



## ICAO Multilingualism Strategy

(Endorsed by Council at its 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the 225<sup>th</sup> Session)

### 1. GIVING NEW IMPETUS TO MULTILINGUALISM AT ICAO

1.1 To date, ICAO has devoted significant efforts to the provision of language services in accordance with the translation and interpretation requirements of the rules of procedure of its legislative bodies. While the Secretariat's efforts in this area are to be commended, a candid view must be taken of the persistent trend, within the Organization as in the rest of the United Nations system, towards monolingualism. For example: the substance of working papers is often relegated to annexes that are not subject to translation; there is an increasing number of working bodies, more or less formal, which are deprived of interpretation notwithstanding their highly technical nature; there is *de facto* use of only one language in written or oral communication within the Secretariat. While this may be explained by the limited resources available, it runs counter to the United Nations goal of parity among working languages.

1.2 The aim of a multilingualism strategy at ICAO is, first and foremost, to foster a new way of thinking, so that progress can be made towards multilingualism, not only in terms of language services, but also by mobilizing the full potential of the Organization to make the most of its diversity. With this goal in mind, it is necessary to define a coherent and coordinated approach, involving the Organization's governance bodies, the Member States and the Secretariat, and encompassing language services, human resources policy, communications and the promotion of multilingualism.

#### 1.3 Provision of quality language services

1.3.1 ICAO has six working languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, the status of which has been established by various rules of the legislative bodies, by resolutions of the Assembly and by the recognition that the text of the Chicago Convention in these six languages is equally authentic.

1.3.2 The implementation of these rules applicable to interpretation and translation is the responsibility of Languages and Publications. Two administrative instructions govern the provision and the outsourcing of language services, respectively.

1.3.3 In order to improve the quality and availability of language services, and to make progress towards parity between working languages, action is proposed on several fronts.

#### 1.3.4 Streamlining documentation and improving translation turnaround

1.3.4.1 The constant increase in the number and volume of documents, which has been noted for several years, has become a parameter for assessing performance. A break must be made with this quantitative approach, which does not guarantee efficiency, results in overwhelming the Council with documents that are too long and of dubious relevance and overloads the translation services. The result is a

decline in parity, as it is not possible to ensure the simultaneous transmission of documents in the six working languages.

1.3.4.2 In order to reduce the volume of documents translated and to improve translation turnaround times, it might be necessary to streamline documentation by avoiding redundancy, reducing the length of documents and producing only what is strictly necessary, in particular for the work of the various bodies.

1.3.4.3 This streamlining should make it possible to move towards compliance with the principle of simultaneous distribution of documents in all working languages, in accordance with Resolution A24-21. In the long term, plans should also be made to increase the number of multilingual publications.

1.3.4.4 Implementation of this new approach to documentation and its impact on translation should be monitored, with parameters such as the evolution over several years of the volume of documents translated and the average time taken to make documents available in the six working languages.

### 1.3.5 **Better response to interpretation needs**

1.3.5.1 In addition to the meetings that customarily receive interpretation services (Council, Air Navigation Commission, conferences), consideration should be given to the possibility of expanding the number of meetings for which interpretation is provided, in particular for committees, panels and secretariat groups, depending on the technicality and complexity of the work and on the demand from national experts or the Secretariat. The need for interpretation should be verified in consultation with those involved in these forums and subject to the provision of adequate financial or in-kind resources.

1.3.5.2 In addition, the possibility of providing language services in languages other than the ICAO working languages should be examined. This could be more the case for the activities of regional offices and certain events organized for States or groups of States. This service provision could, if necessary, be supported by the States concerned.

1.3.5.3 Because multilingualism is a common and shared responsibility, Secretariat staff and members of delegations should be encouraged, when interpretation is provided, to use the ICAO working language that they know best or are most comfortable in. This good practice would make the best use of the services provided by the Organization and promote the expression of diversity. It could be the subject of regular reminders at the beginning of meetings or conferences with interpretation services.

### 1.3.6 **Supporting language services**

1.3.6.1 The Languages and Publications Branch is central to the implementation of this strategy and the provision of quality services. To enhance its effectiveness and relevance, it is necessary to develop a forward-looking management of needs and capacities, as well as the monitoring of language services quality (see paragraph 7 of Resolution A37-25), based on an evaluation by users, in particular through periodic surveys.

1.3.6.2 ICAO should keep monitoring United Nations best practices (see paragraph 8 of Resolution A37-25), in order to identify new technologies that could enhance the quality and efficiency of language services, by increasing and improving output and by easing the burden on staff. As part of the digital transformation programme launched by the Secretary General, appropriate processes and mechanisms should be established to take full advantage of technological innovation.

1.3.6.3 The implementation of the Language Services Management System (LSMS) Project will play a key role in this regard. This project seeks to equip ICAO with state-of-the-art systems and tools

designed by the UN Secretariat and successfully used in a growing number of UN system agencies in recent years. The software package includes a computer-assisted translation and terminology tool (eLUNa), a workflow management tool (gDoc) and an interpretation management tool (eAPG). It can also connect through application programming interfaces (API) to artificial intelligence tools such as WIPO Speech-to-text or WIPO Translate and interoperability or semantic tagging frameworks such as AKN4UN<sup>1</sup>.

1.3.6.4 ICAO should also strengthen partnerships with the UN Secretariat, the UN System, and entities such as the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) and its technical arm, the Joint International Annual Meeting on Computer-Assisted Translation and Terminology (JIAMCATT), to leverage experiences and best practices in the provision of language services.

1.3.6.5 The overall management of language services should continue to be strengthened and streamlined. In particular, the Secretariat should pursue its efforts to build the roster of freelance interpreters, translators and editors in all ICAO languages and to ensure that staff vacancies are filled in a timely manner. Furthermore, the Junior Language Officer Programme should be reinforced and properly funded to help prepare the next generation of aviation linguists. Partnerships with training schools should be pursued and career opportunities in the Organization promoted. The use of social and other media to advertise job openings and the reinforcement of partnerships with UN and other international organizations should contribute to these efforts.

1.3.6.6 The ICAO rules, policies and administrative instructions applicable to language and publication services should continue to be reviewed, updated and enforced to reflect new and emerging trends, practices and developments in the area of multilingualism.

## **2. TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF THE SECRETARIAT STAFF**

2.1 As recalled in the [JIU/2020/6](#) report, United Nations staff must reflect the universal character of the Charter through language skills that enable them to master more than one of the official and working languages. The same report points out that, in accordance with the administrative rules in force, staff members in some secretariats should be at least bilingual, in other words, proficient and able to communicate in at least two languages of the respective organizations. This notwithstanding, in the United Nations system, as in ICAO, the implications of these policies are not kept sufficiently in mind at the recruitment stage or in the promotion process.

2.2 The relevant rules applicable to ICAO staff, especially the administrative instructions on continuous training or minimum training requirements for professional and managerial posts, do not provide for minimum language requirements and there are very few rules that promote multilingualism. Moreover, only vacancy announcements for D-2 positions are translated into the ICAO working languages.

2.3 Yet a multilingual administration has the essential advantage of being closer to all its stakeholders, starting with its Member States. Enhancing language skills will also contribute to greater openness and inclusiveness, to the benefit of staff and their performance.

2.4 It is therefore necessary to take full advantage of the language skills present in the Organization as an asset and to promote multilingualism internally as a core value. In the same vein, human

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<sup>1</sup> More information on *Akoma Ntoso for UN* is available at <https://unsceb.org/unsif-akn4un>

resources management should take into account the language skills of staff at all stages of their careers and ensure that they are developed.

## **2.5 Mapping the language skills of officials**

2.5.1 In order to take stock of the current situation, data regarding the language skills of the Secretariat staff is required, in accordance with United Nations standards<sup>2</sup>. Such data, which would be included in the annual report on the composition of the ICAO workforce, as approved by the Council, would make it possible to identify staff members' language skills, which could be mobilized as needed, and to identify training needs<sup>3</sup>.

## **2.6 Upgrading the language training policy**

2.6.1 The training policy should be strengthened in order to develop staff members' skills in the use of the Organization's working languages and, where appropriate, other languages, not only to foster diversity but also to facilitate interaction with stakeholders and adaptation to the environment, especially for staff in regional offices.

2.6.2 The provision of language training should be reinforced, with the assistance of Member States interested in supporting this effort, with courses tailored to the needs of ICAO staff or through staff exchanges.

2.6.3 These courses could be open to Council members and delegations staff.

## **2.7 Taking language skills into account in recruitment and career management**

2.7.1 Promoting multilingualism includes the possibility of strengthening language requirements in the recruitment of Secretariat staff. In this regard, consideration could be given to encourage proficiency in two or more languages, for General Service staff and for Professional and Director-level staff (P2 to P5 and D1-D2). The first step would be to identify the posts for which this requirement is necessary and should therefore be phased in.

2.7.2 This is particularly the case for regional offices and certain headquarters positions (such as the sections in charge of audits) which require specific language skills. These positions and requirements should be mapped and included in the vacancy notices for the positions concerned.

2.7.3 There is also a need to review the way in which language skills are taken into account in performance evaluation of staff, beyond the current system of awarding bonuses.

2.7.4 To ensure wider dissemination and awareness of staff vacancies and to show potential candidates ICAO's commitment to diversity, consideration could be given to translate professional-level vacancy notices over time, starting with those for regional office positions in the working language/s used in the region concerned.

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<sup>2</sup> [United Nations Language Framework: UN Levels of Language Competence, Harmonization of Language Learning and Assessment](#)

<sup>3</sup> See C-DEC 223/4, 8 a).

### **3. ENHANCING MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION**

3.1 As an organization of the United Nations system, ICAO should communicate more in several languages, in order to be accessible to as many people as possible.

3.2 Some good practices have already been established, such as broadcasting messages on social media platforms or translating certain pages of the website into several working languages. Translation of the Organization's websites and social media platforms into the six working languages could be explored. However, this would require adequate voluntary contributions from Member States.

3.3 Once the language skills of Secretariat have been mapped, they could be leveraged to improve the Organization's multilingual outreach, which should not rely exclusively on the language services department or the staff in charge of communications, but could be based on an ICAO-wide mobilization. This should comply with the criteria spelled out in the UN Language Framework, which establishes four UN Levels of Language Competence.

### **4. PROMOTING MULTILINGUALISM AS A UNIVERSAL VALUE**

4.1 Multilingualism should be actively promoted, as should the celebration of International Mother Language Day (21 February each year) and the respective international days of ICAO working languages.

4.2 Establishing partnerships with higher education institutions could also contribute to the development of multilingualism in the international civil aviation sector.

### **5. MOBILIZING THE MEANS FOR A DYNAMIC IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS STRATEGY**

5.1 Multilingualism is a common good. Therefore, effective implementation of the related strategy must be the shared responsibility of the Secretariat, the Council and the Member States.

#### **5.2 A responsibility shared by all components of the Secretariat**

5.2.1 In accordance with his Charter Letter, the Secretary General is responsible for the implementation of this strategy. The Secretary General shall report thereon to the Council and to the Assembly every three years and shall also propose updates to the strategy as necessary before each session of the Assembly to raise the level of its ambitions. The Secretary General is assisted in this task by a Multilingualism Coordinator.

5.2.2 In line with the recommendations of the JIU reports ([JIU/REP/2011/4](#) and [JIU/REP/2020/6](#)), the Deputy Director, Languages and Publications is designated as the Multilingualism Coordinator. His/Her responsibilities are to act as a channel for concerns and issues raised by Member States and Secretariat entities, to play a facilitating role in achieving a concerted, uniform and consistent approach to multilingualism in the Secretariat and to instil a culture of multilingualism in all departments and offices by proposing and introducing innovative solutions. These commitments should be translated into tangible actions, incorporating best practices from the United Nations system.

5.2.3 The coordinator should be able to rely on a network of multilingualism focal points, designated in each bureau and regional office. Under the guidance of the coordinator, the network will be

responsible for relaying policies and best practices within the Secretariat and promoting collective action in favour of multilingualism.

### **5.3 The necessary involvement of the Council and the Member States**

5.3.1 Member States should take an active part in promoting multilingualism, which they embody and benefit from. They should contribute to this endeavour, playing a driving role and leading by example. State representatives and their experts should remain mindful that the first contribution they can bring to a diverse and multilingual organization is to express themselves, whenever possible, in the ICAO working language they know best or are most comfortable in.

5.3.2 In particular, Member States should consider supporting the Secretariat by helping develop partnerships for the language training of ICAO staff. They are strongly encouraged to consider secondments of language specialists to support the work of the Language and Publications department as well as the promotion of multilingualism across the Organization. Furthermore, Member States should consider voluntary contributions to specific initiatives such as the translation of ICAO websites and of certain regulatory documents that are not yet available in some working languages.

### **5.4 Budgetary resources to match ambitions**

5.4.1 Given the significant contribution of multilingualism to the achievement of ICAO's strategic objectives, its benefits largely justify the investments made to promote it.

5.4.2 In a context of limited budgetary capacity, language services should not be considered as an "adjustment variable" and should be allocated the necessary resources to perform their functions. The current resources allocated to multilingualism should therefore be maintained, notwithstanding further consideration of ideas and initiatives aimed at better management of the resources available.

5.4.3 Any additional resources needed to implement this strategy should come from the efficiency gains resulting from (i) streamlining documentation, (ii) using innovative technologies and work practices to make language services more efficient and less resource-intensive, and (iii) mobilizing Member States to generate various types of contributions: cash, in-kind, training in Member State institutions, free courses to RO staff, etc.

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