



UNESCO

The Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation

UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global
Literacy

**“Addressing Literacy Challenges in Europe with a
Sub-regional Focus:
Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative
Approaches”**

14-16th May 2008

*Hyatt Park Hotel
Baku, Azerbaijan*

Report of the Conference

Key Partners

Ministry of Education, Republic of Azerbaijan
The Heydar Aliyev Foundation
UNESCO Headquarters, UNLD Coordination Unit
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), Hamburg

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List of Acronyms

CE	Continuing Education
CLC	Community Learning Centre
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFA	Education For All
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LIFE	Literacy Initiative For Empowerment
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNLD	UN Literacy Decade
USAID	US Agency for International Development

“A society that accepts illiteracy is unfit for the future.”

H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands

“The serious challenge for Europe regards the level of literacy. A high proportion of people simply do not have the literacy skills they need for full social and economic participation.”

Koïchiro Matsuura, Director General, UNESCO

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Section I: Synthesis

Background

Despite high overall literacy rates in Europe, illiteracy is a problem for a significant proportion of the population. Contrary to the commonly held assumption that low literacy levels are only found among minority groups, there are growing numbers within mainstream European populations who either have weak foundations in literacy from school or are unable to use their literacy skills and therefore do not retain them. The demands of rapid social and technological change, economic and cultural globalisation, growing diversity, competition and liberalisation, inequality of opportunities, conflict, and poverty in all its forms require that individuals have basic competencies that go far beyond mere technical communication skills. Over and above reading and writing skills, scientific literacy, mathematics and the acquisition of language, people need to develop capacities for assessing, managing, integrating, interacting with and evaluating knowledge.

Although successful and sustainable national literacy policies as well as very rich and stimulating programmes and initiatives do exist in the region, in many European countries, more efforts are required to build a national strategy to address the literacy and adult education challenges. It is in this background that UNESCO organised, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a regional conference on *“Addressing Literacy Challenges in Europe with a Sub-regional Focus: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches”*, in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 14-16 May, 2008. The Conference witnessed the participation of 30 countries of Europe and the CIS countries, including Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

The Baku Conference was the fifth in a series of six regional conferences being organised in support of literacy by UNESCO internationally, as a follow up to the White House Conference on Global Literacy hosted by Mrs Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States, in New York City in September 2006. Thus far, similar conferences have been organised in Qatar, Mali, China and India, covering the Arab States, Africa, East Asia, South-East Asia, the Pacific regions and South, South West and Central Asia respectively. The final conference will be held in Mexico in September 2008, covering Latin America and the Caribbean.

The common objectives of the Regional Conferences are:

- to build awareness among countries on their literacy and adult education challenges;
- to advocate for literacy and adult education;
- to identify and discuss main challenges and achievements in literacy and adult education;
- to present and disseminate effective literacy and adult education practices;
- to build cooperation among stakeholders;
- to develop recommendations on how to move forward and how to mobilise countries to build national strategies to address their literacy and adult education challenges.

In particular, the objectives of the Baku Conference were to raise awareness of the literacy and adult education situation specific to Europe, to stimulate discussion and provide a platform for information exchange, and to generate concerted action aimed at addressing this challenge, thereby contributing to the implementation of the goals of the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. As would be recalled, the latter is an action plan for the European Union that aims to make the EU “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010”¹.

The Regional Conferences on literacy are being facilitated by UNESCO in the background of the UN Literacy Decade (UNLD) and the Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (LIFE). The UN Literacy Decade was launched in 2003 with the slogan “Literacy as Freedom”, with the aim of increasing literacy levels and empowering people everywhere, and in declaring this Decade, the international community recognised that the promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, as part of efforts towards peace, respect and exchange in a globalising world. At the request of the UN General Assembly, activities related to the Decade are coordinated by UNESCO, which launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in 2005 as a framework for achieving the UNLD goals. LIFE targets 35 countries that have a literacy rate of less than 50 percent or a population of more than 10 million people who cannot read nor write. Eighty-five percent of the world’s non-literate population resides in these countries, and two-thirds are women and girls.

Formally inaugurated on the evening of 14th May, the deliberations of the Conference took place on the 15th and 16th May 2008. During these discussions, participants took

¹ For more details, refer http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/pdf/kok_report_en.pdf

part in four roundtables and six panel discussions. The roundtables focused on the following themes:

- The concept and evolution of literacy and adult learning in today's world
- Assessment, measurement and evaluation of literacy levels and basic competencies
- Pedagogical approaches for promoting quality basic learning
- Responding to new demands, integrated systems of learning opportunities

The panels showcased effective practices and innovative projects in the region, focusing on the broad themes of:

- Family Literacy and Intergenerational Learning
- Literacy for Health
- Workplace Literacy
- E-learning, Open-Distance Education and ICTs
- Quality basic learning for groups with special needs, e.g. minorities, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, prisoners
- Education for Sustainable Development: Citizenship, consumer and environmental education

Summary of the deliberations of the Conference

The opening ceremony, prefaced by a message of welcome from H. E. Mr I. Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan, was addressed by Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of Azerbaijan, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director General UNESCO, Mr Hafiz Pashayev, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Azerbaijan, and H. R. H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. Each of the speakers highlighted the issues facing the region in the area of literacy, pointing out that it was no longer adequate to rely upon the traditionally accepted high rates of literacy. Even though the absolute numbers of illiterate adults in Europe are low, there are still many who lack the necessary skills to participate successfully in society in an economically and socially fulfilling manner. In areas of conflict, these problems are exacerbated, and refugees and internally displaced persons often remain deprived of the benefits of literacy².

In addition, the growth of technology and increased globalisation has meant that while there is no longer a simple definition of literacy, it is certainly no longer confined to the ability to read and write. Constant upgrading of skills to keep up with changing technology has become essential, and the quality of literacy delivered to citizens has therefore acquired greater significance. If the vision of the Lisbon Strategy, which aims to make Europe the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010, is to be achieved, vigorous measures will be called for now. Knowledge is all about information, and illiteracy translates into the inability to access information, and thus an inability to be part of a knowledge society.

This implies that it is essential to increase and sustain awareness about the importance of literacy at all levels of society, from governments and policy makers to service

² Full texts of all speeches are provided in the annex.

providers. It is not only important to put literacy at the top of political agenda, it is also important to mobilise society to get involved in this effort, remembering that there is no silver bullet to eradicate illiteracy. All aspects of literacy are important, from dealing with early childhood care and education needs, to school education and adult education, because finally, societies that accept illiteracy are unfit for the future.

The formal discussions of the conference began with a roundtable discussion of the concept and evolution of literacy and adult learning in recent years. Participants agreed that it was necessary to reconceptualise literacy at regular intervals, so that practitioners have a better understanding of all that it implies and new and different ways of looking at the issue are found. It is important to situate reading and writing in the broader context of social practice, so that the concept is understood in its various facets and as a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Speakers felt that this is an historical juncture in the development of the concept of literacy, one in which one sees an unintended paradox—while on the one hand governments are paying greater attention to the development of school education and improving the quality of education for young people, on the other, after World War II especially, adult literacy seems to have been somewhat marginalised. In the context of Europe specifically, the differing political histories across countries have had varying implications for the development of literacy. While in the Eastern (and formerly socialist) parts of Europe literacy was viewed as a tool for mass mobilisation, it developed in the West largely as a fall out of the emphasis on young people.

There are several challenges for the future, including the creation of a supportive literate environment that sustains the gains of literacy learning. Some momentum in the direction of creating awareness and involving governments and people has been achieved but much remains to be done.

The panel on family literacy and inter-generational learning discussed several examples of programmes designed to use the family as a ready vehicle to deliver literacy. While children improve their reading and writing skills, their teachers – parents and grandparents - display improved social skills, confidence and literacy levels themselves. Despite these encouraging results, there were concerns that such programmes still tend to be small and NGO-run, which often compromises their sustainability. There was a strong feeling that successful initiatives supporting inter-generational learning should receive more support from governments so that their reach and impact can be increased.

The panel discussion on literacy and health emphasised the strong connection between the two, which can of course, work in both directions. In other words, while literacy is important for health, the absence of good health can be a factor in preventing participation in schooling and literacy initiatives. Evidence from across the world shows that mother and child health depends crucially on the level of literacy of the mother, and clearly literacy is important in providing people critical information that helps to promote health and prevent disease. And yet, the presence or absence of literacy impacts the biological and psychological health of human beings on a larger scale, and should not therefore be viewed only in terms of a mechanism for the delivery of information. Health-related programmes serve as non-formal entry points for the delivery of literacy programmes, and can be targeted in a manner that allows both

objectives to be met. The implementation of such initiatives can be greatly facilitated by the use of peer learning, and of course, by ensuring strong community involvement in the design and delivery of the programme.

The issue of literacy and sustainable development was considered in the third panel. It was felt that with increased globalisation, in societies that are made up of diverse groups, preventive education is essential to maintain peaceful coexistence, in turn essential for sustainable development. This makes it important to include human rights education in programmes for young adults and children and to teach them to respect diversity and other cultures. Human rights education must be an integral part of the right to education, combining as it does learning *about* human rights (as facts), learning *for* human rights (developing skills and competencies like active listening and critical thinking) and learning *through* human rights (using empathy and understanding). In any multicultural society, sustainable development depends upon the acceptance of differences and diversity. Several methods by which this can be done were discussed, including community outreach programmes, role play, participatory training and cultural festivals.

The roundtable on assessment and measurement described several ongoing and proposed systems designed to measure literacy levels. The act of measurement acquires greater significance as our understanding of literacy changes. No longer being an either-or concept, literacy has to be viewed as a continuum of learning. It thus becomes important to identify those who need most help so that specific targeted interventions can be designed to assist them, and to this end, policy makers would always be interested in those who are at the lower end of the measured scale. Literacy is no longer about reading and writing, and its measurement must be viewed in the context of the impact that it has in ensuring social and economic well being. The benefit of assessment lies more in the nature of the policy changes that it helps to bring about in terms of, for instance, remediation and capacity building for teachers, and not so much in terms of individual scores on the concerned tests. Assessment and measurement are essential for evidence-based policy making and there is a need to disseminate their results widely to enable greater understanding of the issues. Given the importance of assessment results, several speakers pointed to the need to design the related tools carefully to ensure that they are not compromised by cultural and other biases.

The panel discussion on ICTs and literacy focused on the use of technology as a tool to further the spread of literacy, particularly in the context of the growing knowledge society in the European region. Speakers agreed that ICTs have the great advantage of being able to use local content, yet be replicable across national boundaries. Some of the examples presented included the use of mobile phones, the internet and TV to deliver literacy-related material. Technology of this nature has great potential for bringing about equity and improving access to information, empowering learners in the process so that they can independently find and use the information they need to function successfully in their day to day lives. Moreover, ICTs help to create a dynamic literate environment which is of utmost importance for supporting and sustaining the learning process.

The panel on learning for groups at risk considered the requirements of those with special needs, including, among others, refugees, minorities, internally displaced persons, nomads and prisoners. Such groups exist in all countries, and the percentage of

those without basic literacy skills in these groups tends to be always higher than in the mainstream. The delivery of tailored programmes to meet their learning needs requires an understanding of their characteristics, and must strike a balance between mainstream education and the need to remain connected to their own culture and heritage. At the same time, experience has shown that segregated education is not the answer to such situations, since it leads to poor learning and disconnects from larger society. Panellists shared details of successful projects, describing the steps to take to ensure successful implementation, such as mobilisation of parents and community members, creation of a positive environment through advocacy with policy makers, teachers, administrators and others, and providing remedial and extra-curricular support to the children so that they could catch up with their peers in the mainstream. An important lesson learnt was that the institutionalisation of such projects is as important as the initiatives themselves, and continuous advocacy with governments is essential in order to move from practice to policy.

Issues of workplace literacy engaged the participants in panel 6, who agreed that it was essential to raise awareness among employers about the importance and utility of workplace programmes. The need for workplace literacy arises from the fact that a significant number of those employed often lack or have low basic skills and may be inadequately prepared to tackle new technology and equipment. However, the definition of literacy in this context needs to be broader, focusing on life skills and new technologies to avoid the resistance from employers and employees that is likely to arise if there is reference only to a lack of basic literacy. To avoid any feeling of shame, it has been found useful to involve both low and highly skilled workers.

The development of relevant indicators should be an integral part of the project design to measure progress over time, and these indicators should be circulated and understood by all stakeholders. In general, ICT courses were found to be fairly popular, reinforcing some of the ideas emanating from the panel discussion on ICTs and literacy. Among the challenges listed by speakers were the need to ensure sustainability of programmes that have already been taken up, increasing the level of government involvement and support, and the necessity of placing this issue on the public agenda. An important recommendation was to prepare and circulate a list of transnational companies that have already taken up workplace literacy programmes in one country, to use it to convince managers of the same company in other countries to follow.

The roundtable on the promotion of quality basic education discussed several factors that impact the delivery of quality learning. Presenters began by pointing out that there was often not enough evidence on teaching and learning practices and that better understanding of effective teaching and its relationship to learning outcomes was essential for the development of better tools and policy guidelines. More research in these areas is thus an important requirement, focusing among other things on foundational skills. In some countries of the region, the arrival of large numbers of immigrants necessitates a rethinking of the concept of basic literacy. Such new members of society need the skills necessary to adapt to their new home, and it becomes important to help them build broader skills that cover cultural and social requirements. The process of improving the quality of programmes can be helped greatly by the use of formative assessment - the frequent assessment, along the learning process, of learner understanding and progress to identify needs and individualise teaching and learning.

Going further, speakers emphasised the need for improved initial and continuing teacher training and for ensuring that literacy programmes make use of the learner's prior experience. Future programmes should build on what is already known and draw lessons from successful projects. More emphasis needs to be placed on improving outcomes and on integrating various institutions - educational, political and administrative - to ensure that learning is delivered effectively and at various stages of the learner's life.

Participants in the final roundtable on responding to new demands and creating integrated systems of learning opportunities began by pointing out that a significant problem when considering this issue arises from the fact that illiteracy is often not recognised as an issue in the European region. The problem at policy level is one of denial. For instance, even though nearly 800,000 people in Switzerland (about 16 percent of the population) could officially be classified as low literate, the issue is never discussed, and only 3000 of them actually attend any sort of remedial programme. The major players in such a situation are the non-governmental or non-formal actors, trying to take up the role that should rightfully be discharged by the government. There is an urgent need to create increased awareness about this issue, to involve as many agencies as possible in an assessment of the scale of the problem and to identify the concerned target groups. Addressing the problem will require strong partnerships between government and non-government agencies, as well as with the private sector and community-based organisations, which makes it particularly important to understand the role of State vis-à-vis non-State actors. Target groups of literacy programmes clearly do not have the resources to pay for them, while non-governmental organisations implementing them are also constrained in this respect, making it important for governments and public institutions to step in and provide the necessary financial support. In many cases, non-governmental actors may develop high quality training programmes, curricula and material, yet the high cost of doing so may prevent these efforts from being mainstreamed without government assistance.

Special mention was made of migrant populations who may well be literate in their own language, but not in the language of the country of their residence. Community-based organisations can play a significant role in facilitating literacy programmes in various situations. Speakers stressed the need to promote literacy and education as a value and to send out the message that literacy can change lives. Finally, the importance of cooperation between networks and countries was stressed, so as to learn from the experience of each other as a means to avoid duplication and to optimise the use of available resources.

Section II: Detailed report session by session

DAY 2: 15 May 2008

Roundtable 1: Concept and Evolution of Literacy and Adult Learning in Today's World

Moderator: Mr Adama Ouane, Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

**Panellists: Mr Peter Lavender, Deputy Director, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales), United Kingdom
Ms Marta Ferreira, Head of Unit, Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission
Ms Margareet de Vries, Director, Reading and Writing Foundation, Netherlands
Mr Janos Toth, Associate professor, Pázmány Catholic University, Hungary
Mr Aaron Benavot, Senior Policy Analyst, EFA Global Monitoring Report team, UNESCO**

Discussant: H.E. Ms Tatjana Koke, Minister of Education and Science, Latvia

Introducing the experts, Mr Adama Ouane stated that the roundtable would focus on clarifying basic concepts and issues. He emphasised the need to redefine what literacy means for this region, given the background of increasing globalisation and the importance of a knowledge society.

Mr Peter Lavender, United Kingdom

There are several challenges involved in conceptualising adult literacy: the term 'literacy' or 'literate' is problematic in itself, and means different things to different people and countries. A set of working definitions commonly accepted would be helpful. A second problem relates to having visible and coherent strategies by country, keeping them funded and sustained, and ensuring that all aspects of civil society are involved. The creation of a national strategy must be accompanied by a comprehensive campaign that educates and informs. A third challenge is to ensure that the teaching and learning approach is appropriate and understood. New forms of embedded teaching and learning must be developed; periodic curriculum renewal is important. A fourth challenge is the extent to which quality improvement is maintained, including the match between teacher development and the encouragement of new learners to take part. New forms of teacher training have to be developed and constantly upgraded. A fifth challenge relates to monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of programmes. This requires research on the social benefits of learning as well as an assessment of economic benefits, and great care that measurement does not create false incentives for educators and learners.

There is a need to reconceptualise literacy for two reasons—first, it makes it easier for practitioners and teachers if they understand clearly what it is. Second, this continuous

reconceptualisation allows discovering new and different ways of looking at literacy. It has often been pointed out that literacy is a means to an end and not the end in itself. Reading and writing therefore need to be situated in a broader context to focus on social practice, assuming that literacy and numeracy have different meanings in different contexts. Literacy and numeracy do not mean the same, and the latter should be given its proper place. If we are clear about reconceptualising literacy, we would be much sharper in our actions.

Nearly 350,000 people in England alone are learning English as a foreign or second language; if the ability to read, write and understand English is taken as a measure of literacy, these people would be classified as illiterate. Literacy programmes therefore must ensure that groups like these are also suitably covered.

Ms Marta Ferreira, European Commission

‘Adult literacy’ is a widely contested term and the definitions of ‘literacy’ and ‘adult basic skills’ vary from Member State to Member State in the European Union (EU). All definitions are however underpinned by the same requirement for adequate literacy to cope with the requirements of personal, social, and economic life.

From the last century, in all our societies, States and generally society have a well defined objective, that is, to send children and youth to school. However, large numbers of adults have not had the chance to go to school and have hence been marginalised due to a lack of basic literacy skills. Although societies are ageing, the number of adults who are illiterate is still significant in European society. While we have good school systems, there is still scope for improvement as has been shown by the Nordic countries. Two important streams feed the group of people who lack literacy skills—young drop outs from school and migrants. In a globalised world, Europe is in competition with others; in today’s knowledge society, without knowledge, one cannot manage one’s life. Dropouts need to be addressed as do those adults who lack literacy skills. The European Commission (EC) has been trying to raise awareness about these issues and to place this on the political and financial agenda.

Europe has 80 million low-skilled workers, around one third of the labour force. Estimates indicate that by 2010 only 15 percent of newly created jobs will be for those with basic schooling, while 50 percent of additional jobs will require tertiary level qualifications. At the same time, international surveys show that a significant share of the European population does not have the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community, and early school leavers are particularly at risk.

In all Member States, low levels of education and training contribute to marginalising large numbers of people and to excluding them from the benefits of society and from making a contribution to society. The contemporary labour market offers limited opportunities to people with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills.

Making basic skills genuinely available to everyone has been identified as one of the key issues for education and training policies by the Education Council in the Education and Training 2010 work programme (2002). The European Commission Action Plan on adult learning also addresses the need to ensure that adults in Europe

have possibilities to update and receive recognition for their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy.

The general situation over the last five years shows a significant improvement in the sphere of cooperation between countries. It is widely recognised that cooperation in education and training in 27 countries cannot take place without each other. There is also awareness that the situation of each country has evolved for historical reasons, hence the position in Nordic countries for instance, is very different from others. Substantial improvement is required in many countries. Strong cooperation between countries is therefore encouraged by the EC, facilitating the sharing of information with each other on performance and developments. Much of the reporting is around national strategies and their development. The exposure and exchange of ideas and practices is helpful and a successful method used by the EC and its Member States. The Commission has made several recommendations about teacher training, competence, qualifications and learning which have given room for discussion in the European Parliament and which resulted in recommendations of the Council of Ministers. A new momentum on the subject has been created along with the awareness that much needs to be done. The quality of teachers and trainers is an important aspect, as is the lack of research and statistics to make evidence-based policies. Governments need to see the results of their investments and appropriate research to establish the impact of these efforts is therefore essential.

Recent developments in adult literacy in the EU include the preparation of new documents that have been approved by the Council of Ministers and countries. Adult literacy is now accepted as an important issue to be tackled on priority, and there are signs that it will not stop now. Investments will have to be in priority areas to solve the problems of these groups. The European Commission Action Plan on adult literacy prepared in 2007 includes seventeen measures to be taken up in cooperation with Member States and other stakeholders at local and regional levels. These have a significant emphasis on quality and quality learning outcomes. One principle included is that all people must have an opportunity to qualify and move at least one step up from the present during their lifetimes. The Commission is also working with Member States to improve monitoring of the sector, which is very important since empirical evidence alone is not enough. The Action Plan is to be launched on 22nd May, and will allow countries to adopt their own action points, to be followed by appropriate legislation in each country. A group on research and statistics is being created to assist and some financing will be made available for peer learning groups.

The difficulty in Europe at the moment is to make the question of literacy one that can be treated deeply. Many good practices have emerged, but there is a need to set up a mechanism that would enable the Commission to share these more widely.

Ms Margreet de Vries, Netherlands

In the Netherlands there is a group of nearly 1.5 million people who have low literacy skills, which represents 10 percent of the population between the ages of 16-75 years. This means that they do not have sufficient skills to function in daily life, at home, work or at school. Among this group, there are some 250,000 people who are completely illiterate.

Lack of literacy skills is clearly a threat to society. In a developed country like the Netherlands, people find it hard to believe that there are still large numbers of people

who do not have sufficient skills to operate in daily life. In countries where the school system appears to be functioning well on the surface, there is a tendency for policymakers, parents, managers and teachers to take basic skills for granted. This leads to a situation where literacy is taken as given, along with the assumption that mandatory schooling will “do the trick”. Illiteracy is not talked about, and when people stop talking about something, it becomes a taboo. The lack of discussion encourages illiterates to remain silent, as they believe that they are the only ones with a problem. The longer people remain silent, the longer it takes to get the issue on the agenda and keep it there.

The issue of illiteracy is no longer just an educational issue, but also an economic, societal, technological and political one. This is precisely the rationale behind the Reading and Writing Foundation; because illiteracy is an issue that affects many policy areas, it can only be solved by involving different players and engaging more agencies with the issue. The Foundation works on the basis of a snowball effect, by getting as many individuals and entities as possible involved to create the necessary momentum to bring the issue to the fore. The Foundation works in three main ways: (1) communication, so as to break the taboo and ignorance about the issue; (2) the Foundation serves as a “marketplace” that brings together the required expertise in the field of illiteracy, from both public and private sectors; (3) it helps to develop concrete projects so that organisations can address the issue within their particular contexts.

There is momentum, but there is still a long way to go. In 2007, only 25 percent of companies surveyed named literacy as a problem. Many people still do not realise that they have a role to play in this area, because literacy is still in the “education box”. For instance, in waste companies, the Foundation’s survey found that basic literacy skills were lacking, and these findings were used to convince the companies of the importance of improving such skills. A toolkit (*Language Power*) was designed to help companies pick up things that they would like to concentrate on, from simple to more involved activities.

Mr Janoz Szigeti Toth, Hungary

Concepts such as literacy, old and new basic skills and key competencies are changing regularly, while the level of competencies in the great social groups is stagnating against revised concepts, rapid changes and new demands. It is of primary importance that public authorities recognise the significance of the development of a productive public schooling system and relevant training practice for adults. Having key competencies is not only a basic human right, it is also a fundamental component of any socio-economic development. Ensuring constant updating of key competencies is a joint responsibility of public bodies, businesses, firms and citizens themselves.

If the hierarchy of importance is turned to focus on citizenship and social inclusion instead of employability, a higher level of employability can be achieved whilst achieving other inherently valuable learning goals at the same time. Bridging disparities means more active citizenship, which can only lead to the achievement of sustainable economic competitiveness. There is a need to build key competency development programmes into an integrated lifelong learning policy at local government, regional and national levels. In addition to this there must be an operational public finance support mechanism, as well as infrastructure and adequate human resources. There is a need to develop a set of accepted tools for (a) criteria of good practices, (b) monitoring

of results, (c) investigating the needs of adults, (d) evaluation of providers, and, (e) creating a culture of developing local key competences programmes as joint projects.

Literacy levels in a traditional sense are high in the former socialist countries; there is, however, a need for a new concept of literacy. Something new began with OECD's work on literacy and competencies definitions and research, but the broad theoretic response of OECD has only focused on competition and economic aspects. While the initial focus was only on the school age population, it was realised later that all adults should also be able to maintain these skills over a lifetime. This led to the development of the key competence concept covering knowledge, skills and attitudes, focusing on personal fulfilment, employment and social interaction. These concepts have consequences for the harmonisation of delivery and implementation.

Competitiveness should lead to more equality and social inclusion in society. If we consider not only the twenty seven EU members but also the larger geographical Europe, there are several cultural and other differences that need to be reconciled. Investments in literacy need to be reviewed, especially with reference to public funds and response of governments, while reform in curriculum and institutions is important. Countries can be broadly divided into three categories: in some, there is a clear national strategy for literacy, backed by firm financial commitments. In the second category, there is much rhetoric but less commitment. In the last category, there is a big silence, almost as if no discussion implies no problem. There is a need to develop criteria for identifying good practices and sharing them with each other. Actors in policy and programme formulation are not only politicians, but also civil society, adult learners themselves, churches, etc. and they should be involved in designing these programmes.

Mr Aaron Benavot, UNESCO

Based on the conventional definitions of measuring the presence or absence of minimum reading and writing skills, the literacy challenge in Central, Eastern and Western Europe is rather trivial. Out of a total of 900 million adults, only 15 million (or less than 2 percent) are counted as lacking basic literacy skills. Adult literacy rates, as well as measures of the literate environment, are high throughout the region. Indeed, most European countries have dropped literacy questions from their census schedules. Universal primary - and often secondary - education have been achieved. By implication, most young people should have acquired core literacy skills, i.e., the abilities to decipher a script code, understand a printed text and communicate verbally and write in a shared language.

Recently, however, policy makers and academics have indicated a less sanguine picture of the state of literacy. They emphasise emerging literacy challenges in the wake of globalisation, spreading knowledge-based economies, and powerful ICTs. Literacy increasingly entails the acquisition of key analytical, communication and problem solving skills, the ability to locate, organise and assess the diverse forms of information, and to understand and communicate in diverse cultural contexts. Such literacy skills, when effectively acquired, contribute to a toolkit of generic competencies, which enable individuals to learn and communicate effectively throughout their lives. Schooling thus becomes the first phase of a lifelong process of adult learning.

Throughout this region, pockets of poor quality schools and high drop-out rates continue to leave many young people with weak literacy skills and low educational qualifications. In the face of dynamic information-laden societies, low literacy contributes to cycles of poverty, economic marginalisation, poor health and social exclusion. These conditions are particularly salient among migrants, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. To address these literacy challenges, it becomes necessary for governments to prioritise public funding for literacy programmes, increase access to quality formal, non-formal and informal educational opportunities, and coordinate the work of literacy stakeholders.

We are at a very unique historical juncture in the evolution of the literacy concept. Two paradoxical trends have been observed in the last few years at the adult literacy level. It is considered a key element of modernisation and development of populations. However, census schedules show that many countries no longer ask questions about adult literacy, as if assuming that it is not important. At the level of young people, expansion of schooling, improvement of the quality of education and the periodic assessment through tests such as PISA seem to indicate that literacy is being included in such assessments. The notion of literacy among young people becomes a more central part of the discourse. The dots have now been connected to the notion of lifelong learning and adult literacy, indicating that the skills that young people acquire help in adult learning. The political histories of eastern and western Europe have, of course, been very different, which has implications for literacy. In the east, literacy was seen as important to mobilising adult populations, while in the west, the emphasis was on young people, with literacy being achieved largely as a by-product.

The notion of a literate environment is a critical aspect. Literacy is more than mere reading and writing, and needs to be supported by an appropriate literate environment. The availability of material, publications, access to communication devices using text, and the like, make a big difference to sustaining literacy. Arriving at a consensus on what constitutes a literate environment is essential to ensure that the gains of literacy programmes can be sustained; this requires the development of appropriate indicators, concepts and policies.

Based on experience of the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR), there are some issues to keep in mind in relation to varying country definitions of literacy. UNESCO has historically compiled data about literacy and has found that while the international community has made great efforts to standardise matters in formal education, this is not the case for literacy. The definition of literacy varies from country to country, which means a lack of standardisation across countries, resulting in different compilations of information. Second, there has always been a black and white divide in terms of can and cannot; yet literacy is not a stand alone characteristic, it is part of a continuum and means many things such as literacy, numeracy and the ability to write. The ability to measure literacy is lagging behind such developments and concepts. Countries like China, for instance, have developed more direct assessment methods for literacy, which give us a different understanding of the extent of the challenge.

Discussant: H.E. Ms Tatjana Koke, Minister of Education and Science, Latvia

The evolution of the concept of literacy extends the discussion to implementation as well. The discussion so far can be broken up into two parts: the consequence of

illiteracy and the new efforts being taken up. What are the challenges facing us as we go forward?

Illiteracy grows because learning results are still evaluated in each level separately and not from a point of view of a continuum of learning. Inadequate relevance of qualifications and competencies required by employers also leads to illiteracy. The more people use complicated technologies, the more there is a need to focus on illiteracy. Participation in community life is threatened by such illiteracy. Effective learning experience increasingly alienates learning from traditional schools, and ongoing processes in society create disparities in standards of teaching. The demand for knowledge increases quickly, while time and skills are limited. Thus in learning, not only should the amount of learning increase, but also the quality of learning should correspond to the social and economic needs of individuals. New and more effective learning patterns should be implemented. The challenge is to offer learning to socially excluded groups, like migrants and others. Changes in society influence life more than people realise and faster than they can react.

In recent years, employers have claimed that learning is inadequate for work conditions. More cooperation with employers is needed to widen the learning experience. The challenge for the future is to teach an individual to create and generate new knowledge in problem-solving and self-directed learning. We belong to the first generation that knows that it does not know what the future will be like.

General discussion and questions from the plenary

The discussion that followed focused on appropriate definitions of literacy, and the relevance of concepts like financial and ICT literacy. Some participants pointed out that it was difficult to discuss literacy in Europe without linking it to the larger issue of 774 million illiterates across the world. Presenters responded by saying that it was important to be careful when discussing concepts like financial literacy and/or ICT literacy as these are often used as euphemisms or understood differently by different groups, leading to inconsistency in approach. Countries could be trapped by narrow functional definitions of literacy, so that teachers and trainers end up working only to those definitions and do not take a holistic view. The presenters emphasised the importance of developing a national strategy in order to have a consistent approach and to develop sustained programmes. Whether this requires specific law or other measures is not an easy question to answer as there are unanticipated consequences of laws or narrowly focused strategies.

Panel 1: Family Literacy and Intergenerational Learning

Moderator: H.R.H. Princess Firyal, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

**Presenters: Ms Viorica Alexandru, Romania
Ms Ann Jolly, United Kingdom
Ms Derya Akalin, Turkey
Ms Carol Taylor, United Kingdom**

Introducing the panellists, Princess Firyal pointed out that parents have a huge impact on their children's learning. First, according to research, literate parents are more likely to send their children to school, to keep them there and to support their progress through school. Second, parents who encourage children's literacy by reading with them lay a strong foundation for independent reading later.

Where parents have not had the opportunity to become literate, an intergenerational approach involving parents and their children can offer an effective alternative. Also known as family literacy, an intergenerational approach takes into consideration the different learning styles and needs of both adult and child learners. At the same time, activities designed for parents and children together stimulate and motivate learning and the child receives valuable support. Family literacy also enables parents to engage much more with their children's experience at school and makes the links between school and community stronger. Designing such programmes requires deep knowledge of the local context and sensitivity to language and culture issues.

The moderator posed the following questions to the panellists and invited them to make their presentations. What do you intend by family literacy and why was your programme started? How (when and where and by whom) is the programme delivered? Do you have evidence of the impact of the programme? What are the ways of measuring impact? What are the challenges? What would you like to see in the future?

Family Literacy with Grandparents

NIACE

UK

Presenter: Ms Carol Taylor

Family Literacy was developed in the UK in 1994 as a three-stranded model: sessions with parents, sessions with children, and sessions with parents and children. These demonstration programmes were evaluated in 1996. The evaluators came to the conclusion that it was "one of the most effective programmes ever evaluated". Since then, a big variety of family literacy programmes are run in the UK. Recently, a programme with grandparents was started, as grandparents have an important role in the education of their grandchildren. In the UK, large numbers of grandparents have some or complete responsibility for their grandchildren. About 85 percent of 5 to 16 year olds are looked after for more than 2 hours per week by their grandparents. When children are looked after by their grandparents, they pass on customs, family stories and traditional knowledge to their grandchildren.

There is a great range of programmes in the UK, and thousands of families participate every year. The Grandparents programme runs normally an hour per week; it is difficult to involve only grandparents. The programme is delivered by qualified teachers. The resources they have developed are important, e.g. the “jargon busting guide”, as grandparents are not used to the new language their grandchildren use, and material grandparents and children who do not live close to each other.

There have been several quantitative and qualitative evaluations of family literacy programmes. The soft outcomes are very important, as for instance in improving confidence and employability. In the case of the Grandparents project, it is difficult to measure the impact, but there is evidence that grandparents get more involved with their grandchildren.

Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP)

Mother-Child Education Foundation (ACEV)

Turkey

Presenter: Ms Derya Akalin

The Mother-Child Education Program (MOCEP) was not intended as a family literacy programme but as an early childhood programme to address the problem of limited access to early childcare in Turkey; 80 percent of the children in Turkey are not in preschool. Mothers were involved to increase the effectiveness of the programme, which supports their ability to get involved with the education and literary activities of their children.

ACEV collaborates with the Ministry of Education, and the programme was expanded in the nineties with its support. The programme today reaches 80 of the 81 provinces of Turkey. The Foundation trains the teachers, builds capacities within the Ministry, and undertakes consultant services. The programme takes place in community centres, and there is also a home visiting component, where the mother implements activities with her child.

Access to preschool, literacy and especially women’s literacy is low in Turkey. The MOCEP was originally a research project, involving pre-, post- and control groups. There is a follow-up project to the original 1982 project; children have been evaluated several times, the last time just a few years ago when they were 25-26 years old. It was found that the benefits continue until that age, with project children having higher educational and economic achievements, making better use of ICTs, better health and lower rates of involvement in crime. On the other hand, the relationship of these children with their mothers had benefited from the time when the mothers were involved in literacy activities with them. The mothers themselves have improved literacy skills and self-confidence and a more positive democratic attitude towards child-raising.

The collaboration between the NGO ACEV and the Ministry has been going for 15 years now. There is currently a move towards consolidating Turkey’s family literacy and adult literacy programmes. In addition to the Mother Child Education Programme, ACEV does also run a Father Support Program and other programmes to meet different

needs in different regions. The challenge in the future is not only to continue the partnership with the Ministry but also to expand these programmes to rural areas.

Parents' empowerment for family literacy

Club Europa

Romania

Presenter: Ms Viorica Alexandru

The Romanian programme is small scale, targeting parents in poor areas with the aim of boosting the literacy of primary school children and enhancing the ability of parents to support their children.

The programme was piloted in the first year and implemented in the second year in areas with families with low income and low literacy levels. The programme is school based; an agreement with the schools is concluded to ensure the programme continues after the pilot phase. Primary school teachers are trained to enhance the literacy skills of parents. The project lasts three months and is delivered through bi-weekly sessions.

Each session is structured in different slots; the first part allows parents and children to find out separately what is going to happen in their course. Then they come together and carry out a literacy activity. At the end of the activity, they separate again and reflect on what they did and what they would like to do next time.

Pre- and post-tests are carried out as part of the programme. The difference is measured by testing the children and taking into account feedback from the teachers. They have found improved writing skills in children and parents, and improved social skills in parents. The impact on the parents is more obvious; they have more confidence in sharing their problems and interacting with their children. Other parents become interested in going back to education, they take certificates, and some of them also find employment. Some grandparents have also participated in the programme and shown significant development.

The challenge is sustainability as most programmes come from the NGO field and only work with a very limited number of schools. Ideally, they would like to promote and disseminate the model further. Teacher training is another challenge. There is no money for training courses, but teachers need training to address adults, and adults and children together. The relationship between teachers and parents is another challenge. Teachers need to learn to recognise the experience of parents who have the “university of life” behind them.

Keepsakes

Campaign for Learning

UK

Presenter: Ms Ann Jolly

The Campaign for Learning is a pilot project for parents in custody. Fifty percent of people in custody have difficulties with reading and 80 percent of them with writing. The programme supports parents to stay in contact with their children through the

production of a baby book for them. It is not the objective that they become literate but this is a welcome side effect.

The programme runs in prisons mostly with younger men. It is delivered by an adult tutor, sometimes assisted by an artist. They create something together, for example family trees. Normally it should run around 20 hours, but there are logistical challenges due to security requirements in prisons and financial challenges. The programme might in the future be continued by prison librarians. Both staff and prisoners value the programme as it builds a link between parents and children that otherwise would be difficult to establish in prison.

General discussion and questions of participants to the Panel

Questions from the participants centred around the manner in which families were attracted to these programmes and how they can be encouraged to participate more. Panellists highlighted the various methods that had been used to attract parents and children, including door-to-door advocacy and focus group discussions. They pointed out that family learning programmes have an adult focus and that one has to be aware that such programmes are ultimately about literacy. The best way is to address both parents and children.

Panel 2: Literacy for Health

Moderator: Mr Örsçelik Balkan, Rotary International

**Presenters: Mr Stojan Dončevski, Education – The Best Therapy, Macedonia
Mr Israil Iskenderov, Umid Humanitarian and Social Support
Centre, Azerbaijan
Ms Ivica Cekovski, Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER),
Macedonia**

Some of the most effective literacy learning programmes combine learning to read, write and calculate with instruction in health matters. Since the need for literacy in pursuing better health is clear, such programmes prove more motivating and, above all, more relevant and useful than merely learning literacy skills on their own. The moderator noted that the aim of the discussion was to review programmes that have proved to be successful in the fields of literacy and health. As a general rule, it is important to consider the local context; the choice of the language is significant.

*Education – the best therapy
Workers’ University “Joska Svestarot” Strumica
Macedonia
Presenter: Mr Stojan Dončevski*

In the last decade the number of young people addicted to drugs in the Strumica region has significantly increased. Not only has the addiction worsened their health, social behaviour and relationships in their immediate family, it has also lead to disengagement in school. As a result, many young people have dropped out of school. The target group addressed by the programme Education – The Best Therapy, is therefore young people addicted to drugs. The programme gives them grounds for more responsibility and is not intended for the de-addiction centre; its main goal is to take youth out of the premises of the centre, give them enough knowledge to perform various tasks and duties and eventually integrate them into society. The idea is to bring them back into the labour market by breaking the stigma.

Integrated within the institution, the programme is designed to respond to the expectations of this target group. However, although the target group had to come to the institution to begin with, the novelty is that they were not confined to it. Teachers were specially trained for the programme, but it was believed that this would not be enough and experts were also involved. This programme will be part of the whole rehabilitation programme of the community starting from next year.

*Improvement of potable water provision along the Baku-Tbilisi Ceyphan Pipeline
“Umid” Humanitarian & Social Support Center
Azerbaijan
Presenter: Mr Israil Iskenderov*

The main focus of the Umid Humanitarian and Social Support Centre is to increase the literacy levels of the target communities; this is the main goal of the ‘Improvement of

Potable Water Provision Project' as well. After assessing 50 communities along the Baku-Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, the main community needs were identified in the areas of clean water provision, adult literacy and a better family budget management. Based on the outcomes of the assessment, Umid HSSC made a proposal for water treatment, increasing community literacy on health and the economic advantages of using purified water for family budgets. Community members were provided with information on how to avoid serious infectious diseases due to unclean water, as well as on the economic and physical advantages of using pure water.

The programme aims to increase community responsibility and consciousness, as well as to encourage close cooperation with local government agencies. Techniques such as mentoring, consultations and training, and individual and group interactions were used. As a result, a framework was created which is both a modular and cost-effective community-based solution for producing purified and safe water. Other aspects of the project touched upon community development, problem solving, and becoming an active and responsible citizen. Communities were encouraged to create relationships with government agencies and to establish Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) for business management.

Youth Peer Education Network (Y-Peer)

Macedonia

Presenter: Ms Ivica Cekovski

Y-PEER, the “Youth Peer Education Network”, is an international youth-to-youth based network pioneered by UNFPA and supported on regional and national levels by a number of partners. The network is implemented by youth from Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, North and East Africa, and was recently initiated in Brazil; more than 5,000 members from 36 countries are linked. Y-PEER is based on inter-personnel communication through meetings and electronic communications. The aim is to promote a healthy life style through a peer to peer approach and to empower young people to make responsible decisions.

Y-PEER Macedonia is part of the international Youth Peer Education Network. The Network in Macedonia officially comprises of 13 organizations that promote youth participation and awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues, including HIV/AIDS. They provide information about prevention through recruitment and training of young peer educators and trainers who undertake informal or organized educational activities with their peers. The Network employs peer education as a methodology for information sharing. Various inclusive techniques and partnerships are used on all levels of training and field work.

The programme uses a very close approach to its target audience: the method is peer education, a process where well trained young people teach other young people about social behaviour; the target audience is not only young people going to school but also those dropping out and in other institutions such as delinquents, orphans and people at risk, such as Roma communities and sex workers. Y-PEER reaches this population through highly motivated people, and the aim is not only to exchange information but also to change behaviour. Other innovations include theatre-based education, and using shows, media, film and TV.

General discussion and questions of participants to the Panel

Participants felt that literacy for health is a very sensitive issue, not only for marginalised people, but also for others. Literacy is essential for being aware of the risks of our environment; indeed, in the case of literacy and health, it was agreed that literacy was the main underlying element.

- Panel 3: Literacy and Education for Sustainable Development**
- Moderator: H.E. Mrs Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador**
- Presenters: Iouri Zagoumenov, Belarus National Institute of Education, Belarus**
Barbora Kahatova, Open Society Foundation (OSF), Slovakia
Mona Motakef, COMPASS, Germany
Ms Oxana Larionova, The Siberian Adult Education Association Programme, Russian Federation

Initiating the discussion, H.E. Mrs Finnbogadóttir pointed out that sustainable human development must be based on cultural diversity, social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources. Sustainable development is not only about nature, but also about everything that defines human life.

Promoting literacy and confidence-building in multi-ethnic communities in Belarus
Belarus National Institute of Education

Belarus

Presenter: Mr Iouri Zagoumenov

While Belarus has a history of positive and tolerant coexistence between the main population group and the country's nearly 140 diverse ethnic, religious and national minorities, the country is now faced with new challenges from an influx of recent refugees from the republics of the former Soviet Union. This, combined with increasing stress on the nation's economy and dislocations due to fundamental changes in the social structure, may potentially compromise the tradition of tolerance and lead to social segregation and decreasing literacy rates among ethnic minorities and migrants. The communities faced new challenges because of new entrants (refugees) and the problems of assimilation. This has led the Belarus National Institute of Education in cooperation with the State Committee on Ethnic Minorities and Religions, NGOs "SCAF", Center for Innovations and Education and associations of ethnic minorities to develop and implement a community-based curriculum for inter-ethnic confidence building and the integration of ethnic minorities in basic education and society.

Two major concerns when deciding on the methodology to be used were the need to convince education policy makers that this has to be done, and the already overloaded curriculum, a hangover of the Soviet times. Since it was difficult to introduce anything new in the curriculum, a community-based curriculum was introduced. Young people were engaged in research in their community, to understand the history and background of coexistence. This was particularly important in the context of the influx of refugees from the republics of the former Soviet Union. Since no information was available at the national level, these students became social scientists, who undertook interviews

with members of the family and community to understand that nobody was pure Russian and that there was a mix of influences.

Teams of students developed community outreach programmes, including those from ethnic minorities. Parents and community members were involved, culminating with cultural events and traditional festivals. Schools developed resources to teach about different ethnic minorities and culture, leading to development of a school based curriculum and guidebooks and workbooks for teachers, students. Resources collected by students were also published in the form of resource books. Schools became resource centres for others, and greater awareness was created, leading to the introduction of the curriculum in other institutions. In-service training of teachers also began to include some of this material to reinforce the message. Partners in this venture were the stakeholders who supported various activities including publication. The Institute observed that it was important to engage all ethnic minorities in the process, yielding more information for the schools.

Support to Education Reform and Educational Policy through an increase of civic participation and inclusion of multicultural education

Open Society Foundation

Slovakia

Presenter: Ms Barbora Kahatova

The Open Society Foundation (OSF), since its establishment in 1992, has developed programmes to support the values of an open society, the principles of democracy and respect for human rights, as an inherent part of the educational reform and policy in a tolerant and welcoming environment. In order to promote a democratic and participative society, Slovakia set out to make highly needed changes to its school system, which was last reformed in 1984. In comparison to other EU countries, the Slovak educational system still lacks principal reform that would reflect the demands of a modern society. The most needed changes which have to be introduced include a transition from a teacher-centred to child-centred learning methodology, and from centralised school management to participatory decision-making management involving parents, teachers and school councils.

In addition, the ongoing reform process needs to respond in a flexible way to the internal dynamics of the multicultural Slovak society. The OSF addresses this topic via introduction of multicultural education. As the process of educational reform is strongly owned by the Ministry of Education, the main goal of OSF's nationwide programme is to empower the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in education by using effective advocacy tools such as membership of CSO candidates in State educational committees, and to lead intermediate discussion on future forms of curriculum reform. It is important to share ownership of the reform process and leave room for non-governmental and academic sectors to participate. Along with supporting educational reform, the programme aims at developing the tolerant environment required for Slovakia's multicultural society.

The OSF and its partners have organised a number of roundtables and public discussions covering reform issues. A book called "Multicultural Education at School"

was also published as a reference manual for schools and teachers, to help them incorporate multicultural education into future school curricula.

COMPASS: Training for Trainers – Programme on Human Rights Education
German Institute for Human Rights

Germany

Presenter: Ms Mona Motakef

The German Institute for Human Rights offers training for trainers on human rights education. The training sessions are based on the concept of COMPASS, which is a manual on human rights education published by the Council of Europe. The general problem being addressed is the lack of human rights education in youth and adult education. The programme offers participatory training around subjects such as gender and poverty, using role play and interactive methods. The target group is the young people who work with other young learners or children.

Since 2005, six trainings have been conducted all over Germany. Human rights education is an integral part of the right to education, combining learning *about* human rights, *for* human rights (skills and competencies like active listening and critical thinking) and *through* human rights (empathy, understanding). The feedback so far has been that trainers become highly motivated themselves and find it easier to motivate learners through such methods, which they find very empowering. COMPASS combines what needs to be done with what can be done to make a change. One example is that of “Take A Step Forward”, a social role play. Cards are handed out to participants describing their situation (refugee, disabled young man, unemployed single mother, President of a political party, daughter of the American Ambassador). Participants are then asked to react to given situations—if they say yes, they take a step forward; saying no means a step backward. The exercise helps to highlight the difference between those who move forward and those who do not, stressing the disparities between groups and how they develop. The goal of the programme is to help educators become well equipped, so that they can promote awareness and understanding of human rights issues in their work with youth and adults, in order that they respect human rights.

The Siberian Adult Education Association Programme

SAEA

Russian Federation

Presenter: Ms Oxana Larionova

One of the major tasks of adult education today is the social adaptation of the person to new social and economic conditions. For Russia and Siberia in particular, the urgency of adult education is characterized by the challenge of having to train many people in a very short time, whose knowledge has become outdated and who therefore cannot find specialized work. These groups represent the socially vulnerable groups and require retraining. Groups particularly vulnerable are the unemployed, migrants, and refugees

The major purpose of the Siberian Adult Education Association’s activity is to lobby for the idea of lifelong learning and for the development of an adult education system in

the territory of Siberia and Russia.

The most important SAEA projects are:

1. The Siberian festivals of adult education for advocacy and awareness raising. The festivals' themes touch upon various issues, including social partnership and adult education; quality of life and adult education; dialogue of cultures and adult education; andragogical forum; sustainable development and adult education; and art and adult education .
2. Preparation of experts in adult education, using modern technologies of educational work with adults;
3. Development of functional literacy and life skills for the improvement of the adult person's quality of life .

The purpose of our actions is to demonstrate the economic and social benefits of adult education for the individual and society as a whole, to impart the culture of lifelong learning and to convince the national authorities that an investment in education is the wisest investment to make.

General discussion and questions of participants to the Panel

Participants wanted to know about the impact of these programmes and the relationship of multiculturalism with literacy. Mr Iouri Zagoumenov stated that the programme has had an impact on the lives of Belarus citizens and supported peaceful coexistence and support. Young people understand the culture of others and learn to respect diversity and difference. Ms Barbora Kahatova responded that multicultural education helps to reduce racism and xenophobia. Introduction in the curriculum is important and is supported by the efforts of civil society, NGOs and others. Ms Mona Motakef pointed out that human rights education leads to empowerment and motivates people to think about implementation of human rights in society.

One participant commented that it was important to understand multicultural issues and their relation to literacy. Referring to the discussion of human rights he said that multiculturalism follows human rights, not the other way around. For instance, in the case of immigrants, they must be taught not only the local language but also be given the opportunity to learn their own language and retain their heritage.

Roundtable 2: Assessment, measurement and evaluation of literacy levels and basic competencies

Moderator: Mr Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

**Panellists: Mr Yvan Clermont, Centre for Education Statistics Division, Statistics Canada
Mr William Thorn, Education Directorate, OECD
Mr Jean-Pierre Jeantheau, National Agency for Fighting Illiteracy (ANLCD), France
Professor Ireneusz Bialecki, Warsaw University, Poland
Professor Andris Kangro, University of Latvia, Latvia
Ms Marina Kuznetsova, Centre for Primary Education, Russian Academy of Education, Russian Federation**

Introducing the roundtable experts, Mr Burnett reminded the audience that the thinking about literacy is changing; it is now recognised as more a continuum than an either-or situation. This has policy implications for different groups and the strategies that target them. Efficient and relevant policy-making for literacy and adult education as well as the planning and implementation of literacy, basic adult education and skills training programmes call for an in-depth knowledge of the existing literacy and skills levels of the whole population and of different target groups, based on a well-defined concept of youth and adult literacy and key competencies. Literacy assessment must therefore be linked to the fundamental issues and principles concerning the improvement of literacy and basic skills learning.

Mr Yvan Clermont, Canada

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) began in 1994 by looking at a subset of six or seven countries, and was first applied internationally in 1996-97. Further to this survey, the Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey (ALLS) was developed in 2003 to capture also life skills, numeracy and the evaluation of problem solving and analytical reasoning capacities. The objective was to try and understand the various determinants associated with skills formation and outcomes associated with them.

During a follow-up assessment of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey in Canada, a focus was put on the reading abilities of society's least-skilled adult readers (below Level 3 in the ALLS assessment). The assessment looked at the various components of reading that were found to be the most important for adults at Levels 1 and 2, i.e. word and pseudo-word reading efficiency, spelling, vocabulary, rapid letter recognition and short-term memory. Major challenges were associated with developing measures in several languages, their implementation in a large-scale household survey and their scoring and their interpretation.

The detailed evaluation of the assessment results led to the design of special programmes targeted at adult learners below level 3.

Mr William Thorn, OECD

The Programme for International Assessment of Academic Competencies (PIAAC) is being developed by OECD and will be introduced by 2011, covering 22 OECD countries, with participation open to non-OECD countries. This will be the third in a

series of international adult literacy skills tests and will build on definitions that have already been developed and on the experience of the two previous international assessments of adult cognitive skills – the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS).

Measurement is not for the sake of measurement alone, but is related to the relationship that literacy skills have with social and economic conditions. A measure that combines literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills gives of course a more comprehensive picture than one that only looks at literacy. PIAAC is not a diagnostic measure or designed to measure individual skills - it is conceived as a population measure. The results of PIAAC will need to be complemented with other measures that cover these areas. PIAAC measures literacy (prose and document), numeracy, performance of people at the lower end of skills distribution (fluency and vocabulary) and ‘problem solving in a technology rich environment’. The last will test individuals’ capacity to locate, analyse and integrate information using common ICT tools to solve problems, an item which is of great interest to policy makers. The tests will be delivered through computers but there may be tests delivered on paper for those who do not have adequate computer skills.

Mr Jean-Pierre Jeantheau, France

In the 1970s, France considered that all citizens were literate but NGOs proved that this was not true. In 1984, the Government decided to create a special department within the Ministry of Social Affairs to fight illiteracy. A new organisation, the National Agency for Fighting against Illiteracy (ANLCI), was created to bring together public and private partners dealing with literacy issues.

Instead of participating in ALLS, ANLCI developed a French national survey which was first carried in 2004-2005. The IVQ (Information et Vie Quotidienne - information and everyday life) survey covers the 18-65 year age group. In addition to obtaining data necessary for measuring the size of the problem, the survey allows to better inform decision-makers so that they could target efforts more accurately, and to test outworn ideas that have considerably restrained the development of the fight against illiteracy in France. For example, it was found that more than half of the functionally illiterates are over 45, whereas the generally accepted idea is that illiteracy mainly concerns young adults. Two-thirds of illiterate people have a job, whereas the usual representation of illiterate people is that they are unemployed. The survey will be repeated in 2010. Local and national policy makers are interested and involved and are considering regional versions of the survey since this helps to target programmes more accurately.

Mr Ireneusz Bialecki, Poland

Assessment and measurement begins with the definition of the concept of literacy and that of functional literacy. One of the recent tendencies in the discussion around the concept of literacy is to broaden it according to a competency-based approach. This approach involves measuring abilities such as carrying out tasks successfully and comprises both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions. This is the OECD and EU approach. The work done by DeSeCo, OECD and the European Commission on the definition and selection of key competencies provides important information on this area.

Literacy is no longer narrowly defined as a single skill that enables people to deal with various types of text. People in industrialized countries face many different kinds of written material every day, and they require different skills to understand and use information including in digital form. To reflect this complexity, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and then the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) developed different skills assessment domains for literacy. The specific literacy domains designed for IALS and ALL are subsequently divided into five broad literacy levels. Level 3 is considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society.

Low literacy levels not only affect individuals, but the society as a whole and its economy in the era of the information society and a knowledge-based economy.

Over 40 percent adults in Poland were at level 1 or below in the first international adult survey carried out in 1996. In PISA 2000, scores were lower than the OECD average, and a high number of pupils were located at or below level 1. In PISA 2003, there was a notable jump for those at level 1 and below. The results of these surveys can sometimes be misleading, if not interpreted in an appropriate way. The PISA surveys in 2000-2003-2006 show how the distribution of low literacy has changed in Poland.

Poland has no specific policy aimed at identifying low-literate adults yet. It seems therefore necessary to undertake policy-oriented research in order to create an evidence-based policy, including well targeted pre-school programmes, policies to improve the school environment and early identification of groups at risks and their learning needs.

Mr Andris Kangro, Latvia

In Latvia, measurements of literacy are concentrated at the school level. This is important because low adult literacy levels often come from poor learning in school. These studies help to look at trends in education. Looking at test results from 2000, 2003 and 2006, there was significant improvement in 2003, but almost no change between 2003 and 2006. Indicators show that the numbers of low achievers seem to be increasing, which is clearly a problem. The reasons behind this trend include increasing drop-out rates, which will eventually imply higher adult illiteracy rates. Curriculum reform, teacher development and centralised examination in schools have however had some impact on the levels of literacy.

Ms Marina Kuznetsova, Russian Federation

Russia has been participating in the PISA cycle since 2000. The PIRLS approach (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) has significantly influenced national studies and the content of educational programmes in primary and secondary schools. Adult literacy is connected to the results of PIRLS cycle. At present, for the primary school monitoring of the students' achievements in reading, Russia uses the tests developed on the base of the PIRLS approach to assess reading comprehension. The tests are intended to evaluate the four processes of comprehension: 1) focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information, 2) make straightforward inferences, 3) interpret and integrate ideas and information, and 4) examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements. The four processes are assessed on the basis of the two purposes of reading: 1) literary experience and 2) acquire and use information.

In standardised national examinations, known as unified state examinations and set for grades 9 and 11, Russian and Literature are assessed separately, but both tests include

test analysis and essay writing in relation to the text or to a problem raised in the text. In 2006, 2 percent of the children tested could not even reach the first level. Combined with the 8 percent that reached level 1, they were clearly the at-risk group and needed significant motivation. This group faced serious difficulties in reading comprehension and was unable to understand and further use what they were reading. They also had problems in understanding home assignments and were not able to explain what they were thinking. Gender disparities were clearly revealed by both PISA and PIRLS, with girls ranking better than boys. Poor ranking in the 2006 PISA evaluation was a cause for serious concern: 46 percent of 15-year old Russians did not reach level 2. This led to a revision of the federal system of education quality evaluation. Today, national tests are used, based on PIAAC and others. In addition to other tests, essay writing is used to allow students to present their points of view.

General discussion and questions of participants to the Roundtable

Participants wanted to know what action has been taken to help those who were found to be at the lower end of the surveys. Experts described how the results usually provide support for additional remedial programmes to address these issues. The tests measure things not in the curriculum but are more focused on applying knowledge that has been acquired. The issue of aligning the surveys to the teaching method was discussed, raising the question of whether the correct questions were being asked to measure what had been taught. It was clarified that when the issue of adult literacy is addressed, one usually faces a compilation of several curricula in the same country. Older people would have learnt very differently from the way present children are taught and it is difficult therefore to necessarily link the assessment to the education system; it is linked more to outcomes than inputs. Studies such as PIAAC and others are for policy formulation, not individual results, and should lead to policy measures that help to improve the overall situation.

The lack of cultural specificity in survey instruments was also brought up, with the question if it was actually possible to avoid taking into account cultural specificities of different countries while measuring literacy levels. Experts clarified that cultural specificity is not always relevant when measuring literacy levels. The idea is to provide information to policy makers about the nature and level of difficulty rather than only individual learning levels. PIAAC develops items in a manner that would eliminate those which would cause different results in different cultural circumstances. In the case of PISA, analysis has found that there is very little cultural bias in the questions.

DAY 3: 16 May 2008

- Panel 4:** E-learning, Open/Distance Education and ICTs
- Moderator:** Ms Rebecca Simor, BBC
- Presenters:** Ms Weronica Pielas, Centre for Constant Practical Education, Poland
Mr Robert Borwick, St. Vincent's Trust Literacy Service, Ireland
Mr Ben Vaske, Expertise Center, Netherlands
Mr Christian Fiebig, German Adult Education Association, Germany

The use of new learning technologies has provided significant opportunities for informal and continuing literacy learning. Distance learning and ICTs can facilitate skills development, use learner generated materials, stimulate awareness raising and learner motivation, support and train literacy workers, facilitate the distribution and update of materials and gather feedback from learning centres and individual learners. It is rare, however, that literacy programmes are conducted solely through these media, which instead are used primarily in support of conventional programmes or as one component of a multi-pronged approach to literacy and numeracy learning.

***Distance Education Centers in Rural Areas
Center for Constant Practical Education
Poland
Presenter: Ms Weronica Pielas***

In rural areas of Poland, the level of literacy among adults is much lower than in cities, and people have little access to further learning that would enable them to improve their competencies. Distance education through ICTs was considered to be an efficient means to reach these populations. Therefore, computer centres were established in rural districts in Poland by a consortium of four partners including the Centre for Constant Practical Education, 4system Polska Ltd., Ecorys Polska Ltd. and Foundation Supporting Physically Disabled Computer Specialists. It has been estimated that this nationwide project reached at least 8000 beneficiaries each month.

The centres have been providing free of charge access to a wide range of educational on-line courses and career guidance tools. The offer of centres aims at developing and supplementing the users' vocational qualifications using ICTs. Each beneficiary is counselled by a staff member at each Centre; the counsellors support the users' on-line education, and promote the project in the local community. The project's activities are accompanied by a promotion campaign at the national and local level. By February 2008, 379 computer centres had been established. They open for 20 hours a week, are fully equipped and also accessible for physically disabled persons. Since then, about 16,000 users have been given access to the centres' educational offer, and more than 13,000 of them have finished at least one on-line course.

“Written Off?”
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Ireland
Presenter: Mr Robert Borwick

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has been developing distance education approaches to literacy since 2000. In partnership with the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the national TV broadcaster, NALA has developed seven highly successful TV series, two radio series and three learning websites with associated print and phone support. NALA continues to work on providing adult literacy tuition through distance education, involving the use of print, broadcast and web media along with telephone tutoring. It targets an adult audience who wishes to improve reading, writing and numbers skills. NALA’s Distance Education Policy is to ensure that people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. To meet this goal, NALA is committed to widening access to literacy learning opportunities through the use of distance education approaches.

In 2008, NALA is continuing to advance this approach through an 8-part TV series called ‘Written Off?’ This series is supported by a distance education service including a freephone support line for callers, a website to support literacy learning at a distance and a telephone tutoring service. The experience of the students documented on film provides a clear insight into social inclusion and engagement aspects of adult literacy work.

Read and Write! Language at the Workplace
Expertise Center ETV.nl
The Netherlands
Presenter: Mr Ben Vaske

‘Lees en Schrijf!’ (‘Read and Write!’) is a successful multimedia initiative and aims at providing easy access to groups among the 1.5 million adults in the Netherlands with reading and writing problems. The primary objective is to motivate and stimulate these adult people to practice their reading and writing skills and also their ICT skills. The second objective is to stimulate them to go back to school for a reading and writing course. ‘Read and Write!’ mainly targets independent learners. Learning material is delivered through television, free work books, websites with exercises and audio support, a free phone line to order the workbook, exercises and a game on the mobile phone. Learning is undertaken in a non-formal way.

The initiative is based on the Irish series ‘Read Write Now’ (1999-2005), and was adapted to the Dutch context. Evaluations of the programme showed that it had had a very positive impact, with 90% of the respondents saying that the self esteem they gained increased their reading and writing skills.

Ich-will-lernen.de
German Adult Education Association
Germany
Presenter: Mr Christian Fiebig

Promoting and improving lifelong learning is one of the objectives of the German Federal government in the education sector. This includes the promotion of adult literacy. Many adults with low literacy levels have gone to school, but still experience difficulties with reading and writing. Only 20,000 of those with low literacy skills have actually taken advantage of reading courses offered by outreach programs throughout the country. Others often feel too ashamed to admit their problem and to seek help.

In order to promote literacy, a new initiative was launched in Germany to teach reading and writing anonymously via the Internet. On International Literacy Day in September 2004, a special web-site was launched to provide individual instruction which serves either as a complement to classroom teaching or as a primary learning source for those not enrolled in a course. The contents of the portal are based on real life situations and are adapted to each learner's goals and previous knowledge. Learning material is presented through video clips, audio files and simple, self-explanatory graphics. Every exercise once completed is evaluated online to assess learning progress and is reported back to the tutor and the learner. Since 2005, around 115,000 learners have registered on the e-learning portal. The programme offers six levels and on average each learner needs four months for one of these six levels. The programme does not provide achievement certificates on completion; learners stop learning when they feel that they have acquired sufficient competencies and knowledge.

- Panel 5: Quality Basic Learning for Groups at Risk**
- Moderator: Ms Leyla Nugmanova, UNHCR**
- Presenters: Ms Maria Todorova, DVV International, Bulgaria
Mr Levan Kvatchadze, Institute for International Cooperation, German Adult Education Association, Georgia
Mr Rumyan Russinov, Roma Foundation, Hungary
Mrs Natalia Sitnikova, Russian Federation**

Ms Nugmanova pointed out that Azerbaijan hosts one of the largest internally displaced persons (IDP) populations in the world, nearly 680,000 people. By definition, refugees and IDPs are persons with special needs. Standard approaches to providing quality basic education may not reach everyone. There are special groups with special needs in every country: nomadic populations, disabled, prisoners, refugees, IDPs, and minorities, and the percentage of people without basic literacy skills in such groups is much higher than in the mainstream population. Understanding the characteristics of each groups is essential in order to tailor programmes that meet their needs and circumstances.

***Second Chance School in Bulgaria
DVV International Bulgaria
Bulgaria
Presenter: Ms Maria Todorova***

In 2002, a pilot school based on the model of ‘Second Chance Schools’ was opened with the support of DVV-International, Bulgaria, in the second largest Roma community in Bulgaria, in Plovdiv. Illiterate adults of this population or people who did not complete school were offered non-formal education. Whenever possible and necessary, an additional vocational education training (VET) was also provided. The goal of the programme was to provide tailored training and non-formal education, aiming at employment and social inclusion. The objectives were to provide illiterate adults of this population group with reading and communication skills, to support the completion of an educational grade/level, to motivate illiterate adults to make the link between literacy and employability, and to support social inclusion and active citizenship.

The literacy and VET courses raised the motivation of the learners for seeking employment. Moreover, through the completion of upper secondary education, adult learners had increased their chances to obtain stable jobs and to engage in further learning, as well as to participate actively in social and political life. The ‘Second Chance School’ became an educational, cultural and social centre of the community. The challenge now is to upscale the programme from a pilot project level to a national programme and to impact on policy.

Adult Education Centers in Samtshke-Javakheti (South Georgia) – a chance or integrating minorities
DVV International Georgia
Georgia
Presenter: Mr Levan Kvatchadze

Samtskhe-Javakheti is a region in South Georgia characterised by ethnic and religious diversity, with representatives of ethnic minorities (mainly Armenians) making up the majority of the population. The majority of the population in the region does not master the national language Georgian. In addition, geographic isolation, generally harsh economic situations, unemployment and lack of investments have worsened their living conditions. Due to the low economic, social and cultural interaction between this region and the rest of the country, there are problems of integration in this region.

Integration involved overcoming the language barrier and removing isolation. The area is geographically difficult and many of the problems could not be tackled at the design stage. With the overall objective of integration, it was necessary to work with both the minority and the majority. Awareness raising activities and interactions between these groups were promoted and information made available about various aspects of life to counter preconceived prejudices. Since people not integrated with mainstream society cannot be active citizens, it was important to integrate these groups to allow them to participate in social life. Lack of education also implies that people are unaware of their rights and duties. These considerations led to the setting up of Adult Education Centres, which was new for Georgia. Discussion clubs and other means were used to bring home the message that all are part of the same society.

The basic goal of the Adult Education Centres is to assist the population in raising the level of knowledge in different fields, and to receive free legal consultations. Various vocational training and computer courses are offered to contribute to a better cohesion between various ethnic, religious and social groups of the population. Courses in Georgian, civic education and the basics of private entrepreneurship are promoting the creation of more active participation in society among the local communities. Different cultural events, debate clubs, lectures, seminars, meetings with interesting people, exhibitions and fairs are used to promote inter-cultural and inter-ethnic mutual understanding. The particular and innovative aspect of the project is to promote integration, inter-ethnic interaction and active citizenship through non-formal educational activities. Nearly 4000 local inhabitants have participated in the various courses and activities organised by the Centres so far.

Desegregation of Roma education in Central and South-Eastern Europe
Roma Education Fund
Hungary
Presenter: Mr Rumyan Russinov

Across Central and South-Eastern Europe, Romani children attend separate schools as a result of residential patterns; sometimes they are placed in schools for children with mental disabilities due to poor command of the majority language, or in classes separated from non-Romani children. In all cases, the effect of this practice has been education of lower quality and social exclusion. The goal of the Roma Education

programme is to discontinue this trend and to ensure that Roma children have access to quality education in mainstream schools together with their peers from the majority population.

The strategy from the beginning included two main components - organisation of concrete practices showing that integration of Romani children in mainstream is possible, and carrying out advocacy with the government to institutionalise practices, moving from projects to policy. The difficult was to convince the many actors in the process, given the atmosphere of prejudice. Desegregation was undertaken in the five countries of Hungary, Macedonia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria with the help of several NGOs. The steps taken included motivating parents, creating a positive and supportive environment in the schools and among policy makers and mainstream society, and conducting additional remedial classes and extra-curricular activities for the children.

The success of the school integration initiatives in Bulgaria has dispelled fears and misconceptions about the integration of Romani children in education. First of all, it has demonstrated that Romani children do not need adapted curricula and that they can achieve as much as non-Romani children where proper educational support is provided for them. It has also demonstrated that Romani parents are not indifferent to the education of their children and that when they have appropriate information and support, they choose integrated schooling.

***Community Education of Nomadic Peoples of the North of the Republic of Sakha
Ministry of Education of the Republic of Sakha
Russian Federation
Presenter: Ms Natalia Sitnikova***

A significant nomadic population lives in the North of the Russian Federation in eastern Siberia. It is not far in history that these areas were settled and many steps have been taken to integrate indigenous minorities. However, there are problems in delivering education to the remote areas where they reside without compromising their cultural heritage. Since their numbers are small, it is difficult to establish adequate schools in proximate locations; at the same time, children suffer if separated from parents, so these facilities need to be in the place where the nomads are living.

A programme was specially designed for education of the nomadic population; such programmes are necessary for pastoral communities who wish to keep their children with them. Within the main federal State policy of education, special place has been given to the development of systems for these groups. Nine models of education delivery were developed for these groups, including ICT using internet, and satellite TV. Equipment for life and learning is provided so that they can learn where they are. In-service teacher training and awareness-raising among the community are important parts of the project. Children are socialised into a broader environment, namely the school, village, town and country. A resource centre has also been established in Yakhutsk to support the programme, in which representatives of the groups participate. State level and municipal level programmes have been designed for project management.

General discussion and questions of participants to the Panel

Most of the discussion following the presentations focused on how cultural diversity can be maintained while seeking integration into the majority culture. Presenters stated that practice has shown that their projects have not decreased cultural identity. Even though minorities often have fears about being assimilated into mainstream society, these projects should be seen as opportunities to become literate in more than one language.

Panel 6: Workplace Literacy

Moderator: Ms Hanaa Singer, UNICEF Representative, Azerbaijan

Presenters: Ms Bjørg Ilebekk, VOX, Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning, Norway
Mr Alfred Berndl, ISOP GmbH (Innovative Social Projects), Austria
Ms Mihaela Tilinca, Romanian Institute for Adult Education, Romania

The last decades have seen significant changes to literacy requirements as workers move from farming and manufacturing to service-based industries, and as technology and team-based work replace manual work. Although employers feel this pressure, they often fail to prioritise workplace training due to costs, misperceptions or lack of expertise in in-house training. This has led to the recognition by governments that they have a role to play in education beyond the traditional school education. Workplace Literacy refers to the skill set and training necessary for individuals to do their jobs.

Basic Competencies in Working Life
VOX (Norwegian Institute of Adult Education)
Norway
Presenter: Ms Bjørg Ilebekk

Norway has taken part in both the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skill Survey (ALL). Although the country had a high score compared to others, there are still a large number of adults whose basic skills need to be addressed. Depending on how the statistics are interpreted, at least 400,000 adults between the ages of 16 to 65 years score below the minimum level in reading and numeracy considered necessary to function in work and social life. The Basic Skills in Working Life programme started in 2006 to address these challenges. The purpose of the programme is to fund and monitor basic learning projects in enterprises or projects aiming at preparing people for working life in cooperation with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. The programme is funded by the National Budget, making it financially viable for private and public enterprises to start up basic skills development schemes for their employees and job-seekers.

The programme deals with reading and writing, numeracy and the use of digital tools. To increase the quality of teaching and ensure an education tailored to the needs of the individual, a national framework for basic skills for adults has been developed as a sub-project under the programme. The framework comprises descriptions of levels of competence, guidelines for providers, mapping tools and tests, and a model for teacher training.

In Motion – Network skills for life and literacy

ISOP GmbH (Innovative Social Projects)

Austria

Presenter: Mr Alfred Berndl

There is no long tradition of literacy provision in Austria. Austria did not take part in any literacy surveys, but the situation changed with the results of the PISA study where Austrian students performed unexpectedly poorly. The study revealed that 20 percent of 15 year olds were at level 1 for reading, i.e. at risk. The programme 'In. Motion' was initiated to address some of these issues. The programme develops and tests quality programmes for literacy and life skills for adults in Austria together with thirteen partners. The goal of this nationwide programme is to develop and test research-based, target-group differentiated counselling and course offers, which can be used by Austrian adult education institutions willing to offer literacy and life skills courses. 'In.Motion' also established an Austria-wide service hotline and a website to support the target groups. One focus of the programme is to develop and implement quality standards for course offers, trainers and providers. The total budget is 4.15 million Euros, provided by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the European Social Fund.

Countries in Europe deny terms like illiteracy or functional illiteracy and say that this is not a problem in their country. But training at the workplace is very important as requirements at the workplace are changing rapidly and the need for literacy skills of workers is increasing. Low literacy skills result in costs to the company, while highly skilled workers are more motivated. The programme began with research to find out the needs of target groups. At the end of this phase, companies were found that were interested in participating in the project, among them a large enterprise with 7000 employees, and several small or middle enterprises. The second phase was the training phase. Tutors and trade union activists were identified who received training. In the third phase, pilot courses were held outside the companies in adult education centres. Evaluation was carried out and embedded right from the beginning, and adjustments could be made according to the results of the evaluation.

Basic skills and workplace basic literacy

Skills for Life (UK) and Romanian Institute for Adult Education (Romania)

Romania

Presenter: Ms Mihaela Tilinca

While in Romania workplace literacy training is not yet part of any national, regional or local strategy or programme, several steps have been taken in order to initiate systematic changes in workplace literacy training strategies and to document and prepare policy frameworks meant to set national, regional or local programmes. Two examples of effective practice in terms of partnerships exist; the forums they have provided for the employers, employees and providers of workplace literacy training are WoLLNET and CELiNE. While WoLLNET (coordinated by Skills for Life, UK) is about evaluation of workplace literacy, CELiNE is about training teachers in embedding literacy into vocational training. Both are about raising awareness for literacy in the workplace in the new economy. Both projects began in 2007, funded by

the European Union until 2009. In CELiNE, the target group are teachers and trainers, in WoLLNET employers and trade unions.

The image of Eastern and Central European countries is still that everybody can read and write, based on the history of the region where a literate environment and schooling for everybody was of high priority. But there are literacy problems, and they have to be challenged. Toolkits and resources have now been developed and one impact has been that employers started to understand that literacy is an issue for them. Future challenges include the need to introduce workplace literacy in policies in Romania, as well as in adult education.

General discussion and questions of participants to the Panel

A question was raised on how to best involve all employers. Panellists suggested that it was better to identify and work with those who were already interested, and use leading companies to put pressure on the others. It was generally agreed that in the context of workplace literacy, the definition of literacy should be very broad. It was better to focus on life and ICT skills than on basic literacy as basic literacy problems are more likely to be denied both by employers and employees. Greater sustainability of programmes is needed, and a lot of effort, time and money to raise awareness in companies. Most importantly, it is essential to form partnerships between strategic partners, i.e., the management, programme representatives, workers and trade unions.

- Roundtable 3: Pedagogical Approaches: Promoting Quality Basic Learning**
- Moderator: Mr Mark Richmond, Director, Division for the Coordination of UN Priorities in Education**
- Panellists:**
- Mr John Vorhaus, National Research and Development Centre in Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Institute of Education, UK**
 - Ms Ewa Przybylska, Department of Adult Education, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland**
 - Mr Afgan Abdullayev, Azerbaijan University, Azerbaijan**
 - Mr Ekkehard Nuissl von Rein, German Institute for Adult Education, Germany**
 - Ms Janet Looney, Independent Consultant, Former OECD**

Introducing the speakers, Mr Mark Richmond emphasised the significance of quality basic learning, curriculum design and teacher training, as well as the importance of listening to learners. He requested the speakers to help in the identification of two or three key aspects that could be focused upon by policy makers.

Mr John Vorhaus, United Kingdom

The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) was set up to conduct research and development in adult literacy, language and numeracy. A major recent NRDC research initiative into adult pedagogy in reading and writing involved the identification of relationships between what teachers do and how learners learn, and identifying the most (and least) effective teaching and learning practices. Learners were assessed towards the beginning and end of their courses, through extensive classroom observations and interviews of teachers and learners. This provided a uniquely rich and robust data set, giving insight into how learners learn, how teachers manage their time and the practices that had the largest positive impact on learning progress.

It is standard practice in England to distinguish between literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), although that distinction is increasingly becoming blurred. The NRDC also conducted research into ESOL teaching and learning. All these projects were largely confined to formal learning environments, classrooms in particular.

There is always a political and research context to adult learning; the Moser Report of 1999 found that up to 7 million adults in the UK had difficulty in literacy, with one in five being functionally illiterate. This led to the “Skills Alive” initiative with major investment in adult literacy and renewed focus on curriculum. The quality of teaching and learning and the need for improvement of standards remain major concerns. Virtually the only teaching practice found to be related to learning progress in adult education programmes was the practice of relating learning to outside world activities.

Policy makers now need to get down to detailed development work, formulating programmes of localised development practices, building on what we already know. It is also time that learners need to understand the importance of informal learning and

self-study time. It should be possible to develop a learner-centred model that provides a role for formal and non-formal learning, but also includes informal learning and self-study.

Ms Ewa Przybylska, Poland

Given the increasing number of people from different cultural backgrounds migrating into Europe, there is an increased need for qualifying and training adult education professionals in intercultural competencies. An adult educator without these competencies becomes a creator of social inequalities, lessens the learners' chances of social integration and dooms them to failure. There are several ongoing initiatives helping to develop concepts of academic curricula for adult educators competent in working with people from different cultural backgrounds, as for instance the TEACH Project (Teaching Adult Educators in Continuing and Higher Education) and the Bologna Process towards the European Dimension of Lifelong Learning. Another example is the postgraduate programme "Labour market support for people from different cultures". Once they complete the studies, graduates possess enhanced specialist knowledge and are able to work independently in public administration, or in educational and social institutions, consultancies and other organisations involved with migrants.

Literacy can be understood as an adaptation process for migrants to participate in society and cope with the new culture through participation in the social and political life of the country. Adult educators thus have to have adequate knowledge and skills that can help learners in these areas. Migration is a major challenge faced by our societies today; high unemployment coupled with an ineffective welfare system creates difficulties when combined with illiteracy. It is necessary to expand institutions working on different aspects affecting immigrants, and to expand programmes that enable dialogue of cultures.

Mr Afgan Abdullayev, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.746, and an adult literacy rate for the 15-50 year age group of 98.8 percent. There is no such thing as a neutral educational process - education either facilitates integration of the learners with the existing system or becomes a means for freedom. Different learners expect different things from learning. However, education is not a service industry and we should be careful about using terms like "consumers" and "providers". Learning is not a product created by educators and delivered to learners, but a much more complex process. Key factors of learning include motivation and confidence, access to resources, and well-organised, high-quality learning environments.

Knowledge is not poured into learners' heads, and skills are not imparted to learners' hands. It is the learner who creates the learning, and it is the job of the educator to facilitate, guide and support the learner to make this transformation of themselves, their knowledge, attitudes and abilities. Adult education is the practice of teaching and educating adults. This often happens in the workplace, through 'extension' or 'continuing education' courses at secondary schools, at a college or university. Other learning places include folk high schools, community colleges, and lifelong learning centres. The practice is also often referred to as 'Training and Development'. A difference is made between vocational education, mostly undertaken in workplaces and frequently related to up-skilling, and non-formal adult education including learning

skills or learning for personal development. Educating adults differs from educating children in several ways. One of the most important differences is that adults have accumulated knowledge and experience that can add or hinder the learning experience. One of the single most important criteria in teaching adult learners successfully therefore is a genuine understanding of the learner. Through such an understanding, it is possible to direct the teaching method to the adult's specific needs and interests.

Mr Ekkehard Nuissl von Rein, Germany

The German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) plays a leading and innovative role in the area of literacy provision in Germany and beyond. The Institute attaches importance to qualifications of teaching staff, creation of conditions conducive to participation, development of suitable material (including new media) and linkage of illiteracy to forms of counselling and support. As a body funded in partnership by the Federal governments and the States, DIE has been in existence for the last 50 years. The Institute works in adult education, publishing, curriculum development, teacher training, with a special focus on linking theory and practice.

In the 1970s, people became aware of illiteracy in Germany and the Institute took up several projects; these activities acquired renewed importance in the 1990s after reunification with East Germany. The role of the Institute is to develop strategies for improving the situation. One major project with which the Institute is associated is called "Inclusion", and focuses on groups at risks, as for instance, migrants and long-term unemployed, including illiterates. The Institute is also working on three other projects: i) literacy and basic education, ii) monitoring literacy and basic education, and, iii) preparation of a large survey on functional literacy in Germany as a follow up to IALS which revealed that there are nearly 7 million functionally illiterate Germans.

From a policy perspective, there is a need now for individualised approaches, highly qualified teachers and quality provision; and for more funding. It is also necessary to recognise that improving the situation in literacy requires greater involvement of all educational institutions along the life span. The problem does not start only at the adult age; it is essential to take a holistic approach, involving the whole educational chain. Finally, better integration and cooperation of political and administrative entities is required, at the federal, regional, and local levels.

Ms Janet Looney, expert to OECD

Too many adults still fail to acquire even basic skills, with enormous effects on their individual lives, and on their countries' economic and social well-being. In the last decade, many OECD countries have invested in large-scale surveys to better understand the scale of this challenge, and the characteristics of adults with low foundation skills. They have also made investments to improve access to learning opportunities. But little is known about the quality of adult learning programmes. A new OECD report, "Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults: Improving Foundation Skills", looks inside classrooms and programmes to learn more about "what works". The report draws upon evidence from case studies of exemplary practice, reviews of international research, and country background reports. It examines the implementation and impact of different practices, the way programmes address the diverse needs and goals of adult learners, and policies that support or hinder effective practice.

The OECD report has a particular focus on “formative assessment”, that is, the frequent assessment of learner understanding and progress to identify needs and individualise teaching and learning. Formative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment for learning, as distinct from assessment *of* learning (tests and examinations). It is true that it is unusual for OECD to focus on classroom practice. However, it was felt that it was important to understand something about the quality of teaching and learning. In general, a “black box” concept exists - inputs and outputs are known, but what happens inside the box is not clearly understood. A better understanding of effective teaching and what happens in the classroom could help to impact what happens in the box, in the form of better tools and guidelines, as well as improved leadership. The relationship between teaching-learning and assessments must be understood in order to make effective changes.

Major recommendations to policy makers would include the need to focus on better support. What is the right level of support? There has to be a combination of the right flexible structure, discipline, understanding of learners’ needs and flexible responses. In addition to further research in the field, there also needs to be more emphasis on outcomes and accountability.

General discussion and questions of the plenary to the Roundtable

The discussion following the presentations focused on teacher training and the skills required by teachers delivering literacy programmes. A common concern expressed by members of the audience related to the poor qualifications of teachers engaged in literacy programmes, many of whom are part-time or temporary. Others sought views on the relationship of quality basic education to socio-economic contexts. Panellists responded by saying that constant upgrading of teacher qualifications and skills was essential, and that it was important to advocate for adult literacy. They pointed out that there is an urgent need to address teacher training/qualifications, and to train teachers in teaching methods. It was agreed that this was a significant challenge for the future.

- Roundtable 4: Responding to New Demands and Creating Integrated Systems of Learning Opportunities**
- Moderator: Mr Cesar Birzea, Chairman of the Steering Committee on Education, Council of Europe**
- Panellists: Ms Katarina Popovic, University of Belgrade, Serbia
Mr Lorenz Lassnigg, Institute of Advanced Studies, Austria
Ms Ruth Jermann, Swiss Federation for Adult Learning, Switzerland
Mr Urkhan Alakbarov, Academy of Science, Azerbaijan
Mr Viktor Bolotov, Russian Academy of Education, Russian Federation**

Introducing the roundtable experts, Mr Cesar Birzea pointed out that the first roundtable had focused on the new concept of literacy in a changing society. Literacy is no longer limited to cognitive skills; it means much more, such as the key competencies to live and work in the knowledge society and capacity building for employment, personal development and active citizenship. It must be recognised as a policy issue. Many reports still do not have a reference to illiteracy as an issue. Some of the questions we must ask ourselves must include whether we need to recognise literacy as a policy issue? If so, how should we tackle it, considering literacy as a part of the right to education? Literacy can be a human right and a means to be part of the knowledge society; this implies a need to broaden the scope of literacy. How can one implement literacy policies without relating them to education? Effective cooperation at regional, national and local levels between various existing partners, such as the State, local authorities, public institutions, private and public teaching establishments, associations, trade unions and family organisations is therefore necessary.

Ms Katarina Popovic, Serbia

Countries in the region of the Western Balkans and South-Eastern Europe (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR of Macedonia, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria), which are all in a period of transition, both economically and politically, face similar problems regarding adult literacy. The problem of literacy is still serious: there are a significant number of illiterate adults and people with low educational levels and their needs and demands are increasing. However, the preconditions of successful delivery of literacy programmes do not exist - there is no coherent system for lifelong learning, no system of continuing education, no prior learning assessment, and no incentives for adult learners.

The formal education system is not really equipped to meet the demands of adult literacy. There is a lack of adequate policy and legislation, insufficient offer of literacy programmes and inadequate programme content and delivery methods which are not adapted to adult learning and their needs. The need for literacy provision is not enough recognised in this region, and the extent and degree of illiteracy is not understood as the myth was inherited from the socialist past that illiteracy is not a problem in the region. Data on literacy is based on simple census questions, where respondents answer whether they are literate or not.

NGOs are well intentioned but lack coordination among themselves or with other sectors like the government or the Church. Their efforts are often not recognised and they find it hard to sustain these due to lack of resources. There needs to be greater clarity regarding the role of the State vis-à-vis the non-formal providers. Legislation by itself is not enough and has to be supported by other means. Literacy and education must be promoted as values.

Mr Lorenz Lassnigg, Austria

Making a taboo of illiteracy has hampered development. Neither policy makers nor individuals want to find it, therefore available information on illiteracy is scarce, and much awareness-raising is needed to mobilise actors. There are new demands, and it becomes important to distinguish between need and demand. The results of international surveys provide some basic data about the scope of the problem. Even then, the problem may not be recognised in time. This resistance against literacy issues (a policy of “hide and not seek”) results in an ostrich-like situation, with people at policy level not wanting to identify the problems. Given this background, one must be cautious about expanding the concept of literacy, otherwise there will only be a change of concept, not of reality.

The first literacy programme was taken up in Austria in 1991. Today there are sixteen providers in the country. While this has been a successful network for quality, the scope of the problem is larger than their reach. People who need training cannot pay for it, and service providers depend on public resources. The role of public institutions therefore increases. One innovation in Austria was a policy that was carried through from the bottom up. Development of teacher training programmes, training for trainers, quality improvement, curriculum development and other measures have been initiated, but are very expensive. Mainstreaming becomes a problem because of the high costs involved.

Migrants are particularly important, especially older migrants who may be literate within their own language but not in the one of the new host country. One important point to remember is that if one only considers literacy, there are about 20 percent illiterate adults in Austria; however, if numeracy is added, these figures may be higher, say around 40 percent. In addition to developing suitable policies focused on adult literacy, it is important to encourage private initiatives in the labour market, and to improve delivery. Monitoring and evaluation are equally essential to help in recognizing demand and in obtaining information about various needs.

Ms Ruth Jermann, Switzerland

For a number of reasons, literacy only emerged as an issue in Switzerland after the results of IALS. More recently the ALL Survey showed that like several other countries in Europe, Switzerland also faces a major literacy problem: 800,000 Swiss, 16% percent of the adult population, have literacy skills at a most rudimentary level. And it is estimated that only a fraction of this number, 3,000 adults, attend literacy classes. The usual response is to consider this as a problem of immigrants, but the truth is that these people are actually part of the mainstream population. Thus, even though the problem is vast, participation is very low.

In 2004, the Swiss Ministry of Culture initiated and financed a 4-year project to foster professionalization in the literacy field, and the reasons for this initiative will be

explored in this presentation. As a first step, a teaching qualification framework for literacy teachers was to be defined and validated by a national expert group, and a modular training course for teachers, leading to a certificate called “LiteratorIn”, was to be developed, tested and evaluated.

A national network to fight illiteracy, share knowledge and improve the quality of services provided to adults with low literacy skills has been established recently. There is a need to create innovative and creative methods to raise awareness and to bring back people who do not want to learn. In the context of raising awareness, several initiatives have been planned on Literacy Day, as for example, serving alphabet soup in restaurants, launching a programme based on the theme of “let the brain cells dance” with the mascot Knutl, the first brain cell. A bicycle tour is also being planned in September to highlight the importance of learning.

Teaching literacy means providing a wide range of didactic methods in order to meet the needs of the wide variety of learning styles that the learners bring with them. Usually materials for adult-literacy courses are based on schoolbooks from primary school. While this approach is understandable, the world of adults is very different from that of children. While playful elements may be used therefore, connections with issues of concern to adults (communication, relation to others, self-awareness) are also important.

Mr Urkhan Alakbarov, Azerbaijan

The formulation and implementation of literacy policy is based on the cooperation of government, NGOs, and the private sector. Government functions include legislation, for example Presidential Decrees, while as an NGO, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation plays a key role in implementing a programme on the comprehensive advancement of educational institutions. Other NGOs engage in building human capacity, for example offering training courses for different age groups. An interdisciplinary subject of sustainable human development was introduced in Azerbaijan in 2001. A textbook was published in the country in 2003 which has had an impact on literacy among parents of school students amongst the refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) community. It motivates parents to establish a Community Based Organisation (CBO) for upgrading their own literacy and occupational skills.

It is also important to create the appropriate environment for literacy and to strengthen the role of official formal literacy programmes in literacy for all. Education for sustainable development was introduced in Azerbaijan four years ago. School children use their text books at home to help parents improve their skills, sometimes through CBOs. Support has been received from the private sector, strengthening government inputs.

Mr Viktor Bolotov, Russian Federation

In the Russian Federation adult literacy problems are addressed in various ways depending on the tasks the State faces and the needs of different social groups. It is necessary, however, to remember that “improving literacy” can take different meanings for every particular group. There are several types of adults for whom the State has made provisions for learning. The first population group consists of adults who failed in school but are willing to raise the level of their education. This higher level of education is needed for both entering formal education institutions and for getting a job.

To cover this group, the Russian Federation has a wide network of evening schools. They are financed from municipal budgets and follow the State school education standards with State accreditations. A high number of immigrants take part in these evening schools.

The next important population group is unemployed people or those who cannot find a job after graduation. Generally, the improvement approach promotes working skills using professional education institutions, as well as specially established Employment Service Centres. However, one of the main problems is that most of the unemployed people failed to find a job even after retraining. To a large extent, this is a result of the gap between working skills acquired during the courses and employers' demands. State institutions and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP) cooperate closely to solve this problem. In cooperation with field employers' unions, RSPP establishes the "professional competencies" that are needed to meet real market demands in every professional field. In the long run, these competencies will inform the content of retraining programmes for the unemployed.

Another very important population group is demobilized soldiers. While the retraining programmes in civil skills for officers are already established (with the support of OECD), for other military personnel this process is still at the beginning. Two main approaches have been taken. The first allows for acquiring civil professions during military service, provided by both civil education institutions and army education centres. The second is targeted at wider access to preparatory courses to facilitate entry into higher education institutions.

Among the Russian working population a large number of people seek to improve their professional skills, supported by their employer or on their own (for example, new software, international languages, improving work with customers). However, although the number of educational institutions providing this sort of service at the employers' or individual's expense is growing, the quality of knowledge is far from being excellent. In the long run, professional communities should be in charge of ensuring the quality of these educational programmes. It must be remembered, however, that in the final analysis, it is each adult's choice whether or not to undertake further learning. For all the groups discussed, key issues include sources of financing (State, employer, and/or personal funds), quality control (State, professional communities, and employers associations), and the possibility of common solutions across CIS countries.

General discussion and questions of the plenary to the Roundtable

The questions and discussion following the presentations related to the issues of recognition of the demand and need for adult education in Europe and the unwillingness of policy makers to recognise it and act accordingly. Specifically in the case of migrants, the question of relating literacy programmes to themes that they were familiar with at home was raised. Participants wondered how far identification actually relates to demand and whether identification necessarily translates into a demand. The role of State and non-State providers was also discussed, bringing out the need for CSO providers to work with governments while of course also keeping their independence. As one participant put it, we must accept the fact that there are multiple literacies, and that there are no simple answers.

Annexe

Letter of H.E. Mr Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

***To the Participants of the UNESCO Regional Conference
“Addressing Literacy Challenges with a Sub-regional Focus: Building Partnerships
and Promoting Innovative Approaches”***

Dear Conference participants!

I would like to extend my greetings and sincere wishes to all of you.

In the contemporary world, where globalisation is becoming more and more comprehensive, and where education has become a universal value beyond the agenda of separate countries, the organisation of a forum on literacy problems is a remarkable event. Taking successful steps in the creation of the information society, Azerbaijan makes every effort to meet challenges of globalising world. Therefore, the organisation of this conference is of great significance, especially since it provides unique opportunities for benefiting from the experiences of European countries. I am confident that this event will also contribute to the expansion of mutual relations between Azerbaijan and UNESCO.

Today many people in our country think that the problem of illiteracy was solved 50 years ago. This conference clarifies the new meaning of literacy and alerts us to the possible danger that in the near future every person might face some serious problems in the labour market as well as in the society. On the other hand, the issues which will be addressed in the conference open a large circle of activities for all of the structures of the civil society, and emphasise the importance of lifelong education.

The care for the development of education, one of the strategic areas, is increased day by day in Azerbaijan, where the economic development is swiftly under way. The educational problems of more than a million of refugees and IDPs, who were banished from their native lands as a result of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, are on the focal point. I hope that the issues on their education will become a topic of your discussion.

Evidently, this conference will be of immense significance in enhancing the literacy level in Europe and will be the milestone towards achieving the ends as they are set out in the related documents of UNESCO.

With great respect,

(Ilham Aliyev)
President

Speech of H.E. Ms Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Mr. Director-General of UNESCO, Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I greet sincerely all participants and guests of the UNESCO regional conferences in support of literacy in Europe. I welcome all of you in Azerbaijan. UNESCO's activities in developing education all over the world are highly valued. I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, for his relentless and extensive work in supporting science, education and culture, and establishing cooperation between countries in this field. I am also privileged to welcome our special guests, Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of Netherlands, Her Royal Highness Princess Firyal of Jordan, and Her Excellency Mrs. Finnbogadottir, Goodwill Ambassadors of UNESCO. I express my special thanks to them for actively supporting this conference and being with us today.

Today we are pleased to meet leaders and officials of national education systems, prominent experts from more than 30 European countries as well as the representatives of many respective international organisations. The Baku conference continues a number of regional and sub-regional UNESCO conferences in support of global literacy. It is part of the joint effort to promote literacy at national, regional and international levels. Today UNESCO is mobilising resources to ensure that people in every country have open and equal opportunities to education. Particular attention is given to issues related to overall access to high quality education and eradication of illiteracy. It is hard to overestimate the importance of this current forum for further development of education in European countries. This event will aid the effective resolution of illiteracy problems specific to our continent.

European countries have been successful in promoting literacy through national policies. However, in spite of traditionally high level of literacy there are still specific problems and changes in this field. Our conference is aimed at drawing the attention of the broader European community to the most topical issues in the sphere of literacy and adult education. This unique opportunity to discuss the current educational problems will enable the exchange of innovative ideas, experiences and best practices. It will define common approaches. The conference will also determine the effective methods and means to promote literacy and adult education. We expect to see new great ideas and measures aimed to raise the quality of education in Europe, which will be reflected in the final document and recommendation of the conference. This forum will foster dialogue and inform the actions of various national governments and international organisations. It will ensure a high standard of literacy across the European continent. I hope that the conference will make an important contribution to the formulation of national strategies for solving problems in the field of literacy and education. It helped the successful implementation of "Education for All" programme. I consider the holding of such an important conference in Baku as recognition of the success of Azerbaijan in promoting its policies in the sphere of education. I am pleased that UNESCO and Azerbaijan are working together successfully in many different spheres and now have a close supported partnership.

Today Azerbaijan is dynamically a developing country. The policy of modernisation is felt in all spheres of social life: economic, political and cultural. The stable political

situation and economic growth are creating the foundation for the successful resolution of problems in the field of education. It is helping to introduce, use and develop new technologies. During the last 4 years more than 600.000 jobs have been created within the country. Of course, there is a serious need to train specialists in many sectors of the economy, particularly in management, banking and other fields.

The most successful projects of education for adults are being implemented in this field. The government attaches special importance to the creation of national education system, which will meet the most modern requirements. It is investing large parts in the development of educational sector and construction of modern facilities. Wide-scale programmes are being implemented to develop education and raise it to the level of European standards. In our country the special state program is aimed at the resolution of existing problems such as a weak application of modern teaching methods, shortcoming in the formation of specialists and low use of modern information technologies in teaching. These are issues which many post-Soviet countries face. I think that Azerbaijan has made good progress and moving in the right direction.

Our biggest problem is Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabagh problem. As the result of Armenian ethnic cleansing there are one million refugees and IDP's. Over the last twenty years a new generation has been born to this situation. The children of refugees are suffering from the consequences of the conflict. However, despite this difficult situation our government has been able to provide a good level of education for these children. We have created an educational module which maintains infrastructure of these regions to solve educational problems for them. Today all children are being educated by their own teaching staff. The displaced schools perform at the same level as the national average. Over the last decade this is one of our most important achievements.

Comprehensive support for the development of education is one of the priorities of Heydar Aliyev Foundation. Since its creation it has contributed greatly to the development of education in our country. For example, important support in the field of education has been extended by the Foundation within the program called "New School for New Azerbaijan". In the framework of this program more than 200 schools have been constructed in various regions of our country and equipped with modern facilities. Education for children in orphanages is of special importance for us. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation supports and continues to expand its ties with UNESCO. It is carrying out several joint projects and programmes. In 2007, the agreement of implementing the project for the development of vocational education in our country was signed between UNESCO, the government of Azerbaijan, and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. Today's conference is further example of our collaboration. Throughout our joint cooperation we are building a strong and lasting relationship, which will bring concrete benefit for all.

Finally, I would like to express my hope that this conference will give a new impetus to the closer and broader communication between our countries. It will help to strengthen cooperation between the representatives of national education systems of all European countries and elevate our partnership to a new level. I express once again my sincere gratitude to initiators, organisers, participants of this event and all those who have

actively participated in the preparation of the current conference. I hope you will enjoy your stay in Azerbaijan and I wish you every success.

Thank you

**Speech of Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General, UNESCO
Delivered at the Conference Opening Ceremony**

*Madam Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of Azerbaijan,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Madam former President of Iceland,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am delighted to welcome you to the UNESCO Regional Conference on Literacy Challenges in Europe.

Let me begin by paying tribute to Madam Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of Azerbaijan, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, and President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, under whose auspices this conference is being held. Mrs Aliyeva has distinguished herself through her dedication to promoting education and culture as vectors for peace, dialogue and development. Let me express my heartfelt gratitude for her support to this event, and for her devotion to the ideals of UNESCO.

I also wish to thank the deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan and other ministers, and their staff, for making this meeting possible.

We are privileged to have as our keynote speaker, Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. Princess Laurentien is Chairperson of the Reading and Writing Foundation of the Netherlands. She is a passionate advocate of literacy, whose commitment is grounded upon her own experience as a literacy teacher

We can also look forward to a video message from Mrs Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States of America and Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade. This meeting is a direct follow-up to the landmark White House Conference on Global Literacy that Mrs Bush organised in New York in September 2006.

Finally, let me welcome the other strategic partners who will contribute to our deliberations: UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, Ministers, policy-makers, development agencies, NGOs, universities, foundations, the private sector and, last but not least, literacy experts and practitioners from Europe and around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting here today because we share the same deeply held belief that literacy can empower people.

We know that literacy is the foundation of future learning and a major lever of development. Neither the Dakar vision of Education for All, nor the Millennium Development Agenda of reducing extreme poverty, can be achieved without progress in literacy. Female literacy, in particular, is important to reaching every one of the MDGs.

We also know that literacy is a force for freedom, democracy and, in today's increasingly knowledge-driven societies, a major determinant of individual income, employability and economic well-being.

Not one of us would be here today if we had not personally acquired the basic competencies of reading and writing.

And yet, despite this proven power of literacy, millions are still deprived of its benefits.

We have often repeated the statistics, but allow me to state them again.

Over 774 million adults in the world – one in five – cannot read or write. Of these, two-thirds are women. In addition, around 72 million children do not attend primary school and have little chance to acquire basic literacy skills.

I believe you will agree with me if I say that this situation is utterly unacceptable in this day and age.

Five years ago, the countries of the world gathered at the United Nations with the determination to redress this global injustice. They proclaimed 2003-2012 the Literacy Decade, with a view to raising awareness of the global literacy challenge and galvanizing action to address it.

In recognition of the Organisation's longstanding commitment to literacy, UNESCO was invited to coordinate this international campaign, and I had the honour of launching the Decade alongside Laura Bush in New York in February 2003.

UNESCO is leading actions in several areas in support of the Decade.

In 2005, we launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment – LIFE – to catalyze progress at the country level towards the EFA goal of improving adult literacy rates by 50 percent by 2015.

LIFE targets 35 developing countries where the literacy rate is less than 50 percent or where there are more than 10 million people who cannot read and write. These countries account for 85 percent of the world's illiterate adults.

At the international level, UNESCO is working to strengthen advocacy for literacy, improve monitoring and reporting, share good practices, and mobilise partnerships and resources in support of country-led actions.

In particular, we are urging donor agencies to give much higher priority to literacy.

At present, overall aid to basic education remains far short of what is required to achieve EFA. Funding to adult literacy programmes, especially, is shamefully low, leaving millions on the margins of society.

Donors must therefore urgently increase aid to basic education in general, and adult literacy in particular. I would like to make a special call on donors to channel more resources to support the 35 LIFE countries, whose progress will be vital to eradicating illiteracy globally.

It is in order to build such a spirit and practice of partnership, that UNESCO is organising this series of six regional and sub-regional conferences in support of global literacy.

Today's conference for Europe is the fifth to be held, following those for the Arab States, Africa and Asia and the Pacific. The conference for Latin America and the Caribbean is scheduled to take place in Mexico in September.

Our meeting will evidently take a slightly different focus. But the challenges, I would argue, remain no less important.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The countries represented here have high literacy rates, often over 95 percent. Schooling is virtually universal. While efforts are certainly needed to reach the some 15 million adults in Europe who still cannot read or write, the principal challenge is not one of numbers. Europe accounts for less than 2 percent of illiterate adults in the world.

The serious challenge for Europe regards the level of literacy. A high proportion of people simply do not have the literacy skills they need for full social and economic participation.

Indeed, the 2005 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) by the OECD and Statistics Canada found that between one-third and two-thirds of adults do not attain the level of literacy required to meet the demands of daily life and work.

For example, it is a striking statistic that one in ten parents in the United Kingdom struggle to understand the bedtime stories they read to their children.

Some population groups show even higher proportions of low skill levels. This includes minority and immigrant populations, older learners, persons with disabilities, the unemployed, prisoners, and those living in deprived areas.

Low levels of literacy reflect and reinforce social and economic exclusion.

According to the European Commission, there are some 72 million low-skilled workers in Europe – around one-third of the total labour force.

However, it is estimated that by 2010 only 15 percent of newly created jobs will be for those with low skills, and 50 percent of new jobs will require tertiary level qualifications.

How can European countries best respond to these changing literacy needs? This is the question we are gathered here to address. Let me highlight some important issues for consideration.

The first is the quality of schooling. A 2006 OECD study estimates that 6 percent of 15-year-olds in member countries experience serious difficulty in understanding the meaning of a short text. In some countries, the rate is much higher. Low learning achievement in primary and secondary education remains a serious concern in Europe, which must be addressed as the first step to raising literacy levels.

The second issue is that of sustaining literacy. A literate society is not merely a society with high literacy rates. It is a society where literacy skills are developed, nourished and used.

Today, the uses of literacy are changing. It is no longer sufficient to be able to read and write words on a page. Information technologies have created whole new forms and languages of communication that learners must master.

In addition, rapid technological change and globalisation require individuals to have competencies that go beyond basic cognitive and practical skills, to encompass the ability to assess, manage and integrate knowledge.

There is no simple definition of literacy and nor should we look for one. Instead, we must enable people everywhere to acquire the competencies they need to thrive in their own context.

Another key issue is that of equity and inclusion. Addressing the disparities in literacy levels that exist in Europe will require tailored and targeted measures. It will also require a finer understanding of the different needs of learners and the difficulties they encounter. In this regard, the efforts being made to improve national and international tools for measuring and evaluating literacy levels are important and must be pursued.

This necessitates a coherent and well-coordinated literacy strategy, which leads me to my final remark.

A variety of different actors and mechanisms for delivery are required to address the ever more complex and heterogeneous needs of learners in Europe. These partners must work productively together in a complementary manner, and programmes must be coordinated and monitored, with effective quality control.

Strong policy frameworks and flexible means of delivery are particularly important for providing learning opportunities for marginalized populations and groups at risk.

It is my hope that, as you discuss these crucial issues, you will develop fresh insights and open up new pathways of action for the benefit of those who, for one reason or another, do not yet participate fully through literacy in the rapid socio-economic changes we are all facing and the new opportunities which they offer.

It is for this reason that I am particularly happy to note that your debates will be informed by presentations from a wide range of contexts, spanning the whole of Europe and North America.

Such exchange, which is at the heart of UNESCO's mission, not only stimulates new reflection and action, but also creates new networks whose impact may be felt well into the future.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
My hope and expectation is that this conference will provide fresh impetus for literacy in Europe.

The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 aims to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by the year 2010. It also seeks to combat poverty and foster greater social cohesion. This conference is an opportunity for the countries of Europe to realize this vision, as part of global aspirations towards sustainable development and improved quality of life.

Let us show that we can take the agenda forward, and effectively implement plans of action that will propel our advocacy efforts towards achieving literate societies.

The countdown has begun. This is a crucial stage for the international community as we approach the mid-term of the UN Literacy Decade and the halfway point toward the 2015 target date for achieving EFA and the MDGs. It is time to deliver on the promises made.

Thank you very much.

Presentation by Ambassador Hafiz Pashayev, Rector of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy

*Your Excellency, First Lady of Azerbaijan
Your Excellency Director-General of UNESCO*

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to speak in front of you at such an important conference. This conference, one of the series, is aimed to address the problems of illiteracy in Europe and the rest of the world and to find innovative solutions to it. I applaud the efforts of UNESCO and its Director-General Dr Koïchiro Matsuura for conducting this decade long campaign on literacy. I also applaud the First Lady of Azerbaijan, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO Madam Mehriban Aliyeva for hosting this event in Baku. Last year, I had the privilege to attend a meeting of these series in Qatar, where problems of illiteracy among Muslim women and children were discussed.

This is, indeed, a precious opportunity for me to be able to address such a distinguished gathering of people who shape the future of education on our planet. Issues discussed here and decisions made can and will impact the lives of millions of people. Thus, I would like to use this moment to speak about the vision, vision for the education in Azerbaijan, which could be multiplied and used in a larger context.

Our country is a unique place in the world, where within only one century remarkable transformations in literacy, education and science have taken place. Only 100 years ago, Azerbaijan was a place where the majority of population could not read and write and had to depend on religious clergy to guide their lifestyles. Yet, even in that environment, prominent poets, philosophers and scholars, such as Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Hasan bey Zardabi, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Uzeyir Hajibeyov were brought up and further enriched already existing profound cultural heritage. Although thanks to visionary Azerbaijani philanthropists like Zeynalabidin Tagiyev a number of secular schools were established in the late 19th-early 20th centuries, including a women's gymnasium, the general masses remained in darkness of illiteracy. The forceful change of alphabet three times in one century (from Arabic to Latin to Cyrillic and back to Latin), unprecedented in the rest of the world, only further exasperated the problem of illiteracy. This is in large part due to the policy of the Imperial Russia, which treated Muslim minorities rather differently from others.

The Soviet power in 1920s, despite all of its negative consequences for the sovereignty of my nation, nevertheless, managed to eradicate the problem of traditional illiteracy. Masses of people were educated, university system and research started prospering. By the mid 20th century, the mandatory secondary education was already in place and thousands of schools and higher educational facilities were opened. All of this was done in an effort to eradicate the problem of inability to read and write. In my opinion, the goal was largely achieved. The Soviet Union had one of the highest percentages in the world in terms of literacy among its population. What is more important, the reading culture became an essential part of the everyday lifestyle. The vivid example of education's revival at that time was the establishment of the 20th century generation of Azerbaijani intelligentsia- members of which were inspired by the idea and

opportunity of building statehood and identity. We appreciate the fact that the 100 years jubilees of several representatives of that generation were celebrated in recent years under the auspices of UNESCO.

Yet, the Soviet system of education had also its own flaws. These flaws were mainly related to the structure, methodology of the education and its deep detachment from the real world. I want to bring an example from my own experience in scientific research in physics. Although science and illiteracy are two notions that do not fit together, but in some sense we, the scientists, were illiterate about how to implement the results of our research in practice. In fact, there was a popular joke at that time, which said that “the scientists do research to fulfil their own curiosity with the funding from the State”. Separating science and education from real life meant breeding generation after generation of experts who lived in a “whole different world”. Universities lost the sense of reality. Methodology of teaching became outdated and graduates of the universities were not equipped with necessary tools to survive and succeed in a competitive environment, both domestically and internationally. Since it was the government’s obligation to provide jobs to every graduate, getting diplomas, not knowledge was the goal of many.

With independence, we became responsible for our own destiny and the Soviet legacy in education could not be tolerated any longer. As the world becomes more globalised, complex and fast, the type of skills and knowledge which is required for an individual to succeed in the society differ very much from those which were needed decades ago in immobile and largely slow societies. The pace of development today is much faster than yesterday. Thus, when we talk about literacy, we should start thinking about broader terms, than simple writing and reading. People today need the ability to use the computer and internet, rely on personal research and initiatives, develop and apply leadership and business skills, interact with others in a respectful and tolerant manner. Globalisation means interaction and interdependence of cultures, religions, languages and often the knowledge of one or two foreign languages is not even enough to succeed in business and personal life.

As I said, this conference provides a unique opportunity for partnership among us to discuss these challenges and figure out ways to move forward in a creative and innovative manner.

Here in Azerbaijan, the Government has been keen to make rapid transformation from the past to the future. Just a few examples to show: At the moment, the Parliament is discussing a new bill on education. Intention is to drastically change the education system in the country, and we all hope, that despite taking long, at the end Members of Parliament will produce a final legislation that will meet today’s and tomorrow’s challenges. The shortage of modern and highly trained human resources led President Ilham Aliyev to establish a Human Capital Development Fund, which aims at training close to 5000 young Azerbaijanis in prestigious universities of Europe and America. This is all part of the vision of late President Heydar Aliyev to turn black gold into human gold. Indeed, we in the government firmly believe that the wealth of the nation is not in its natural, but human resources.

I would, especially, like to mention the First Lady of Azerbaijan and Heydar Aliyev Foundation’s champion role in fostering the improvement in education sector. In the

past decade, more than 200 new schools were built, more than 600 were repaired, new sport and health facilities were constructed in the regions of the country, special health care education was launched. All of these are done with the goal of providing safe, warm and comfortable conditions for the people in war-torn areas of the country to study, educate and succeed in their personal and professional goals. The First Lady's motto is "not to leave a single child without care", meaning reaching out to impoverished and marginalised, as well as minority and refugee strata of population.

But new schools and universities are not a goal in itself. They are, simply, the tools to achieve the broader goal—to cultivate a type of a citizen, which is qualitatively different from a Soviet citizen. The "new citizen" should rely more on own skills for the solution of daily problems, be initiative, creative and forward thinking. The "new citizen" should be able to work in teams and lead others, be able to adapt fast to the rapidly changing conditions around the world. We want not a passive, but active, not a reactive, but proactive citizen.

In order to achieve that, we have to substantially change our educational methodology and curricula. And the government has already started reforms in that respect. We need to move away from formal teaching style, where student and teacher have rather vertical relationship. Dogmatic teaching methods result in the memorisation of lectures by students and spelling out those memorized materials during exams. This methodology kills the spirit of creativeness and independence.

Education system needs to have dynamic and constantly evolving relations with the private sector. It needs to be able to use the new technologies and adapt to new demands, created by market. It needs to be able to understand the trends within the real world. Only that type of education can address the challenge of illiteracy from a broader perspective.

To give you sense of urgency in transformation, I would like to bring to your attention the establishment of a new school of international affairs here in Azerbaijan, which I have been personally involved in recent years. It is called Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA) and is created by the Presidential decree to address the shortage of professional diplomats and other specialists in the international affairs.

President Ilham Aliyev's vision is to expand, strengthen and broaden Azerbaijan's foreign relations both in the East and the West. Our geography dictates this necessity and only professionally trained diplomats can fulfil this historic task at the scale that President has in mind. It is worth to emphasise the fact that during H.E. Ilham Aliyev's presidency Azerbaijan's diplomatic missions abroad have increased from 26 to 56 with another 20 embassies underway for the next two years. Outlining plans for ADA will be a good conclusion for my remarks and effectively portray the message that I am trying to deliver.

While serving as Azerbaijan's Ambassador in the United States from 1992 to 2006, I, more than anyone else, felt uneasiness of the process of growing and educating diplomats on duty. There in Washington, I also saw the important role which universities play in shaping the future of their country, both through research, community work and interaction with policy-makers. I believe similar situation exists in Europe as well.

So, we aimed at establishing a school where students get not only academic knowledge, but a place where minds are shaped. On the screen, you see some images of our green campus, which is under planning. We believe that a place where you study affects the way you study. Therefore, we strive for the most unique setting for our academic village. However, ADA is not about buildings or latest equipment only. In our vision, ADA is a design of a new concept of education. Education that is based on innovation and responsible citizenship.

“Innovation” for us is extremely important, especially, when it comes to teaching and learning. We want to depart from formal, authoritarian style of education and move on to new teaching methods, such as case studies, peer to peer learning, team work, etc. We want to create a collaborative and open environment, where the flow of ideas is highly valued and encouraged. For that purpose we are building an Academic Village, where we all live and learn together. At ADA, learning is not confined to study rooms or auditoriums only. It continues everywhere, from staircases to lounges and to my favourite corner in the future campus - the Garden Amphitheatre.

Innovation at ADA touches other aspects of education, such as developing a fully automated library and academic management system, running a wireless campus and utilising the latest information technologies in long-distance education. Creating a financial mechanism for our students through merit-based scholarships, student loans and permanent endowment is a key to sustainability of the project.

We aim at putting students on top of the educational process and creating student-centred environment, with student government, along with the first-time-ever in Azerbaijan Board of Trustees. Full academic cycle for us starts with admissions, goes into academics and continues with career management and alumni relations. We believe dropping out any of these four steps will hurt the other parts of the chain too.

Another very important pillar of our concept of education is instilling the sense of “responsible citizenship”. We want to teach our students the culture of giving back to the society. We do that by building and sharing the largest foreign language library in the country and by improving the neighbourhood beyond ADA campus. The Dede Gorgud park, images of which you see on the screen, is the product of the ADA efforts to change our community and avoid living in isolation. This once abandoned park will now be home to our campus, where, among many other things, energy and environment will not only be taught but also practiced in real life through geothermal heating and cooling, wind turbines, green roofs, and rain water recycling.

ADA, as Azerbaijan itself, has a unique location at the intersections of Asia, Europe and Middle East, history and future, the West and the East. For that purpose, we want to promote the ideas of regional cooperation and teach our students both multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance, for which we, Azerbaijanis, are so proud of. Enough to say that teaching in Azerbaijan is conducted in languages of 15 ethnic minorities.

While we primarily designed ADA for Azerbaijanis, we also hope that it will become a unique brand in the region. We aim at international collaboration and we already built excellent relations with such reputable schools in the US as Georgetown University,

Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Johns Hopkins University as well as European schools, like College of Europe, ENA, Cambridge University, MGIMO, University of Trento etc. I want to specifically highlight that our Academy has informal and formal cooperation agreements with many similar institutions in East European countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to conclude by saying that our school is proud to start cultivating a new mentality, new generation of Azerbaijanis who are more creative, courageous and independent. The Azerbaijanis, who can think critically and reason analytically. That is the formula for literacy we are envisioning and that is the way to make sure that Azerbaijan is better known not for its wealth beneath the Caspian Sea, but for its real asset - human talent.

This is the vision. Vision for fighting illiteracy in broad terms. And a vision must be shared. I am grateful to many of my colleagues within and outside the government, who have come to believe in ADA and its significance for the country. But among them, there is someone who has been my biggest inspiration. She is here with us. The implementation of the vision and concept of education I have outlined here today would be impossible without her input and support. Once again, I would like to extend my deep gratitude to Madam Mehriban Aliyeva and to acknowledge her innovative thinking in education.

Thank you

Keynote speech by H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands

Royal Highness, First Ladies, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends

It's a great pleasure being here. It allows me to translate the stories of millions of people affected by literacy across our continent, across the globe. Individuals, such as my fellow countrymen and women who learnt to read and write when they were adults. Veronica, Fernando, Fre, Samira, Aljien, Dini, Anke and Ahmed. It's the story of our children who will so need literacy skills to get on in life. And this is the story about an issue that goes to the heart of our societies.

Like you, I am inspired to be part of this global UNESCO initiative, hopefully making a contribution to our shared efforts. Baku is a perfect setting – for its vibrancy and inspiration, and of course for the commitment to literacy by the First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mrs Aliyeva. Thank you very much for your hospitality.

We've heard the numbers globally: some 800 million adults don't have sufficient reading and writing skills to function independently. Over 100 million children don't go to school. And across Europe, about 5 to 20 percent of our populations lack the literacy and numeracy skills to come along.

Do we find this acceptable? Do we see these shocking figures as mere statistical data? Or do we realise that behind each number, there is a person like you and me. Someone often ashamed of his handicap, deprived of chances everyone deserves.

Do we see literacy merely as a technique of memorising letters, words and sentences? Or do we see literacy, as Kofi Annan said, "as a road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential". But is it getting the attention it deserves? The answer lies with you, with us. You know what triggers the right mindset to make this a priority in your respective countries. You know what works and what doesn't.

So this conference is an opportunity to get inspired. An opportunity to work with an open mind and at times even to be brave enough to challenge commonly held notions. We need to be practical. And most of all – this is an opportunity to make a difference and affect change. We need to be able to look each other in the eye when we meet at future occasions, be it in Hungary or Brazil, and say to each other: "yes, we are making real progress".

I'd like to look at literacy and illiteracy first from a human perspective, then from a societal perspective. They are the pillars of my firm belief that we urgently need to mobilise our entire societies to tackle illiteracy structurally. I will share some concrete examples of how this could be done.

1. The human perspective

Again, let's keep reminding ourselves that literacy is about people. And illiteracy is often linked to immense personal problems - low self-esteem, social isolation and an inability to function independently. As UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning says: "Literacy arouses hopes in the individual who is striving for fulfilment, happiness and personal benefit by learning how to read and write" .

From a policy perspective, literacy is often boxed in as an adult education issue. This simply doesn't make sense when the individual is the starting point, the centre, of our thinking. Because an adult once was a child, and a child will grow to become an adult. If we accept this natural course as the basic premise, it's only logical to work with the concept of the literacy chain.

What it means: you take a person's life and determine when, how and where that person does or should get in touch with reading and writing. All those circumstances provide opportunities to invest in literacy – we have to make the links and connect the dots.

You get the point: the literacy chain is about preventing and reducing illiteracy. The Dutch philosopher Erasmus said that literacy is a mindset. Likewise, education and reading and writing go way beyond schooling. Education starts at birth. I recently attended a speech by a formerly illiterate adult at a secondary school. He wanted to encourage children to take reading and writing seriously. He clearly linked the limitations of his life due to his illiteracy to the need to invest in basic skills early on in life. He told the room full of children: "Don't take the path I took of not learning to read and write. It's a dead end. I had no self-esteem and always felt ashamed. Make the right choices while you can." Imagine this: two hundred 16 year-olds, stunned in silence...

2. The societal perspective

Society is made up of a multitude of areas that people come into contact with throughout their lives, from the healthcare and educational systems to government services, shops and the labour market – you name it. So people always wear several hats: they are citizens, students, consumers, employees, patients or unemployed. In all these capacities, reading and writing play an important role in one way or another.

In our societies, the pace is set by rapid technological change, which requires us to constantly update our skills. When we talk about long-term economic growth and development, we tend to focus on knowledge, innovation and research. In the so-called Lisbon strategy, the European Union outlines its ambition "to be the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (...) by 2010".

But consider this: knowledge is about information. Information is, more often than not, in written form. Our ability to grasp, process and use written information determines to a large extent our ability to participate in society in all our different roles, wearing several hats at the same time. For instance, many services and transactions increasingly require some form of e-skills – from banking to buying train tickets to filling out our tax returns, and from voting to applying for a job.

Those who lack the necessary reading and writing skills are left behind. In societies that strive for social cohesion and maximum participation of its citizens, this is highly undesirable. Indeed, in the Netherlands, we estimate that tackling low literacy in relation to health, criminality and social security would save us approximately 537 million euro per year. A society that accepts literacy is unfit for the future.

Also, we should not forget that low literacy levels affect all groups – not just immigrants, the elderly or socially less wealthy groups, as is commonly thought. In my own country for example, of the 1.5 million adults with low literacy levels, 1 million people are born and bred in the country. Yes, they followed our own school system. And yes, it also affects the young: also in the Netherlands, 25 percent of our 11-year olds are two years behind in reading!

Mobilising society

What does this all mean? Based on the notions of the literacy chain and societal benefits and needs of investing in literacy, I believe that there are three preconditions for a visionary, structural and durable approach to literacy. I hope that these provide directions of your thinking during this conference. The preconditions are:

Literacy needs to be on the societal and political agendas (and high up there!);

All areas of action need to be linked – from early childhood development to adult education, from health literacy to literacy in the workplace;

Society needs to be mobilised to feel a shared responsibility for promoting literacy and tackling illiteracy. There are two main strands to this: communications and approaching the field of literacy as a market place.

Communications

Communicate again and again to break a vicious circle. What is this vicious circle: illiterate people feel that they are the only ones with the problem. Their sense of shame stands in the way of seeking help. Getting the issue out in the open will help overcome the taboo. This in turn will encourage them to go back to school and stop us from taking literacy for granted. Breaking the vicious circle is also needed to stop. Awareness-raising is also needed for politicians to realise the relevance of literacy to society and make the necessary commitments.

I've experienced first-hand how hard it is for a society to admit that staggering numbers of people cannot read and write. Countries are ashamed to admit to failures not only of educational systems, but also of informal societal structures such as the family and communities. These structures are apparently not able to detect illiteracy or stimulate children to learn how to read and write.

The sky is the limit when it comes to communications about literacy. Seek the active engagement of business and political leaders; highlight new angles of the issue through research and partnerships to keep the issue afresh and on the agenda. Invest in a well-targeted media campaign. And finally, use "Literacy Ambassadors" - their intensely personal stories are more powerful than anything else to encourage others to go back to school. You no doubt have many other creative and effective ideas and good practices.

Market place

Clearly, illiteracy is too complex an issue for one organisation too "own" it. So we need to develop a sense of shared responsibility among all stakeholders involved. While traditional networks are important, the notion of shared responsibility goes further than a simple exchange of information; it calls for a market place where supply and demand come together. The supply side consists of the vast array of knowledge,

educational methods, materials, campaigns, toolkits and research as well as experts and teachers. In a way, this is the “easy” part, given the amount of expertise that exists around the globe – see what’s represented in this room alone!

What’s needed on a large scale is to create demand among leading individuals and private and public sector organisations for these offerings that exist on the supply side, particularly in the area of informal education. Despite all efforts made, there ignorance about the issue persists. This makes taking responsibility impossible. How to create such demand: by reaching out to inform opinion leaders and organisations to highlight and demonstrate the relevance of literacy to each and every one of them. Once they are convinced, we need to encourage and support them in tackling illiteracy within their own structures - by using the offerings on the supply side. The beauty of it is that the actual work is done by the organisations themselves. What’s needed are catalysts to make this happen. And, for efficiency’s sake, it is best to work through multipliers – for instance to work through entire sectors in addition to working through individual organisations, or, in turn, to work with one company with the aim of addressing entire sectors.

I’ll give you a concrete example of the market place in practice: we identified a company with the potential to multiply impact: Schiphol airport, where two-dozen large companies and hundreds of smaller companies operate, employing many low-trained workers. Until recently, Schiphol was unaware of the issue of illiteracy. The company wasn’t unwilling; they simply didn’t know. We created awareness among the management of Schiphol and provided them with the necessary tools and arguments to encourage other the companies to address illiteracy within their structures. The ultimate aim of the approach: for employees to come forward about their literacy deficiencies and go back to school. The CEO of Schiphol is now an outspoken advocate on literacy issues – which of course is useful for communications purposes.

Connecting the dots...

To end:

There is no silver bullet in eradicating illiteracy. We must work together to raise awareness, implement practical initiatives and measure actual results. Mr Matsuura, in doing so you have called on the collective will of the international community to ensure that the necessary support is forthcoming.

Indeed, we have to dare to have a vision and must be ambitious. Those of us here are in a prime position to connect the dots, to seize opportunities and to maximise the potential of the market place approach. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel and there’s no sense in preaching to the converted. We need to reach out to new and seemingly unexpected constituencies to tackle illiteracy within their structures.

We have no time to waste.

Thank you