

# Spread of literacy among women highlighted in UNESCO anniversary global review

21 April 2017 – The increase in reading and writing proficiency among women is a result of the significant up tic in their enrolment and completion of primary education over the last five decades, even as overall funding for adult literacy has remained low, a recently-launched study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) has found.

The publication, *Reading the past, writing the future: Fifty years of promoting literacy*, marks the “uplifting and sobering” [fiftieth anniversary](#) of UNESCO’s efforts to mark global progress on literacy, celebrated annually on 8 September as International Literacy Day. The authors of the current report examine the nature and evolution of the educational challenge, and take stock of literacy initiatives worldwide.

The spread of literacy among women has been a key feature of the past fifty years. However, the gap between male and female literacy rates only started narrowing from 1990 onwards. UNESCO projects that it is likely to keep unfolding over the period of 2015–30 and beyond.

While various positive trends are highlighted, Qian Tang, UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Education, in the [publication’s foreword](#), calls for “renewed and strengthened commitment to support literacy promotion for all, including the 758 million youth and adults currently excluded from the networks of written communication.”

The authors note that around 1950, just over half of all the world’s people were reported as being literate. Since then, they state, the adult literacy rate has increased by five percentage points every decade on average, to 86 per cent in 2015.

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with various contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society. UNESCO  
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One of the report’s main findings is that there are now more illiterate adults compared with 50 years ago, meaning that literacy efforts have not kept pace with population growth, a trend UNESCO’s Mr. Tang finds ‘troubling.’

**Resources to educate adults**

The UN's educational arm identifies sufficient resources for education as one of the bottlenecks for the [2030 Agenda](#) and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically [Goal 4](#), on ensuring 'inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning' particularly for the large and growing group of illiterate adults. The authors find that funding for adult education and literacy has rarely been adequate.

UNESCO claims that lack of funding is one of the reasons why progress continues to be slow in certain regions and countries. Among the surveyed countries, only four devote three per cent or more of their educational budget to adult education.

Total aid to education by the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is about 1.4 per cent of their total aid budget, according to UNESCO's report, with only a few OECD-members devoting more than three per cent of their individual funding to education.



Numbers of illiterate adults (aged 15 and above) and illiterate young people (aged 15–24) (million), by region, 1950 and 2015. Graphic: UNESCO

### ***Regional disparities***

Progress has been far from uniform across countries and regions. UNESCO defines the spread of literacy among young people – especially young women – as a decisive trend for Western Asia and Northern Africa regions, with regional youth literacy rates reaching almost 95 per cent in 2015.

UNESCO argues that the spread of literacy has contributed to the demand for political freedom and socio-economic development expressed by young people in these regions. It also points out that their reading and writing proficiency will be crucial for democratization and stabilization in both regions.

Eastern Asia and South-East Asia have almost universalized literacy thanks to steady progress since the 1960s. Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have also reached high adult literacy and almost universal youth literacy in recent decades.

For decades large-scale adult illiteracy will persist in Southern Asia, UNESCO projects. The number of illiterate adults has merely stabilized, but the region still counts 43.9 million illiterate young people. Progress made in the last 25 years has been hampered by extreme poverty and conflict.

Other regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania face specific difficulties. UNESCO warns that both regions cannot be expected to reach universal youth literacy rates by 2030 if current trends continue. It claims that sub-Saharan Africa – accounting for almost half of the world's illiterate people – is the only region in which the number of illiterate young people kept increasing.

The report is based on data from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and

information from UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL). The publication analyses trends and impacts of literacy programmes on 50 countries around the world.

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## [UN refugee agency sending urgent relief items for Congolese civilians fleeing to Angola](#)

21 April 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency is shipping tents, mosquito nets and other essential relief items to Angola, where some 9,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have fled this month alone.

Refugees reported fleeing [attacks from militia groups](#), who are targeting police, military officials, and civilians who they believe are supporting or representing the Government, Babar Baloch, spokesperson at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters at the UN's Geneva Office.

The refugees are fleeing from the Kasai region, a formerly peaceful area that turned violent in mid-2016, forcing more than one million civilians to run away.

The new arrivals are terrified and still fear for their lives and mentioned they do not have any immediate plans to return home, Mr. Baloch said. Some parents have reportedly sent their children across the border, worrying they would be forcibly recruited by the militias if they had stayed in the DRC.

The UN agency expressed particular concern about the situation of children, many of whom are arriving malnourished and sick & suffering from diarrhoea, fever and malaria.

Those fleeing into Angola continue to arrive mainly in Dundo, the capital of north-eastern Luanda Norte Province.

UNHCR is sending an additional emergency team to the town tomorrow, to support relief efforts.

There are concerns that the situation will worsen as Angola's wet season peaks in April, further complicating living conditions and the health of refugees, particularly women, children, the elderly and the disabled.

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## UNICEF calls for action to prevent more deaths in Central Mediterranean as attempted crossings spike

21 April 2017 – Noting increases in number of migrants, including children, attempting to reach European shores using the Central Mediterranean route, and consequent rise in number of deaths, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has called for safe and legal pathways for those who are fleeing conflict, poverty and deprivation.

[According](#) to UNICEF estimates, at least 849 people, including more than 150 children, perished at sea while trying to make the perilous crossing since January this year.

“It is deeply concerning that vulnerable people, including thousands of children, are risking their lives to reach Europe’s shores using this incredibly dangerous route,” Afshan Khan, the UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe, said in a [news release](#) today.

Since the start of the year, nearly 37,000 [refugees and migrants](#) – 13 per cent of them children – have reached Italy by sea via the Central Mediterranean. This is an increase of 42 per cent compared to the same time period last year.

In particular, unaccompanied and separated children are at most risk, and these numbers too have seen a dramatic increase. In January and February this year, some 1,865 unaccompanied and separated children arrived in Italy, an increase of 40 per cent compared to the same period last year.

This is further evidence that when safe and legal pathways to migration are cut off, desperate children and families will do whatever they can to flee conflict, poverty and deprivation

UNICEF also noted that recent good weather and calmer waters in the Mediterranean have been accompanied by a surge in refugees and migrants attempting to cross. During the Easter weekend (last weekend) alone, more than 8,300 were rescued from the sea between Libya and Italy. At least eight migrants were reported to have drowned over the weekend.

“This is further evidence that when safe and legal pathways to migration are cut off, desperate children and families will do whatever they can to flee conflict, poverty and deprivation,” noted Ms. Khan.

As part of its global policy for children on the move, the UN agency has been calling for more action to protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children; end the detention of children seeking refugee status

or migrating; and to promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.

It has also underlined the need to keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status; to ensure that all refugee and migrant children have opportunities to learn, access to health care and other quality services; and to address the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants.

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## [All sides in Syria crisis felt impact of 'horrific' weekend attack on evacuee convoy, says UN envoy](#)

20 April 2017 – Speaking to journalists after a meeting of the Humanitarian Taskforce (HTF), Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, stated that the horrific attack on a convoy of evacuees this past weekend had impacted everyone at today's talks.

"Armed groups' representatives [present at the HTF], Government representatives and non-governmental organizations, all of them [were] affected by the explosion, all helped to make sure that [the wounded] could get to the hospital," [said](#) Mr. de Mistura.

"That was the main moment of total unity among all the members of the HTF [...] in a way the divisions were blurred by the horrific attack which was meant to do the opposite," he added.

At least 130 people, including 67 children were killed in the attack near Rashideen, western rural Aleppo, and more than 200 were wounded. [According](#) to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), video showed children gathering around a person giving out sweets just prior to the explosion.

Mr. de Mistura also informed the media that he will be meeting with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister on Monday, 24 April, to discuss the next steps regarding both Astana process – which yielded the December 2016 ceasefire in Syria brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran – and the UN-facilitated [intra-Syrian talks](#).

He also noted that though the trilateral meeting, involving the UN, the United States and Russia has been postponed, it "is still on the table" and there is a clear intention to maintain the forum and resume it at a later date.

Together with the Ceasefire Taskforce, the Humanitarian Taskforce was

established last February by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). They have been meeting separately on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

Also speaking alongside Mr. de Mistura, Jan Egeland, the UN Senior Advisor informed the media that as of mid-April, some 564,000 people across front lines, and in besieged and hard-to-reach areas were provided with relief. Compared to last year, fewer people were reached in besieged areas (160,000) but more were provided relief in hard-to-reach areas.

“So 30 per cent less access to besieged areas, 35 per cent more to hard-to-reach areas,” he said, noting that there are resources for relief in Syria and humanitarians willing to deliver them, “but the military logic is [prevailing over] the besieged areas these days [and] we are not able to go there.”

Mr. Egeland further underlined that besiegement should end by being lifted, not by places being emptied from people, and expressed hope for a breakthrough so that people are able to access urgently needed humanitarian relief as well as get back to their normal lives.

“If they follow a military logic, I think they will continue, if they follow a humanitarian logic I think a breather could be wise to ensure that there are sufficient protection guarantees,” he said. “[Sieges] belong in the Middle Ages, they do not belong in 2017, they could be lifted, you can still choose to fight a war, but without suffocation of civilians.”

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## [UN seeks more ‘cost-effective’ flight logistics in peacekeeping, political missions](#)

20 April 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today launched an initiative to boost efficiency of United Nations planes and flights, as it was revealed that the Organization spent close to \$750 million from 2015 to 2016 on air assets in its peacekeeping and political missions.

“While these assets provide essential logistics and military enabling capabilities, given their significant cost implications, the Secretary-General has asked the heads of field missions to systematically analyze and adjust the composition and utilization of their air fleet and to seek alternative solutions that may be more cost-effective,” UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told journalists in New York.

Immediate changes include reducing fleets, limiting passenger movement to essential needs and cutting the number of non-mission passengers traveling on UN flights, and reducing the number of special flights.

The UN currently deploys 58 fixed-wing and 157 rotary-wing aircraft in 12 peacekeeping missions and 6 special political missions, the Spokesperson said.

The effort to reduce costs is being led by the Department of Field Support, which provides logistical support to the Department of Peacekeeping and the Department of Political Affairs.

The policy change is part of the Secretariat's "ongoing review of costs and the use of resources provided by Member States," the Spokesperson added.