



The European Union needs to overhaul its approach to improving literacy standards, according to a high-level group of experts set up by European Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou to address the issue. One in five 15 year olds, as well as nearly 75 million adults, lack basic reading and writing skills, which makes it hard for them to get a job and increases their risk of poverty and social exclusion. The expert group's chair, HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, a long-time campaigner in the field, describes the report as a "wake-up call about the crisis that affects every country in Europe".

The 80-page report includes a raft of recommendations, ranging from advice for parents on creating a culture of reading for pleasure with their children, to siting libraries in unconventional settings like shopping centres and the need to attract more male teachers to act as role models for boys, who read much less than girls. It also makes age-specific recommendations, calling for free, high-quality early childhood education and care for all, more specialist reading teachers in primary schools, a change of mind-set on dyslexia, arguing that almost every child can learn to read with the right support, and for more varied learning opportunities for adults, especially in the workplace.

Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, said: "We are living a paradox: while reading and writing are more important and relevant than ever before in the context of our digitalised world, our literacy skills are not keeping up. We urgently need to reverse this alarming situation. Investments to improve literacy among citizens of all ages make economic sense, producing tangible gains for individuals and for society, adding up to billions of euros in the long run."

*Photo: HRH Laurentien, Princess of the Netherlands, on the left, and Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou present the High-level group of experts' report at a press conference in Nicosia 6 September 2012. (European Commission) □*

*Full text of the report:*

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/literacy/what-eu/high-level-group/documents/literacy-report.pdf>

*Futher information:*

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/12/940&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>