

8 et 9 September 2026

Chiapas, Mexico



Global conference in collaboration with the Government of Mexico

Concept note

Background

Literacy,¹ as the ability to read, write, and use numbers, as well as to do so using digital materials to solve problems in an increasingly technological and information-rich environment, is central for individuals' engagement in work, learn and life. It is an essential component of the right to education and a prerequisite for enjoying other human rights.

In the past decades, steady progress has been made in literacy. In 2024, however, the world was still home to at least 739 million youth and adults who lacked basic literacy skills.² Progress has been uneven across regions, countries, and population groups within a country. Over 77% of non-literate adults live in the two world regions, namely sub-Saharan Africa (225 million) and Southern Asia (347 million). Women made up 63% of them – the proportion which has hardly changed over the past three decades with data. Turning to younger generation, many children still struggle to fulfill their right to

¹ The word literacy in this document is used to include reading, writing, and numeracy skills, based on these definitions of literacy ([UNESCO, 2015](#)) and numeracy ([OECD, 2019](#)).

² [UIS data browser](#) (September 2025). The sources of the data used in the concept note, unless other sources are provided, are the UIS data browser.

literacy. Globally, four in ten students (42%) did not meet minimum proficiency levels in reading by the end of primary education in 2019, while 273 million children were not enrolled in school.³ These literacy challenges are intertwined with other types of inequalities. Globally, an estimated 40% of learners are not being taught in the language they speak and understand most.⁴

Literacy skills and challenges continue to evolve in a rapidly changing world. Digitalization, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), is reshaping how literacy policies, systems, programmes and practices are designed, implemented and monitored. It also reminds us of the necessity of a solid foundational literacy base and raises demands for higher-order skills to engage with knowledge and information critically, safely and responsibly. In particular, literacy skills that enable individuals to read ‘the world’ critically - going beyond merely decoding ‘words’ – form the foundation for becoming agents of transformation. Literacy is also essential for acquiring broader sets of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and competencies in different areas - be it media and information literacy, financial literacy, technical and vocational skills, health, political and social sciences, environmental science, citizenship education, and cultures.

The year 2026 marks the 60th anniversary of International Literacy Day (ILD), proclaimed by UNESCO in October 1966 during the 14th session of its General Conference. Since then, countries and partners across the world have advanced literacy as a fundamental right and a powerful driver of peace and sustainable development.⁵

ILD2026 theme and scope

In this context, ILD2026 will celebrate the literacy gains over the past 60 years, especially since 2015, identify remaining and emerging issues, explore effective policies and solutions and identify areas for international cooperation to address those challenges for peace and sustainable development.

ILD2026 will provide a platform for ministers, senior officials and diverse stakeholders and international organizations to engage in peer learning, open exchanges, address critical questions and share concrete examples of literacy policies and programmes.

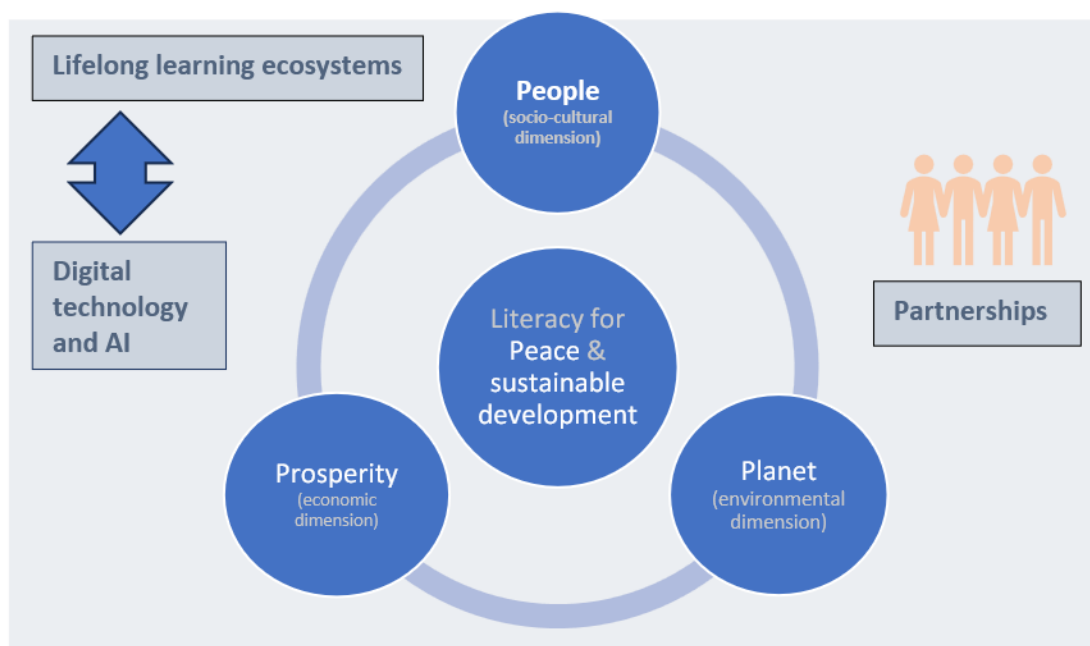
The ILD2026 theme of ‘**Literacy for people, the planet and prosperity**’ will provide a framework to reflect on how national policies and a range of literacy programmes and practices have made a difference since 2015 and how improved literacy skills, in turn, have contributed to advancing the socio-cultural (People), economic (Prosperity), and environmental (Planet) dimensions of sustainable development.

From a lifelong learning perspective, literacy progress will be explored in four broad areas: 1) increasing access to basic education of good quality; 2) providing alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school children and low-skilled young people and adults; 3) enriching literate environments and a lifelong learning culture; and 4) implications of rapid advances in digital technology and AI for literacy skills and provision.

³ UNESCO (2026) [Global Education Monitoring Report 2026: Access and equity – Countdown to 2030](#). Paris: UNESCO.

⁴ UNESCO (2016) [If you don't understand, how can you learn?](#) Paris: UNESCO. Also [2025 article](#) on ‘Language matters: Global guidance on multilingual education’.

⁵ Some examples of evidence on how literacy contributes to sustainable development and peace [UNESCO 2015](#); [UIL 2015](#); [Mackay 2018](#).



ILD2026 will examine the prevailing paradigm and approaches to literacy which have been used over the past decades and will initiate dialogue to rethink literacy in the digital and AI era.

This collective dialogue is expected to continue as the international community advances into the final phase of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and commences deliberations on future global priorities at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit scheduled in New York for September 2027. Ultimately, it will help pave the way for shaping a post 2030 global literacy agenda, grounded in rights-based, human-centred and lifelong learning perspectives.

Global celebration of ILD2026

Venue, format and language

To mark the occasion of International Literacy Day (ILD) 2026, the global celebration on 'Literacy for people, the planet and prosperity' will be organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the Government of Mexico on 8-9 September 2026 in San Juan Chamula and San Cristobal de Las Casas, Mexico. It will be livestreamed to a global audience.

The working languages will be English, French and Spanish. The global celebration will also include the award ceremony of the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes.

Objectives

The main objectives of the global conference are:

- To take stock of literacy progress since 2015 and its contribution to sustainable development and peace.
- To celebrate progress achieved in Mexico and in Latin America and the Caribbean
- To identify effective policies, as well as approaches and solutions for literacy provision, practice and monitoring across lifelong learning ecosystems.
- To reflect on literacy required today and tomorrow.

- To celebrate the achievements of six laureates of the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes 2026.
- To discuss the draft Action Plan for the implementation of the UNESCO Global Alliance for Literacy (GAL) Strategy (2026-2029).

Participants

Participation in the global conference is **by invitation**. Participants will include Mexican leaders and stakeholders, representatives of UNESCO member states and partners in charge of education, staff and experts from ministries, multilateral organizations, civil society organizations, NGOs, the private sector and foundations, learners and educators, research institutions and universities. Interested representatives of countries and partners, as well as individuals are invited to follow the global conference discussions through a webcast (tbc).

Contact

For more information, please contact the Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development: literacy@unesco.org or see the website: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/literacy>.

