



## Youth and adult literacy educators: status, challenges and opportunities towards professionalization

Tuesday, 6 October from 10h00 to 11h30 (GMT +2)

English, French and Spanish interpretation available.

### Registration

### Context and rationale

The recent COVID-19 crisis has had a dramatic impact on schooling and lifelong learning for children, young people and adults, magnifying pre-existing literacy challenges. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, at least 773 million adults and young people lacked basic literacy skills<sup>1</sup>. In addition, 617 million children and adolescents were not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. A rapid analysis of the situation of youth and adult literacy provision<sup>2</sup> suggests that the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on youth and adult literacy has been disheartening. The majority of literacy programmes have been suspended, while many initial education response plans have not explicitly addressed the issue of learning continuity of this population.

<sup>1</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy>

<sup>2</sup> In August 2020, UNESCO conducted a survey on impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth and adult literacy programmes with the programmes documented in the UIL Effective Literacy Programme database (LitBase). (unpublished as of 15 September 2020)

In the time of massive disruption of literacy learning and a rapid shift to distance learning, youth and adult literacy educators have been on the frontlines to sustain and promote quality lifelong learning. Despite challenges countered by many youth and adult literacy educators, emerging anecdotal records indicates that they played an important role during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Many of them have flexibly deployed alternative modes of teaching and learning using radio, television, computers, mobile phones, print materials and open learning spaces. They have demonstrated their leadership, dedication, resilience, creativity, and mutual support in adjusting curriculum, adapting learning materials, developing online courses, and interacting with youth and adult learners by using the most relevant devices at their and their learners' disposals (UNESCO, 2020).

At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis has illuminated significant challenges faced by youth and adult literacy educators of diverse profiles, ranging from literacy educators who are in formal basic institutions, such as formal school teachers, to literacy facilitators, community animators and mobilizers, volunteers, and adult education tutors who tend to work in non-formal education (Rogers, 2005).<sup>3</sup> The already fragile and poor working conditions of youth and adult literacy educators have been further worsened. For instance, in some cases, educators' salaries were only partially paid, while in others, they were fully suspended. Moreover, the pre-existent differences between formal school teachers and adult literacy educators have become even more pronounced in terms of salary discrepancies, technologically poor infrastructure, lack of accessible, free, distance and digital learning materials, poor digital skills inadequate training opportunities, just to name a few. Also revealed is the differences between different types of youth and adult literacy educators, with educators in non-formal programmes, such as adult literacy facilitators, often being exposed to more challenges than those who are in formal education institutions. These challenges, along with a range of others, raise serious concerns about the future status of youth and adult literacy programmes and educators in particular.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, youth and adult literacy educators and facilitators were facing a number of issues, including short-term contracts, insufficient remuneration, challenging working conditions, lack of rigorous training opportunities and limited career development prospects. Importantly, many youth and adult literacy educators do not often receive any payment for their services, especially those serving in the communities and working on a voluntary basis<sup>4</sup>. For those who are remunerated, the average monthly pay varies widely. In many cases, however, their salaries are substantially less compared to a basic primary school teacher salary.

In many contexts, governments pay less attention to teachers, educators and facilitators who work in the non-formal education sector resulting in the absence of relevant normative and legal provisions for this group of educators. In terms of their training, the UNESCO's Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education<sup>5</sup> shows that many countries reported improvement in pre-service (76%) and in-service training (70%) of adult educators, including youth and adult literacy educators. Yet, a significant number of youth and adult literacy

---

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, A. (2005). Training adult literacy educators in developing countries. Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006 'Literacy for Life'. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO (2005). Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life. Paris: UNESCO and UIL (2017). The status of adult learning and education in sub-Saharan Africa - Regional report, CONFITEA VI Mid-Term review 2017. Hamburg: UIL.

<sup>5</sup> UIL (2019) Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education – Leaving no one behind: Participation, equity and inclusion. Hamburg: UIL.

educators do not receive any specialized training, and only a few have opportunities to benefit from continued professional development. Hence, professionalization and formalization of literacy educator training is imperative, if the quality of literacy provision and learning outcomes are to be improved. This process involves establishing common understandings of adult literacy educators and their minimum professional competence levels, institutionalization of their training, evaluation and certification of their competencies, and equivalencies with the formal education system, while still maintaining flexible methods of hiring and working with community volunteers (Rogers, 2005).

To leave no one left behind, including young people and adults with no or limited literacy skills, urgent attention is required about the professionalization of youth and adult literacy educators and strengthening their capacities during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Given the rise of distance learning, especially in the current context of the Covid-19 crisis, it is also important to develop and continuously improve their skills and capacities to manage new learning modalities. Without competent literacy educators, it is not possible for countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 Target 4.6 in particular.

In the context of World Teachers' Day 2020 which is celebrated with the theme, "Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future", this session brings together speakers from diverse perspectives to examine the status and working conditions of youth and adult literacy educators and to identify key challenges. It will also explore ideas and opportunities towards professionalization of youth and adult educators and their enhanced capacities for continued reflection and future action. These discussions will be linked with the need to build more inclusive and holistic education and lifelong learning policies and systems which include non-formal education and adult literacy and education sub-sector. During the session, national and international initiatives will be shared towards improving the knowledge base and research on literacy educators.

During this session, special attention will be given to normative instruments which provide guidance and orientations regarding educators of youth and adult literacy. These include the 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education<sup>6</sup> (Paragraph 28), the Belém Framework for Action<sup>7</sup> (paragraph 16), adopted at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (2009, Brazil), and the Education 2030 Framework for Action<sup>8</sup> (paragraphs 22, 81), while the General Comment No.13: The right to education<sup>9</sup> (paragraph 6) adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1999) also provides some orientation. As such, this virtual session is also an occasion to raise awareness about these instruments, as well as the limitation of the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers<sup>10</sup> (1966) which presently does not apply to non-formal and/or adult education. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on how governments can use the instruments as guidance for addressing challenges facing adult literacy educators, especially in the non-formal sector, and how the normative dimension of international efforts can be enhanced.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245179>

<sup>7</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187789>

<sup>8</sup> [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en\\_2.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/dGeneralCommentNo13TheRighttoEducation\(article13\)\(1999\).aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/dGeneralCommentNo13TheRighttoEducation(article13)(1999).aspx)

<sup>10</sup> The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers<sup>10</sup> (1966) does not apply to adult literacy educators for its scope which is limited to 'all teachers in both public and private schools up to the completion of the secondary stage of education'.

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---sector/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms\\_162034.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_162034.pdf)

## Objectives and expected outcomes

---

Main objectives of this session are as follows.

- To deepen understanding of the status of youth and adult literacy educators and the specificities of their profession by shedding light on their working conditions as compared to teachers in the formal sector.
- To identify key challenges experienced by literacy educators, and examine how the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the existing challenges.
- To explore ideas and opportunities for governments and development partners to strengthen legal and normative frameworks policies, governance and holistic training systems which include pre- and in-service professional training and continuous support, by harnessing the potential of truly inclusive and holistic lifelong learning and its systems.

Main expected outcomes are as follows.

- The awareness of countries and development partners raised regarding the status of youth and adult literacy educators
- Key challenges encountered by youth and adult literacy educators identified.
- Ideas and opportunities to improve national systems, policies, measures and practice identified towards professionalization of youth and adult literacy educators and their enhanced capacities for further reflection and action.

## How to register

---

To register, click on the 'Registration' link above.

## Agenda

---

Tuesday, 6 October 2020	
10h00 – 10h10	<b>Opening remarks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Mr David Atchoarena, Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning</li></ul>
10h10 – 11:20	<b>Panel discussion on 'Youth and Adult Literacy Educators: status, challenges and opportunities towards professionalization'</b>

	<p><b>Moderator:</b> Mr Hervé Huot-Marchand, Chief, Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ms Carolina Eizmendi, Educator, Permanent Learning Programme of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Uruguay, Laureate of the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes</li> <li>- Mr Augustin Poudiogo, Technical Advisor to the Minister of Education, Mali</li> <li>- Ms Christine Hofmann, Specialist, Skills for Social Inclusion, Skills and Employability Department, International Labour Organization</li> <li>- Mr Uwe Gartenschlaeger, DVV International and Mr Souphap Khounvixay, Curriculum GlobALE, Lao PDR</li> <li>- Mr Alan Rogers, Professor, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom</li> </ul> <p><b>Q&amp;A</b> with participants</p>
<p><b>11h20 – 11h30</b></p>	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr David Atchoarena, Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning</li> </ul>

## Stay in touch

World Teachers' Day 2020 #WorldTeachersDay



WorldTeachersDay@unesco.org



<https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldteachersday>



@UNESCO



@UNESCO