



International Civil Aviation Organization

**WORKING PAPER**

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**ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Agenda Item 19: Multilingualism at ICAO**

**MULTILINGUALISM – ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS OF ICAO AS A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

(Presented by the Russian Federation)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As an essential factor in harmonious communication among peoples, multilingualism is of particular importance to the specialized agencies of the United Nations. In addition to promoting international understanding and dialogue, multilingualism ensures the effective participation of national experts in the work of the Organization, eliminating conditions that result in discrimination on grounds of nationality, and is an indispensable element for the effectiveness of the Organization.

**Action:** The Assembly is invited to:

- (a) request the ICAO Council to continue to monitor, on an ongoing basis, the implementation of ICAO Assembly resolutions on language services;
- (b) request the Council to further analyse and assess the human and financial resources required to ensure the timely preparation of ICAO documents related to the implementation of standards in all ICAO working languages, to adequately provide interpretation services for international events conducted by ICAO, as well as to further review the scope of work, without prejudice to the effectiveness of the Organization, while taking into account the best practices of other United Nations specialized agencies;
- (c) instruct the Secretary-General, with the support of the ICAO Council, to give top priority to ensuring the highest quality of interpretation and translation services in all six official languages by recruiting highly qualified language professionals to work for the Organization and further digitalizing translation and interpretation procedures;
- (d) encourage ICAO Member States to collaborate actively with the Secretariat in promoting multilingualism as an integral part of the programmes and activities of the Organization.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to all the Strategic Objectives of ICAO.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	

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

<i>References:</i>	Doc 7300/9, <i>Convention on International Civil Aviation</i> Doc 10125, <i>Budget of the Organization 2020-2021-2022</i> Doc 10140, <i>Assembly resolutions in force</i> (as at 4 October 2019) United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/346 “ <i>Multilingualism in the United Nations system</i> ” Report of the Joint Inspection Unit JIU/REP/2020/6
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/346 of 16 September 2019 recognized that multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, contributes to the achievement of the goals of the United Nations, stressed the need for strict observance of the resolutions and rules establishing language arrangements for the different bodies and organs of the United Nations, and emphasized “the paramount importance of the equality of the six official languages of the United Nations”.

1.2 The principle of multilingualism plays a fundamental role in ICAO by, inter alia, encouraging States to comply with 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...”. Furthermore, the use of only one language does not allow the Organization to take full advantage of the best practices of many Member States in the field of international civil aviation.

1.3 In its resolution A22-30, the ICAO Assembly recommends that the Council “keep under review all aspects of the translation services in ICAO”; Assembly resolution A24-21 “adopts simultaneous distribution in all the working languages of ICAO as a principle of policy for the publications and documentation of the Organization according to the conditions determined by the Assembly and the Council”. Further, Assembly resolution A37-25 states that “it is vitally important to ensure a unified and harmonized understanding of ICAO publications by all Contracting States in all ICAO working languages, in order to maintain the safety and security of international civil aviation and to minimize the impact of aviation on the environment”; recognizes that “language services are an integral part of any ICAO programme”, and resolves that “parity and quality of service in all of the working languages of ICAO be the continuous objective of the Organization”. Furthermore, at its 40<sup>th</sup> session the Assembly emphasized that multilingualism promotes the global implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and Procedures for Air Navigation Services (PANS) and thereby the development of enhanced safety of international civil aviation.

## 2. LANGUAGE SERVICES

2.1 According to the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit, in 2018, ICAO held 181 meetings with interpretation and translated 10.8 million words (JIU/REP/2020/6). The current language services budget calls for an annual output of 8.6 million words for translation, 1,344 meetings with interpretation, and a maximum of seven meetings per week, as in the previous triennium. However, in the next triennium, under the regular budget proposal, translation capacity will be reduced to 7.7 million words per year, but real demand is actually increasing.

2.2 The work of the interpretation section has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this difficult context, the demand for interpretation increased greatly in comparison with previous years. Thus, in the first six months of 2022 alone, there were 165 meetings (in virtual and hybrid modes) compared to 130 meetings during the same period in 2019. By way of comparison, there were 207 meetings in 2019 (given that the Assembly was in session that year), as against 174 in 2018.

2.3 As a result of the implementation of the decisions of the 38th Assembly and the elimination of six interpreter posts, there is now only one team of permanent interpreters left, which can service a maximum of seven meetings per week. This decision was made on the assumption that temporary interpreters would be recruited in Montreal. However, the local market for qualified simultaneous interpreters who are familiar with ICAO terminology is currently very limited. Consequently, interpreters from other cities and regions have to be hired, which lowers the quality of interpretation and increases costs for the Organization. The lack of any reserve in the Interpretation Section creates a constant additional workload for the full-time interpreters. These problems have only worsened during the pandemic.

2.4 The global implementation of the ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) cannot be achieved without adequately staffed simultaneous interpretation and translation services, comprising highly professional interpreters and translators who are familiar with aviation topics and terminology, and are fully committed to the goals and objectives of the Organization. The quality of translations of texts on the highly complex aeronautical and technical subjects dealt with by ICAO can be ensured only by highly qualified personnel with many years of experience with aviation, technical and legal translation in government and international organizations. All these qualities can be acquired only by working regularly for the Organization.

2.5 The Organization's budget for 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Doc 10125) unfortunately continues to state that "Council information papers will be presented in English only as is the case for other ICAO meetings" and Appendices "will be kept in English only, except for Annexes, legal instruments, Budget and financial statements". At the same time, we are disappointed to note that the Secretariat, and subsequently the Council, refused to allow a Contracting State party to a dispute to have translated into one of the working languages of the Organization the annexes to its Memorial which was filed under the ICAO Rules for the Settlement of Differences, and which are an integral part of that Memorial.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT FOR THE TRAINING OF YOUNG TRANSLATORS AND FREELANCERS**

3.1 ICAO should seek to attract and retain high-quality interpreters and translators that are in demand throughout the UN system. To this end, in keeping with best practices of the United Nations, it is necessary to ensure their timely promotion and facilitate their professional development. Over the next three years, a large number of interpreters will reach retirement age, and replacements must be sought for them in advance in accordance with a clear plan for the transfer of institutional memory.

3.2 The Organization's practice has been to offer short-term contracts to young translators through MoUs with universities, providing on-the-job training and mentoring by senior translators. ICAO's language services have compiled a roster of freelance translators comprising retired ICAO staff members and translators who have at least 10 years' experience, but have never worked at ICAO. It is advisable to improve the effectiveness of the "roster" by providing freelancers the opportunity to take short-term internships at ICAO so that they gain a better understanding of the work of the Organization. In addition, it is desirable to involve them in short-term work at ICAO to create a pool of possible candidates for future vacancies.

### **4. OUTSOURCING**

4.1 The increased demand for translation services has been addressed by securing additional funding from other ICAO sources and by streamlining processes within Languages and Publications (LP).

4.2 When work is outsourced, it is difficult for the client, in this case ICAO, to control the quality of the work of external translators. The subsequent checking of this work by ICAO in-house

translators leads to duplication of effort and additional costs for the language services. In addition, the confidentiality of the documents transmitted for translation may be compromised.

## **5. USE OF A COMMON TERMINOLOGY DATABASE**

5.1 Failure to use the ICAO Secretariat terminology database when drafting documents causes additional confusion in the understanding of technical aviation terminology at the level of national aviation enterprises.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 At its 37th session the ICAO Assembly unanimously adopted resolution A37-25 on “ICAO policy on the language services”, which affirmed that “multilingualism is one of the fundamental principles to achieve the goals of ICAO as the specialized UN agency” and resolved that “parity and quality of service in all the working languages of ICAO be the continuous objective of the Organization”.

6.2 Language services are an integral part of any ICAO programme and are also critical to avoiding discrimination on the basis of nationality in the work of the various ICAO bodies and international meetings and events. Language services are essential to all of the Organization’s strategic objectives and for the global implementation of SARPS and PANS. In addition, language services provide essential support for the “No Country Left Behind” initiative.

6.3 The Secretary-General will be expected to continue to make the necessary efforts to ensure that multilingualism is not undermined by the measures taken in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is of fundamental importance for the Organization to ensure respect for multilingualism in such environments in the future and in the context of the improvement of production activities and the introduction of new technologies.

6.4 Multilingualism should not be viewed solely as a cost centre but also as an investment in supporting flight and aviation safety and reducing the adverse impacts of aviation on the environment.

6.5 The practice of hiring outside translators and interpreters has not yielded positive results. Lack of familiarity with civil aviation terminology and technical subjects means that in many cases translations are not done correctly. Consequently, the reduction in the staff of the ICAO language sections is detrimental to the efficiency of the Organization. The quality and volume of ICAO language services in ICAO should be improved through digitalization. However, none of the existing linguistic systems has managed to do away with the necessity of having texts checked by professional translators who possess terminological and technical knowledge in the field of civil aviation.