

International Literacy Day – UPSC Notes

International Literacy Day is celebrated on **September 8th** every year to acknowledge the importance of literacy and to demonstrate how reading and writing is very important factor in most people's lives.

International Literacy Day, 2021

- The International Literacy Day (ILD) 2021 will be celebrated across the world by UNESCO, governments and partners to uphold the right to literacy and foster the acquisition of literacy and digital skills by youth and adults for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.
- The International Literacy Day 2021 will highlight the theme of “**Literacy for a human-centred recovery: Narrowing the digital divide**”.
- While numerous events will be organised at community, school, and country levels, there will be two online global meetings on 8-9 September 2021 for the ILD2021 celebration and the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes.

Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst disturbance to education and training systems in a century, with the longest school closures affecting more than 1.6 billion learners at its peak time.
- By November 2020, the average child had lost 54 per cent of a year's contact time, which could be interpreted as the loss of over a year's learning if the time of forgetting what was previously acquired is counted.
- The pandemic and its repercussions have also magnified the pre-existing inequalities in access to meaningful literacy learning opportunities, disproportionately affecting 773 million non-literate young people and adults.
- With low or no reading and writing skills, they tend to be more vulnerable in managing their health, work, and life.

The UN International Literacy Day

- International Literacy Day was proclaimed to be held every year on September 8th by the United Nations on November 17th, 1965.
- The first Literacy Day, however, was observed in 1966.

- The main aim behind starting a day on literacy was to spread awareness among individuals, communities and countries.
- Since 1967, this annual celebration has brought attention to people in the world who don't know how to read or write.
- It highlights ways to combat this problem and the huge progress that has been made.
- Every 8 September, UNESCO holds an awards ceremony in Paris, in which prizes are given to individuals and organisations who work hard to increase literacy around the world.

UNESCO International Literacy Prizes

- Since 1967, UNESCO International Literacy Prizes have rewarded excellence and innovation in the field of literacy.
- Currently, there are two UNESCO International Literacy Prizes, which include:
 - The UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize (3 awards)
 - The UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy (3 awards)

Importance of Literacy

- Literacy is a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning.
- It is fully essential to social and human development in its ability to transform lives.
- For individuals, families, and societies alike, it is an instrument of empowerment to improve one's health, one's income, and one's relationship with the world.
- Literacy is not only important to read and write, but it leads to an overall, more empowered society. Some of the reasons for the importance of Literacy are:
 - "Right to Literacy" is a human right and a means for personal empowerment.
 - It is significant for social development.
 - A literate society is the core of developing a society free of poverty, child mortality, population growth, gender equality, peace and development.

Concerns

- It is estimated that around 14 per cent of the global population is illiterate.
- On a positive note, the levels of illiteracy have fallen a lot in recent decades (in just 1980, world illiteracy was at 43 per cent).

- However, there are still enormous differences between regions.
- In sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, illiteracy remains around 30 per cent.
- Illiteracy is a major problem around the world. To acknowledge the huge efforts of people working in this field, the United Nations celebrates International Literacy Day every 8 September.

Consequences of Illiteracy

- Illiteracy and poverty are interrelated and have a strong relationship with each other.
- People who can read and write have an enormous advantage over those who can't when it comes to studying and training.
- This means that literate people generally earn more money and even enjoy better health.
- The United Nations also reports more negative attitudes towards women in societies with lower literacy levels.

Way Ahead

- Some experts argue that we need to change our idea of literacy.
- These days, knowing how to read is a limited skill if the same person doesn't know how to use a computer or smartphone.
- Some suggest that we need to expand the idea of literacy to include skills such as knowing how to use a web browser, create a document on a computer or even send a text message by phone.
- Embracing diverse solutions for distance, face-to-face and hybrid learning for literacy.
- Integration of learning of reading and writing skills and digital skills.
- Quality of technology-enabled literacy learning.
- Equitable and inclusive access to technology-enabled literacy programmes.
- Good governance and partnerships for technology-enabled literacy learning.
- Promoting youth and adult literacy as an integral part of national lifelong learning policies and systems.
- Coordinated and sustained collective support, advocacy, and knowledge management.