

International Literacy Day 2019 'Literacy and multilingualism' Concept note

International Literacy Day 2019 – Literacy and Multilingualism

This year's **International Literacy Day** (ILD, September 8) will be celebrated worldwide to promote literacy as part of the right to education, as well as a foundation for individuals' empowerment and inclusive and sustainable development. With the specific theme of '**Literacy and Multilingualism**', ILD2019 will provide an opportunity to rethink the fundamental importance of the language and its diversity for both individuals and society. It is also an occasion to reflect on policies, systems and practice required to promote literacy in contemporary multilingual contexts. Adopting the same theme, the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes (ILP) - currently, the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize (two awards) and the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy (three awards) – will be awarded at a global International Literacy Day event.

Despite progress made, literacy challenges still persist, distributed unevenly across countries and populations. Embracing linguistic diversity in education and literacy development is central to addressing these challenges in today's world, in which multilingualism has become increasingly common with higher human mobility. Multilingualism contributes to the development of inclusive societies that allow multiple cultures, worldviews and knowledge systems to coexist and cross fertilize. It is also characteristics of many marginalized and at risk populations, including migrants, refugees and other people on the move. ILD2019 is an opportunity to rethink literacy in multilingual contexts by exploring current trends and issues of 'literacy and multilingualism' from holistic and interdisciplinary perspectives.

One dimension is the evolving shape and patterns of multilingualism, influenced significantly by globalization and digitalization, and their impact on literacy policies and practice. Today, people and societies are more interconnected and interdependent than they have been at any time in the past. Multilingualism extends beyond geographical boundaries due to rapidly increasing human mobility and the growing ubiquity of multimodal and instantaneous communication. These changes have educational repercussions that are influenced by their socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions.

Another dimension is 'literacy and multilingualism' and inclusion. The objective of Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure 'inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' will only be fully achieved if the

learning needs of young people and adults with limited literacy skills are met with inclusive education. Mother language-based multilingual approaches to literacy are a pillar of this education. These approaches recognize linguistic and cultural diversity, support literacy and learning and preserve human dignity by respecting the needs of different groups and individuals. ILD2019 is an occasion to reflect on how to make literacy provisions more inclusive in today's multilingual societies, especially for speakers of non-dominant languages, as well as marginalized and vulnerable people, including ethnic minorities, indigenous people, women, rural dwellers, migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people, people in situation of fragility and conflict, and people with disabilities.

Finally, ILD2019 will explore conducive environments and effective partnerships required for promoting literacy in multilingual contexts. Over the past several decades, many programmes adopting mother language-based, multilingual approaches have demonstrated the cognitive, psychological, pedagogical, socio-cultural and economic benefits. For more people to benefit from such approaches and to promote youth and adult literacy more broadly, national efforts to improve relevant policies, systems, and practice need to be accompanied by conducive environments and effective partnerships, including cultures of accountability and monitoring, external and domestic financing, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and literate environments.

Specific context of ILD2019

The ILD2019 celebration will take place within the context characterized by the following.

- This year is the **International Year of Indigenous Languages**, for which UNESCO is mandated as the lead agency.
- The year 2019 marks the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Special Needs Education, at which the Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education was adopted, and UNESCO will organize the **International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education** (Cali, Bogota 11-13 September 2019).
- The **2020 GEM Report will also focus on 'inclusion and education'** in the context of the SDGs which claim to leave no one behind.
- **UNESCO's new strategy for youth and adult literacy** being developed for possible adoption at the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019.
- As UNESCO's instrument for sustaining collective and coordinated efforts, the **Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL)** has been revamped to target 20 countries and E9 countries.