



ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 19: Multilingualism at ICAO

PROMOTING MULTILINGUALISM AT ICAO

(Presented by China)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Languages are the most important means of communication and thought, and their diversity reflects the richness of human civilization and cultures. Multilingualism represents a core value of the United Nations and a fundamental principle and strategy of ICAO. Assembly Resolution 37-25: ICAO Policy on Language Services mandates the global distribution of ICAO produced documents, in particular the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) in all six ICAO languages. This serves to achieve the Strategic Goal of No Country Left Behind, enabling effective participation in ICAO programs and activities, as well as the implementation of SARPs by Member States.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) Continue to uphold multilingualism as a long-term fundamental principle of ICAO;
- b) Request the Council to continuously monitor the improvements in language services and the implementation of the Resolutions of the Assembly and Council, and their decisions and policies related to multilingualism;
- c) Instruct the Secretary General to take into full consideration of the benefits that could be leveraged by the Secretariat from generative AI Large Language Models (LLMs) - not only in language services, but also in meetings and document writing among others - to enhance quality and efficiency. In the meantime, require the Secretary General to treat all AI tools and software equally and impartially, streamlining internal procedures to facilitate their use by translators, interpreters and other staff;
- d) Instruct the Secretary General to pursue innovative approaches to ensure high-quality translation and interpretation services, including the recruitment of qualified language professionals;
- e) Instruct the Secretariat to update and beef up the Action Plan for the Implementation of the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy by proposing new action items for the next triennium, and to develop a phase-in plan for expanding the availability of SARPs and PANS and guidance materials in all ICAO languages;
- f) Request the Secretariat, building on the existing training programs to enhance the policy and report writing skills of staff, to consider organizing virtual course on drafting working papers, reports and manuals, and to make recordings available on ICAO TV and/or its Harmony Hub on Sliq or other channels, ensuring accessibility for all Member States to improve the quality of submissions and effective participation of ICAO meetings;

¹ English and Chinese versions provided by China

g) Call on all Member States and ICAO to avoid treating language services as lower-priority “adjustment variables” particularly during financial austerity, but rather to recognize them as a long-term commitment to and investment in global aviation safety and sustained development; h) Urge Member States to reaffirm their support for multilingualism as a fundamental principle and strategy of ICAO, and work together with ICAO to advance its implementation; and i) Invite Member States with official ICAO languages to consider adopting practices similar to the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) as appropriate, fostering closer cooperation with ICAO in language services.	
<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to all Strategic Goals.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	The activities referred to in this paper are expected to be undertaken with the resources available in the 2026-2028 Regular Budget and/or from extra-budgetary contributions as guided by the ICAO Business Plan 2026-2028.
<i>References:</i>	A42-WP/36-EX/19 A41-WP/44-EX/22 Doc 10183, <i>Report of the Executive Committee</i> Doc 10184, <i>Assembly Resolutions in Force (as of 7 October 2022)</i> United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/78/330 <i>UN Strategic Framework on Multilingualism</i> JIU Report 2020/6

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Languages are the most important means of communication and thought, and their diversity reflects the richness of human civilization and cultures. In recent years, the United Nations adopted multiple resolutions on multilingualism. The latest one, i.e. United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/78/330 adopted on September 6, 2024, reaffirms “multilingualism as a core value of the Organization”, recalls “Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are both the official and the working languages of the General Assembly, including its committees and subcommittees”, underscores “the importance of multilingualism in the activities of the United Nations”, and further requests “the Secretary General to submit to the General Assembly at its eightieth session a comprehensive report on the full implementation of its resolutions on multilingualism”.

1.2 Similarly, multilingualism is a fundamental principle and strategy of ICAO. The ICAO Secretariat provides language services and produces documents and publications for the Assembly, the Council, deliberative bodies, and other meetings. Multilingualism enables Member States to share best practices and experience, ensures their contributions are fully considered in the development of ICAO rules, standards and procedures, and fosters uniform understanding and consistent implementation of these rules, standards and procedures by Member States.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Language services are essential to the global implementation of ICAO’s Strategic Goals, SARPs, and PANS. Assembly Resolution (A37-25) recognizes language services as an indispensable component of all ICAO programs, emphasizing the need for equal provision and consistent quality across

all working languages as an ongoing objective. The Resolution mandates the Council to continue monitoring language services as part of its review mandate. Undoubtedly, the continued oversight of language services - along with the implementation of various Assembly and Council resolutions and policies related to multilingualism - plays a crucial role in upholding multilingualism as a fundamental ICAO principle and strategy.

2.2 During the formulation of ICAO's triennial budget for 2026–2028, the Council and Member States adopted a “nominal zero growth” approach. Given constrained financial resources, ICAO continues to strive for “doing more with less”. In this context, language services - often perceived as lower-priority variables - face the risk of budgetary reductions without proportional workload adjustments. However, Member States should avoid treating language services as reducible costs for ICAO and instead recognize multilingualism and language service as long-term investments in global aviation safety and sustained development.

2.3 In 2024, ICAO implemented the Language Services Management System (LSMS). UN language service tools - such as gDoc 2.0, eLuna, eAPG, and UNTERM - as well as translation tools like Microsoft Translator and DeepL, were made available to translators, interpreters, and language service staff, improving the efficiency of language services.

2.4 Recent years have seen rapid advancements in generative AI, which has emerged as a transformative tool across industries. The concept of “AI + Civil Aviation” reflects the sector's trend of embracing artificial intelligence. However, at ICAO, the use of such tools remains cumbersome due to bureaucratic internal procedures, limiting their potential to boost productivity for language professionals and other staff. Therefore, it is necessary to review cybersecurity and other regulatory parameters, easing restrictions on AI for processing non-restricted, non-sensitive, or publicly available information. Streamlining internal processes would enable language staff among others to leverage general AI tools more effectively, boosting operational efficiency.

2.5 While the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly calls for the full implementation of ICAO's multilingualism strategy, it also urges the development of a corresponding Action Plan. In 2023, ICAO developed the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy Implementation Action Plan, which outlines objectives, actions, timelines, and status updates/comments. While some initiatives have already been completed and others are planned for conclusion in 2025, several remain ongoing. Despite being designed within existing resource constraints, the Action Plan is expected to be dynamically updated for the 2026–2028 triennium, with a focus on identifying actionable measures. Additionally, ICAO is expected to phase in the multilingual versions of SARPs, PANS, and guidance materials, improving global accessibility and compliance. A phase-in plan would help States anticipate availability timelines of these documents.

2.6 In 2023, ICAO launched a training program to strengthen staff competencies in policy and report writing, while simplifying publication and improving document quality and timeliness. This initiative not only reinforces multilingualism principles but also elevates drafting efficiency and output standards. Such training also benefits Member States by enabling more substantive participation in ICAO activities - particularly the drafting of working/information papers, active engagement in deliberations, and contribution to high-quality meeting outcomes. Therefore, the Secretariat shall consider expanding these efforts by offering virtual courses or workshops on document, report, and manual drafting, with open access training materials on platforms like ICAO TV among other channels. Such measures would empower national representatives with the skills needed to participate more effectively in ICAO activities, share best practices, and make more contributions to ICAO's work.

2.7 The multilingualism strategy encompasses not only language services and communications, but also legal aspects (e.g., the Chinese and Arabic versions of the *Chicago Convention* have yet to be ratified by a sufficient number of States), air navigation, air transport and aviation security. Therefore, Member States and ICAO shall enhance awareness, conceptions and culture regarding multilingualism, integrating it as a core element of ICAO's regular activities and work programs.

2.8 The International Cooperation and Service Center of Civil Aviation Administration of China (ICSCC) serves as a supporting entity for international cooperation and specializes in providing interpretation and translation services for the aviation industry. Since 1997, ICSCC has collaborated with ICAO on translation services, with ICAO recognized translation excellence. States with native speakers of ICAO's official languages are encouraged to take note of CAAC's approach and, where appropriate, consider establishing similar language service partnerships with ICAO.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Multilingualism, as a fundamental principle and strategy of ICAO, serves as an indispensable component of all the Organization's programmes. It plays a vital role in ensuring the globally consistent and effective implementation of SARPs and PANS. Furthermore, multilingualism significantly enhances ICAO's capacity to serve Member States and promote aviation safety and development. It constitutes a key enabler for achieving the Organization's Strategic Goals, particularly No Country Left Behind.

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