

# Response to the Consultation on the draft of the Second SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) National Implementation Plan 2022-2024

Submitted to the Department of the Environment,  
Climate and Communications

June 2022

## Introduction

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills enable people to reach their full potential, be active and critical participants in society and help address poverty and social exclusion. These life skills allow us to participate in, and make sense of, the world.

NALA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft of the second SDG National Implementation Plan 2022-2024.

## Defining literacy

Literacy is an essential life skill that involves listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate, to build relationships, understand and access services, and make informed choices. Unmet basic skills needs have devastating consequences for our society, economy and environment, both financially and democratically<sup>1</sup> and are a factor in social exclusion and inequality.

Resulting from education and wider systemic inequalities having low or no literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills affect all areas of life and impacts families, health and wellbeing, work-life, social-life and community participation.

## Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs in Ireland

### Rooted in education and wider systemic inequalities:

- One in six (18%)<sup>2</sup> of the adult population struggle with reading and understanding everyday text. For example, reading a bus timetable or medicine instructions.
- One in four Irish adults (25%) has difficulties using maths in everyday life. For example, basic addition, working out a bill or calculating averages.<sup>3</sup>
- Over half (55%) of the adult population has low digital skills.<sup>4</sup> For example, using a smart phone, googling and understanding information online. Note that the majority of people who have digital literacy needs have underlying literacy issues.

## Supporting unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs

In September 2021, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) published the [10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy](#). As part of this new strategy, we hope to see more adults accessing literacy programmes along with financial and care supports for participation.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2013). [Skills Outlook 2013](#): First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills.

<sup>2</sup> CSO (2013). [PIAAC 2012](#) (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) Results from Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Cedefop (2020). [Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways](#).

## NALA comments on the draft report

### Commitment to leaving no one behind

NALA believes in leaving no one behind and the furthest behind first principle, as named in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>5</sup> and in successive national anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies. It means that where funding is limited, State investment should target those most in need. In Ireland, this would mean that the needs of those with less than a Leaving Cert (QQI Level 4 qualification) would be met first. These adults are most at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Vulnerable adults, who cannot access supports or are refused help when they need it, may not seek help again. **The implementation plan should call for enhanced and targeted opportunities and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy learning in particular for vulnerable groups.**

### Communicating in plain English and using a literacy-friendly approach

The implementation plan has many actions for training, resources and processes for staff and communities. NALA recommends that **all written, spoken and digital communication uses plain English principles** – NALA’s [Writing and Design Tips](#) gives suggestions and the [Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service](#) goes into more detail. NALA also recommends that **training and events are designed and delivered using a literacy-friendly approach** – this means taking account of the literacy and numeracy needs of the group and removing literacy related barriers.

### Raising awareness of adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs

Where useful and relevant, training around SDGs **could include awareness of the adult literacy issue** where 18% (1 in 6) of adults struggle with reading and understanding everyday text, 25% (in 4) of adults find numbers challenging and 42% of adults have digital literacy needs.

### Other points:

1.5 Ireland’s national approach to the SDGs	<b>Include reference</b> to the <a href="#">Adult Literacy for Life</a> : A 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy (published in September 2021)
7.5.2 Further and Higher education institutions	In adult literacy, adult and community education programmes, <b>the purpose and role of SDGs could be integrated into course content</b> . For example, a communications course could explore SDGs. There is some relevant content in the <a href="#">Facts Matter</a> tutor guide and more could be developed to support this.

### Further information

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<sup>5</sup> [Transforming our world](#): the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership based organisation. We work to support adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs to take part fully in society and to have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA does this by raising awareness of the importance of literacy, doing research and sharing good practice, providing online learning courses, providing a tutoring service and by lobbying for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

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**NALA**   
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh



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Government of Ireland



Có-mhaoinithe ag an  
Aontas Eorpach  
Co-funded by the  
European Union

**SOLAS**  
learning works

Adult Literacy is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund.