



**WORKING PAPER**

**ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Agenda item 19: Multilingualism at ICAO**

**MULTILINGUALISM AS ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR ATTAINMENT  
OF THE GOALS OF ICAO AS A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

(Presented by the Russian Federation)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Russian Federation, while sharing and supporting the decisions of the United Nations General Assembly and the resolutions in force of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on multilingualism, establishing, in particular, parity and quality of service in all six working languages, expresses concern about the current state of language services at ICAO.

This paper provides an overview of the Organization's current language support services, an analysis of the ICAO policy on multilingualism, and examples of potential negative impacts, including the risk of being unable to achieve the ICAO Strategic Objectives and global implementation of the Standards and Recommended Practices and the Procedures for Air Navigation Services, if the quality of interpretation and translation is further compromised.

The information set forth in the paper requires close attention and decisive action on the part of the Assembly.

**Action** to be taken by the Assembly:

- (a) To recognize that language services are a high priority resource for implementation of the ICAO Strategic Plan 2026–2050;
- (b) To recognize the inadequacy of the measures provided for in the Action Plan for the Implementation of the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy;
- (c) To instruct the Council to undertake a comprehensive and systematic review of the current situation of multilingualism in ICAO and to report on the results of that review at the 43rd Session of the ICAO Assembly;
- (d) To instruct the ICAO Council to implement a quality system for language services in ICAO, including both work performed by staff and outsourced work;
- (e) To request the Council to consider the need to amend Doc 7231/11, ICAO Publications Regulations, to ensure the dissemination of ICAO publications in all the working languages of ICAO;
- (f) To instruct the ICAO Council to review the rules on language services for the technical expert groups of the Council and the Air Navigation Commission;
- (g) To instruct the Secretary General of ICAO to take measures to upgrade the quality of translation services and to avoid the situations listed in paragraphs 4.1–4.7;
- (h) To instruct the Secretary General of ICAO to appoint a focal point for multilingualism from among the current staff members of ICAO, who will be responsible for handling requests relating to multilingualism from all parts of the Secretariat, ICAO Member States and national experts.

<sup>1</sup> Russian version provided by the Russian Federation

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| <i>Strategic Goals:</i>       | This working paper relates to all Strategic Goals, High Priority Enablers and Supporting Enablers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>Financial implications</i> | The activities mentioned in this paper will be carried out within the resources available under the 2026–2028 Regular Programme Budget and/or from extrabudgetary contributions and contributions from Member States to the Strategic Fund.                                                                                        |
| <i>References:</i>            | Doc 7300, Convention on International Civil Aviation<br>Doc 10184, Assembly Resolutions in Force (as of 7 October 2022)<br>General Assembly resolution 78/330 of 11 September 2024<br>ICAO Publications Regulations (Doc 7231/15)<br>United Nations Strategic Framework on Multilingualism (2024)<br>ICAO Strategic Plan 2026–2050 |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Assembly resolution 78/330 of 11 September 2024 re-emphasized the importance of multilingualism, which promotes unity and international understanding. The resolution also emphasizes the importance of the equality of all six official languages of the United Nations.

1.2. The principle of multilingualism plays a fundamental role in ICAO by, among other things, enabling States to fulfil the provisions of Article 37 of the Chicago Convention, which provides that “Each contracting State undertakes to collaborate in securing the highest practicable degree of uniformity in regulations, standards, procedures...”. In addition, the use of only one language severely limits the Organization's ability to apply the accumulated expertise and experience of ICAO Member States in the field of civil aviation.

1.3. In accordance with ICAO Assembly Resolution A37-25, which is still in force, parity and quality of service in all of the working languages of ICAO languages should be the continuous objective of the Organization.

1.4. In practice, the ICAO Publications Regulations (Doc 7231/15) stipulate that the Organization's publications are issued "in the language or languages to be determined by the Council", but the question remains as to the criteria by which the Council determines the language or languages in which ICAO documentation is issued, and also the volume of translation required. For example, the annexes to the Memorial and other procedural documents filed under Article 84 of the Chicago Convention and Doc 7782, Rules for the Settlement of Differences, are not translated into other ICAO working languages, despite the fact that the annexes form an integral part of these procedural documents.

1.5. In recent years, there has been a trend towards the use of a single ICAO working language, English, in the Organization. As a result, a number of documents are published only in English. There are examples where annexes to ICAO Council working documents and to ICAO State letters have not been translated into all ICAO working languages. Most ICAO activities, including expert group meetings involved in the development of standards, are conducted in only one language (English), with no simultaneous interpretation into the other ICAO working languages. The question arises as to whether this practice is consistent with the principles officially proclaimed within the United Nations itself, and the extent to which the current policies and practices of ICAO are in line with the challenges and problems pertaining to multilingualism that persist within the Organization.

## **2. ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ICAO MULTILINGUALISM STRATEGY**

2.1. At its 41st Session, the ICAO Assembly endorsed the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy, which includes necessary measures for the promotion of multilingualism in ICAO by ensuring parity and quality of service, optimizing available resources, falling in line with United Nations best practices in language services, and developing and using improved technical tools.

2.2. In 2023, an Action Plan for the Implementation of the ICAO Multilingual Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the Action Plan) was developed, consisting of a list of tangible, time-bound steps required to advance implementation of the ICAO Multilingual Strategy.

2.3. In particular, in line with the current status of the Action Plan, ICAO has introduced a number of innovative digital tools (the Language Services Management System – LSMS, MS Translator, and the eLUNa artificial intelligence platform) in less than three years with the aim of enhancing the performance of the ICAO language services. The report that has been submitted includes no indicators of the effectiveness of the implemented tools; it only provides the expected positive results.

2.4. At the same time, to date, a number of the measures called for in the Action Plan have not been implemented because of the lack of the necessary financial resources. For example, in the first place, ICAO has conducted no studies on the need for interpretation for meetings where interpretation services are not normally provided; second, the Junior Language Officer (JLO) programme has not been re-established, to build capacity and ensure continuity in the ICAO language services; and, third, no plans have been implemented on working with training centres and higher education institutions as part of internship programmes.

2.5. By and large, we note the lack of a comprehensive and systematic review of the current situation regarding multilingualism in ICAO. There are no consolidated statistics on the basis of which a comprehensive assessment could be made of the state of multilingualism in the work of ICAO.

## **3. LANGUAGE SERVICES AT ICAO**

### **3.1. CURRENT STATUS**

3.1.1. In the Organization's budget for 2023, 2024 and 2025, the share of expenditure on language services is 11 per cent (40,771 Canadian dollars). These resources are intended to provide 7.7 million words of translation per year and to cover 224 conferences (meetings) with interpretation.

3.1.2. The Organization has a total of 16 full-time translators. Although the budget provided for 7.7 million words of translation, the demand for written translation in 2023 amounted to 8.20 million words, in 2024 to 9.83 million words, and in 2025 (as of May 2025) to 4.21 million words.

3.1.3. The Interpretation Section has 13 full-time interpreters, including the Chief of the Section. In 2024, this team provided language support for 155 ICAO meetings, out of a total of 894 work meetings scheduled for that year.

### **3.2. LANGUAGE SERVICES PROVIDED BY FREELANCE STAFF**

3.2.1. According to the available quantitative data for the past three years, in 2023 alone, 45 per cent of the written translations were outsourced.

3.2.2. The local market for professionally trained simultaneous interpreters is very limited, and hiring interpreters from outside ICAO Headquarters entails additional costs and administrative complexities (visas, per diem and travel expenses), added to which external simultaneous interpreters are insufficiently familiar with aviation terminology.

3.2.3. When work is outsourced, it is difficult for the client, in this case ICAO, to monitor the quality of the work of external translators. The subsequent revision by ICAO in-house translators leads to the effective duplication of effort and additional costs for the language services. In addition, the confidentiality of the documents transmitted for translation may be compromised.

3.2.4. It should be emphasized that it is impossible to ensure the total accuracy of outsourced translations of publications into the official languages of ICAO because freelance translators lack the opportunity to liaise with national experts in the scientific editing of language versions of new or amended standards.

#### **4. IMPACT OF THE DECLINING QUALITY OF TRANSLATION SERVICES ON THE ABILITY OF ICAO TO ACHIEVE ITS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

4.1. According to information received from national aviation and other professionals involved in the work of ICAO, the quality of interpretation and the translation of ICAO publications is a matter of concern. At the same time, in most cases, only the main part of working documents is translated, without the annexes, which contain important source information. Records show that a large number of ICAO working group meetings and ICAO regional meetings, at which complex technical issues were discussed, were held without simultaneous translation. In such a situation, experts who do not speak English fluently are effectively excluded from participation.

4.2. The ICAO draft budget for 2026–2028 defines conference and translation services as an assistive resource developed alongside the Strategic Objectives and the High Priority Enablers. The exclusion of language services from among the High Priority Enablers is not only inconsistent with the principle of multilingualism of the United Nations system, but also undermines the fundamental principles underpinning the existence of ICAO as an international organization.

4.3. The failure to ensure the simultaneous distribution of documents of the Council and its Committees in all ICAO working languages is also cause for great concern.

4.4. The weak outreach and advocacy efforts by ICAO with national experts, including on the terminology framework prepared by the Secretariat, mean that this database is not being used by expert groups in the preparation of documents, resulting in confusion in the use of aeronautical terminology.

4.5. There have been cases where not all the ICAO working languages were used during ICAO retreats, which limits equal access to information for participants and runs counter to the practice of inclusivity.

4.6. Multilingualism standards are not respected on the ICAO website or on the Organization's official social media pages (Instagram, Facebook). English is the language predominantly used.

4.7. The absence of an ICAO focal point for multilingualism, whose functions would include receiving queries and requests from ICAO Secretariat staff and State representatives, is not conducive to a coordinated, coherent and coherent approach by the Organization to multilingualism.

— END —