Literacy in Europe: Facts and figures

**ECONOMIC EFFECTS**

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<td>Lost earnings and limited employability</td>
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<td>Lost business productivity</td>
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<td>Lost wealth creation opportunities for individuals and business</td>
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<td>Lower technology skills capacity in future</td>
<td>Higher spending on education due to students falling behind</td>
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**WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?**

In order to achieve a fully literate Europe, action is required:

- **Across society**: Create partnerships for literacy development between education and societal players such as municipalities, businesses, trade unions and NGOs.
- **Across age groups**: Literacy policies should have a lifelong time-span, stretching from early childhood to adulthood.
- **Across government**: Ministries of Education should develop a joint literacy approach, actively involving other ministries such as Culture, Health, Employment and Finance. The same joint policy approach is needed at the EU level.
- **Across election cycles**: Literacy development and politics move at different speeds. Sustained political commitment to keep the issue alive in society is crucial to maintain momentum for initiatives on the ground.

**The costs related to literacy issues for all 28 EU countries are estimated to be 350 billion euros.**

**Children with literacy difficulties in Europe**

- On average 17% of European 15-year-olds have poor reading skills (Source: PISA, 2012).
- According to the latest PISA report on average 17% of European 15-year-olds (13% of 15-year-old girls and 27% of 15-year-old boys) have poor reading skills and cannot understand their own school textbooks well (Source: PISA, 2012).

**Adults with literacy difficulties in Europe**

- Number of adults (16-65 years of age) with literacy difficulties (Source: PIAAC, 2013).
- Percentage of adults between 16 and 65 years with literacy difficulties.

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Social inclusion
- Adults with poor literacy skills are only half as likely to trust others as highly skilled adults are; they believe they have little impact on the political process; and they are less likely to participate in volunteer activities.
- A higher percentage of no-show and non-take up (not making use of governmental information) is observed among adults with literacy difficulties.
- People with higher literacy skills report a higher level of independence and are better equipped to fill out forms. Higher literacy skills help improve self-reliance and social inclusion.

People with literacy difficulties are more likely to be in insecure and irregular employment. Adults (aged 16-65) with literacy difficulties are more likely to be unemployed and to be on social benefits.

The percentage of low-skilled jobs is expected to decrease by 39% in 2020 compared to 2010. By 2025, low-skilled employees are expected to face a number of problems related to the wage gap, decreased job security and a higher risk of poverty (Source: CPB and SCP, 2015).

Health
- Having low literacy skills is connected to a higher risk of numerous illnesses, being hospitalised, and depression.
- People with literacy difficulties have a 1.5 to 2 times higher death risk than people without literacy difficulties, for example because they are less able to understand medicine leaflets or to read prescriptions correctly (Source: Sudore et al., 2006; Twickler et al., 2009).

Family life
- Children whose parents have poor literacy skills are more likely to struggle with literacy themselves and are less likely to do well in school.
- People with higher literacy skills report improved contact with family members.

Crime
- 60-80% of prisoners have reading and writing skills below basic levels.
- Amongst juvenile delinquents, up to 85% are not able to read and write well.
- Those prisoners who still have reading and writing difficulties upon release have a higher probability of re-offending (Source: World Literacy Foundation, 2015).

Unemployed Europeans have far lower literacy skills than those working full-time.

Source: PIAAC, 2013.