

EUROPEAN DECLARATION OF THE RIGHT TO LITERACY

Introduction

Literacy is fundamental to human development. It enables people to live full and meaningful lives, and to contribute towards the enrichment of the communities in which we live. By literacy we mean the ability to read and write at a level whereby individuals can effectively understand and use written communication in all media (print or electronic), including digital literacy.

Literacy is an essential prerequisite for all forms of learning. In the knowledge-based societies of the 21st Century, with the rapid spread of new technologies and a constantly changing work environment, literacy learning is no longer limited to childhood and adolescence but must be recognised as a lifelong need and requirement.

The European Literacy Challenge

In Europe one in five 15-year-olds and nearly 55 million adults lack basic literacy skills. Not only does this make it difficult for them to find a job, it also increases their risk of poverty and social exclusion, limiting opportunities for cultural and civil participation, lifelong learning and personal growth.

The European Commission recognises that there has been little improvement in literacy in the last 10 years. Yet, with affirmative action, we can make a difference. This Declaration shows that with the right support in place, children and young people *can* develop strong literacy skills, and adults *can* improve their skills and take their rightful place in society.

Literacy as a basic right in Europe

Everyone in Europe has the right to acquire literacy. European Union Member candidate and associate States should ensure that people of all ages, regardless of social class, religion, ethnicity and gender, are provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to develop sufficient and sustainable literacy skills and knowledge in order to effectively understand and use written communication in print and digital media.

11 CONDITIONS REQUIRED TO PUT THIS BASIC LITERACY RIGHT INTO PRACTICE:

1. Young children are encouraged at home in their language and literacy development.

2. Parents receive support in helping their children's language and literacy development.

3. Affordable high-quality preschool, or kindergarten, fosters children's language and emergent literacy development through play.

4. High-quality literacy instruction for children, adolescents and adults is regarded as a core goal for all educational institutions.

5. All teachers receive effective initial teacher education and professional development in literacy teaching and learning in order to be well prepared for their demanding tasks.

6. Digital competence is promoted across all age groups including critical and creative use of digital media.

7. Reading for pleasure is actively promoted and encouraged.

8. Libraries are accessible and well resourced.

9. Children and young people who struggle with literacy receive appropriate specialist support.

10. Adults are supported to develop the literacy skills and knowledge necessary for them to participate fully in society.

11. Policy-makers, professionals, parents and communities work together to ensure equal access to literacy by closing the gaps in social and educational levels.

Authorship: Renate Valtin (chair), Viv Bird, Greg Brooks, Bill Brozo, Christine Clement, Simone Ehmig, Christine Garbe, Maurice de Greef, Ulrike Hanemann, Kees Hammink, David Mallows, Fabio Nascimbeni, Sari Sulonen, Giorgio Tamburlini



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