

Sixteen Million Illiterates in Brazil Over 15

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The United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (Unesco) celebrated International Literacy Day on September 8. In Brazil the date also represented the first anniversary of the Literate Brazil Program, launched by the Ministry of Education (MEC).

The program has already served 1.9 million youngsters and adults who had left school or never had a chance to attend one.

The MEC invested R\$ 175 million on the Literate Brazil Program last year and intends to spend another R\$ 168 million by the end of this year, bringing the total of beneficiaries to 3.2 million.

According to the Ricardo Henriques, MEC Secretary of Ongoing Education, Literacy Instruction, and Diversity, the goal of the Ministry is not only to teach students to read and write but also to encourage them to continue their studies through the Youth and Adult Education program (EJA), which offers fundamental and secondary school subjects to people over 15 years old.

"Literacy instruction must be understood as the first step for us later to succeed in getting people to obtain fundamental and secondary schooling, through formal and informal systems of education," the Secretary explained.

Concomitant with International Literacy Day, the National Youth and Adult Literacy Instruction Forum is being held in Porto Alegre, in southern Brazil.

Over a thousand specialists are meeting through Saturday, September 11, to discuss the directions of government programs to reduce illiteracy. The main themes are teacher training and giving continuity to the process of literacy instruction.

Brazil has approximately 16 million illiterates over 15 years old and 30 million functional illiterates, those with fewer than four years of schooling.

These data come from the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP), based on figures from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics' (IBGE) 2000 census.

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