

Global Literacy Fact Sheet



“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” –Nelson Mandela

Fast facts

- One in five adults, or 796 million people, lack basic literacy skills
- 67 million primary school age children are not in school
- 74 million secondary school children are not in school
- Millions more are sitting in classrooms and receiving education of such a poor quality that it will do little to enhance their life chances

Why education?

Education is imperative to tackling poverty. When children have the opportunity to learn basic life and literacy skills, economies grow faster and poverty rates decline.

- Each year of primary school increases the wages people earn later in life by 5-15% for boys and even more for girls
- For each additional year of secondary school, an individual's wages increase by 15-25%
- No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without first having at least 40% of its adults able to read and write

Gender

Even today, in most countries women and girls are the last to get the opportunity to learn.

- 54% of children out of school are females
- Out-of-school girls are far less likely to enter primary school education than out-of-school boys
- Nearly two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women

Health

Education is essential to improving the health and life expectancy for the world's poorest.

- Seven million cases of HIV/AIDS could be prevented in the next decade if every child received an education
- A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of 5 years

Global Education promises

World leaders have made several promises to make the basic human right of education a reality. Most significantly, in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals were outlined by the UN. They pledged to ensure that “by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling”. Progress towards these goals has been slow and unproductive. At current rates, there could be more children out of school in 2015 than there are now, and the goal of Education for All could take over 75 years to achieve.

What needs to be done?

- An extra 1.9 million teachers, and 4 million new classrooms are required in order to enable every one of the world's children to receive an education
- Around \$16 billion is needed annually to improve education in the world's poorest countries
- School fees must be eliminated, particularly for low income earners
- More teachers need to be trained and effectively retrained, to motivate those in the profession
- Billions of dollars worth of books, learning resources, desks, chairs, lights and other equipment are needed to build new schools and improve the poor standards of existing schools

Sources:

(2011) “Education for All: beating poverty, unlocking prosperity” <http://www.campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/brown/EFA%20Report_Low%20Res%20v2.pdf>

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(2011) “UNICEF State of the World's Children” <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/pdfs/SOWC-2011-Main-Report_EN_02092011.pdf>