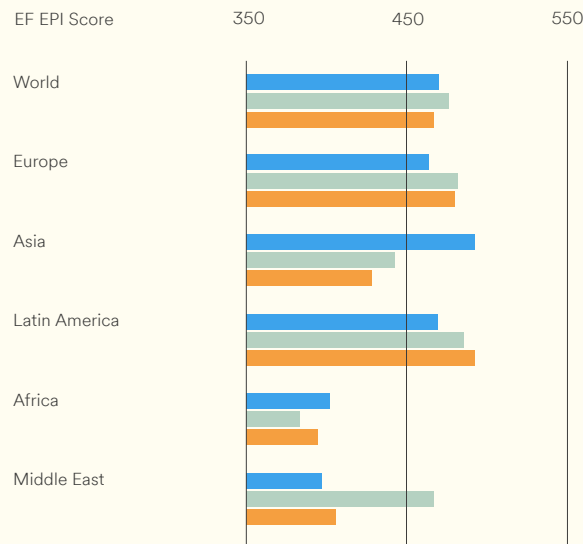
EF EPI by Job Function



Proficiency Bands: ● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

Although managers continue to have slightly better English proficiency worldwide, they are not the best English speakers in three of the five regions studied, and the gaps are unusually narrow. This democratization of English proficiency across seniority levels is in line with the steadily improving English of adults over 30. Wider seniority gaps in Asia and the Middle East are likely to close as proficiency improves.

EF EPI by Seniority

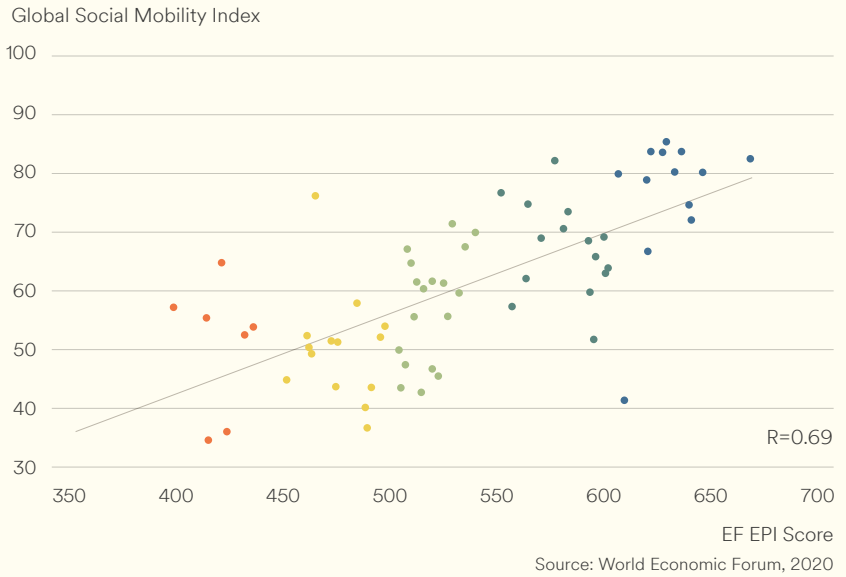


Seniority Levels: ● Executive ● Manager ● Staff

English and Society

Modern societies are plagued by rising levels of inequality which erode trust in political institutions and fuel a growing sense of injustice. English proficiency is highest in those countries giving everyone a fairer chance. Because English opens up international opportunities, it can expand socioeconomic mobility beyond that which a country can provide on its own. However, if English skills are distributed unequally, they will only compound the problem.

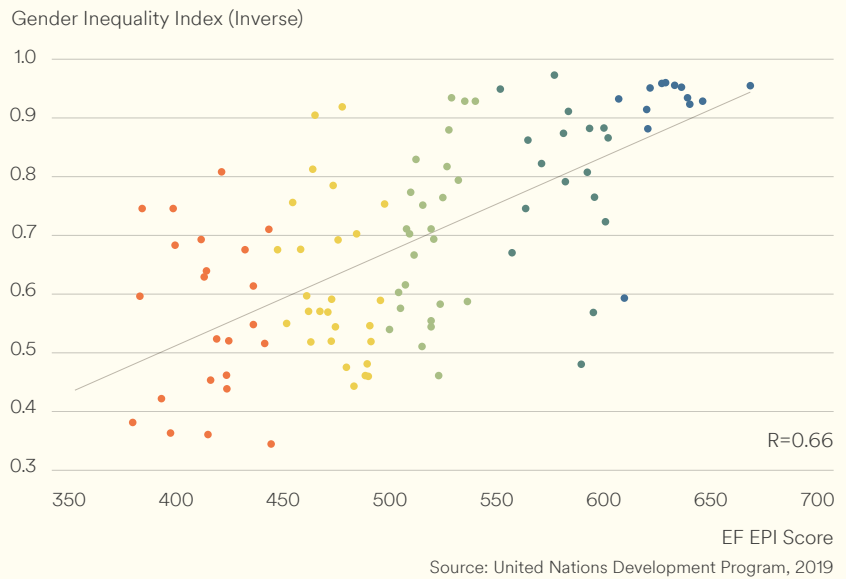
GRAPH E
English and Social Mobility



Proficiency Bands

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

GRAPH F
English and Gender Equality



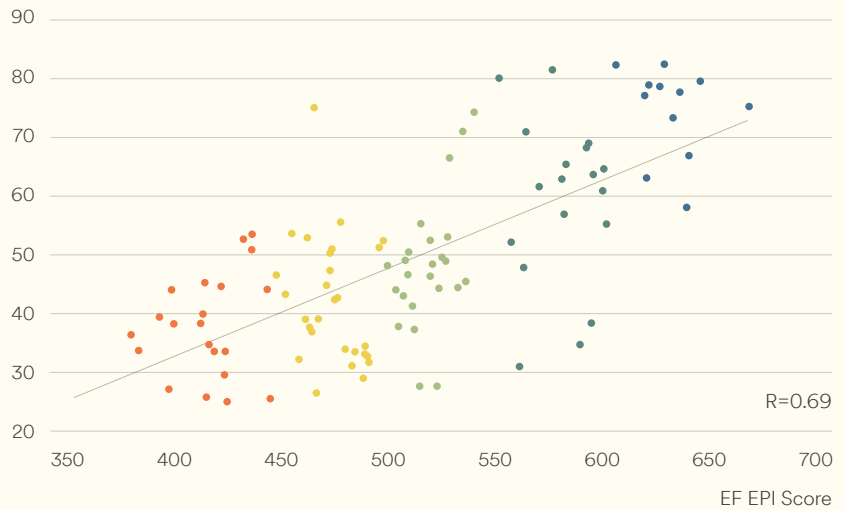
English and the Future

A globalized planet needs a way to communicate and English is firmly established in that role. Speaking English allows people to engage internationally in the broadest possible sense: meeting colleagues and watching Netflix, but also understanding humanity's common challenges and collaborating on solutions. From addressing the climate crisis to maintaining peace between nations, open access to information and frictionless international communication are the most basic prerequisites.

GRAPH G

English and the Environment

Environmental Performance Index



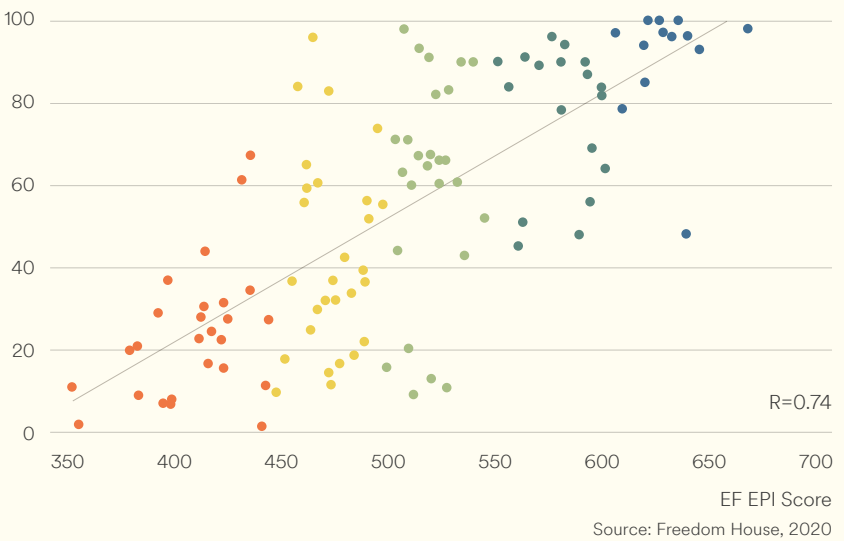
Proficiency Bands

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

GRAPH H

English and Freedom

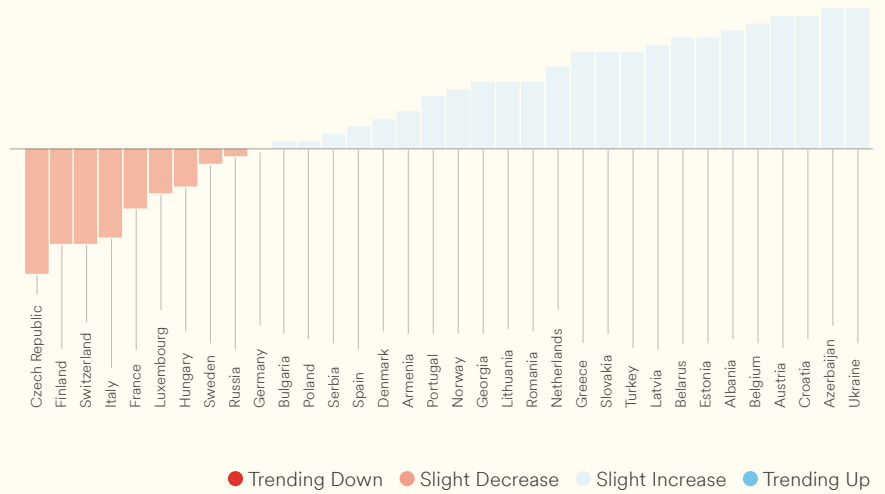
Global Freedom Scores



EF EPI Trends

The average level of English within the EU has risen by an average of six points per year since 2011, making it the area of the world with the largest gains over the past decade. Portugal has improved its English by 116 points, more than any other country in the index.

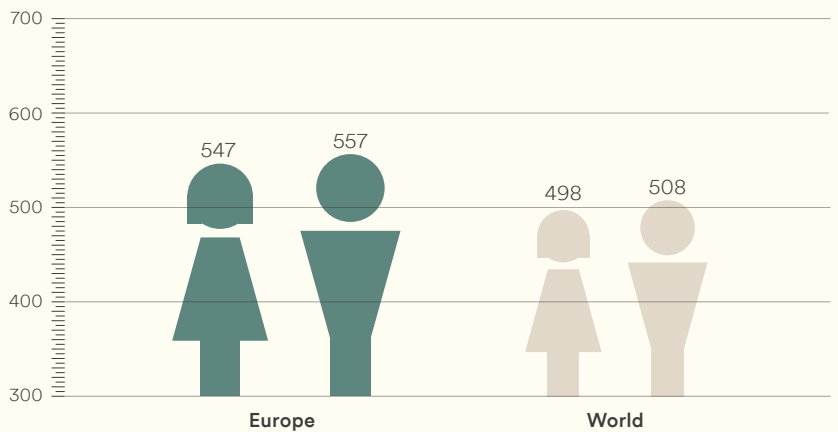
EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



Gender Gap

Last year, men’s English proficiency in Europe outpaced women’s for the first time by a very small margin. This year that gap has doubled. Men in Albania, the Czech Republic, Denmark, and Spain significantly outsourced women on average.

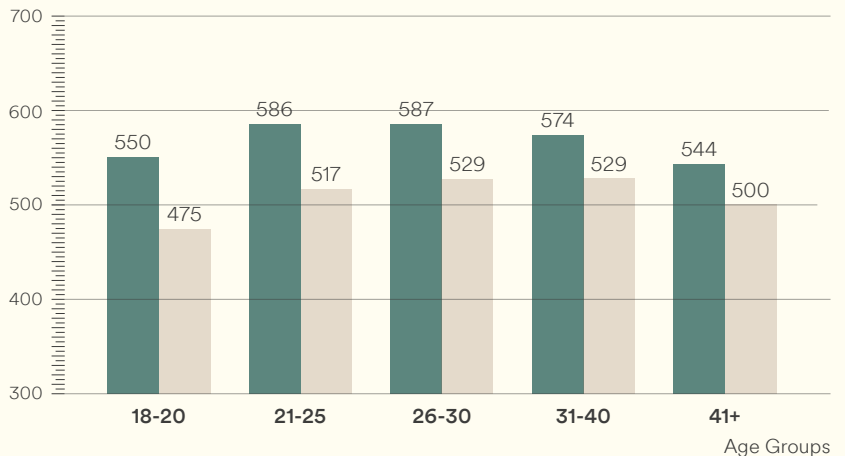
EF EPI Score



Generation Gap

Gains in English proficiency in Europe appear to be driven by older adults. Since we began collecting age data in 2015, Europeans over 40 have improved their English by almost twice as much as those aged 20-25, while the level in the 18-20 age group has remained stable.

EF EPI Score





ASIA

EF EPI Rankings

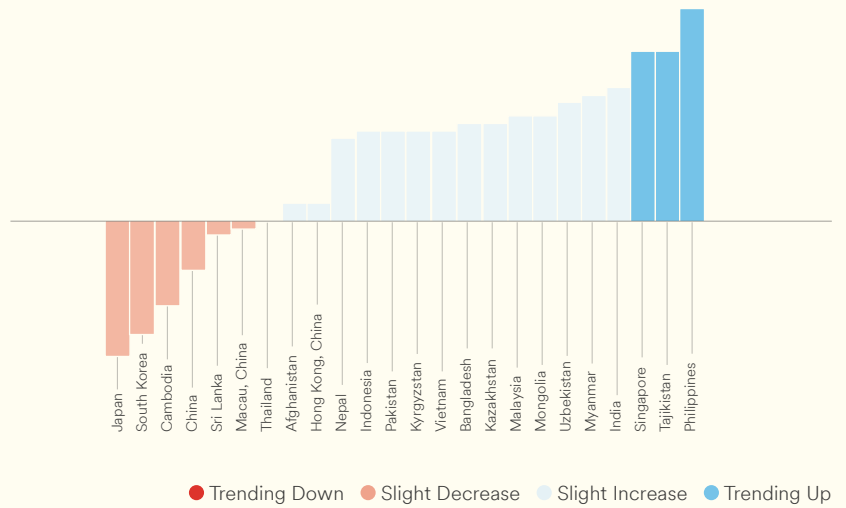
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 04 Singapore 635 18 Philippines 592 28 Malaysia 562 32 Hong Kong, China 545 37 South Korea 529 48 India 515 49 China 513 57 Macau, China 504 62 Nepal 492 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 63 Pakistan 491 65 Bangladesh 490 66 Vietnam 486 78 Japan 468 80 Indonesia 466 82 Sri Lanka 464 83 Mongolia 461 87 Afghanistan 448 88 Uzbekistan 447 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93 Myanmar 429 96 Kazakhstan 426 97 Cambodia 423 100 Thailand 419 101 Kyrgyzstan 418 103 Tajikistan 405
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Proficiency Bands ● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

EF EPI Trends

Over the past decade, English proficiency in Asia has been more stable than in any other region, but that is not the case for individual countries. Central Asia only entered the index in 2018, but it is currently the fastest-improving area in the world, with an average score change of eight points per year.

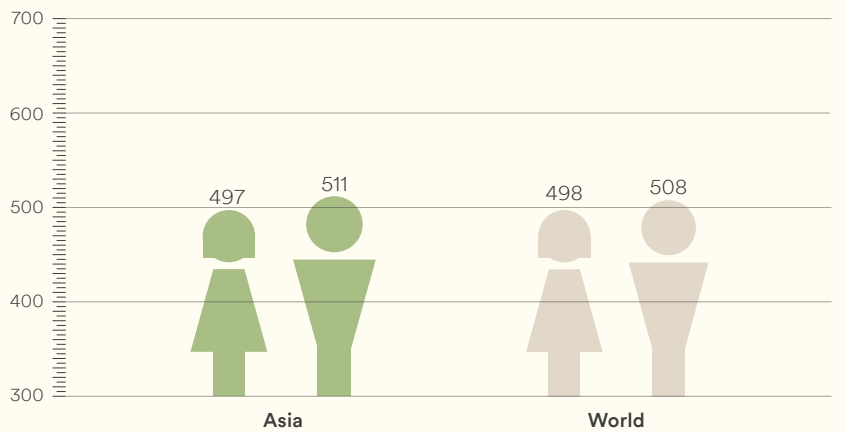
EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



Gender Gap

Men's English proficiency has outpaced women's for the first time this year in Asia, driven by India and Thailand with gender gaps of 21 and 32 points respectively. Meanwhile, China has moved in the opposite direction. Its gender gap, in favor of women by 36 points, has doubled since last year, and is now the world's third largest.

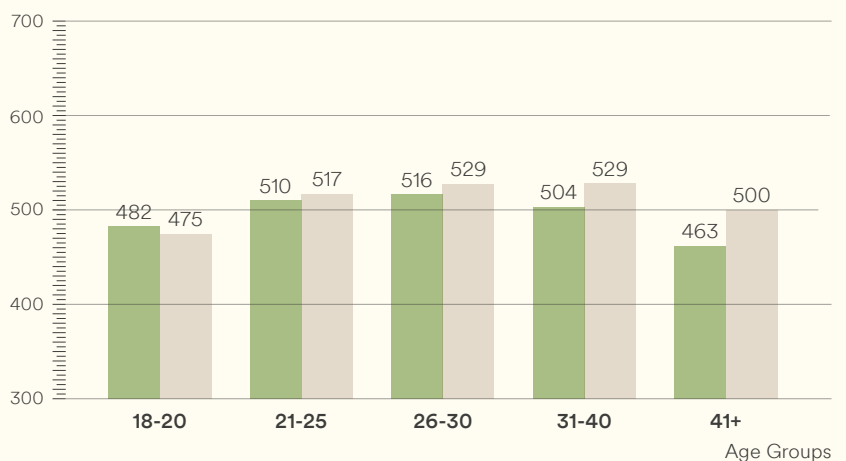
EF EPI Score



Generation Gap

Adults in their 20's and 30's remain the best English speakers in Asia. The skill distribution between age groups has not changed much since 2015, with a slight skill loss among those 18-20.

EF EPI Score



LATIN AMERICA



EF EPI Rankings

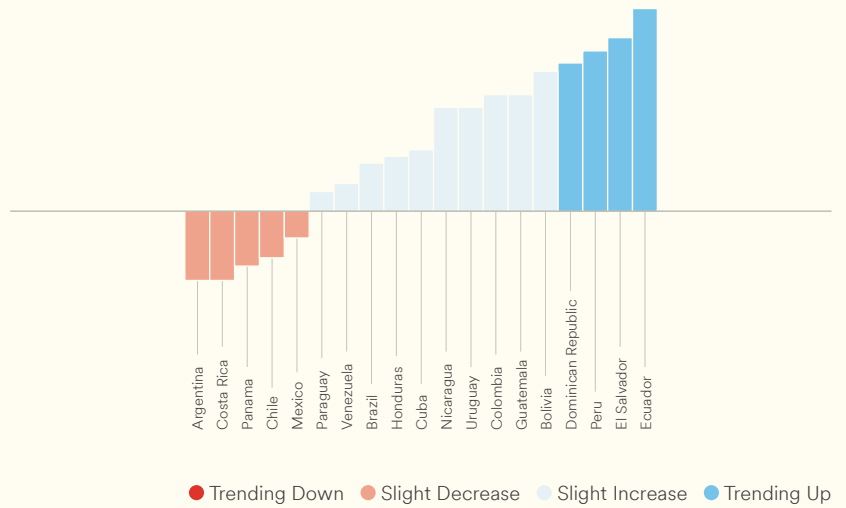
30 Argentina	556	56 Peru	505
41 Bolivia	524	60 Brazil	497
43 Cuba	521	61 Guatemala	493
44 Costa Rica	520	73 Panama	475
44 Dominican Republic	520	73 Venezuela	475
44 Paraguay	520	76 Nicaragua	470
47 Chile	516	81 Colombia	465
53 Uruguay	509	90 Ecuador	440
54 El Salvador	508	92 Mexico	436
55 Honduras	506	105 Haiti	403

Proficiency Bands ● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

EF EPI Trends

English proficiency in both Central and South America continued to rise overall in the past year with more countries now in the Moderate Proficiency band than ever before. However, Mexico's score, which has declined every year since 2017, held the Latin American average stable.

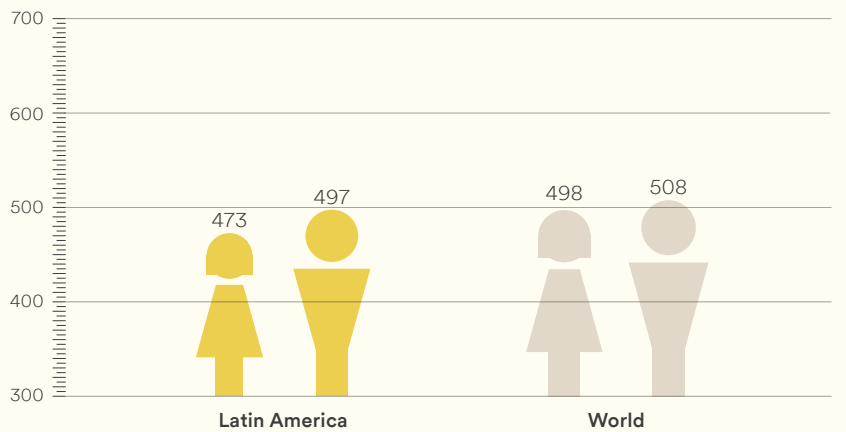
EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



Gender Gap

Since 2014, women's English proficiency in Latin America has declined slightly while men's has improved significantly, leaving the second largest gender gap of any region of the world. Of the eight countries where men have the greatest advantage in English proficiency, five are in Latin America.

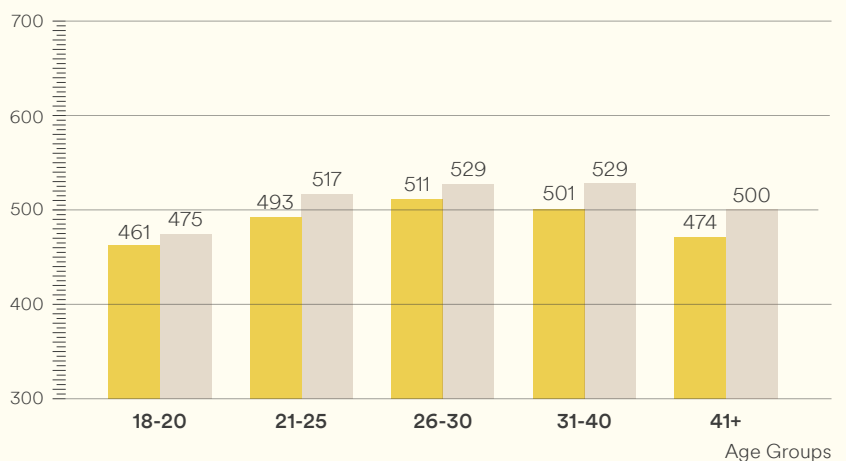
EF EPI Score



Generation Gap

The largest gains in English proficiency in Latin America since 2015 have been among adults in their 30's. Although school systems are often credited (or blamed) for the level of English, economic incentives, workplace exposure, and access to English-language media are clearly contributing to adult proficiency.

EF EPI Score





AFRICA

EF EPI Rankings

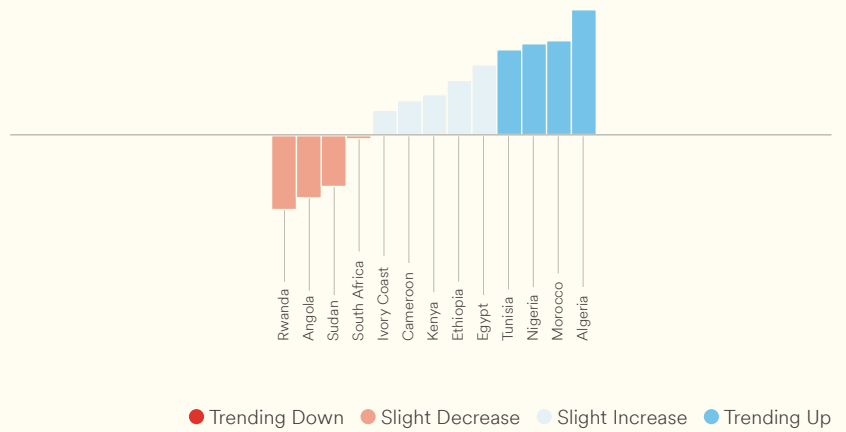
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 South Africa 606 21 Kenya 587 29 Nigeria 560 42 Ghana 523 52 Tunisia 510 63 Ethiopia 491 67 Tanzania 485 68 Mozambique 482 71 Morocco 477 75 Algeria 474 77 Madagascar 469 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85 Egypt 455 94 Angola 428 94 Cameroon 428 98 Sudan 421 99 Ivory Coast 420 106 Somalia 401 108 Libya 390 109 Rwanda 389 110 Democratic Republic of the Congo 386 111 South Sudan 363
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Proficiency Bands ● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

EF EPI Trends

We do not yet have enough historic data on adult English proficiency in Africa to be able to speak of continent-wide trends, but a third of the countries which improved significantly since last year are in Africa. North Africa in particular stands out for its steady gains.

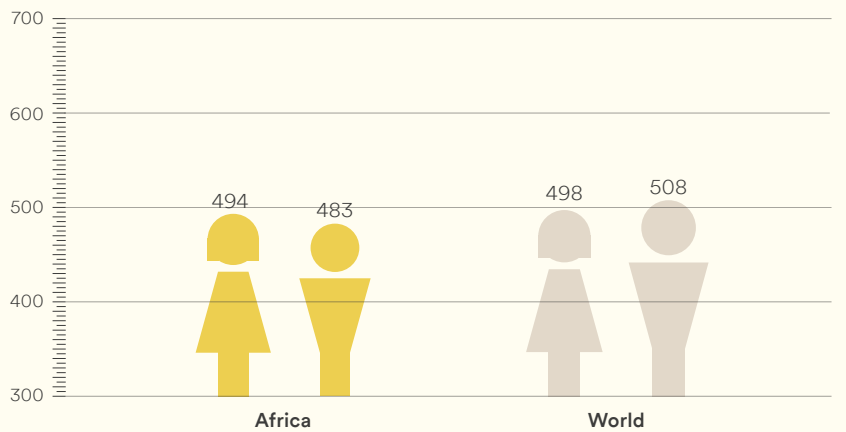
EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



Gender Gap

Africa is the only region in this year's index where women's English proficiency is higher than men's. Of the seven countries with a significant proficiency gap in favor of women, five are African (Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, South Africa and Sudan).

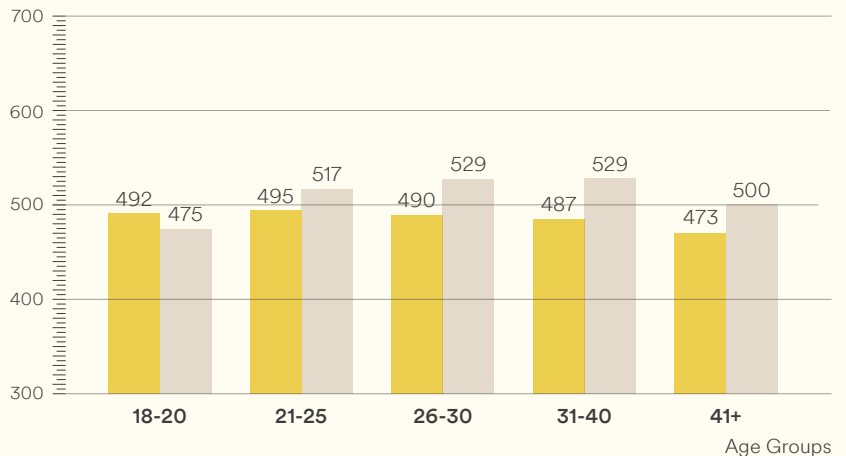
EF EPI Score

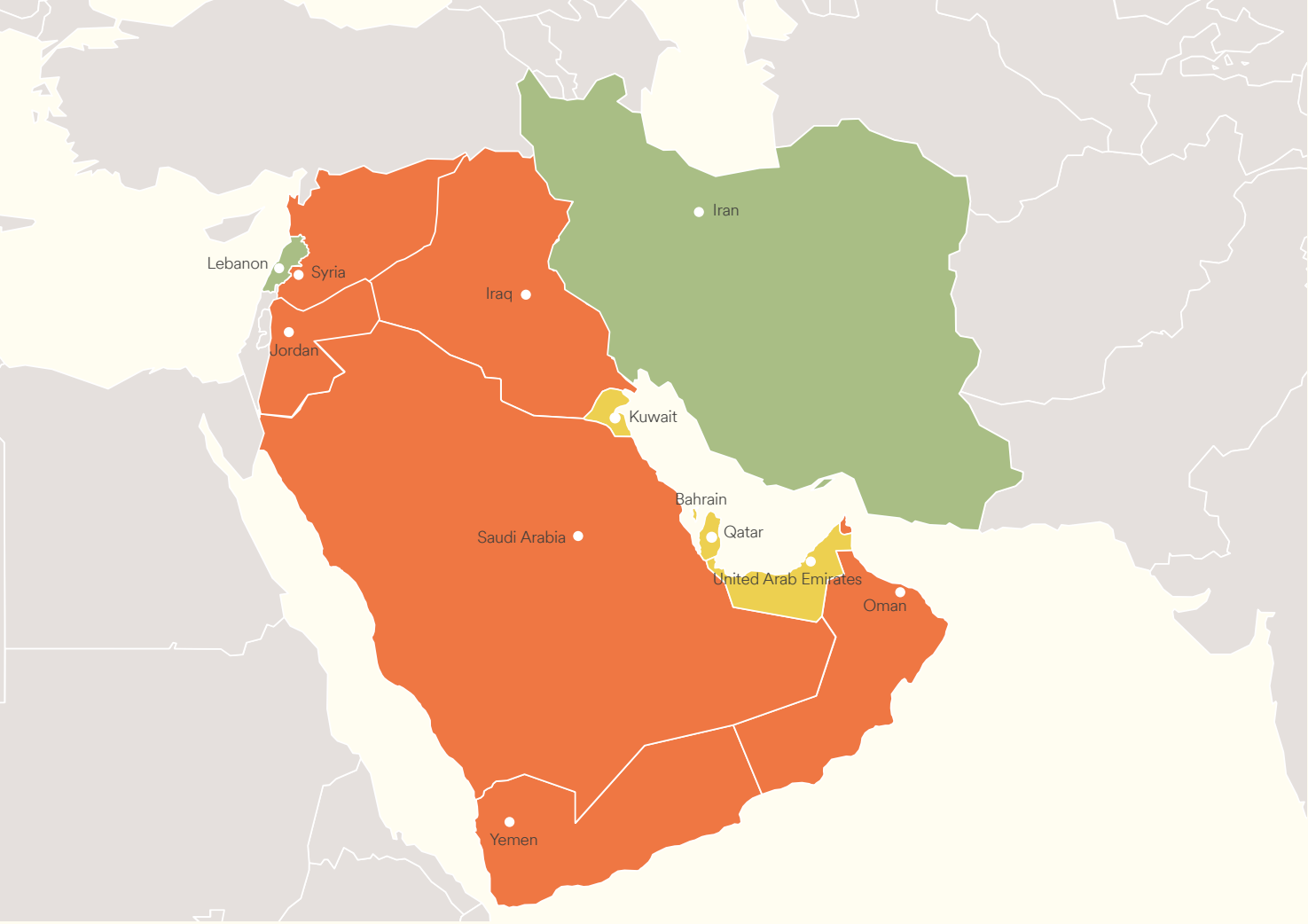


Generation Gap

In Africa on average, age is not a determining factor in English proficiency. However, this trend is driven exclusively by countries where English is an official language. In other African countries, the gap between the highest and lowest proficiency age groups is far wider.

EF EPI Score





MIDDLE EAST

EF EPI Rankings

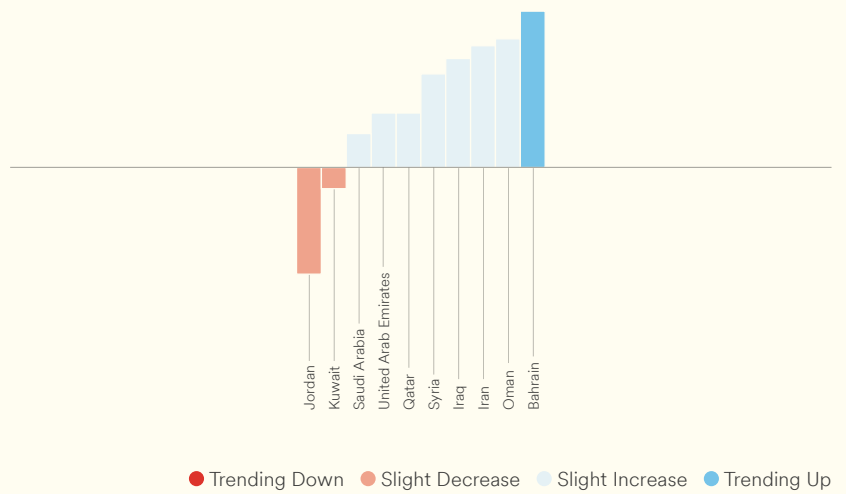
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 34 Lebanon 536 58 Iran 501 69 United Arab Emirates 480 72 Bahrain 476 79 Qatar 467 84 Kuwait 458 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 89 Syria 445 90 Jordan 440 102 Oman 417 104 Saudi Arabia 404 107 Iraq 399 112 Yemen 360
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Proficiency Bands ● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

EF EPI Trends

Although the Middle East has made progress over the past decade, other regions have improved more quickly, causing the majority of countries to slip down the rankings. While Asia, Europe, Latin America and North Africa have gained an average of five or more points per year, the Middle East has only gained three.

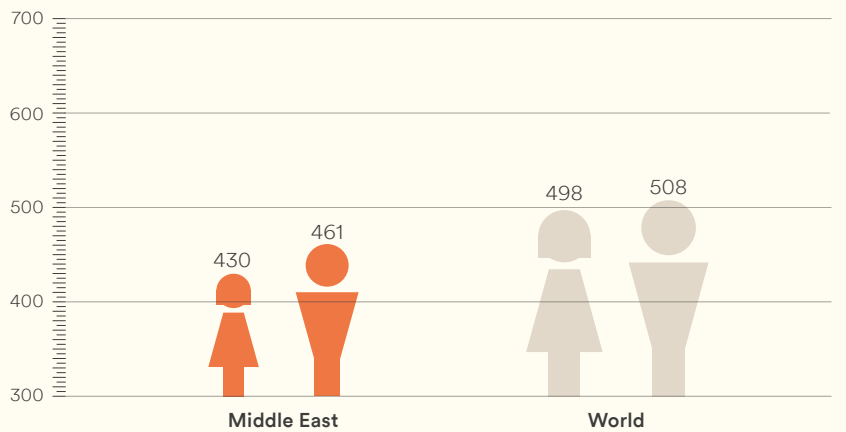
EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



Gender Gap

The English proficiency gap between genders has widened this year in the Middle East, driven mainly by Saudi Arabia and Iraq. However, like elsewhere, the situation is heterogeneous. In the U.A.E., women have higher proficiency than men, and in six other countries in the region, there is no real difference in proficiency by gender.

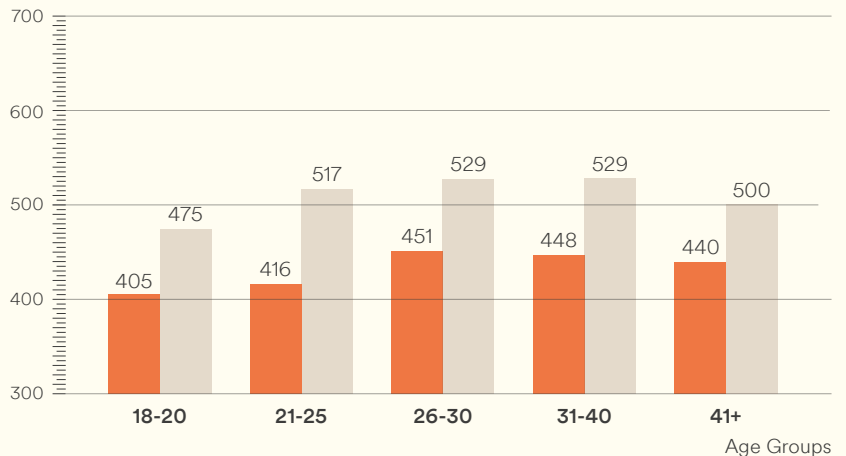
EF EPI Score



Generation Gap

In the Middle East, English proficiency in under-25s as compared to other adults is strikingly low. This age-related gap opened up last year and has widened slightly after simultaneous proficiency gains in people over 30 and losses in younger groups. For a youthful region, this trend is worrisome.

EF EPI Score



Conclusions

In 2021, English is a powerful tool for information exchange. All fields, from science to culture, diplomacy to business, use it to share their work and keep abreast of innovation.

If the adoption of English is rooted in history, the need for a lingua franca springs from globalization. The more our economies, technologies and populations have intertwined, the more we have needed a way to communicate across borders. As a consequence, English usage has spread around the world over the past decades, unevenly but persistently.

As companies internationalize, they hire more English speakers and invest in training their employees. Education systems realize that graduates need better English and improve their teaching methods. Adults who want to improve their competitiveness get their children tutors and sign up for night classes. In country after country, the patterns are the same.

There are also other patterns, older ones of colonialism alongside newer ones of mass tourism and streaming media. When people ask, "Why don't people in x country speak English better?" the answer is never straightforward, but what is straightforward are the elements that must come together for an adult to learn a language: motivation, instruction, exposure and practice.

Pandemic geography

The COVID pandemic loosened our ties to geography while simultaneously reinforcing them. The loosening occurred as activities moved online. School, work, volunteerism, culture: everything went virtual. Where you lived hardly seemed to matter anymore. Parents left the city; emigrants went home; both kept their jobs. Companies gave up leases on large offices. Conferences, concerts, and other cultural events became accessible to people everywhere.

Office culture opened up too. Where once colleagues interacted most frequently with their office mates, from home, they developed new borderless routines. With all meetings already online, why not invite the colleague from Japan, the partner from Argentina? Time zones were the only remaining barrier, and a low one at that.

At the same time, borders snapped shut and international travel dropped by over 70%. As governments rolled out restrictions, we found out how much power they actually have. More stationary than at any time in living memory, our lives became profoundly local. How bad things got, how much freedom you had, how quickly you got vaccinated: all depended on where you were physically located.

What stays online

It is impossible to say at this point which pandemic habits we will carry into the future, but a few seem obvious. Working from home has been well and truly tried. Many companies will not go back to the old way, at least not completely. While employment law will continue to stand in the way of open, cross-border working arrangements, companies already say they are hiring further afield and are no longer averse to flexible working arrangements. English will be a key skill for those who want to access these location-neutral positions.

The pandemic also put online learning through its paces. We now know children need to be in classrooms, but we have also seen how well online learning can work for adults when all the prerequisites are met: teachers who understand the platform, a good internet connection, functional software and hardware. Those who spent all or part of the pandemic studying online may return eagerly to school, but they will not lose the skills to take charge of their own education and learn more autonomously in the future.

Education systems themselves, from teachers to deans and network administrators, have learned a lot from their forced period of virtual instruction. While primary and secondary schools will likely go back to a purely face-to-face model, universities may have crossed a threshold. Will online and blended degrees become options within the mainstream university experience? Only time will tell.

Finally, to learn a language, people need huge amounts of exposure and practice (roughly 1,200 hours to go from beginner to upper intermediate). Moving abroad for full immersion is the quickest option, but for professionals, a high-quality online school is probably the next best choice, especially when combined with a job where they can put their new skills to immediate use. Online English schools have competed with brick-and-mortar schools for years, but the pandemic may prove a tipping point in their adoption.

Not too far

Fundamentally, the more interconnected the world is, the more people need to communicate across borders. However, the pursuit of English proficiency, if taken too far, causes collateral damage.

When English is used as the sole language of instruction before children have been educated in their native language, educational outcomes suffer. In order for children to develop to their full intellectual potential, they must be taught in a language they understand. English can be introduced from a young age, but it cannot replace mother tongue instruction until children are fully proficient. Likewise, ministries that rush headlong into introducing English-language instruction without first training teachers waste time and money trying to recover from that mistake.

Countries that were colonized have an understandably complex relationship to their colonial language. Deciding which roles different languages should play in the educational system merits careful reflection and a national dialog.

As higher education internationalizes, pressure to attract students from abroad has grown, which often means universities in non-English speaking countries offering degree programs in English. Although this practice is fine on a small scale, when expanded across a university system, it denies non-English-speaking students a tertiary education, and over time, reduces the number of students who have received a university-level education in the language they were born into. This risk is easy to mitigate—ensure a steady supply of higher education degree programs in national languages. International students can also learn their host country’s language (and become excellent ambassadors) if encouraged and supported in that direction.

Equalizing access to English

Speaking English has become a requirement to access skilled work in many countries, and yet more must be done to ensure equal access to English education. In too many places, only urban schools have English teachers, and even when teacher supply is not an issue, the level of instruction is too low. Parents send their children to private schools or abroad to learn English. Adults use their evenings and vacations to improve their proficiency. Those who do not have these resources get left behind. English skills allow access to international training and career progression, as well as providing a vehicle for better mutual understanding and belonging in the workplace.

If English proficiency is not to become one more source of frustration in unequal societies, more must be done to define it as a core skill. Children and young adults need to be taught English to a professional level during the course of their basic education. Adults need access to continuing education programs that work. Public servants and private sector employees need English training aligned to the needs of not just their current position, but their careers.

Speaking English opens up enormous opportunities. More people deserve access to them.

Recommendations

Most organizations and individuals are convinced of the advantages of English proficiency. However, not everyone knows how to get there. Here are a few recommendations for different stakeholders.

For companies

- Set realistic goals that take into account the hours needed to close the gap between current and target proficiency levels for each individual.
- Build a culture of internationalism and mobility, including in branch offices.
- Use platforms that facilitate frequent contact between teams in different countries.
- Build diverse, multinational teams in all functions, including the back office.
- Test the entire workforce to identify strategic weaknesses in English.
- Train employees using a role-specific English curriculum.
- Leverage technology to bring flexible learning at scale.
- Set minimum standards of English proficiency for different roles, and test that those standards are being met.
- Reward employees who invest time in improving their English.
- Encourage executives and managers to lead by example and share their experiences as English learners.
- Prioritize access to English learning for all employees.

For governments and education authorities

- Consider the hours available in the curriculum and the proficiency level achievable for each major educational milestone.
 - Use large-scale assessment of both teachers and students to benchmark a starting point and track progress over time.
 - Adjust entrance and exit exams so that they evaluate communicative English skills.
 - Include English in the training regimens for all new teachers.
 - Re-train English teachers in communicative teaching methods if they were initially trained using other methods.
 - Ensure that English is taught only by people who speak the language well enough to instruct in it.
 - Set a minimum level required to teach English, test instructors regularly, and train those who miss the mark.
 - Teach children to read and write in their own native language.
- Assess the English skills of all public servants and provide training as necessary, not only for their current jobs, but also for their careers.
 - Provide English language instruction in job centers and unemployment reduction programs.
 - Give adults access to lifelong learning programs.
 - Ensure that government-funded adult language courses are long enough and intensive enough for learners to meet their goals.
 - Develop standardized micro-credentials that certify course quality and improve skill portability.
 - Allow TV shows and movies to be shown in their original language, with subtitles rather than dubbing.

For teachers, schools, and universities

- Teach English using a communication-based methodology.
- Give students frequent opportunities to speak English through activities like English clubs, theme days, classroom twinning, school trips, and guest speakers.
- Provide a forum for teachers to share best practices and get advice about teaching English effectively.
- Give teachers a straightforward path to improve their own English.
- Include English language requirements for all university majors.
- Allow subject classes to be taught in English if both the students and the professor meet the requisite English level.

For individuals

- Play the long game: plan for the hundreds of hours it takes to move from one proficiency level to the next.
- Be aware of growing competence at different stages and celebrate your successes.
- Study English every day, even if only for a few minutes.
- Study in sessions of 20-30 minutes rather than for hours at a time.
- Set specific, achievable goals and write them down.
- Memorize vocabulary relevant to your job or field of study and begin using it immediately.
- Practice speaking, even if it's just reading a book aloud.
- Watch TV, read, or listen to the radio in English.
- When traveling to an English-speaking country, speak as much as possible.
- Use social media in English and set computers and apps to English to get more built-in exposure to the language.

About the Index

Methodology

This edition of the EF EPI is based on test data from more than 2,000,000 test takers around the world who took the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) or one of our English placement tests in 2020.

The EF Standard English Test (EF SET)

The EF SET is an online, adaptive English test of reading and listening skills. It is a standardized, objectively scored test designed to classify test takers' language abilities into one of the six levels established by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The EF SET is available to any Internet user for free. For more information about the research and development of the EF SET, visit www.efset.org/about/.

EF EPI 2021 scores have been found to correlate strongly with TOEFL iBT 2019 scores ($r=0.81$) and IELTS Academic Test 2019 scores ($r=0.73$). These correlations show that, while these tests have different designs and test taker profiles, they reveal similar trends in national English proficiency.

Test Takers

Although the sample of test takers for the EF EPI is biased toward respondents who are interested in pursuing language study and younger adults, the sample is roughly balanced between male and female respondents and represents adult language learners from a broad range of ages.

- Female respondents comprised 53% of the overall sample.
- The median age of adult respondents was 26.
- 83% of all respondents were under the age of 35, and 96% were under the age of 60.
- The median age of male respondents was 27, slightly higher than the median age of female respondents, which was 26.

Only cities, regions, and countries with a minimum of 400 test takers were included in the Index, but in most cases the number of test takers was far greater.

Sampling Biases

The test-taking population represented in this Index is self-selected and not guaranteed to be representative. Only those who want to learn English or are curious about their English skills will participate in one of these tests. This could skew scores lower or higher than those of the general population. However, there is no incentive for test takers to inflate their scores artificially on these low-stakes tests by cheating, as the results are purely for personal use.

The EF SET is free and online, so anyone with an Internet connection can participate. Almost all of our test takers are working adults or young adults finishing their studies. People without Internet access would be automatically excluded. The EF SET site is fully adaptive and 30% of test takers complete the exam from a mobile device.

In parts of the world where Internet usage is low, we would expect the impact of an online format to be strong. This sampling bias would tend to pull scores upward by excluding poorer and less educated people. Nevertheless, open access online tests have proven effective in gathering very large amounts of data about a range of indicators, and we believe they provide valuable information about global English proficiency levels.

Score Calculation

To calculate an EF EPI score, we used weighted components which include English tests and the EF EPI from 2020. Inclusion of the previous year's Index helps to stabilize scores year over year, but test takers from the previous year are not counted in the total test taker count for the current year. Regional averages are weighted by population.

Based on score thresholds, we assign countries, regions, and cities to proficiency bands. This allows recognition of clusters with similar English skill levels and comparisons within and between regions.

CEFR	EF EPI Score
C2	700-800
C1	600-699
B2	500-599
B1	400-499
A2	300-399
A1	200-299
Pre-A1	1-199

- The Very High Proficiency band corresponds to CEFR level C1.
- The High and Moderate Proficiency bands correspond to CEFR level B2, with each EF EPI band corresponding to half of the CEFR level.
- The Low Proficiency band corresponds to the upper half of CEFR level B1.
- The Very Low Proficiency band corresponds to the lower half of CEFR level B1 and A2.

Other Data Sources

The EF EPI does not aim to compete with or contradict national test results, language polling data, or any other data set. Instead, these data sets complement each other. Some are granular but limited in scope to a single age group, country, region, or test taker profile. The EF EPI is broad, examining working-aged adults around the world using a common assessment method. There is no other data set of comparable size and scope, and, despite its limitations, we, along with many policymakers, scholars, and analysts, believe it to be a valuable reference point in the global conversation about English language education.

The EF EPI is created through a different process from the one used by public opinion research organizations such as Euromonitor and Gallup, or by the OECD in skills surveys such as PISA and PIAAC. Those studies select survey participants using age, gender, level of education, income, and other factors. Their survey panels tend to be small, with at most a few thousand participants. Because they have been composed using complex sampling methods, they are considered representative of the entire population. Unfortunately, no such survey of English skills has ever been performed at an international level.

Another source of data about English proficiency comes from national education systems. Many schools test the English skills of every high school student or university applicant using a standardized national assessment. The results may or may not be made public, but educators and government officials use the data to assess the efficacy of education reform and pinpoint areas for improvement. Unfortunately, those national assessments are not comparable to each other, and they are not administered to adults, so while they give a good indication of English proficiency among high school students in one part of the world, they cannot be used for international comparison, nor can they tell us much about adult English proficiency levels.

EF Education First

EF Education First (EF), founded in Sweden in 1965, provides culturally immersive education through language, travel, cultural exchange, and academic programs in over 100 countries. Learn more by visiting www.ef.com. The EF English Proficiency Index is published by Signum International AG.

EF EPI

Proficiency Bands

About EF EPI Proficiency Bands

The EF English Proficiency Index places the surveyed countries and territories into five proficiency bands, from Very High to Very Low. The bands make it easier to identify countries and regions with similar skill levels and to draw comparisons between and within regions.

In the chart on the right, we give examples of tasks that an individual could accomplish at each proficiency band. The selection of tasks is not meant to be exhaustive, but it is a useful reference for understanding how skills advance across the bands.

It is important to keep in mind that a proficiency band merely indicates the level of the “average” person. The EF EPI seeks to compare countries and territories, which necessitates overlooking individual strengths and weaknesses.

Proficiency

Very High

Netherlands
Singapore
Sweden

Sample Tasks

- ✓ Use nuanced and appropriate language in social situations
- ✓ Read advanced texts with ease
- ✓ Negotiate a contract with a native English speaker

High

Hungary
Philippines
Kenya

- ✓ Make a presentation at work
- ✓ Understand TV shows
- ✓ Read a newspaper

Moderate

Italy
Costa Rica
China

- ✓ Participate in meetings in one's area of expertise
- ✓ Understand song lyrics
- ✓ Write professional emails on familiar subjects

Low

Guatemala
Pakistan
Turkey

- ✓ Navigate an English-speaking country as a tourist
- ✓ Engage in small talk with colleagues
- ✓ Understand simple emails from colleagues

Very Low

Mexico
Tajikistan
Rwanda

- ✓ Introduce oneself simply (name, age, country of origin)
- ✓ Understand simple signs
- ✓ Give basic directions to a foreign visitor

CEFR Levels and Can-Do Statements

Proficient User

-
- | | |
|-----------|--|
| C2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. • Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. • Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently, and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. |
| C1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. • Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. • Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. • Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices. |

Independent User

-
- | | |
|-----------|--|
| B2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. • Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. • Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. |
| B1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. • Can deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken. • Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. • Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. |

Basic User

-
- | | |
|-----------|--|
| A2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to most relevant areas (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). • Can communicate during routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar matters. • Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need. |
| A1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. • Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows, and things he/she has. • Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. |

Quoted From the Council of Europe

All countries and regions in the EF EPI fall into bands corresponding to levels A2-C1.

EF EPI Country and Region Rankings

A look at changes
in English skills over
the past year:

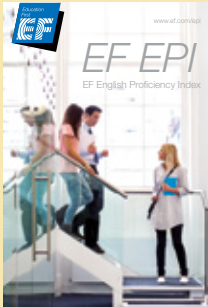
	EF EPI 2020 Edition	EF EPI 2021 Edition	Score Change
Netherlands	652	663	+11
Austria	623	641	+18
Denmark	632	636	+4
Singapore	611	635	+24
Norway	624	632	+8
Belgium	612	629	+17
Portugal	618	625	+7
Sweden	625	623	-2
Finland	631	618	-13
Croatia	599	617	+18
Germany	616	616	+0
South Africa	607	606	-1
Luxembourg	610	604	-6
Serbia	597	599	+2
Romania	589	598	+9
Poland	596	597	+1
Hungary	598	593	-5
Philippines	562	592	+30
Greece	578	591	+13
Slovakia	577	590	+13
Kenya	577	587	+10
Estonia	566	581	+15
Bulgaria	579	580	+1
Lithuania	570	579	+9
Switzerland	588	575	-13
Latvia	555	569	+14
Czech Republic	580	563	-17
Malaysia	547	562	+15
Nigeria	537	560	+23
Argentina	566	556	-10
France	559	551	-8
Hong Kong, China	542	545	+3
Spain	537	540	+3
Lebanon	—	536	Re-entry
Italy	547	535	-12
Moldova	—	532	New
South Korea	545	529	-16
Belarus	513	528	+15
Albania	511	527	+16
Ukraine	506	525	+19
Bolivia	504	524	+20
Ghana	—	523	New
Cuba	512	521	+9
Costa Rica	530	520	-10
Dominican Republic	499	520	+21
Paraguay	517	520	+3
Chile	523	516	-7
India	496	515	+19
China	520	513	-7
Georgia	503	512	+9
Russia	512	511	-1
Tunisia	489	510	+21
Uruguay	494	509	+15
El Salvador	483	508	+25
Honduras	498	506	+8
Peru	482	505	+23

	EF EPI 2020 Edition	EF EPI 2021 Edition	Score Change
Macau, China	505	504	-1
Iran	483	501	+18
Armenia	494	499	+5
Brazil	490	497	+7
Guatemala	476	493	+17
Nepal	480	492	+12
Ethiopia	477	491	+14
Pakistan	478	491	+13
Bangladesh	476	490	+14
Vietnam	473	486	+13
Tanzania	—	485	New
Mozambique	—	482	New
United Arab Emirates	472	480	+8
Turkey	465	478	+13
Morocco	453	477	+24
Bahrain	453	476	+23
Panama	483	475	-8
Venezuela	471	475	+4
Algeria	442	474	+32
Nicaragua	455	470	+15
Madagascar	—	469	New
Japan	487	468	-19
Qatar	459	467	+8
Indonesia	453	466	+13
Colombia	448	465	+17
Sri Lanka	466	464	-2
Mongolia	446	461	+15
Kuwait	461	458	-3
Egypt	437	455	+18
Azerbaijan	432	451	+19
Afghanistan	445	448	+3
Uzbekistan	430	447	+17
Syria	431	445	+14
Ecuador	411	440	+29
Jordan	456	440	-16
Mexico	440	436	-4
Myanmar	411	429	+18
Angola	444	428	-16
Cameroon	419	428	+9
Kazakhstan	412	426	+14
Cambodia	435	423	-12
Sudan	434	421	-13
Ivory Coast	414	420	+6
Thailand	419	419	+0
Kyrgyzstan	405	418	+13
Oman	398	417	+19
Tajikistan	381	405	+24
Saudi Arabia	399	404	+5
Haiti	—	403	New
Somalia	—	401	New
Iraq	383	399	+16
Libya	—	390	Re-entry
Rwanda	408	389	-19
Democratic Republic of the Congo	—	386	New
South Sudan	—	363	New
Yemen	—	360	Re-entry

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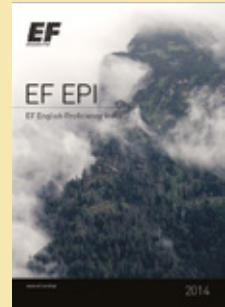
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