

Overview of illiteracy in Amazonas and Manaus: regional disparities and sociodemographic challenges

Retrato do analfabetismo no Amazonas e Manaus: disparidades regionais e desafios sociodemográficos

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Abstract

This article examines illiteracy in Brazil, particularly in populations in the state of Amazonas and the city of Manaus, using documentary research based on data from the 2022 Census and the 2023 National Household Sample Survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. The study aims to understand how sociodemographic factors such as age, race, and sex influence illiteracy rates, showing regional disparities and the challenges faced by vulnerable groups. Adopting a qualitative and descriptive approach, the study analyzes secondary data from official surveys, providing a comparison between national illiteracy rates and the unique characteristics of the Amazonian population. The results show that, despite the country's overall reduced illiteracy rates, a significant "debt" remains among older adults, due to limited access to education in past generations. Additionally, it was observed that black and brown populations—particularly in Amazonas—exhibit higher illiteracy rates, reflecting historical inequalities. Manaus has a 2% illiteracy rate, representing approximately 43,000 people, with a higher prevalence among women and older adults. These findings underscore the need for inclusive public policies geared toward reducing such disparities, focused on providing literacy for older adults and addressing racial and regional inequalities.

Keywords: illiteracy, documentary research, inequalities, Amazon.

Resumo

Este estudo examina o analfabetismo no Brasil com foco nas populações do estado do Amazonas e município de Manaus, adotando a pesquisa documental utilizando dados do Censo 2022 e da Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios 2023 do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). A pesquisa busca compreender como fatores sociodemográficos como idade, raça e sexo influenciam as taxas de analfabetismo, destacando as disparidades regionais e os desafios enfrentados por grupos vulneráveis. Com abordagem qualitativa e descritiva, utiliza análise de dados secundários provenientes de levantamentos oficiais, permitindo uma comparação entre o analfabetismo no âmbito nacional e as peculiaridades da população amazonense. Os resultados revelam que, apesar da redução geral da taxa de analfabetismo no país, há um "estoque" significativo entre os idosos, devido à falta de acesso educacional nas gerações passadas. Observa-se também que a população preta ou parda, especialmente no Amazonas, apresenta índices mais altos de analfabetismo, refletindo desigualdades históricas. Em Manaus, o índice é de 2%, representando cerca de 43 mil pessoas, com maior prevalência entre mulheres e idosos. Assim, fica evidente a necessidade de políticas públicas inclusivas para reduzir essas desigualdades, com foco na alfabetização de idosos e na atenção às disparidades raciais e regionais.

Palavras-chave: analfabetismo, documental, desigualdades, Amazonas.

Introduction

Illiteracy is still a current challenge in Brazil and, “despite progress in meeting the growing demand for education, a significant portion of the population is not benefited and have low or no education” (Pinheiro & Oliveira, 2020, p. 202, our translation). The persistence of this indicator, even with the current legislation and public policies, shows the need for in-depth research to support the formulation and implementation of effective strategies to address the issue.

This article¹ proposes a detailed analysis of this issue in Brazil with consideration of the populations in the state of Amazonas and the municipality of Manaus, based on data from the 2022 Census and the 2nd quarter 2023 National Household Sample Survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). From a sociodemographic perspective, the study examines how factors such as age, sex, and race/skin color influence illiteracy rates and show regional and demographic disparities that persist in the country.

¹This article is part of the master's dissertation entitled The Right to Education for Young People and Adults: an analysis of access and permanence policies in the municipal network of Manaus-Amazonas.

Adopting a comparative approach, the analysis shows the differences in illiteracy rates between regions, underscoring the inequalities that impact access to education. Thus, this article contributes toward a deeper understanding of the educational barriers faced by specific groups, particularly in the state of Amazonas and the municipality of Manaus.

Initially, we present population growth, which is moderate, with a rate of 0.52% since 2010, and the regional population distributions. The Southeast and Northeast regions remain the most populous, while the North and Central-West regions, although less inhabited, have the highest growth rates.

Then, we delve into the socioeconomic and racial inequalities that affect access to education and literacy, with consideration of race and skin color differences that persist, especially, in regions such as Amazonas. The analysis also covers the context of functional illiteracy, emphasizing the concentration of illiterates in older age groups, which shows educational gaps in past generations.

Finally, the article reflects public policies necessary to mitigate disparities, advocating for an inclusive education that addresses historical inequalities in access to education and educational quality. By examining gender, race and age, this study shows the priority needs of Brazilian society, reinforcing the importance of more effective and equitable policies for Brazil's social development, mainly for peripheral regions, such as the state of Amazonas.

It is demonstrated, through numbers, how illiteracy is still a historical debt in our regions, despite the Ten-Year Plans, more specifically Goal 9, which aims to raise the literacy rate of the population aged 15 years or older, eliminating absolute illiteracy and reducing functional illiteracy rates by at least 50% in the period of the National Education Plan (PNE) (Law No. 13.005, of June 25, 2014), which ended in 2024 without achieving its goals. Thus, it is underscored the relevance of more in-depth public policies geared toward the most affected populations and the most vulnerable regions.

Methodology

The descriptive and qualitative methodology adopted in this study with a documentary approach, classified by Marconi and Lakatos (2007) as public archive type, is based on official secondary data, mainly from the 2022 IBGE Census and complemented by educational data from the IBGE referring to the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD). These data include detailed information on the total resident population, categorized by regions, age group, sex and race/skin color, in addition to illiteracy indicators, organized according to age and skin color variables.

Data analysis was conducted in two main phases. First, a demographic analysis focusing on population growth and regional variations in the annual growth rate, with comparisons between the 2010 and 2022 censuses. This step enabled us to trace trends in Brazil's populational dynamics throughout the period. Then, an analysis focused on educational and racial inequalities, with an emphasis on illiteracy rates and educational access challenges faced by different racial and age groups.

The data were processed through descriptive analysis, involving calculations of geometric growth rates and percentage comparisons to examine changes in population and illiteracy rates over the period. Tables and graphs were prepared to illustrate the population distribution and disparities found between regions, as well as differences between age and race/skin color groups.

As the data used are public and released in a clustered format, the study respected personal data protection rules, maintaining anonymity and ensuring that the analysis was conducted in an ethical manner. Thus, the methodology applied ensures result reproducibility and provides a detailed view of the sociodemographic and educational variables addressed in the study.

Brazilian panorama

Brazil's official population is 203,062,512 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2022), according to the last population census in 2022. Compared to the 2010 data collection, Brazil's population grew by 6.5% (or 12,306,713 people), which results in an average annual growth of 0.52%, the lowest rate observed in the series under analysis. Table 1 presents the country's population growth based on all censuses:

Table 1

Resident population and geometric mean annual growth rate - Brazil - 1872/2022

Dates	Resident population (1)	Resident population geometric mean annual growth rate - 2010/2022 (%)
1.8.1872	9.930.478	...
31.12.1890	14.333.915	2,01
31.12.1900	17.438.434	1,98
1.9.1920	30.635.605	2,91
1.9.1940	41.165.289	1,49
1.7.1950	51.941.767	2,39
1.9.1960	70.070.457	2,99
1.9.1970	93.139.037	2,89
1.9.1980	119.002.706	2,48
1.9.1991	146.825.475	1,93
1.8.2000	169.799.170	1,64
1.8.2010	(2) 190.755.799	1,17
1.8.2022	(2) 203.062.512	0,52

Source: IBGE (2022)

Regarding data from Brazil's regions, the Southeast remains the most populous region in Brazil, with 41.8% of the population, followed by the Northeast, with 26.9%, South, 14.7%, North, 8.5% and Central-West, 8%. Compared to the last census, all regions had lower growth rates, which means that the Brazilian population has grown little in the last twelve years.

Based on these data, we observed that the regions with the highest rates were the Central-West, although it is the least populous, and the North, according to Table 2:

Table 2

Resident population annual growth - 2010/2022

Geographic area	Resident population geometric mean annual growth rate - 2010/2022 (%)		
	1991/2000	2000/2010 (1)	2010/2022 (1)
Brazil	1,64	1,17	0,52
North	2,86	2,09	0,75
Northeast	1,31	1,07	0,24
Southeast	1,62	1,05	0,45
South	1,43	0,87	0,74
Central-West	2,39	1,9	1,23

Source: IBGE (2022)

Table 2 shows the historical series for the growth rate. Based on the last three censuses, all regions showed decreases. The North region has a population of 17,349,619 inhabitants, with a growth rate above the national one (0.75%), and the state of Amazonas has 3,941,175 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022), with a growth of 1.03%. It is among the 14 states with growth above the national average.

From a municipal perspective, of the 20 largest municipalities in population², 17 are capitals, and Manaus is one of them, with a population of 2,063,547. It is in the seventh position, with a growth rate of 1.14%, the highest among the cities, as shown in Table 3:

²They concentrate 22.1% of the total resident population.

Table 3

Largest municipalities in population

Position	Municipality	Resident population	Resident population geometric mean annual growth rate - 2010/2022
1	São Paulo	11.451.245	0,15%
2	Rio de Janeiro	6.211.423	-0,14%
3	Brasília	2.817.068	0,76%
4	Fortaleza	2.428.678	-0,11%
5	Salvador	2.418.005	-0,84%
6	Belo Horizonte	2.315.560	-0,21%
7	Manaus	2.063.547	1,14%
8	Curitiba	1.773.733	0,10%
9	Recife	1.488.920	-0,27%
10	Goiânia	1.437.237	0,83%
11	Porto Alegre	1.332.570	-0,47%
12	Belém	1.303.389	-0,55%
13	Guarulhos	1.291.784	0,46%
14	Campinas	1.138.309	0,42%
15	São Luís	1.037.775	0,18%
16	Maceió	957.916	0,22%
17	Campo Grande	897.938	1,11%
18	São Gonçalo	896.744	-0,90%
19	Teresina	866.300	0,52%
20	João Pessoa	833.932	1,19%

Source: IBGE (2022)

Table 3 provides a detailed view of the population distribution and growth or decline trends over a twelve-year period. This can be useful for analyses related to urbanization, urban planning and public policies, including educational ones.

It can be observed that the three cities above 100,000 inhabitants that had the highest populational growth are capitals, with Manaus, in the state of Amazonas, up from 1.8 million to 2,063,547, an increase of 261,500 people in twelve years. The data show that, despite the little increase in population rates in the last census, part of the population still needs more attention in this large country.

Explaining about the Census, Ferraro (2009) addresses how researchers can analyze data related to sex, skin color/race, and educational characteristics, such as literacy. He suggests that, by introducing concepts such as gender, race and class, researchers recognize that educational

inequalities are not the result of physical differences, but rather of historical, social and power relations. These social relations occur between different groups, such as men and women, people of different skin colors/races, employers and workers, and between regions or federative units.

Brazil's Federal Constitution (FC), in article 205, clearly defines education as a right for all, thus establishing its universal scope (Brasil, 1988). This right must be offered without distinction of origin, race, sex, skin color, age and any other forms of discrimination (according to art. 3, IV of FC/88). However, despite the legal recognition of this class of rights, effective enforcement requires the identification of priority groups, that is, sets of individuals who share a common condition of need or vulnerability, with social rights being mitigating factors for the inequalities inherent in class societies and integrating marginalized groups or categories (Duarte, 2007).

Therefore, considering these populational data, it is important to reflect on educational disparities based on race and skin color. Florestan Fernandes (2008) argued on the issue of class and racial struggle: “the class situation only finds validity when a certain social category conquers the social and cultural economic requirements of a class (or part of a class)” (p. 33, our translation). However, he mentions how blacks were excluded from this process: “the ‘black’ lived in a society organized in classes without participating in the class regime” (Fernandes, 2008, p. 33, our translation). They faced social and racial exclusion, aspects that still strengthen inequality in the country and require broad debate.

These inequalities may include access to quality education, school dropout rates, access and permanence in education. Here, we seek to discuss the population based on skin color or race, in 2019 and 2022. Explicitly addressing race and skin color issues enables observing historically marginalized situations in the data. This is essential to support initiatives geared toward them.

Table 4

Resident population, by skin color or race and age group

Year (2019) x skin color or race

Brazil, Federation Unit and Metropolitan Area	Age group	Total	White	White (%)	Black or brown	Black or brown (%)
Brazil	Total	209276	88837	42%	118299	57%
	0 to 3 years	11611	5273	45%	6268	54%
	4 to 5 years	5968	2493	42%	3441	58%
	6 to 9 years	11667	4663	40%	6911	59%
	10 to 14 years	14954	5630	38%	9200	62%
	15 to 17 years	9411	3472	37%	5865	62%
	18 to 24 years	23958	9191	38%	14553	61%
	25 to 29 years	16960	6865	40%	9917	58%
	30 to 39 years	34002	13929	41%	19682	58%
	40 to 59 years	51879	22899	44%	28434	55%
	60 years or older	28867	14422	50%	14029	49%
Amazonas	Total	3975	647	16%	3239	81%
	0 to 3 years	290	60	21%	224	77%
	4 to 5 years	153	29	19%	121	79%
	6 to 9 years	274	44	16%	220	80%
	10 to 14 years	392	58	15%	324	83%
	15 to 17 years	234	34	15%	192	82%
	18 to 24 years	550	74	13%	465	85%
	25 to 29 years	347	61	18%	280	81%
	30 to 39 years	597	98	16%	484	81%
	40 to 59 years	799	129	16%	656	82%
	60 years or older	339	60	18%	273	81%
Manaus (AM)	Total	2542	518	20%	2005	79%
	0 to 3 years	176	45	26%	131	74%
	4 to 5 years	88	21	24%	67	76%
	6 to 9 years	157	32	20%	124	79%
	10 to 14 years	216	46	21%	169	78%
	15 to 17 years	125	26	21%	98	78%
	18 to 24 years	349	59	17%	287	82%
	25 to 29 years	244	50	20%	192	79%
	30 to 39 years	413	82	20%	327	79%
	40 to 59 years	550	108	20%	438	80%
	60 years or older	223	50	22%	171	77%

Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (year)

Regarding Table 4, for 2019, there is a prevalence in the percentage of black or brown skin colors in Brazilians, Amazonians and Manauaras almost in all age groups, except for the 60-year-old group at the national level. In Manaus, the percentage of the black or brown population has the vast majority, with a total of 79%. The highest percentage is in the age group from 18 to 24 years, with 82%.

Table 5

Resident population, by skin color or race and age group

Year (2022) x skin color or race						
Brazil, Federation Unit and Metropolitan Area	Age group	Total	White	White (%)	Black or brown	Black or brown (%)
Brazil	Total	213940	92228	43%	119342	56%
	0 to 3 years	11367	5235	46%	6039	53%
	4 to 5 years	6057	2625	43%	3383	56%
	6 to 9 years	11856	4920	41%	6842	58%
	10 to 14 years	14564	5726	39%	8709	60%
	15 to 17 years	9159	3488	38%	5596	61%
	18 to 24 years	22827	8912	39%	13661	60%
	25 to 29 years	17027	6763	40%	10081	59%
	30 to 39 years	34102	14277	42%	19421	57%
	40 to 59 years	54743	23870	44%	30237	55%
	60 years or older	32239	16412	51%	15374	48%
Amazonas	Total	4155	726	17%	3288	79%
	0 to 3 years	302	62	21%	222	74%
	4 to 5 years	157	26	17%	126	80%
	6 to 9 years	299	55	18%	231	77%
	10 to 14 years	370	66	18%	292	79%
	15 to 17 years	205	32	16%	167	81%
	18 to 24 years	548	88	16%	437	80%
	25 to 29 years	370	66	18%	290	78%
	30 to 39 years	639	109	17%	516	81%
	40 to 59 years	883	144	16%	714	81%
	60 years or older	381	77	20%	293	77%
Manaus	Total	2668	554	21%	2084	78%
	0 to 3 years	178	42	24%	133	75%
	4 to 5 years	91	18	20%	72	79%
	6 to 9 years	179	39	22%	140	78%
	10 to 14 years	224	50	22%	172	77%
	15 to 17 years	113	23	20%	89	79%
	18 to 24 years	335	67	20%	262	78%
	25 to 29 years	246	52	21%	190	77%
	30 to 39 years	434	88	20%	342	79%
	40 to 59 years	612	116	19%	488	80%
	60 years or older	257	60	23%	195	76%

Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (year)

The year 2022 shows no major variations in relation to year 2019, at the national, state, and municipal levels. Manaus' population has a total of 78% of black or brown persons, well above the national statistics, which presents 56%. The highest percentage is in the age group from 40 to 59 years, with 80% of blacks or browns in the city, and the lowest percentage is in the age group from 0 to 3 years, with 75%.

In regions and states with strong indigenous heritage, it is essential to address the presence and contribution of these populations. In Brazil, indigenous people represent approximately 1,693,535 people, which corresponds to 0.83% of the total population. Notably in Manaus, this representation is even more significant, reaching 3.48% of the population, or 71,713 inhabitants. The 2015–2025 Municipal Education Plan (PME) also contains goals related to guaranteeing the right to education for indigenous peoples related to Youth and Adult Education (EJA) but integrated with vocational education. In a general context, Pinheiro and Santos (2016) analyze the guidelines established on indigenous school education in the PME:

The analysis of the indigenous school education established in the Manaus Municipal Education Plan guidelines for the ten-year period from 2015–2025 observed no innovative goals and strategies to address the challenges posed by the Amazonian context as to enforcing the right to education for indigenous peoples, such as expanding access to schooling for the population of indigenous communities and the implementation of the specific, intercultural and differentiated indigenous school demanded by the indigenous movement. To some extent, the 2015 Manaus PME shows inconsistency between the proposals and numerous initiatives claimed at the regional preparatory conferences (one held in Manaus) and the plans approved at the first Indigenous School Education Conference in 2009 (p. 92-93).

To a lesser extent, but no less relevant, quilombolas also have their share of contribution. They represent 0.65% of the Brazilian population. However, Manaus has 0.01%, totaling 214 quilombolas, according to the 2022 Census.

Including race and skin color in discussions on educational agendas enables discussing that all racial and ethnic groups have equal access to education, within their particularities. A clear understanding of racial inequalities in the educational system contributes to fostering public policies based on more effective strategies and programs to address them, including by reducing illiteracy.

Another important aspect to consider when discussing population is the perspective of gender and age group. Historically, women have faced oppression and marginalization. By prioritizing this approach, we not only uphold human rights, but also promote a more democratic society, and discussing age groups supports demographic analysis, planning and decision-making in various sectors.

Addressing this aspect is advocated by Mattos et al. (2013), who emphasize that there has been a significant increase in the presence of women in leadership positions around the world, including Brazil. Despite this progress, the gender equity issue remains complex and challenging, requiring the implementation of specific policies to address current disparities. An example of consideration of gender inequality was the creation, in 2003, of the Special Department of Policies for Women (SPM), responsible for formulating and coordinating public policies for women, with the objective of promoting gender equality.

National Plans of Policies for Women were among the actions implemented. The last plan, from 2013-2015, presents as one of its objectives:

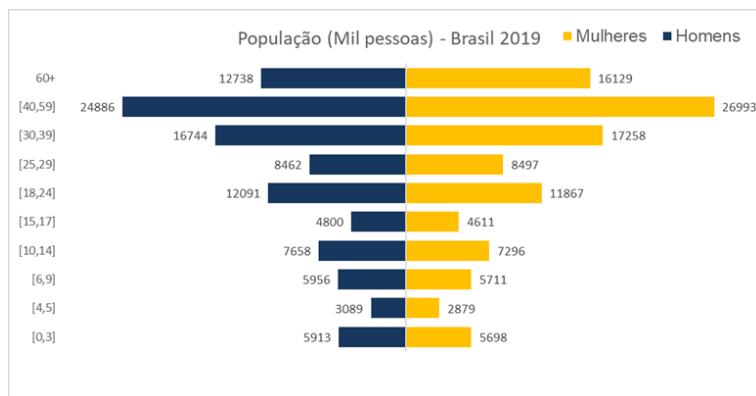
Promoting quality education access and permanence for girls, young women and women, particularly considering groups with low education (adult and elderly women with disabilities, black, indigenous, from traditional communities, from the countryside and in prison and girls removed from child labor) (Brasil, 2013, p. 23).

The plan aimed at gender equality in a democratic society in which oppression and discrimination against women still persist. However, in 2016, the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, Youth and Human Rights, of which the National Department of Policies for Women was part, was discontinued. That department was relocated to another ministry, and the plans were no longer implemented.

However, the perspective of analysis by gender enables the formulation of more effective and inclusive public policies, meeting the real needs of the population. Thus, the following graphs show the characteristics of the Brazilian, Amazonian and Manauara populations in 2019 and 2022:

Graph 1

Resident population, by sex and age group (Brazil 2019)

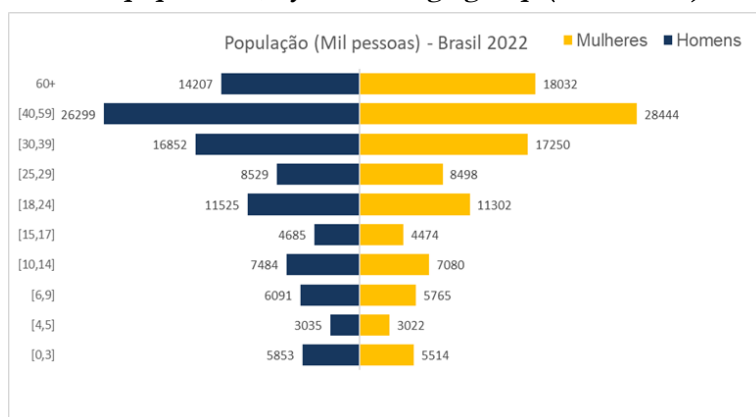


Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

About Graph 1, we have in the 2019 data: the youngest age groups, 18-24, 15-17, 10-14, 6-9, 4-5 and 0-3, have a larger ratio of men than women, who represented more the population in the 60+, 40-59, 30-39 and 25-29 age groups. In 2019, the Brazilian population was more concentrated in the 40-59 age group.

Graph 2

Resident population, by sex and age group (Brazil 2022)



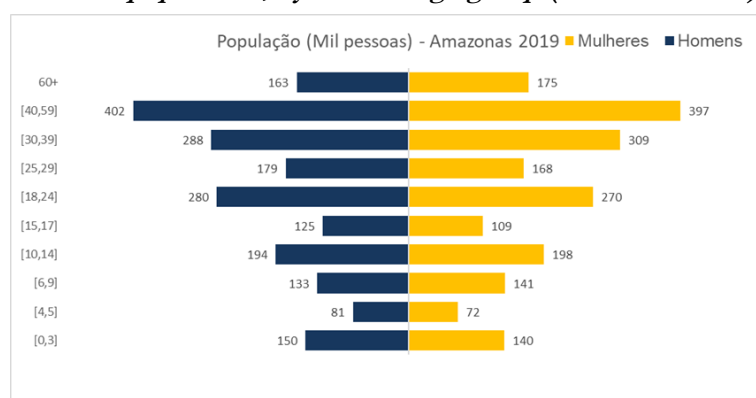
Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

About 2022, the trend is a greater proportion of men than women in almost all age groups, although in general the number of women is higher than that of men, with 51% of the population, mainly because the Brazilian population is concentrated in the age group of 30 to 60+ years, in which there is a higher number of women.

The 40-59 age group still represents a large portion of the population, but there was an increase in the 60+ age group compared to 2019. In Brazil, the distribution by sex changes when comparing age groups. In the younger age groups, there is a higher proportion of men from the age of 30, and the percentage of women is higher than that of men. Overall, the base of the Brazilian age pyramid has been shrinking, with women having a greater presence, with 94.2 men for every 100 women (IBGE, 2022).

Graph 3

Resident population, by sex and age group (Amazonas 2019)



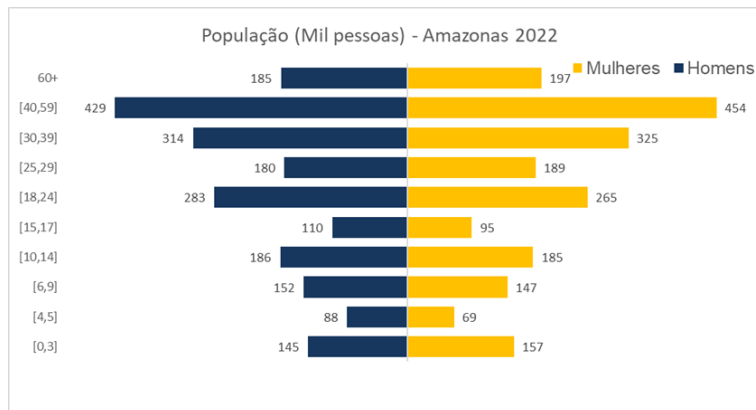
Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

Regarding the state of Amazonas, the graphs above show a larger population in 2019, both for men and women, in the age group from 40 to 59 years, with 402,000 women and 397,000 men.

The Amazonian population, in general, has a balanced distribution, with a half-half percentage. The lowest population is in the 0-3 years age group, which may indicate a moderate birth rate relative to the other age groups. In summary, the state of Amazonas, in 2019, had a population distribution that was mainly concentrated in the middle-aged age groups (30-59 years).

Graph 4

Resident population, by sex and age group (Amazonas 2022)

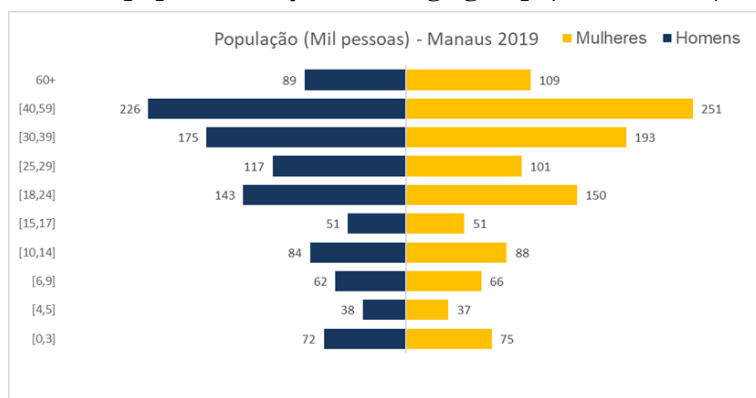


Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

Compared to 2019, in 2022 the numbers of women and men remain almost equal, with a predominance in the 40-59 age group. In this three-year period, the population grew little, as happened with the national data. Below are the graphs for the residents of the municipality of Manaus.

Graph 5

Resident population, by sex and age group (Manaus 2019)

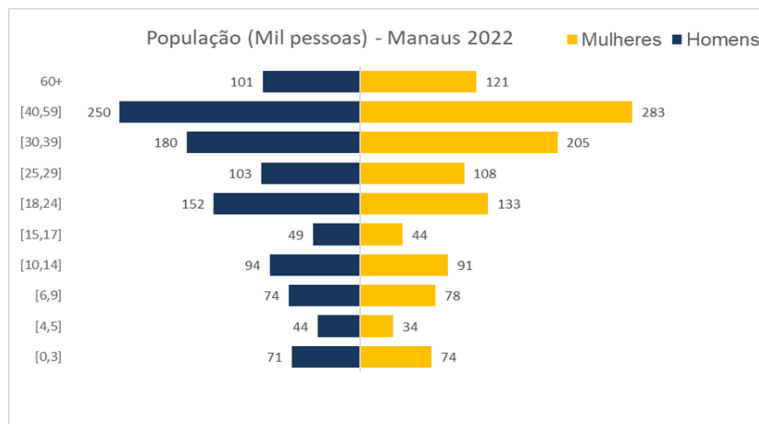


PNAD – 2nd quarter (203)

Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous

Graph 6

Resident population, by sex and age group (Manaus 2022)



Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

The Manaus population also grew little in the period from 2019 to 2022, with the same percentage of men (49%) and women (51%) in the two years presented, with a higher number of the population concentrated in the age groups from 30 to 59 years and lower between four and five years.

It is important to note that the distribution by sex and age has very similar behavior in the three regions analyzed, in addition to having undergone no extreme changes between the years, a very short period for a new format to occur. Still, it presents an overview for analysis in the period determined by the research.

In summary, Brazil has a population of 203,062,512 inhabitants, the state of Amazonas, 3,941,175, and Manaus, the locus of research, 2,063,547. This shows that the Amazonas capital has a large part of the state's population, with a predominance of the age group from 30 to 59 years, with the vast majority being black or brown (78%) and with more women (51%). With the population detailed, the illiteracy data are addressed below.

Illiteracy in Brazil and Amazonas

The IBGE considers illiterate persons who self-declare not knowing how to read and write, and functional illiterate persons aged 15 years or more with less than five years of school education: “these are people who attend or have attended school, and, even though they are ‘literate,’ they cannot understand short texts” (Leite & Cadei, 2016, our translation).

Based on these concepts, in the Brazilian context, despite the advances achieved in recent decades, there are still areas and population groups marked by high illiteracy rates. Regional inequalities are notorious and—as detailed in the theoretical framework—have deep historical roots. According to the PNAD, illiteracy rates by region and age group are presented as shown in Table 6:

Table 6
Illiteracy rates in Brazil and regions

Region	Illiteracy Rate	
	15 years or older	
	2019	2022
Brazil	6,1%	5,6%
North	7,0%	6,4%
Northeast	12,9%	11,7%
Southeast	3,0%	2,9%
South	3,0%	3,0%
Central-West	4,4%	4,0%

Source: PNAD (IBGE, 2023)

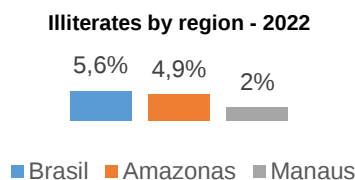
The PNAD lacks data for 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we note that the national illiteracy rate decreased by 0.5% in a four-year period, and all Brazilian regions had a decrease or maintenance in their data. The only region that kept the percentage was the South. Although the rates have decreased, they remain asymmetrical in the country.

The North region was the second region that decreased the illiteracy rate most, more than the national average of 0.6%; however, the result still shows a region with an illiteracy rate higher than the country's average and more than double that of the Southeast region, which decreased only 0.1% in this time period. It is important to note that this region already had low illiteracy rates, as well as the South, which maintained the data.

In the state of Amazonas, the illiteracy rate is 4.9%, below the rate in the North region, but with an absolute number of 148,000 people. It is the 14th state in the ranking of illiteracy, which shows that there is still much to evolve. However, a positive aspect was that, in part, PNE goal 9 was achieved: “raising the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and over to 93.5% by 2015” (Law No. 13.005, of June 25, 2014, our translation). Amazonas is one of the 15 states that achieved this phase of the goal. Graph 7 provides a comparison:

Graph 7

Illiteracy in Brazil, Amazonas and Manaus



Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

Graph 7 shows illiteracy rates in 2022, comparing data at the national, state and municipal levels. It should be noted that Manaus has an index below the national average, which is certainly a positive point.

It is even more encouraging to note that in a span of just three years, from 2019 to 2022, the city was able to reduce its illiteracy rate from 3% to 2%. However, as in the case of the state, the municipality has a major challenge, as the percentage of 2% represents in absolute numbers 43,000 illiterate people in the city; this perspective is emphasized by Braga and Mazzeu (2017) when explaining that absolute data is what really shows illiteracy in the country. In fact, percentages can create the illusion of being close to the elimination of illiteracy—a goal that has not been achieved. Hence the need for a detailed profile of this quantity.

Table 7 details in absolute numbers the number of illiterate people aged 15 years or older by sex and age group. It is observed that there is a drop in the percentage of illiterates in the vast majority of the regions and age groups.

Table 7

Variable - Illiterate people aged 15 years or older (of 1,000 people)

Brazil, Federation Unit and Metropolitan Area	Age group	Year x Sex					
		2019			2022		
		Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Brazil	15 years or older	10054	5095	4959	9560	4834	4727
	18 years or older	10005	5059	4946	9515	4801	4714
	25 years or older	9785	4905	4879	9344	4689	4655
	40 years or older	8733	4222	4511	8501	4131	4370
	60 years or older	5230	2286	2943	5171	2236	2935
Amazonas	15 years or older	147	80	67	148	79	69
	18 years or older	146	79	67	147	78	69
	25 years or older	141	75	66	143	75	68
	40 years or older	117	61	56	123	63	60
	60 years or older	63	30	33	70	35	35
Manaus (AM)	15 years or older	45	24	21	43	21	22
	18 years or older	44	24	20	43	21	22
	25 years or older	43	23	20	41	20	21
	40 years or older	37	19	18	39	19	21
	60 years or older	21	10	12	25	11	14

Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

In 2022, Manaus had a higher prevalence of illiteracy for women. This situation contrasts with that of 2019, when there was a higher prevalence of illiterates among men. This change can be clearly observed in Table 8:

Table 8

Exclusive total (only for the highlighted age group) (1,000 people)

Exclusive Total							
Brazil, Federation Unit and Metropolitan Area	Age group	2019			2022		
		Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Brazil	15 years or older	49	36	13	45	33	13
	18 years or older	221	154	67	171	112	59
	25 years or older	1051	683	368	843	558	285
	40 years or older	3504	1936	1568	3330	1895	1435
	60 years or older	5229	2286	2943	5171	2236	2935
Amazonas	15 years or older	1	1	0	1	1	0
	18 years or older	5	4	1	4	3	1
	25 years or older	24	14	10	20	12	8
	40 years or older	54	31	23	53	28	25
	60 years or older	63	30	33	70	35	35
Manaus (AM)	15 years or older	1	0	1	0	0	0
	18 years or older	1	1	0	2	1	1
	25 years or older	6	4	2	2	1	0
	40 years or older	15	9	6	14	8	7
	60 years or older	22	10	12	25	11	14

Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

In 2019, Manaus had 45,000 illiterates, of whom 24,000 were men and 21,000 were women. The age group with the highest illiteracy rate was 60 years or older. In 2022, this number was reduced to 43,000, with a predominance of females.

The age group of 60 years or older continues to have the highest number of illiterates, with a total of 25,000. This situation is recurrent in data for Brazil and for the state of Amazonas. It can be concluded that the illiteracy bottleneck is found in older people, or, as proposed by Sampaio and Hizim (2022), the "debt bias" (p. 275, our translation), when the large percentage

of low education is concentrated in the older population due to the lack of access to schools in past generations, perpetuating illiteracy.

According to Peres (2011), illiteracy affects older populations due to the government's negligence in establishing educational policies aimed at this age group. This situation reveals an educational exclusion, in which the education system is mainly aimed at preparing young people for the urban-industrial labor market, reflecting the logic of the capitalist system. This has contributed to the marginalization of older adults in the labor market and their exclusion in the sphere of education. Peres also argues that from the capitalist perspective there is no significant role for older adults, since individuals at this stage of life have become unproductive and obsolete (Peres, 2011).

Based on these insights, we observe that EJA—an educational modality that is often sidelined in Brazilian educational policies—presents an even deeper exclusion: the exclusion of older adults. This exclusion is based on a mistaken view of wasted educational investment that makes this group completely invisible, despite the constitutionally guaranteed rights. It is essential to recognize and address this double marginalization to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all.

Another aspect to be discussed is the racial issue. This point should also be emphasized, since education is not isolated from current racial inequalities in society. Historically, people of certain races have been marginalized and have had less access to quality education. This marginalization still resonates today, influencing the quality of and access to education.

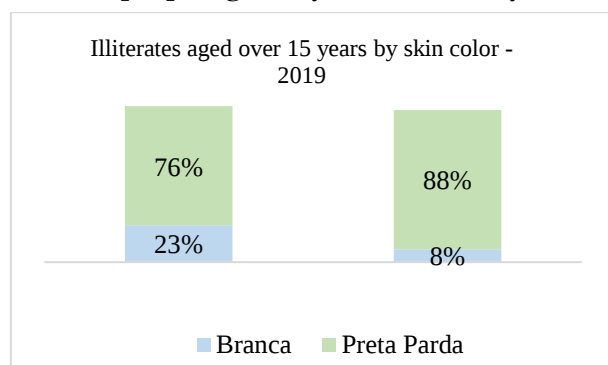
In Brazil—which is conceived by the world and by itself as a paradise of miscegenation—the hypocrisy of not sufficiently questioning differences, which are many, has allowed the maintenance and aggravation of the silence that speaks in favor of prejudice. Non-plurality in education is just one of the means of preserving the major veneer of “racial democracy” that conceals the lack of actual democracy (Baibich, 2002, p. 113, our translation).

The excerpt discusses the complexity of the national identity and the racial dynamics in Brazil and underscores how racial inequality is sustained and perpetuated. The reference to “non-plurality in education” notes how educational institutions often fail to adequately recognize and debate racial diversity, contributing to the maintenance of stereotypes and discrimination. It underscores the urgency of addressing these issues to promote a deeper and more inclusive understanding of Brazilian society.

We have no data for Manaus based on the perspective of race or skin color of illiterate inhabitants; however, we can observe national and state-level indices for 2019 and 2022.

Graph 8

Illiterate people aged 15 years or older, by skin color or race

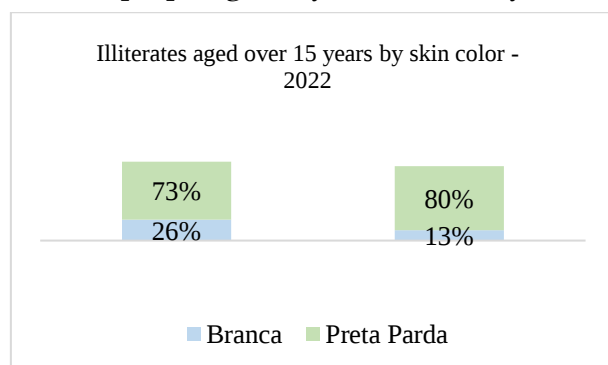


Source: IBGE, PNAD – 2nd quarter (year)

Graph 8 shows the major predominance of illiterates among black and brown people in the country. The data for the state of Amazonas presents higher percentages than the national numbers, with 88%.

Graph 9

Illiterate people aged 15 years or older, by skin color or race



Source: IBGE, Annual Continuous PNAD – 2nd quarter (2023)

Graph 9 shows that the rates for black or brown illiterates in 2022 decreased at the national and state levels, but without changing the major predominance of this indicator. Amazonas rates for illiteracy among blacks and browns remained higher than national levels, with 80%.

The data indicate that, despite their reduction, inequalities by region, skin color and race remain. According to the numbers, women are more literate than men, and whites had better educational indicators than blacks or browns. We can conclude that illiteracy is declining, but with a pattern: there is a higher ratio of illiterates among older age groups, which demonstrates that younger age groups of the population have more access to education and are taught how to read and write at the correct stage of life.

The significant portion of older adults who did not have an opportunity for education in their youth remain illiterate in adulthood. Thus, achieving the goals of the national, state and municipal plans for overcoming illiteracy requires intensified efforts oriented toward the older population.

Final considerations

The data indicate a gradual reduction in illiteracy rates at the national, state and municipal levels; however, the pace is still far below that which is necessary for achieving the goals of the ten-year plans, especially Goal 9.

Education in Brazil has always seen adversities, especially in maintaining the continuity of public policies. Saviani (2008) is commonly referred to when explaining public policies when noting that the mark of discontinuity in current education policies is present in the goal, always postponed, of eliminating illiteracy, among other educational indicators.

And, in a period recently impacted by a pandemic and reduced resources for EJA, illiteracy has been decreasing at a slow and insufficient rate considering Brazil's potential. Examining the reduction in illiteracy rates by region, there is a marked inequality between different parts of Brazil. The North region, historically characterized by peripheral conditions and structural inequalities, has still high illiteracy rates, with a rate of 6.4%. The state of Amazonas and its capital, Manaus, reflect this situation. In addition, by analyzing the data, it becomes evident that illiteracy in Brazil is strongly associated with factors such as skin color and age group, indicating a problem that is not only educational, but also social and structural.

Based on these data, from the IBGE 2022 Census and 2023 PNAD surveys, we observe policies that seek to address this situation. Among them, we note the resumption of operation in 2023 of the Department of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI), seeking to ensure equity in education.

In continuity, we have the Literate Brazil Program (PBA), resumed in September 2024, which aims to provide literacy to young people and adults aged 15 years or older who could not study at the appropriate age, a policy clearly aimed at achieving PNE Goal 9, especially for regions with higher illiteracy rates:

the prioritization of literacy provision programs by areas, regions or federative entities with high rates of illiteracy, considering the most updated data from the Demographic Census and the Continuous National Household Sample Survey of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics Foundation – IBGE (Ministry of Education [MEC], 2024, p. 1).

Still in the organization phase, the PBA arises as an important tool to boost the fight against illiteracy in the country. Another recent highlight is the 2024 National Pact for Overcoming Illiteracy and Improving Youth and Adult Education, which seeks, among its main objectives, to eliminate illiteracy and raise the educational level of the population, also as a response to PNE Goal 9.

These initiatives represent a breakthrough in tackling illiteracy in Brazil and renew the hope of transformation. However, their effectiveness depends on a continuous and sustained commitment so that, in fact, these initiatives contribute toward building a new education in the country and become long-term State policies rather than short-term government policies.

It is reinforced that survey numbers support the development of public policies geared toward the most affected populations. This article provided an overview of the current situation of illiteracy, focusing on a peripheral Brazilian state with negative impacts on illiteracy rates.

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