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Executive Summary

Since 1967, the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes (ILP) have recognized innovation and excellence in effective literacy practices worldwide. Each year, the ILP adopts a new theme, which for 2021 is "Inclusive distance and digital literacy learning." While the nominated organizations submitted 71 complete nominations to UNESCO for the 2021 edition, 52 met the basic selection criteria and among them, 50 granted permissions to use their data for the current analysis. Thirteen of these programmes originated in Africa, seventeen originated in Asia and the Pacific, eight originated in Arab countries, three originated in Europe and North America, and nine originated in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This analysis uses a mixed approach, primarily textual analysis, drawing on a variety of information sources, including the ILP 2021 programmes proposed by National Commissions for UNESCO or Non-Governmental Organisations in official partnership with UNESCO, as well as documents related to ILP and International Literacy Day (ILD). The analysis begins by thoroughly examining the 50 ILP 2021 nominees, paying particular attention to key concepts such as distance learning with high, low, or no

technology, instructional languages, target population, and impact. Second, it evaluates the 20 finalists' policies, governance, and partnerships; pedagogies and modes of instruction; quality and relevance; equity; incentives; and monitoring and evaluation, identifying promising practices and significant challenges. Finally, it discusses the innovative aspects of distance and online learning, as well as the associated challenges and solutions.

The overall analysis of trends of the 50 nominated programmes shows that 24 of the 50 (48%) used a hybrid learning approach that combined high-, low-, and/or no-tech distance learning equipment, and that 16% of programmes (8 of 50) had not adopted digital technologies on a consistent basis; these programmes included one from the Dominican Republic, one from Malaysia, one from Sri Lanka, one from Guatemala, and four from Africa, among others. In term of learning participation, the median number of learners enrolled in all the 50 programmes in 2020 was 3,673; the largest programme, the United Arab Emirates' Madrasa e-learning platform, had a total of 2,500,000 participants; the smallest programme, Botswana's Mokobeng literacy group-disability, had only ten, however, the analysis also suggests that the majority of literacy programmes may have had a higher dropout rate. In terms of funding, each programme's annual budget varied significantly, ranging from as little as USD7,500 to USD1,490,634.34. Despite the fact that nearly half of the programmes, 21 of 50, or 42%, were geared toward children, participants in all 50 programmes were overwhelmingly female, accounting for an average of 60% of those enrolled.

On the other hand, the analysis of the 20 ILP2021 finalists reveals that, while the overwhelming majority (17 of 20) of shortlisted programmes were delivered primarily in person prior to 2020, many were forced to make an abrupt transition to a partially or entirely virtual format due to COVID-19 safety measures. Most of the shortlisted programmes were established to address specific educational needs and have implemented novel strategies, such as working with illiterate females to develop personal and employable skills. Additionally, other programmes established initiatives to address a particular aspect of children and young adult's educational exclusion. 17 of the 20 shortlisted programmes are leveraging digital technologies to increase access to and participation in educational opportunities. Taking everything into account, the analysis also indicates that only two of the twenty programmes are taught entirely in mother tongues. Moreover, each of the shortlisted programmes proposed curricula that advanced learners through successive levels of education until they attained a predetermined standard educational qualification, and programme durations ranged from one month to 24 months, with an average of 8.7 months.

It should be emphasized that while more programmes are being compelled to go digital as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, several issues regarding digital safety remain unresolved, ranging from data protection and personal data privacy to awareness of social well-being issues associated with technology use by the most marginalized individuals surprisingly, only one programme in Canada, "Frontier College," has provided learners, staff, and volunteers with online safety training.

More information on the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes
- en.unesco.org/themes/literacy/prizes
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