

WARSAW MEMORANDUM

A Memorandum towards building a European Literacy Coalition

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Note for the reader

This Memorandum was prepared based on input from the 40 stakeholders who met in Warsaw on 6 and 7 May 2026 at the invitation of the European Commission. Where it says 'we', it means those participants, as the initiators of a European Literacy Coalition that will be launched in Brussels in September 2026. The Commission supports this process and will support the Coalition; it is not the author of this text.

The Memorandum is addressed to the European institutions, to the governments and public authorities of the Member States, and to organisations and individuals with a stake in literacy across Europe. It is a starting point that the Coalition will complete and expand upon as its work develops.

I. Introduction

Literacy is the foundation for learning and active participation in a democratic, cohesive and sustainable society; it is a source of personal fulfilment and well-being, and improves employability in an ever-evolving labour market. Supporting people in gaining literacy skills helps to strengthen Europe's resilience at a time of rapid and profound change. Technological, social and cultural change – digital developments and, above all, AI – is reshaping how people read, write and engage with information. While this creates new opportunities for learning, communication and participation, it also brings increased exposure to false and misleading content, to misinformation and disinformation, as well as pressures on attention, well-being and informed democratic participation. Also, literacy needs are increasingly complex, shaped by migration and multilingualism.

To meet these challenges, people need to be empowered to learn continuously, to think critically and participate fully in society – capabilities that are grounded in literacy. Yet, across Europe, many children, young people and adults lack the literacy skills they need to thrive in education, work and everyday life.

At the same time, no school, no early childhood setting, no family, no organisation or country can act effectively in isolation. A broader, more collaborative approach is necessary. Acknowledging the need for an impactful European response to declining literacy skills, the European Commission, under the Union of Skills and the action plan on basic skills ⁽¹⁾, has called for a European Literacy Coalition to be set up. This Memorandum captures the shared understanding that emerged in response to that call.

The European Literacy Coalition took root in Warsaw on 6 and 7 May 2026, through the participation and vision of 40 stakeholders from across Europe – representing education, research, culture and libraries, reading promotion, writing, publishing and bookselling, health, civil society and the technology and creative sectors, alongside learners and families.

Over two days of dialogue, the participants defined what literacy means in today's Europe, identified the main barriers to literacy across the course of a person's life, and proposed the first steps in what will be long-term, cross-sector work.

This Memorandum is the founding text for building the European Literacy Coalition. It speaks with one voice and is an open invitation: to every educator, researcher, librarian, reading promoter, author, publisher, bookseller, illustrator, cultural and creative actor, technology and media professional, health worker, public official, civil-society organisation, family and individual across Europe who recognises literacy as a foundation of Europe's democratic, cultural, social and economic life. The Coalition is open. This Memorandum is its first step, and others are invited to join – both by endorsing the principles set out here and by taking part in the work of the Coalition.

II. Preamble

We, the stakeholders who came together in Warsaw on 6 and 7 May 2026 as the initiators of a European Literacy Coalition, set out the following principles.

- a) **Literacy is a fundamental human capability** and a precondition for fully exercising citizenship, participating in democracy, accessing lifelong learning, finding decent work and enjoying cultural life in Europe. It is crucial to the values on which the EU is founded – respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights ⁽²⁾. Literacy requires the appropriate conditions to be in place, expert teaching, access to high-quality reading materials, and ongoing support throughout the course of a person's life.

- b) **Literacy in the 21st century is multidimensional, multimodal and lifelong.** It encompasses the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, question and reflect on ideas and feelings through written, spoken, visual, audio and digital materials, across languages and contexts ⁽³⁾.
- c) **Europe must do more to support current and future generations of readers.** Almost one in three 15-year-olds (31.3%) struggles to understand basic texts, putting underachievement in literacy at an all-time high, while top performance is only at 4.8% across the EU ⁽⁴⁾. More than one in four adults in the EU has low literacy proficiency, limiting their ability to navigate the texts and information that are a feature of everyday life ⁽⁵⁾. Reading achievement among 10-year-olds has declined across several Member States ⁽⁶⁾. Behind these figures and trends are people whose literacy development was not supported in childhood – at home, in education and in the wider community – and many of them are now parents themselves. The economic, civic and democratic costs of inaction are growing with each passing year.
- d) **Literacy gaps are not evenly distributed.** They mirror – and reinforce – socio-economic, territorial, linguistic, disability-related, migration-related and other structural inequalities. Without systemic responses, these gaps will continue to translate into reduced life chances and exclusion, weakened democratic participation, polarisation between communities and heightened vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation.
- e) **Europe has a strong policy foundation on which to build a coherent response to this challenge.** Recent European Commission policies include the Union of Skills strategy (2025), the action plan on basic skills (2025), the European education area (2020) and the digital education action plan (2020). They are complemented by the Council Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018), on Pathways to School Success (2022), and on Upskilling Pathways (2016). This foundation will deliver only if it is sustained, well-resourced and puts people first.
- f) **Literacy is shaped by a wide ecosystem of educational, cultural, social, health, civic and economic actors.** The Coalition aims to engage these sectors – and others not specifically named here – as partners, working with the people of Europe and not only for them, in a genuine process of co-creation and social innovation.
- g) **Europe already benefits from many excellent literacy and reading promotion organisations** and networks, working in education, publishing, research, civil society, culture and other sectors. The European Literacy Coalition does not seek to replace or duplicate them. It provides a common platform through which those networks, together with sectors not traditionally engaged in literacy, can work collectively on shared European priorities, coordinate action across policy areas, and address the European institutions with a single, cross-sector voice.
- h) **This Memorandum builds on the contribution of the 40 stakeholders convened in Warsaw** and on the lived experience of learners, families and communities across Europe. It follows the participatory ‘co-creation workshop’ methodology and strives to be representative of all voices that are part of this process.
- i) **This Memorandum is the first step towards an open and growing European Literacy Coalition** – a wide network of stakeholders, open across Europe to those who share the principles set out here, and supported by the European Commission. It is both a declaration by those who met in Warsaw and an invitation to those who wish to join.

III. A Memorandum on Literacy for Europe

We affirm the following commitments.

- We consider literacy to be a shared European responsibility, across institutions, sectors and Member States.
- We support sustained commitment over the long term, beyond the lifespan of any single political cycle or funding programme.
- We see partnership with the people of Europe as essential, and anchor our shared work in evidence, in lived experience and in the voices of learners themselves.
- We value transparent governance and the regular review of progress achieved.

Aligned with these commitments and with the priorities of the Union of Skills and the action plan on basic skills, we declare that we embrace the following principles for literacy policies in Europe.

1. A contemporary understanding of literacy

The literacy that Europe needs today is not what it needed a generation ago. It is no longer only a decoding skill confined to childhood and schools, but a shared human capacity for meaning-making spanning written, spoken, visual, audio and digital forms, and throughout the entire course of a person's life.

- Literacy is a dynamic, lifelong repertoire of capacities and socially situated practices for accessing, understanding, critically evaluating, creating and communicating meaning. It builds on foundational reading and writing skills, involves cognitive processes as well as motivational and affective dimensions, enables social and civic participation, and is shaped by linguistic, cultural, digital and multimodal contexts.
- We call for a shared European definition of literacy for the 21st century that recognises critical thinking, media, information, digital, visual and AI literacies, multimodalities, multiliteracies and creative expression, and that is shaped together with the actors who experience literacy every day – learners, families and communities as well as professionals.
- We recognise the vital importance of literacy across the entirety of a person's life, and call on European literacy policy to address every stage – from birth onwards, through school life, adolescence and adulthood – focusing particularly on the earliest years.
- We hold that literacy is a cross-cutting capacity present in EU policies for skills, culture, health, employment, innovation, digital and democratic resilience, and call for it to be explicitly recognised in those terms.

2. Literacy as a public good – structurally funded

Literacy is a public good. Its benefits – for individuals, for communities and for the EU as a whole – depend on public investment that is sustained over the long term. Short, project-based funding cycles have failed repeatedly to build the lasting change Europe needs; a serious European response to today's challenges requires a long-term, structural commitment of resources.

- We recognise literacy as a public good deserving sustained, structural investment, and look to develop better alternatives to the fragmented, project-based cycles and approaches that have failed to produce lasting positive impacts.
- We affirm that literacy is a fundamental right of every person in Europe, a right that requires public infrastructure and investment **in order** to be realised.
- We call for an ongoing European commitment to literacy, with dedicated policies and funding instruments across Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the European Social Fund+, Horizon Europe,

Digital Europe, EU4Health, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and other EU funds – and under the programmes that succeed them.

3. Equity as the foundation

Equity is the foundation of any European literacy policy. Literacy gaps in Europe mirror – and reinforce – existing inequalities, and require structural, not merely well-intentioned, responses.

- We consider it a priority to address the situation of those whose literacy limits their access to work, health and information and their democratic participation: across the EU, this concerns almost one in three 15-year-olds and more than one in four adults ^(4, 5).
- We hold that inclusion requires genuine systemic change rather than good intentions – long-term funding, co-design with the communities served, and a willingness to work in unconventional settings and formats shaped on the terms of those they aim to reach, not on those of the institutions that would traditionally provide support.
- We stand alongside learners in vulnerable situations – including, but not limited to, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, hearing-impaired and sign-language communities, learners in rural and remote areas, minority-language communities, and older adults – and recognise that mainstream literacy programmes and initiatives have often failed to reach them.
- We work to make educational and cultural spaces – schools, libraries, bookshops – genuinely welcoming to all, recognising that many people experience them as spaces where they do not belong.

4. Early childhood as the foundation for literacy

Early childhood literacy (0-6) is the most cost-effective and equity-driven investment. The first years of life shape lifelong relationships with language, books and meaning.

- We value the inclusion of family literacy support in early childhood education and care, parental leave, healthcare, libraries and social services, including book-gifting programmes, ‘books on prescription’ and well-child visits with literacy guidance.
- We see parents, caregivers, as well as early childhood educators, librarians and health professionals – trusted points of contact for families in the first years – as essential partners and call for them to have the knowledge, materials and time they need to engage children in shared reading, storytelling, singing and play from birth.
- We support reading in every language of the home, heritage and minority languages included, drawing on the oral traditions of rhyme, song and storytelling as resources for early literacy. Early literacy grows out of early language development.
- We call for universal access to high-quality books, reading materials, libraries and storytelling spaces in every European community, including disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

5. Reading for pleasure and meaning-making

Reading for pleasure – and the pleasure of writing and making meaning – is the beating heart of literacy. Motivation, identity-building and emotional engagement are not optional add-ons but core conditions for lifelong literacy. Providing these conditions is a task for all of society, and sustaining them means meeting readers where they already are, while also supporting those for whom reading is still difficult.

- We treat the encouragement of reading for pleasure as a shared responsibility – of educators, families, librarians, reading promoters, health professionals, employers, media and cultural professionals, politicians and public officials.

- We reject the narrowing of the concept of literacy to skills assessment, recognising that reading taught only as compliance ceases to be a source of joy or meaningful experience.
- We recognise that pleasure and proficiency are linked: those who cannot yet read fluently are unlikely to find pleasure in reading, and support for learners who encounter difficulties is therefore part of a culture of reading for pleasure, not separate from it.
- We strive to meet current and future readers where they already are: in youth hubs, music venues, faith communities, sports groups, prisons, workplaces, online communities and the everyday spaces of public life.
- We embrace a diverse range of formats – including audiobooks, comics and multimodal works – alongside the classics, and reject the label of ‘non-reader’. Everyone already engages with text in some form.
- We recognise, amongst other stakeholders, authors, illustrators, translators, book designers, publishers, librarians, reading promoters, and booksellers as essential actors in a literate Europe, and value direct exchange between writers and young readers in schools and communities, with the support of reading promoters.

6. The professionals of literacy – reshaping how they are trained

Teachers, early childhood educators, adult educators, librarians, reading promoters and literacy specialists deserve recognition, preparation and ongoing professional support to match the complexity of their roles.

- We call for the reform of initial teacher education in literacy at university level – media, information, digital, visual and AI literacies included – and for continuing professional development in service, supported through existing European instruments such as the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, so that both can meet today’s literacy challenges.
- We support teaching methods that meet the diverse needs of learners: playful learning and disciplinary literacy embedded across every subject. This also means treating the multilingual and multicultural realities of European classrooms as valuable resources in themselves.
- We support the establishment of recognised literacy specialist roles within schools: reading development specialists and literacy mentors who build capacity within and between schools.
- We recognise librarians – in schools, public libraries, community and academic settings – and call for their formal integration into pedagogical teams, their inclusion in initial and continuing training, and the coordination of clear career pathways across Europe.
- We call for schools to receive more structural support from specialists in adjacent professions – speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, reading promoters, and community readers – as an essential but currently underdeveloped part of the European literacy ecosystem.

7. Literacy for democratic resilience – digital challenges

The digital age demands a new pact for literacy. Digital environments must support – and not undermine – sustained attention, deep reading and other higher-level reading processes, critical thinking and creative expression. Literacy is also a foundation of civic resilience and democratic participation.

- We affirm digital literacy as a critical, creative and civic practice – not merely a technical skill – that enables people to navigate information, evaluate sources, participate in public discourse, and create and interpret meaning.

- We call for structural investment in supporting parents, educators and other professionals as digital mediators to guide children and young people in the digital and AI-shaped environments in which they read, learn and live.
- We call on the technology sector to take on binding, accountable responsibilities through regulation. This should include aspects such as algorithmic transparency, data-collection practices, advertising models targeting children, the development of educational products with pedagogical expertise and their independent evaluation, and penalties for disinformation and opacity.
- We call on EU lawmakers to require literacy-supporting features to be built into digital products and services from the outset – e.g. ‘literacy by design’, based on the model of the General Data Protection Regulation’s approach to privacy – via a thorough review of the AI Act and the Digital Services Act.
- We expect those who design learning technologies to apply the Universal Design for Learning approach, ensuring accessibility for learners with different abilities, backgrounds and needs, with specialist user-experience expertise built into platforms, apps and services.
- We hold that integration, not substitution, must be the governing principle: dedicated space and time for sustained print reading alongside thoughtful digital reading, and visual literacy recognised as an essential dimension of literacy education at every age.
- We support the recognition of children and adults as producers of digital content, not only as critical consumers, and call for critical thinking and media, information, digital, visual and AI literacies to be embedded in formal, non-formal and informal learning. This will create a foundation of civic resilience against disinformation and the destabilisation of democracy.

8. Local literacy ecosystems – connected across Europe

Local literacy ecosystems are the backbone of a literate Europe. Libraries, schools, early childhood services, adult learning centres, cultural and reading promotion institutions, civil society, health services and families form the everyday infrastructure of literacy.

- We affirm that literacy is a shared responsibility across all sectors – education, health, culture, technology, work, community and family life – and that there must be a move from professional silos to genuine collaboration.
- We encourage local partnerships to include groups rarely seen as literacy actors – employers, retailers, sports clubs, faith communities, health and social services and youth organisations. This approach will help reach people beyond traditional cultural spaces.
- We recognise public, school, community and academic libraries as anchor institutions in local literacy ecosystems and call for professional librarians to be given adequate resourcing, preparation and support.
- We hold that collaboration must be built into structures, not left to individual relationships. We support local literacy coalitions across Europe, and their cross-border connection through tools like eTwinning, communities of practice for professionals, and Europe-wide mapping of existing initiatives.
- We extend local literacy work beyond school age: supporting workplace literacy and reading communities for adults, culture vouchers for adults and older people, and free Europe-wide library access for all, including specialised audio services.

9. Evidence-informed literacy policy

European literacy policy should be grounded in evidence, in lived experience and in research that listens to how literacy is practised – in families, schools, kindergartens, libraries, workplaces and

digital communities. Data and research should not describe literacy from the outside; they should be built together with those they aim to serve.

- We call for a greater volume of robust research and evidence on literacy in Europe, so that policy can be built on shared and current knowledge rather than on assumption.
- We promote and support participatory, ethnographic and child-focused research that takes into consideration how literacy is actually lived and that can be effectively translated into policy and practice.
- We support longitudinal, multidisciplinary literacy research using a range of methodological approaches, capable of informing policy across the life course.

IV. Building a European Literacy Coalition

The following principles concern the Coalition itself – who takes part in it, how it works and how it will be sustained.

10. Literacy as an urgent priority – a Coalition for the long term

To sustain the ambition of this Memorandum, we are building a European Literacy Coalition – a well-governed, cross-sectoral, adequately resourced and open initiative – a ‘common house’ that outlasts political cycles and gives a clear answer to the question: ‘What happens if we do nothing?’

- We call on the European Commission to ensure stable, multiannual support for the Coalition, through the Erasmus+ call for proposals envisaged for its establishment and through complementary instruments across Creative Europe, the European Social Fund+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, EU4Health and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.
- We encourage Member States to develop or update national literacy strategies, with measurable objectives, dedicated funding and inter-ministerial governance across networks and services related to education, culture, reading promotion, health and social services.
- We commit the Coalition to publishing an annual European Literacy Report and organising peer-learning activities that generate sustained professional exchange across countries and sectors. The Coalition will also contribute to the European Semester and Union of Skills monitoring, with the active involvement of stakeholders and learners.

11. A broad, inclusive, people-first Coalition

The European Literacy Coalition is built by those it aims to serve. It welcomes voices currently absent from the literacy conversation. A key principle of the Coalition is to listen before it acts.

- We build the Coalition to reach voices not included in the current literacy conversation: above all children and young people, alongside parents and families, communities alienated from formal cultural and educational spaces, and stakeholders from sectors that have never seen themselves as literacy actors.
- We hold that inclusion is a structural design principle, not a token gesture – built into how the Coalition takes decisions and works, and not something merely added at the end.
- We see learners, families and communities not as recipients of expertise but as co-authors of literacy policies, moving from ‘for whom’ to ‘with whom’.
- We commit to working in a democratic, participatory, co-creative and inclusive way.
- We treat all participants in the Coalition as equals, regardless of institutional weight or professional background.

12. Endorsement

This Memorandum is open for endorsement by stakeholders across Europe. Endorsement is a symbolic and public act: a recognition of the principles set out in this Memorandum and a commitment to take part in the Coalition's work, in whatever way and to whatever extent each stakeholder feels is appropriate. The European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, as well as the governments and institutions of the Member States, are warmly invited to support the Coalition and to be involved in its work.

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Opened for endorsement in Brussels on 22 September 2026.

Notes

(1) European Commission (2025a), *Action plan on basic skills* (COM(2025) 88 final), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0088>; European Commission (2025c), *The Union of Skills* (COM(2025) 90 final), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0090>.

(2) European Union (2016), *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union*, Art. 2., *Official Journal of the European Union*, OJ C, C/2016/202, 7.6.2016, p.17, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2016/art_2/oj/eng.

(3) Council of the European Union (2018), *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning*, *Official Journal of the European Union*, OJ C, C/2018/189/01, 4.6.2018, p. 1, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)).

(4) OECD (2026), *PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en>.

(5) OECD (2024), *Do adults have the skills they need to thrive in a changing world? Survey of Adult Skills 2023*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en>; European Commission (2025b), *Education and training monitor 2025*, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor/en/comparative-report/chapter-7.html>.

(6) Mullis, I. V. S., von Davier, M., Foy, P., Fishbein, B., Reynolds, K. A., & Wry, E. (2023), *PIRLS 2021 international results in reading*, Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, <https://doi.org/10.6017/lse.tpisc.tr2103.kb5342>.

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