

**Message from Khaled El-Enany,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of
International Literacy Day**

8 September 2026

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of International Literacy Day, we reaffirm literacy as a fundamental human right and a powerful force for transforming lives, economies and societies.

Over the past decades, global efforts have driven significant progress. Between 1975 and 2024, youth literacy rates increased from 75% to 93%, while adult literacy rates rose from 65% to 88%. This progress reflects the power of international cooperation from the 1965 Tehran Conference, which inspired the creation of this day, to the 2026 Conference in Chiapas, Mexico.

Yet, today, 273 million children and youth are out of school, and 70% of ten-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple text. At the same time, 739 million adults lack basic literacy skills, two-thirds of whom are women. These figures represent lost opportunities and potential, and the denial of a fundamental human right.

Guided by the Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy 2020–2029, UNESCO works to address these issues. With governments and partners, we expand access to education, strengthen public education systems and support community-based approaches. We place gender equality at the forefront, accompanying countries to address gender norms, barriers and inequalities, focusing on reaching those most often left behind.

As the information terrain expands exponentially, we also work to strengthen new forms of literacy, including media and information literacy, AI literacy, and misinformation and disinformation recognition, to ensure discernment and critical thinking online.

On this milestone anniversary, let us renew our commitment to the work that lies ahead to harness the transformative power of literacy for people, planet and prosperity.