



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 19: Multilingualism at ICAO

MULTILINGUALISM AT ICAO

(Presented by the Council of ICAO)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing multilingualism as a fundamental principle to achieve ICAO's objectives, this paper reports on the implementation of the policies and decisions adopted to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in language services matters.

Pursuant to Assembly Resolution A37-25: ICAO Policy on the language services, which stated that “the provision of adequate levels of services in the working languages of ICAO is important for the worldwide dissemination of ICAO documentation, in particular the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs), and for the proper functioning of the Organization and its standing bodies”; and pursuant to United Nations Resolution A/RES/73/346, this working paper outlines the measures implemented to promote multilingualism in ICAO through parity and quality of services, optimization of available resources, adherence to UN best practices related to language services and through the development and use of enhanced technical tools.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) note ICAO activities supporting multilingualism;
- b) note the newly approved [ICAO Multilingualism Strategy](#);
- c) request ICAO to implement the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy in full; and
- d) urge Member States to actively collaborate with ICAO, including through partnerships, secondments or voluntary contributions, to promote multilingualism as an integral part of the Organization's programmes and activities.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to all Strategic Objectives and all Supporting Strategies
<i>Financial implications:</i>	The ICAO activities referred to in this paper are expected to be undertaken within the resources available in the 2023-2025 Regular Budget and/or from extra-budgetary contributions as guided by the ICAO Business Plan 2023-2025.
<i>References:</i>	A40-WP/635 Rev. 1 Assembly Resolutions in Force (as of 4 October 2019) – Doc 10140 United Nations A/RES/73/346

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The ICAO Secretariat provides language services in the six working languages to the Assembly, the Council, deliberative bodies and other meetings. Publications and documentation are issued based on the principle of simultaneous distribution to ensure “a fair and equal opportunity for all user States to consult the documentation produced by the Organization”.

1.2 Assembly resolutions have called upon ICAO: a) to ensure the provision of adequate language services for the proper functioning of ICAO and its standing bodies, uphold language services as an integral part of any ICAO programme, and maintain the parity and quality of service in all working languages (A37-25); and b) to implement the principle of simultaneous distribution (A24-21). Moreover, at its 40th session, the Assembly stressed that multilingualism contributes to the implementation of Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and Procedures for Air Navigation Services (PANS) and thus to the development of safer international civil aviation. Accordingly, it included multilingualism as part of the No Country Left Behind (NCLB) initiative. To this end, it requested the Secretary General to develop a “comprehensive strategy for the promotion of multilingualism”, identifying as priorities the provision of quality language services and the strengthening of language capacities at headquarters and in the regional offices.

1.3 ICAO is fully committed to the principles set out by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in its resolution 73/346 on “Multilingualism”. The equality of languages is a fundamental principle of the Organization and its documentation.

2. LANGUAGE SERVICES DURING THE PRESENT TRIENNIUM (2020-2022)

2.1 The current language services budget for the 2020-2022 triennium provides for a yearly capacity of 8.6 million words for translation and 1,344 sittings for interpretation, the same as in the previous triennium.

2.2 *Interpretation* – Interpretation capacity is limited to seven sittings per week. The programme of meetings for 2020-2022 is planned and prepared carefully to optimize the use of available resources. For exceptions to the rule, additional funding is provided by the organizing office or from efficiencies achieved elsewhere within ICAO. Category 4 meetings continue to be covered on a cost-recovery basis. In such instances, the organizing Bureau is required to cover interpretation services costs by using revenue generated from the relevant meeting. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the requirement to hold virtual and hybrid meetings, interpretation capacity has been reduced by 40 per cent -- to five sittings per week. Unless there are new administrative and budgetary arrangements to mitigate this major shortfall, this measure will remain in effect for the next triennium as long as there is a requirement for virtual and hybrid meetings. Moreover, additional requirements over the five-sittings capacity per week are provided at a cost either in reduced translation capacity and/or monetary cost.

2.3 *Translation* – Translation capacity is 8.6 million words per year. However, this capacity will be reduced to 7.7 million words per year in the next triennium based on the regular budget scenario being considered. The average demand has remained unchanged as current demand exceeds capacity by 35 per cent.

2.4 In order to address excess translation demand, additional funds are provided from other ICAO sources or through efficiencies achieved within Languages and Publications (LP). While the translation of additional communications with States is handled by internal resources, most of the other

excess requirements are outsourced. This has caused both an imbalance in the translation ratio of 60 per cent in-house to 40 per cent outsourcing and the extra challenge of ensuring the quality of outsourced work. Translation of selected websites continues at a slower pace as funding sources need to be identified for each project. Smaller updates to already translated websites are done by in-house translators.

2.5 As in the previous triennium, full translation services are provided for Categories 1 and 2 meetings, where the key rules on working paper length (four pages per paper) and submission deadlines are respected. The standard practice of providing limited translation of pre-session documentation for Category 3 meetings has continued. In addition to the conditions applied for Categories 1 and 2, translation is restricted to SARPs and PANS amendments or limited to one paper per agenda item in other cases. No translation is provided for in-session documentation, and the report is translated after the meeting. This practice will remain unchanged in the upcoming triennium.

3. **INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY IN THE DELIVERY OF LANGUAGE SERVICES AND THE PROMOTION OF MULTILINGUALISM**

3.1 The Council's endorsement of the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy, at the 3rd meeting of its 225th Session, has been a major achievement. The strategy seeks, first and foremost, to foster a new approach to multilingualism, not only in terms of language services, but also in mobilizing the full potential of the Organization to make the most of its diversity. It includes language services, human resources, strategic communication, stakeholder mobilization (promotion of multilingualism as a universal value, including through partnerships) and the fulfilment of organizational responsibilities through coordination among the Secretariat, the Council and Member States. The Secretariat will prepare an implementation plan with concrete actions in all relevant areas, taking into account the best practices and successful experiences from other United Nations (UN) system organizations which have adopted similar approaches to multilingualism. These actions will have to be implemented within and subject to the resources allocated in the regular budget for the next triennium (2023-2025) and/or from extra-budgetary contributions. The full text of the Strategy can be found at www.icao.int/Meetings/a41/Pages/documentation-reference-documents.aspx.

3.2 To ensure a successful implementation of the Strategy, Member States are invited to play a driving role. In particular, States may support the Organization by:

- a) helping develop partnerships for the language training of ICAO staff to facilitate the provision of multilingual support to ICAO activities;
- b) offering secondments of language specialists (translators, interpreters, editors, etc.) to support the work of the Language and Publications department as well as the promotion of multilingualism across the Organization; and
- c) providing 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, or the provision of translation and interpretation services in non-official languages to meet the specific needs of some countries or regions.

3.3 As part of the Digital Transformation Programme launched by the Secretary General, the implementation of the Language Services Management System (LSMS) Project will play a key role in enhancing the quality and efficiency of language services by increasing and improving output, and by easing the burden on language staff. This project will 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).

3.4 The LP business model of increasing the number of staff translators who are also qualified interpreters has proven its worth by enhancing flexibility and efficiency in addressing unprecedented and time-sensitive demands for interpretation and translation services, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the requirement to telework led to creative arrangements for managing and providing language and publication services. In this regard, remote simultaneous interpretation was the single most complex and innovative achievement, a successful outcome of seamless ICAO-wide collaboration.

3.5 ICAO continued to strengthen partnerships with the UN Secretariat, the UN system, and other international organizations providing language and conference services, especially through 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). These partnerships have always helped leverage experiences and best practices in the provision of language services.

3.6 A major project to provide Organization-wide training on concise report and policy writing, will be initiated before the end of 2022. This practical, hands-on training will be offered to some 500 ICAO staff over a three-year period. It will focus on concision and clarity of expression to help improve staff writing skills and their ability to produce succinct and streamlined policy and technical documents.

3.7 The overall management of language and publication services continued to be strengthened and streamlined. In particular, the Secretariat continued its efforts to build the roster of freelance interpreters, translators and editors in all ICAO languages and to ensure that staff vacancies were filled in a timely manner. The Junior Language Officer Programme, which seeks to prepare the next generation of aviation linguists, was suspended due to budgetary constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it will resume if and when the necessary resources are allocated.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Language services are an integral part of every ICAO programme. They are essential to the fulfilment of all Strategic Objectives of the Organization and to the implementation of SARPs and PANS at the global level. Furthermore, language services are a key requirement of the No Country Left Behind (NCLB) initiative and of ICAO's communications with Member States.

4.2 ICAO continues to provide quality language services while facing the challenge of increased demand and diminishing resources. The improvement of working arrangements and the introduction of the new tools and UN best practices will continue to optimize human, material and budgetary resources, enabling LP to provide crucial support to ICAO's deliberative bodies, Secretariat and other stakeholders as they pursue the Organization's Strategic Objectives. Sustained efforts are being made to streamline processes and operations in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Further measures are being taken to reduce language services demand, to identify alternative sources of funding such as voluntary contributions, to keep improving the quality of services provided and to uphold ICAO's commitment to multilingualism.