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Social development: literacy for life: shaping future agendas

Literacy for empowerment and transformation

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

      The present report is submitted in fulfilment of the request made by the General Assembly, in its resolution 77/192, that the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), submit to the Assembly at its seventy-ninth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. The Assembly also invited UNESCO to continue its mandated role to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda and requested UNESCO to continue its coordinating and catalysing role through the implementation of the strategy of the Global Alliance for Literacy and by continuing to provide support to Member States.

      The present report provides an overview of the global literacy landscape, highlighting progress, key challenges and recommendations for further promotion of literacy as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the follow-up to the Transforming Education Summit and beyond.

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Report of the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

I. Purpose

1.	The present report provides an examination of major progress and challenges in literacy, with a particular focus on young people and adults. It offers an overview of the global literacy landscape and provides recommendations for further promotion of literacy as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the follow-up to the Transforming Education Summit and beyond.

II. 2030 vision of literacy

2.	Literacy [1] plays a central role in an increasingly diverse, complex and information-rich world characterized by rapid transformations and the associated challenges in the socioeconomic, political, scientific, technological, environmental and cultural spheres. As the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using written, print and digital materials, literacy is essential not only for reading and writing, but also for the development of higher-order comprehension, thinking and analytical skills. Literacy, as an integral part of the right to education, empowers individuals, improves the quality of their lives and facilitates social transformation and sustainable development.

3.	The Education 2030 Agenda is the first global agenda that explicitly promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, expanding upon the goal of inclusive and equitable high-quality education. It advances a 2030 vision of literacy, in which literacy is understood as a continuum of proficiency in reading, writing and numeracy skills that are acquired and developed, and which occasionally regress, throughout life, dependent on time- and context-specific demands. Embracing the 2030 vision of literacy, therefore, is critically important for the promotion of literacy as a lifelong process across settings and age groups.

III. Global literacy landscape: progress, trends and issues

4.	Since the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in 2015, steady progress in literacy has been made worldwide. Conventional proxy indicators such as literacy rates, however, indicate that progress has been slow and uneven across regions, countries and populations, closely linked with socioeconomic inequalities and levels of development. This uneven progress can be attributed to several factors, including persistent educational inequalities, which result in millions of children failing to acquire basic literacy skills, and the relative neglect of youth and adult literacy, as reflected in chronic underfunding for associated efforts.[2] The coronavirus disease

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[1]	The word "literacy" in the present report is used to include reading, writing and numeracy skills, based on the definitions of literacy and numeracy provided, respectively, in UNESCO, *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education 2015* (Paris, 2016) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Skills Matter: Additional Results from the Survey of Adult Skills* (Paris, 2019).

[2]	UNESCO, *Education for All: Literacy for Life* (Paris, 2005); UNESCO, *Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges* (Paris, 2015); and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: Citizenship Education – Empowering Adults for Change* (Paris, 2022).

(COVID-19) pandemic and other crises, including conflict and displacement, have also had a negative impact on literacy progress in many places.[3]

5.   The present section pertains to major progress, trends and issues with respect to literacy-related Goal targets: target 4.1, on primary and secondary education; target 4.6, on youth and adult literacy; target 4.3, on affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education; and target 4.4, on young people and adults who have relevant skills for employment.

Children's literacy

6.   The global state of children's literacy shows a mixed picture. Increased access to and completion of basic education has contributed to literacy progress. From 2015 to 2023, the completion rate (global indicator 4.1.2) has increased from 85 to 88 per cent in primary education, from 74 to 78 per cent in lower secondary education and from 53 to 59 per cent in upper secondary education.[4] Progress, however, has been uneven. In sub-Saharan Africa, completion rates were much lower, standing at 67 per cent in primary education, 47 per cent in lower secondary education and 28 per cent in upper secondary education in 2023.

7.   Despite progress made in terms of proficiency in reading and mathematics among children and young people (global indicator 4.1.1),[5] more efforts are required to enhance literacy skills equitably and to enhance the evidence base. In 2019, the proportion of children in grade 2 or 3 of primary education achieving a minimum proficiency in reading ranged from 36 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 68 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean to 94 per cent in Oceania in 2019, while the respective rates for mathematics were 51 per cent, 65 per cent and 71 per cent.[6] Challenges are more acute in low- and lower-middle-income countries than in high-income countries, although progress has been faster in lower-middle-income countries. In 18 out of 31 low- and lower-middle-income countries with data since 2019, fewer than 10 per cent of children are achieving minimum proficiency in reading or mathematics.[7] Factors other than income levels also affect learning outcomes. Children and adolescents with disabilities are 42 per cent less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills.[8] Again, data scarcity also remains a challenge. Globally, 4 out of every 5 countries have no data on learning outcomes in grades 2 and 3, while roughly 1 out of every 2 countries has no data on learning outcomes at the end of primary and lower secondary education.

8.   Although schooling is no guarantee that learners acquire literacy and numeracy skills at the required levels, the rising numbers of global out-of-school children and adolescents is a cause for concern. The global out-of-school rate for primary school-age children was estimated at 10 per cent in 2023 and has stagnated since 2021, following constant decreases in previous years. Out-of-school rates for adolescents of lower and upper secondary school-age stood at 13 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. The number of out-of-school children has increased by 6 million since 2021, to a total of 250 million.[9]

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[3] See, for example, UNESCO, "UNESCO: global number of out-of-school children rises by 6 million", press release, 18 September 2023.
[4] UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.
[5] See UNESCO, "Sustainable Development Goal 4 indicators".
[6] UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.
[7] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.
[8] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Seen, Counted, Included: Using Data to Shed Light on the Well-being of Children with Disabilities* (New York, 2021).
[9] UNESCO, "UNESCO: global number of out-of-school children rises by 6 million".

Youth and adult literacy

9.   The literacy rate for the population aged 15 and older (thematic indicator 4.6.2), improved by less than 2 percentage points globally over the period 2015–2022, rising from 85.6 to 87 per cent.[10] In 2022, about 1 out of 7 adults (765 million people) still lacked basic literacy skills, 63 per cent of whom were women. Over the same period, the global youth literacy rate for the population aged 15 to 24 increased at the same rate as the global adult literacy rate. In 2022, however, the world was still home to 89 million non-literate young people, 57 per cent of whom were young women.

10.   At the regional level, adult literacy rates in 2022 ranged from 68 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 76 per cent in Central and Southern Asia to 95 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean and 99 per cent in Europe and North America.[11] The pace of progress has varied by region. The adult literacy rate has progressed slightly faster in Central and Southern Asia (from 56 per cent in 2000 to 76 per cent in 2022) than in sub-Saharan Africa (from 56 per cent in 2000 to 68 per cent in 2022). Progress in the youth literacy rate has been steady but remains inadequate to achieve target 4.6. In Central and Southern Asia, the youth literacy rate improved from 74 per cent in 2000 to 93 per cent in 2022, while in sub-Saharan Africa the rate increased from 66 per cent in 2000 to 79 per cent in 2022.[12]

11.   When other factors, such as gender and age, are also considered, a more complex picture of literacy inequalities emerges. Data show that the lowest literacy rates are the rates for older women in several sub-Saharan African countries, at around 10 per cent in 2022, while the highest rates are the rates for young and adult men in Europe and North America, estimated at 99 per cent.[13] One positive trend is that, while gender gaps persist, literacy rates among women, particularly among younger women, have improved at a fast pace in several countries. In India, the literacy rate among younger women (ages 15 to 19) was 90 per cent in the period 2020–2021, almost twice the rate among older women (ages 45 to 49), 46 per cent. Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the literacy rate stood at 74 per cent for women aged 15 to 19 and 14 per cent for women aged 45 to 49 in 2019.[14] It should be noted, however, that progress in literacy rates among men has been slower relative to that of literacy rates among women in several countries, such as the Gambia, Liberia and Mauritania. In 2022, men accounted for more than half of non-literate young people in several countries, including Albania (90 per cent), Brazil (68 per cent), Cabo Verde (71 per cent), Georgia (84 per cent), Lesotho (78 per cent), Sri Lanka (72 per cent) and Zimbabwe (70 per cent).[15]

12.   Disparities also persist in high- and middle-income countries. Data from the survey from the first cycle (2012–2018) of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) revealed that an average of 19 per cent of adults in OECD countries had low literacy skills and that around 1 in 4 adults had low numeracy skills (level 1 or below on a scale of 1 to 6). In addition, in several OECD countries, literacy and numeracy levels are declining, especially among the youngest age groups and adults who may be reading less at work.

13.   The indicative nature of some statistics, however, should be noted. Conventional statistics, such as literacy rates, use a simple notion of literacy, by which persons are categorized as either "literate" or "illiterate" largely on the basis of self-reported information. For that reason, in global monitoring efforts, the 2030 vision of literacy

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[10] UNESCO Institute for Statistics database. Available at http://data.uis.unesco.org/.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

is gradually being adopted and more reliable direct assessments used, yet the high cost of certain assessments and weak implementation capacity remain challenges. With respect to global indicator 4.6.1 on the percentage of young people and adults achieving proficiency in literacy and numeracy,[16] for the period 2013–2017, data on literacy are available only in 15 countries and data on numeracy only in 14 countries.[17] In Ecuador, the test-based assessment of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies indicated that only 28 per cent of adults had achieved the minimum level of proficiency (level 2), despite a literacy rate estimated at 89 per cent.[18]

14.   Literacy now also includes the ability to solve problems in an increasingly technological and information-rich environment[19] and deal with digital text-mediated communication. Two of the three indicators for target 4.4 that are related to the skills required for the digital transition[20] provide some, albeit limited, data that help to paint a global picture of literacy progress. Regarding global indicator 4.4.1 on the use of information and communications technology (ICT), ICT skills are unevenly distributed.[21] In lower-middle-income countries, limited evidence indicates that ICT skills are still relatively sparse. Over the period 2014–2019, among the 90 countries for which data were available (mostly richer countries), the proportion of young people and adults who had sent emails with an attachment was 65 per cent in high-income countries, 34 per cent in upper-middle-income countries, 20 per cent in lower-middle-income countries and 3 per cent in low-income countries. It is important to note that literacy and numeracy skills are not only part of ICT skills but also their foundation. Evidence from 28 countries that participated in three cycles of surveys under the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies in the 2010s, which are related to thematic indicator 4.4.2, shows that those with tertiary education were almost twice as likely to have basic proficiency in digital skills as those without it.[22]

Lessons learned from the pandemic to enhance resilience to future crisis

15.   The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that education systems must become more resilient to cope with future crises. The abrupt shift to distance learning and, in some cases, the temporary or permanent halt to literacy programmes affected learners and educators, especially those in lower-middle-income countries. In some places, this shift also accelerated the participation of development partners in education. The crisis showed that distance learning, including digital technology-supported learning, was useful and necessary to maintain learning, while also revealing its limits. In a survey entitled "National policies and programmes for youth and adult literacy: lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic for writing the future", conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2022, UNESCO highlighted lessons learned for future crises, including lessons pertaining to the need to ensure equitable access to devices, tools and the Internet; the importance of digital and literacy skills; the flexible adoption of no, low- or high-tech solutions for distance learning; and the importance of human contact. Similar points

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[16] For the monitoring of progress against this indicator, level 2 of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies has been adopted as the minimum proficiency level.

[17] UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

[18] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in Education – A Tool on Whose Terms?* (Paris, 2023).

[19] UNESCO, *Recommendation on Adult Learning 2015*.

[20] See UNESCO, "Sustainable Development Goal 4 indicators", available at www.education-progress.org/en/indicators.

[21] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.

[22] Ibid.

have also been illuminated by recent UNESCO research efforts examining experiences with educational technology during school closures, which set forth a new direction for education technology, in which emphasis is placed on the need to put the best interests of learners and teachers first; reaffirm the primary importance of in-person learning; strengthen digital connectivity, capacities and content; and protect the right to education.[23]

16. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children has implications for the future state of youth and adult literacy. As of February 2022, children had missed a global average of 20 weeks of school-based education.[24] The impact was strongest on lower-middle-income countries. The estimated proportion of 10-year-olds who could not read a simple text rose from about 57 per cent in 2019 to 70 per cent in 2022.[25] In middle- and high-income countries, the results of the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, which measures achievement among fourth grade students from 57 countries, show that scores declined by an average of eight points over the period 2016–2021, which is the equivalent of about one fifth of what children learn in a school year. The average score on the Programme for International Student Assessment 2022 dropped by almost 15 points in mathematics and about 10 points in reading, compared with the 2018 Assessment; at the same time, it is indicated in the 2022 report that scores have been on a decades-long decline that began well before the pandemic.[26]

17. A clear global picture of the impact of the pandemic that could enhance preparedness for future crisis has yet to emerge. It is likely that the global projections from 2019 for target 4.6, in which the youth literacy rate was projected to reach 94 per cent and the adult literacy rate 90 per cent by 2030, will need to be revised in the post-pandemic context.[27]

Emerging issues and concerns

18. As society has evolved, several trends and concerns have emerged. A major concern is the insufficient recognition of the transformative aspects of literacy education.[28] In literacy development efforts, it is important to apply a holistic approach that takes into account the learner's motivation, prior knowledge, needs and socio-emotional skills and to situate literacy within the context of full citizenship, pluralism and social transformation. A comprehensive approach helps to ensure that literacy learning is not limited to mastering technical skills, but is also a process of meaning-making and fostering a joy for reading, writing and learning. Some evidence supports a broad approach in which reading and writing are taught together, as writing can enhance reading skills.[29]

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[23] Mark West, *An Ed-tech Tragedy? Educational Technologies and Schools Closures in the Time of COVID-19* (Paris, UNESCO, 2023).

[24] UNESCO Institute for Statistics and others, *From Learning Recovery to Education Transformation: Insights and Reflections from the 4th Survey of National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures* (Montreal, 2022).

[25] World Bank and others, *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

[26] OECD, *PISA 2022 Results: The State of Learning and Equity in Education*, vol. I (Paris, 2023), OECD, *PISA 2022 Results: Learning During – and from – Disruption*, vol. II (Paris, 2023), and Andreas Schleicher, *PISA 2022: Insights and Interpretations* (Paris, OECD, 2023).

[27] UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report Team, "Meeting commitments: are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?", 2019.

[28] See, for example, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 4th ed. (New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) and Bernie Grummel, "Maintaining deep roots: the transformative possibilities of adult literacy education", *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, vol. 14, No. 1 (2023).

[29] See, for instance, Steve Graham and Michael Herbert, *Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading* (Washington D.C., Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

19. Recently, other trends have emerged. Integrated and intergenerational approaches to literacy have been proven to be powerful tools in breaking cycles of disadvantage. Attention is increasingly being paid to the role of a learner's first language in literacy development and learning, and linguistic and epistemic diversity have become integral to debates about the future of education. There is also a renewed focus on educators and their training and continuous professional development, especially in response to pandemic experiences, aimed at ensuring high-quality literacy teaching by employing innovative pedagogies and technology. In addition, there is increasing recognition of the importance of literacy, as the basis of communication and critical thinking, amid the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation and fake news.

20. Another trend concerns digitalization and the challenges of the digital divide. While digital technology can be used to motivate people, facilitate literacy teaching and learning and personalize learning pathways, it can be detrimental to literacy development. Digital systems, tools and services (e.g. artificial intelligence, voice recognition, automatic dictation and interpretation services) could disincentivize people from improving their literacy skills and using those skills to engage in cognitive activities, such as text analysis. If not applied appropriately, digital technology could also widen inequalities. Recent research findings emphasize that learning to use digital technology should complement, not substitute, learning to read, write and calculate. A critical finding from the Programme for International Student Assessment 2018 was that literacy and numeracy also prepare people to better navigate a digital environment.[30]

IV. Literacy activities at the country, regional and global levels

21. In the present section, the range of literacy activities that have been implemented worldwide since 2022 is presented, with a main focus on youth and adult literacy. The activities are grouped according to the five priority areas of the UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy and its Action Plan (2020–2025). The main platform for implementation of the Strategy is the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning.

A. Developing national literacy policies and strategies in a lifelong learning perspective

22. Countries have improved their policies, plans, systems and governance for literacy and adult learning and education. The 2030 vision of literacy has facilitated the integration of literacy and adult learning and education into lifelong learning strategies and into sector-wide and cross-sectoral reforms with contextualized, need-based and holistic approaches to building enhanced lifelong learning systems.[31] While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has yet to be fully revealed, the *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* provides an indication of how countries were advancing in 2018–2019, before the pandemic. A total of 60 per cent of the 154 participating countries reported that their policies on adult learning and education had

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[30] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.
[31] Ulrike Hanemann, "Lifelong literacy: some trends and issues in conceptualising and operationalising literacy from a lifelong learning perspective", *International Review of Education*, vol. 61, No. 3 (June 2015), Aaron Benavot, "Literacy in the 21st century: towards a dynamic nexus of social relations", vol. 61, No. 3 (June 2015), and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong "Learning, literacy and numeracy from a lifelong learning perspective", *UIL Policy Brief*, No. 7 (2015).

improved, with literacy and basic skills being given a strong focus, together with vocational skills. More than 60 per cent of those countries reported progress in the implementation of laws on literacy and basic skills. In all, 77 per cent developed and implemented policies on literacy and basic skills, while 81 per cent developed specific plans. Lastly, 86 per cent reported that non-governmental stakeholders were involved in managing policies related to literacy and basic skills.

23.   With the support of UNESCO, countries have instituted the following in 2024: a lifelong learning policy in Mongolia, an adult education policy and curriculum framework in Somalia, a national curriculum for adult education and literacy in Kuwait, a literacy strategy in Côte d'Ivoire, a policy on non-formal education and implementation framework in Haiti, an education sector plan, including adult education, for the period 2020–2029 in Mozambique, a new youth and adult literacy initiative in Honduras and a national pact for overcoming illiteracy and for qualification of youth and adult education in Brazil.

24.   Several Member States have started to build synergies between literacy and technical and vocational education and training. Botswana introduced the teaching of vocational skills into literacy classes, which boosted incentives for class attendance.[32] In Tunisia, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association,[33] together with local partners, linked new literacy approaches to agriculture. Through the UNESCO Capacity Development for Education Programme, 19,000 learners in several countries (63 per cent of whom are women) are benefiting from skills development and lifelong learning. UNESCO is facilitating interministerial collaboration among ministries related to technical and vocational training and education in Chad. Furthermore, a digital technology-supported bilingual educational model that integrates technical and vocational education and training into literacy was piloted in Senegal and has been subsequently replicated in Benin and Togo. The promotion of literacy in technical and vocational education and training programmes benefits non-literate out-of-school young people and women in particular.[34] Switzerland created a work-based programme on basic skills called Vocational Education and Training 2030 and an associated steering body to improve aspects of adult learning and education.[35]

25.   The integration of technical, digital and life skills into adult literacy and adult learning and education programmes often occurs in community learning centres. With support from the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association,[36] Malawi and South Africa combined literacy with skills development using the Community Learning Centre approach. With support from UNESCO, Thailand and Viet Nam have implemented initiatives for flexible learning for marginalized youth using community learning centres and institutions for technical and vocational education and training, while UNESCO, through its Global Network of Learning Cities, facilitated literacy learning in Egypt and the Sudan. In China, the Community Learning Centre network was strengthened with the establishment of 68 new urban and rural centres, and some 600 education officials from urban centres enhanced their capacities.

26.   In Afghanistan, amid severe challenges, UNESCO developed a national mobilization strategy to ensure the continuity of literacy and adult learning and

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[32] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*.

[33] The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association is an associate member of the Global Alliance for Literacy and a close partner of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

[34] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.

[35] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*.

[36] See https://www.dvv-international.de/en/.

education following the change of Government in 2021, using an alternative approach involving family and intergenerational literacy and learning. Meanwhile, in France, the national literacy agency has started to promote foundational skills, using data from the daily life and lifelong learning surveys to allocate funds equitably.

27. Capacity development is essential to ensure high-quality literacy provision. With support from UNESCO and funding from the European Union, Morocco established an educator training institute targeting around 3,000 literacy educators and 484 literacy personnel. In 2023, Egypt adopted and rolled out "Curriculum GlobALE", a modular competency-based framework for the training of adult educators, with support from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association provided training on "Curriculum GlobALE" to 77 education specialists in Uzbekistan in 2022–2023. In Malawi, in partnership with the Catholic University, it helped to develop the country's first-ever tertiary adult education course, resulting in 13 students graduating in 2023.

28. The 2022 Transforming Education Summit generated renewed momentum to promote children's literacy, centred around foundational learning. As a result, 31 countries and 34 partners endorsed the Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning,[37] and the Global Coalition for Foundational Learning was established.[38] Defining foundational learning as basic literacy, numeracy and transferable skills, such as socio-emotional skills, the Coalition aims to bring together partners to reduce the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10. Thus far, the Coalition has facilitated strategic partnerships to provide coordinated support in Malawi, Pakistan and Sierra Leone, among other countries. The Coalition has also developed a menu of assessment options and a road map to help countries to measure and report on learning outcomes and has raised the profile of foundational learning on national and global agendas through advocacy and several high-level forums.[39]

29. Beyond schooling, literacy has been promoted as a lifelong process through integrated, holistic and intergenerational approaches across all age groups. In Mozambique, the UNESCO-supported family learning programme has empowered 109 vulnerable children aged 3 to 5 in rural communities and 200 parents by enhancing their literacy skills and knowledge on family, nutrition and health issues in 2023.[40] In Afghanistan, UNESCO has developed the online course entitled "Family and intergenerational literacy and learning", targeting parents and children in Pashto-speaking communities.[41]

30. Globally, focus continued to be placed on building lifelong learning systems and ensuring equivalencies between learning pathways through the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, as well as through national qualifications frameworks. Supported by UNESCO, Mozambique developed a four-year multilingual primary education curriculum for youth and adults, equivalent to the first seven years of basic education, and provided training to education personnel, with 44,411 learners benefiting. In the Philippines, inclusive education was promoted through the Alternative Learning System. Through the

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[37] See www.unicef.org/learning-crisis/commitment-action-foundational-learning.

[38] The co-founders of the Coalition are UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, the United States Agency for International Development and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Global Partnership for Education joined in 2023.

[39] See https://knowledgehub.sdg4education2030.org/Coalition-Foundational-Learning.

[40] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.

[41] UNESCO, "Launch of the family and intergenerational literacy and learning course", 29 November 2023.

interministerial Basic Education Equivalency Programme and the non-formal Factory Literacy Programme in Cambodia, the transition of 688 graduates into the formal technical and vocational education and training system has been facilitated since 2020.

B. Addressing the learning needs of disadvantaged populations, particularly women and girls

31.   Harnessing the transformative potential of literacy, particularly for disadvantaged people, involves centring learners' needs, aspirations and life circumstances and bringing literacy close to people's lives through inclusive and high-quality literacy provision. Upskilling literacy educators so that they can leverage digital technologies and create and use innovative and learner-centred pedagogies is key. The development of literate environments in which people can be motivated to learn, acquire, apply and advance literacy skills is also required, as are efforts to remove potential hurdles to participation in learning activities.

32.   Initiatives have been implemented around the world to meet the learning needs of out-of-school children and young people. For instance, training provided under the UNESCO project entitled "Better life for out-of-school girls to fight against poverty and injustice in the Philippines", equipped teachers to help out-of-school learners, especially girls, to overcome learning challenges.[42]

Gender equality

33.   Promoting gender equality in and through literacy is central to achieving Goal 4. Improving access to high-quality literacy provision among girls and women has been a core concern. In Afghanistan, where literacy rates among women are among the lowest in the world, over 55,000 young people and adults in 20 provinces (68 per cent of whom were women) have benefited from the UNESCO-supported programme entitled "Youth and adult literacy and basic education". Through the programme, which includes training on pre-vocational skills, disaster preparedness and risk management, and socio-emotional skills, UNESCO has empowered women and girls who have not had access to education since August 2021.

34.   Several countries have developed non-formal education policies and have developed, piloted and scaled up high-quality programmes for adult learning and education, with support from UNESCO through the programme on literacy skills for the empowerment of women and girls under the Capacity Development for Education Programme. Through gender-sensitive literacy and life skills programmes in Mozambique, tools (radio sessions, guidelines and manuals) have been developed for a family learning programme, and a new skills training initiative for women entrepreneurs has been launched. In Mali, through the gender-sensitive initiative entitled "Support for self-employment among rural youth, a vector for peace and social cohesion", young people have received training in national languages on literacy, income-generating skills and conflict prevention techniques. In Cambodia, empowerment of women and young people is at the core of the Basic Education Equivalency Programme and the Factory Literacy Programme (95 per cent of learners are women); 3,453 women have benefited from those programmes since 2017.

35.   While working towards gender equality, attention must also be given to literacy development among men and boys. In 2023, UNESCO drew attention to disengagement from education and grade repetition among boys and their failure to

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[42] UNESCO, "Empowering the alternative learning system's teachers and learners in the Philippines", 4 July 2023.

progress in and complete their education.[43] In Mozambique, men-only integrated literacy and skills development classes were formed in workplaces to increase men's participation.

Indigenous Peoples and minority groups

36.   Countries and partners have promoted literacy among Indigenous Peoples and minority groups through the development of writing systems, learning programmes and first language-based, multilingual approaches to literacy, which contribute to fulfilment of not only their right to education but also their cultural and linguistic rights. Non-governmental organizations have played a key role. SIL International has implemented "Literacy for women in Africa" programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia and the United Republic of Tanzania, developing materials for women's literacy classes in local languages. Assistance was provided to nine language communities in South Sudan to develop basic literacy and health materials. In the Guatemala-Mexico border area, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association has supported the development of a literacy model tailored to local populations.

37.   In its literacy and vocational skills programmes, UNESCO increasingly implements bilingual and multilingual approaches to learning, as exemplified by programmes in Benin, Mozambique, Senegal and Togo.[44] In Honduras, UNESCO-supported rural education programmes target Indigenous students in grades 10 through 12. UNESCO, in collaboration with partners of the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, has shaped a first language-based multilingual education community and promoted language-inclusive education policies. Some 20 countries in Asia and the Pacific committed themselves to supporting the implementation of first language-based multilingual education activities by endorsing the Bangkok Priorities for Action on First Language-based Multilingual Education in 2023. In the celebrations for International Mother Language Day in 2023 and 2024, attention was drawn to the importance of first language-based multilingual education.

Refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants

38.   Worldwide, the number of people on the move has dramatically increased over the past 10 years. While most migration has been related to new opportunities and livelihoods, 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations in 2023, continuing a series of year-on-year increases over the past 12 years.[45] Literacy is important for their survival and socioeconomic empowerment and integration, as well as for social cohesion. Nevertheless, literacy and digital divides, along with gender discrimination, persist among refugees. Only 30 per cent of young people living in crisis-affected countries are literate.

39.   Many ICT-supported programmes have contributed to increasing access to literacy learning among refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons, building educators' capacities, providing relevant content and innovative andragogy, narrowing gender gaps and ensuring that the skills of those populations are

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[43] UNESCO, *Leave No Child Behind: Global Report on Boys' Disengagement from Education* (Paris, 2022).

[44] UNESCO, "How UNESCO's bilingual vocational training project in Senegal is helping out-of-school youth", 25 May 2023.

[45] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global trends forced displacement in 2023" (2024); and Marie McAuliffe and Linda Adhiambo Oucho, eds., *World Migration Report 2024* (Geneva, International Organization for Migration, 2024).

recognized, validated and accredited, as documented in a study prepared by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.[46]

40. Several countries have addressed the learning needs of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons with UNESCO support. In Burundi, with support from Monaco, efforts were made to ensure that out-of-school displaced children had access to high-quality education and psychosocial support and that their caregivers received literacy classes and vocational training. In Chad, literacy materials have been developed and training on literacy and data collection has been provided to officials, technical staff and teachers, and more than 55,000 people, including 45,000 women, have gained access to education as a result. In Haiti, focus has been placed on improving school enrolment and literacy, including through the implementation of policies on literacy and non-formal education.

41. In Uganda, the International Labour Organization (ILO), together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Learning Equality, has launched a partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities, through which educational materials are provided to enhance digital skills and job readiness using an e-learning platform. Education Cannot Wait, the United Nations global fund for education in emergencies, and its partners have supported the delivery of basic education to 8.8 million children and adolescents in 44 crisis-affected countries since 2016; a portion of those efforts has supported literacy development. In 2022, Education Cannot Wait reached 4.2 million children and adolescents in 30 countries. In the same year, the total available funding for education in emergencies stood at $1.1 billion, an increase of 57.4 per cent since 2019.[47]

People in prison

42. Approximately 11 million people are in penal institutions worldwide, and that figure is constantly growing.[48] There is thus a need for improved prison education to support the rehabilitation of inmates and their reintegration into society. Through the "Read Your Way Out" project in the Philippines, with support from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 13 correctional facilities have been equipped with libraries, and training on how to improve inmates' literacy skills has been provided to staff; those measures will be scaled up within and beyond the country. In cooperation with the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison and other partners, the Institute is undertaking in-depth research on policies and practice in prison education with a literacy component, which will be launched at the International Conference on Prison Education, in October 2024. The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association has supported the Malawi Prison Service in offering vocational skills training to inmates in tailoring, carpentry and barbering; 94 inmates have graduated since 2022.

C. Leveraging digital technologies to expand access and improve learning outcomes

43. At the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, a call was issued to harness the digital revolution to ensure high-quality education for all and transform the way that

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[46] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *From Radio to Artificial Intelligence: Review of Innovative Technology in Literacy and Education for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons* (Hamburg, Germany, 2022).

[47] Education Cannot Wait, "Crisis-affected children and adolescents in need of education support: new global estimates and thematic deep dives" (June 2023).

[48] See www.uil.unesco.org/en/adult-education/prison-education.

teachers teach and learners learn for the benefit of public education, with a particular focus on marginalized communities. Nevertheless, many people in greater need of literacy provision face multiple challenges, including lack of connectivity, appropriate digital content and capacities to adopt digital technology. Globally, collaborative efforts have been made to prepare a more solid ground for harnessing the digital revolution, including: the International Telecommunication Union/ UNESCO Broadband Commission, which has strived to achieve universal broadband connectivity; the Gateways to Public Digital Learning initiative, led by UNESCO and UNICEF, which was launched at the Transforming Education Summit to help countries to establish and improve public digital learning platforms;[49] and the Digital Transformation Collaborative, a subgroup of the Global Education Coalition, through which UNESCO helps countries to apply systems thinking to the digital transformation in education.

44. UNESCO has promoted knowledge-sharing on promising digitally-supported literacy practices, peer learning and collaboration through such efforts as International Literacy Day, the UNESCO International Literacy prizes and digital learning weeks. The UNESCO 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, along with other research,[50] has provided new knowledge and insights on the controversial impact of digital technology on education. In the report, UNESCO offers recommendations for the effective adoption of technology, while also noting the challenges and disparities that may arise.

45. Digital technologies have been adopted with a view to improving literacy provision. UNESCO supported countries in managing technology-enabled literacy programmes, implementing a humanistic approach.[51] Through the Global Education Coalition and Global Alliance for Literacy initiative on improving digital competencies of youth and adult literacy educators, which targeted 10,000 educators in 10 countries belonging to the Global Alliance for Literacy, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and Moodle developed and piloted online modules, which were used to enhance the capacity of more than 300 literacy educators in Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt and Nigeria. The Moroccan National Agency for the Fight against Illiteracy, with support from UNESCO and Huawei, launched an initiative to improve the digital skills of 10,000 literacy educators (86 per cent women) by 2025.[52] In Côte d'Ivoire, through the UNESCO-supported project on functional literacy for women traders using ICT, 400 women have been empowered through the use of smartphones. In Cambodia, as part of the Basic Education Equivalency Programme, participants have received support for self-paced online learning through cooperation with a mobile operator, Smart Axiata.

46. In Bangladesh, the programme on empowering remote and climate vulnerable communities with digital literacy, managed by Friendship, has served over 32,000 learners, including children in climate-vulnerable areas, dropouts, out-of-school young people and adults, and Rohingya children.[53] In Kenya, ILO has partnered with Learning Lions to provide digital skills and job training with a view to helping young

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[49] UNESCO, "Gateways to public digital learning".

[50] UNESCO, *An Ed-Tech Tragedy? Educational Technologies and School Closures in the Time of COVID-19* (Paris, 2023), OECD, *21st-Century Readers: Developing Literacy Skills in a Digital World* (Paris, 2021) and Jesé Romero and Carlos Díaz, "Rethinking education to dignify life: reflections on new opportunities in the digital age", DVV International, December 2023.

[51] UNESCO, "What you need to know about digital learning and transformation of education", 6 February 2024.

[52] UNESCO, "Initiative to advance literacy learning in Morocco launches", 22 April 2024 and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, "Literacy educator training in the Kingdom of Morocco".

[53] UNESCO, "Friendship education programme from Bangladesh wins UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy 2023", 7 September 2023.

people to gain access to jobs, with a focus on refugees and host communities. In South Africa, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association has promoted digital learning in Community Learning Centres. In Kyrgyzstan, young people have been trained in computer skills.

47. Technology-supported activities have contributed to children's literacy gain. Examples include the live, interactive lessons transmitted by satellite to 70 remote primary schools in Ghana[54] and the use of digital game-based applications in several countries, such as the Total Reading Approach for Children Plus system in Cambodia,[55] Feed the Monster in Jordan and GraphoGame in Finland.[56] Other initiatives include the Africa e-Library project in South Africa, the UNESCO LearnBig platform for tablet-based literacy learning for out-of-school children and young people in Thailand and the programme on madrasa Arabic lessons in the United Arab Emirates.[57]

48. The positive impact of conventional technologies should also be noted. Radio and television have been used to enhance the literacy skills of out-of-school children and non-literate youth and adults in places where access to technology and connectivity is limited, such as in sub-Saharan countries and in Afghanistan.

49. Digital technology is also used for learning platforms and spaces. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, in partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning, organized an online course on open and distance learning in literacy. Since the launch of the Institute's digital Learning Hub in 2023, over 1,200 lifelong learners from more than 140 countries have benefited from, inter alia, family and intergenerational literacy and learning; recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning; and lifelong learning policies.[58] Likewise, the WHO Academy has developed an online learning platform for adults working in the health sector.

D. Monitoring progress and assessing literacy skills and programmes

50. Despite progress in monitoring, data scarcity remains an issue. UNESCO has paid particular attention to strengthening national capacities in enhancing learning assessment and monitoring systems. In collaboration with countries, the World Bank and OECD, UNESCO has been developing cost-effective assessment and monitoring tools for the comparable measurement of adult literacy skills, and those efforts led to the piloting of a new tool, the everyday-life Practices and Skills Survey, in Albania and Romania.[59]

51. As part of an initiative of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning entitled "Action research on the measurement of learning and educational alternatives",[60] 12 African countries have jointly developed a competency framework for assessment. At a meeting held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 9 September 2022, 11 ministers of education adopted the Abidjan Declaration, committing themselves to allocating the

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[54] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report*.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] UNESCO, "Programme from UAE promoting Arabic language skills is awarded the 2022 UNESCO Literacy Prize", 5 September 2022.

[58] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report*; UNESCO, "Report of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning on the activities of the Institute for 2022–2023", 2 November 2023; and World Bank and others, *The State of Global Learning Poverty*.

[59] See www.uil.unesco.org/en/e-pass.

[60] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, "Measuring Learning Outcomes in Literacy and Basic Skills – RAMAA", available at www.uil.unesco.org/; and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, "Education ministers commit to increased funding and a broader scope for RAMAA", 14 September 2022.

funds necessary to expand implementation of the initiative. Education Cannot Wait has launched a project on holistic learning outcomes measurement, which involves the development of learning outcomes measurement systems that cover academic and socio-emotional skills. Those systems have been adapted to conflict and crisis settings in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq and Uganda.

52.   Several countries enhanced management information systems. In Egypt, as part of a national campaign for literacy targeting women, an online learning management system for adult educators was developed with UNESCO support. Nepal has integrated data on non-formal education into its education management information system for use in the training provided to education officials and stakeholders on non-formal education.[61] Malawi has established an adult learning and education management information system to monitor sessions, track progress and assess learning outcomes, with assistance from the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association.

E.   Advancing the literacy agenda

53.   The vision of Goal 4 is to transform lives through education, which recognizes the catalytic role of education as a driver of development and of achievement of all the Goals. As a foundation for lifelong learning, literacy is essential to the achievement of Goal 4 and the creation of more inclusive, just and sustainable society. The 2022 Transforming Education Summit garnered unprecedented political attention and catalysed global support for education. A total of 143 countries presented national statements of commitment to transform their education systems and invest in education, and a number of global initiatives, including the Global Coalition for Foundational Learning, were launched. The SDG 4-Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee[62] was tasked with ensuring an effective follow-up of the Summit, including through support for and monitoring of the translation of country commitments into action, as well as efforts to further uphold the global movement for transforming education.

54.   UNESCO, serving as Co-Chair and secretariat of the High-level Steering Committee, developed the Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education[63] on the basis of an analysis of the national statements of commitment and country responses to a global survey on transformative actions. Approximately 1 out of 4 countries (24 per cent) committed itself to improving foundational learning at the Transforming Education Summit, while nearly 7 out of 10 countries that completed the survey (66 per cent) reported having undertaken transformative actions to do so.[64] Country examples and good practices are being collected, analysed and disseminated through the knowledge hub for Goal 4.[65]

55.   The Summit of the Future, in September 2024, provides an opportunity to further consider the role of education, including literacy, as part of multilateral solutions to global challenges. In the Our Common Agenda policy brief on transforming education prepared to support Member States in their deliberations

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[61] UNESCO, "Integrating non-formal education data into Nepal's Education Management Information System", 11 April 2023.

[62] See www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en.

[63] See https://unes.co/leadingsdg4.

[64] UNESCO, "Transforming education towards SDG4: report of a global survey on country actions to transform education; highlights" (Paris, 2024).

[65] See www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub.

leading up to the Summit,[66] the Secretary-General advocates the transformation of curricula, pedagogy and assessments by prioritizing the delivery of foundational learning, including creative, critical and scientific thinking, digital literacy and socio-emotional skills. He further calls for a shift towards an integrated and comprehensive system of lifelong learning. Advancing the global literacy agenda as part of lifelong learning ecosystems thus requires not only investing in children's basic education, but also stepping up action for youth and adult literacy, which entails increasing global efforts in coordination and partnerships, advocacy and communication, monitoring and financing.

Global coordination and partnerships

56.   Collective literacy efforts have been coordinated through global and regional mechanisms and partnerships. UNESCO continued to play its mandated coordination role for the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism, which is best understood as an enabling ecosystem consisting of all global education actors and constituency platforms that have agreed to work cooperatively in pursuit of the Education 2030 Agenda. Composed of 28 representatives of geographical regions and organizational constituencies, the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee serves as the Mechanism's apex body, providing strategic guidance, reviewing progress and making recommendations on actions for countries to achieve Goal 4. The High-level Steering Committee convened a meeting entitled "Accelerating progress towards Goal 4: stocktake of transformative actions in education", held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 17 June 2024.[67] The meeting enabled global leaders to adopt a set of decisions, paving the way for accelerating and monitoring progress towards Goal 4, transforming education financing and advancing the global education agenda. Discussions focused on strengthening ongoing work strands related to education financing, including the development of a common narrative on an investment case for education, strategies for increasing domestic resource mobilization and innovative financing. Those decisions will inform the 2024 Global Education Meeting, to be held in Fortaleza, Brazil, on 31 October and 1 November 2024, which will bring together the international education community to agree on transformation and acceleration strategies for the remainder of the 2030 Agenda and strengthen multilateral, cross-sectoral engagement and cooperation to transform education in the light of the forthcoming Pact for the Future.

57.   The Marrakech Framework of Action – Harnessing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning and Education, adopted in 2022 at the seventh International Conference on Adult Education, is being used to guide activities in the area of adult learning and education, including literacy. In 2023, UNESCO organized 10 regional and subregional virtual follow-up conferences with approximately 1,000 participants from 140 countries, which were encouraged to set concrete action-oriented targets in the priority areas of the Marrakech Framework for Action. To foster peer learning and monitor implementation of the Framework, regional communities of practice were established, beginning with the Arab region, and are hosted on the learning hub of the UNESCO Institute for Lifetime Learning.

58.   UNESCO has coordinated literacy efforts guided by its Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2000–2025) and the strategy for the period 2020–2025 of the Global Alliance for Literacy. The Global Alliance has facilitated collaboration among its 30 member countries and partners aimed at enhancing national systems, policies, programmes and practices. Annual meetings in 2022 and 2023 gave Global Alliance

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[66] A/77/CRP.1/Add.9.

[67] UNESCO, "With only six years left to the 2030 deadline, education leaders take stock of progress and gaps in implementing SDG4 while charting the way forward".

countries and partners an opportunity to highlight policy priorities, take stock of progress and discuss future action, resulting in their renewed commitment to implementing the strategy. The Global Alliance has catalysed technical support, information exchange, peer learning and policy dialogue. Thematic webinars on literacy assessment tools, language, multilingualism and digital technologies for literacy provision and learning have been used to build the capacities of 150 policymakers and practitioners. The Global Alliance was also instrumental in establishing the Morocco-based African Foundation for Lifelong Learning in 2023.[68] The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, through its Global Network of Learning Cities, has also promoted lifelong learning, including literacy, through policy dialogue, knowledge-sharing, peer learning, partnerships and capacity development in 356 cities across 79 countries.

59.   Literacy challenges have also been addressed through other policy platforms. Under the presidency of India in 2023, the Education Working Group of the Group of 20 pushed forward foundational literacy and numeracy for intensified action. Similarly, the Education Ministers of the Group of Seven, under the presidency of Japan, issued a declaration in May 2023, which included a commitment to lifelong learning and transformative action in education. Literacy and foundational learning have also been promoted through the African Union Year of Education, which was launched in February 2024 with the theme "Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality and relevant learning in Africa".

Advocacy and communication

60.   To promote literacy for all, events and platforms have been used to advocate greater political will and heightened investment, including the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032), International Literacy Day, International Mother Language Day and the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes. The worldwide celebrations for International Literacy Day have shed light on literacy learning spaces (2022) and literacy for sustainable and peaceful societies (2023). In 2022, the International Literacy Day website generated over 96,000 views, and conversations featuring the #LiteracyDay hashtag on social media channels had a total reach of almost 700 million on X (formerly known as Twitter), over 28 million on Facebook and 2.7 million on Instagram. International Literacy Day 2024 will be focused on the roles of literacy in fostering mutual understanding and peace in multilingual contexts.

61.   The International Literacy prizes currently consist of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, which is focused on mother language-based literacy development, and the UNESCO-Confucius Prize for Literacy, which is focused on functional literacy and leveraging technological environments for adults in rural areas and out-of-school young people. The prizes are supported, respectively, by the Republic of Korea and China. The 12 laureates[69] from 2022 and 2023 reported that the prizes had had a positive impact, including increased visibility and broader acceptance of their work in society thanks to the recognition given by the prizes, expansion of their activities, incentives for fundraising and higher staff morale.

62.   National advocacy events also helped to raise awareness on the importance of literacy and lifelong learning, including celebratory events in 2022 and 2023 related

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[68] Wagdy Sawahel, "Continental foundation launched for lifelong learning", University World News, 12 June 2024.

[69] See UNESCO, "2022 UNESCO International Literacy Prizes reward 6 initiatives promoting inclusion", 31 August 2022, and UNESCO, "2023 UNESCO International Literacy Prizes reward six innovative programmes", 5 September 2023.

to the UNESCO-Confucius Prize for Literacy in China. In Afghanistan, the UNESCO advocacy campaign entitled "Literacy for a brighter future"[70] contributed to increasing public awareness of the right to education, especially that of women and girls, reaching 20 million Afghans, and its week-long campaign for International Literacy Day 2023 raised awareness among 26 million people. The National Literacy Trust, based in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has intensified its campaign to keep literacy high on the political agenda, advocating a more equal society, driven by literacy.[71]

Monitoring

63. UNESCO has continued to play a key role in monitoring global progress on literacy through the work of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, including the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report and the *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. Other organizations have also contributed to monitoring, such OECD, through its Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, and the World Bank, through its Skills towards Employment and Productivity Skills Measurement Programme.

64. The 2024 UNESCO Conference on Education Data and Statistics was a seminal event at which an international community of practice was established with a view to improving data and generating insights related to measurement of indicators and the impact of technology on education statistics.[72]

65. The 2023 meeting of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning was focused on assessments of minimum proficiency levels. The alignment of national and cross-national assessment programmes to a single set of global standards was a significant step forward in monitoring the proportion of children and young learners achieving global indicator 4.1.1.[73] At the meeting, participants also discussed the revision of the Goal indicator framework that is scheduled to occur in 2025. Given the scarcity of data for global indicator 4.6.1, a proposal was made to replace it with thematic indicator 4.6.2 on the youth and adult literacy rate. Reliance on conventional statistics, however, should not be a reason to stop efforts for strengthening test-based assessments to improve policies and practices. Beyond monitoring efforts related to Goal 4, the monitoring of participation in literacy programmes, which is no longer included as part of indicator 4.6.3, and assessment of the impact of literacy learning on people's life and development continue to be challenges, because of the broad and complex nature of the data required.

66. In December 2024, OECD will publish the results of the second cycle of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (2018–2024) on adult literacy, numeracy and adaptive problem-solving skills, on the basis of data collected in 30 countries over the period 2022–2023. UNESCO has begun preparations for the Sixth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, to be launched in 2026, adopting a framework with 30 indicators to monitor implementation of the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education adopted in 2015 and of the Marrakech Framework for Action.

Financing

67. Governments play a central role in financing education, accounting for 78 per cent of global education spending in 2021.[74] Increased government spending in lower-

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[70] UNESCO, "Let girls and women in Afghanistan learn!", 18 January 2023.

[71] See https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/#campaigning.

[72] See https://ces.uis.unesco.org/.

[73] See https://ampl.uis.unesco.org/.

[74] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.

middle-income countries has contributed to a slight expansion of global expenditure on education from public, donor and household sources, which amounted to $5.4 trillion in 2021.[75]

68.   Globally, government spending on education was 14.1 per cent of total government expenditure.[76] However, about one third of the 178 countries with data available for the period 2017–2022 (34 per cent) did not meet either of the internationally established benchmarks of at least 4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 15 per cent of total public expenditure.[77] The annual financing gap for low- and lower-middle-income countries to achieve their national benchmarks for Goal 4 by 2030 is $97 billion, or 2.2 per cent of GDP. If the cost of digital transformation is included, an additional investment of $33 billion will be required annually between 2024 and 2030, which would dramatically increase their financing gap. Low levels of education also have profound economic implications, and the global cost of children achieving less than basic skills is estimated at $10 trillion.[78] In addition, government financing for education had been failing to keep pace with the needs to address literacy and educational challenges, a trend that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.[79]

69.   In this context, financing for youth and adult literacy has been a major challenge despite the commitment made by 142 countries to increasing public funding and resource mobilization for adult learning and education and to preventing rollback of existing budget allocations[80] through the adoption of the Marrakech Framework for Action in 2022. Even before the pandemic, 57 per cent of the 102 countries that responded to the survey for the *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* spent less than 4 per cent of their national education budget on adult literacy and education.[81] The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have increased the financing gap in youth and adult literacy.[82] Furthermore, limited evidence on financing for youth and adult literacy, compared with other subsectors, hinders efforts to draw attention to chronic underfunding in this area. Some initiatives have been undertaken by governments and partners, including a campaign on tax justice by Action Aid International,[83] efforts to promote multi-stakeholder and public-private partnerships, such as the UNESCO Global Education Coalition, and ongoing UNESCO-led efforts to expand the right to education to explicitly include lifelong learning, which would have implications for government budget allocation.

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[75] UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and World Bank, "Education finance watch 2023" (Paris; New York, 2023).

[76] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*.

[77] See UNESCO, *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All* (Paris, 2016).

[78] UNESCO, "Q&A: what you need to know about 'the price of inaction' in education", 17 June 2024.

[79] UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and World Bank, "Education finance watch 2022" (Paris; Washington D.C., 2022).

[80] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*.

[81] Ibid.

[82] See, for example, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: Leave No One Behind – Participation, Equity and Inclusion* (Hamburg, Germany, 2019).

[83] See https://actionaid.org/politics-and-economics/tax-justice.

V. Recommendations

70. **On the basis of the present report, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations for Member States and their development partners:**

(a) **Accelerate progress in literacy as an integral part of the right to education, to empower people and foster inclusive and sustainable development, guided by the 2030 vision of literacy and lifelong learning;**

(b) **Ensure that literacy is mainstreamed into national development, education and lifelong learning policies, strategies, plans, legal frameworks and programmes, as well as into national curricula adaptable to alternative pathways, and promote contextualized, needs-based and integrated approaches to literacy from a lifelong learning perspective;**

(c) **Enhance relevant, sufficient, quality and disaggregated data and statistics on literacy by building national capacities for effective monitoring of progress towards literacy-related Goal targets, particularly targets 4.1. and 4.6, using direct measures, as well as for data management and use for the continuous improvement of policies, programmes and provision;**

(d) **Continue to leverage the potential of scientific knowledge, conventional and digital technologies and innovative pedagogies to ensure that literacy learning opportunities are inclusive and equitable and to empower learners to address present and future challenges to developing more peaceful, just, inclusive and sustainable societies;**

(e) **Place particular emphasis on the literacy and learning needs of disadvantaged populations, such as women and girls, out-of-school children and young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, crisis-affected persons and migrants and ensure their continuous engagement in lifelong learning and social transformation;**

(f) **Foster the professional development of literacy providers and educators to enhance the quality and relevance of literacy provision, considering their status and working conditions and aligning their competencies with curricula;**

(g) **Ensure adequate and sustainable domestic and international financing for literacy, as well as efficient use thereof, on the basis of the long-term political commitment of Governments and through multi-stakeholder partnerships, exploring effective financing models and mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels and explicitly targeting and benefiting youth and adult literacy and marginalized people;**

(h) **Ensure coordinated and sustained collective support, advocacy and knowledge management for literacy promotion through different forums, including the Global Education Meeting, the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee, the Global Alliance for Literacy, International Literacy Day, the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning, and shape preliminary ideas for the post-2030 literacy agenda through stocktaking exercises and discussions.**