

## Where are the world's best English-speakers

English is the most widely spoken language in the world. And of the roughly 1.5bn speakers globally, the vast majority speak it as a second language. So where are the world's best non-native English speakers? According to a new report by EF Education First, an international education company, Northern Europeans are the most fluent. Middle Easterners are the least proficient.

The index is based on the results of a free online test taken by 2.3m volunteers in 100 countries. Nearly six in ten of this year's test-takers were female. Women have always fared better than men, but this year men closed the gap somewhat.

In Europe, the powerhouse economies fare surprisingly badly: only Germany makes the top tier of "very high proficiency" countries. France is next, while Spain and Italy are persistent **laggards**. A study by a Spanish research institute confirmed the bad news: 60% of adults say they speak no English at all. The fact that Spanish is a global language in its own right (the language boasts 400m native speakers) is probably the **culprit**. If you speak Danish, you need another language to take part in global culture; speaking French or Spanish (or Arabic) means hundreds of millions of people to talk to without English.

laggard 迟缓的; 落后的

culprit 犯人

Asia is the region of greatest diversity. Only Singapore makes the top tier, but the Philippines, Malaysia, and India are not far behind. China is further back but still in the second tier, a few slots ahead of Japan. Languishing in the bottom slots are a clutch of South-East and Central Asian countries like **Cambodia** and **Kyrgyzstan**. This correlates with another factor: the company repeatedly finds that English skills are highly correlated with connections and openness to the rest of the world.

Cambodia 柬埔寨

Kyrgyzstan 吉尔吉斯斯坦