United Nations

Strategic Framework on Multilingualism

United Nations

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Foreword

Multilingualism fosters harmonious communication among peoples and enables multilateral diplomacy. By promoting dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding, it ensures the effective participation of all in the work of our Organization.

Recognized by the General Assembly as "a core value of the Organization" that "contributes to the achievement of the goals of the United Nations, as set out in Article 1 of the Charter", multilingualism has been a priority since the start of my mandate. In an interconnected world, multilingualism contributes to building trust and making the United Nations more efficient, more representative and more transparent.

The United Nations takes pride in its intrinsic multilingual character, the rich linguistic skills of our staff and the immense diversity of our Member States, audiences and operational environments. We must also acknowledge existing challenges and strive to make further progress.

In this context, I am pleased to present the United Nations Strategic Framework on Multilingualism. Mandated by the General Assembly and recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit, this Framework is the first of its kind (within the Secretariat and system-wide). Under the supervision of the Coordinator for Multilingualism, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Framework is the result of efforts carried out since 2022 by a wide working group and extensive consultations with key entities. This Framework reaffirms our commitment to multilingualism by integrating language considerations into every aspect of the Secretariat's work. It presents the findings of the comprehensive review of multilingualism in the Secretariat, the broad goals as well as recommended next steps for our Organization.

While more remains to be done, I am confident that it will contribute to further mainstreaming multilingualism, both internally and externally, in an accountable and data-driven manner, while taking into account our operational needs, budgetary constraints and resource requirements. I count on all members of the United Nations family in our joint endeavour to advance multilingualism and make our Organization ever more effective and closer to the people we serve.

António Guterres
Secretary-General

Section 1.

Introduction

Section 1.
Introduction

The General Assembly has consistently underlined the importance of multilingualism in achieving the goals of the Organization, as set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

The General Assembly has recognized that "multilingualism is an enabler of multilateral diplomacy and that it contributes to the promotion of the values of the United Nations, as well as the faith of our peoples in the purposes and principles enshrined in its Charter" and that "multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding, tolerance and dialogue".[1]

In addition, the United Nations "pursues multilingualism as a means of promoting, protecting and preserving diversity of languages and cultures globally, as well as of improving the efficiency, performance and transparency of the Organization".[2]

The aim of this Strategic Framework is to support the mainstreaming of multilingualism, which is embedded in the United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework under the value of inclusion and is recognized by the General Assembly as a core value of the Organization that contributes to achieving the goals of the United Nations, as set out in Article 1 of the Charter,[3] by integrating language considerations into every aspect of the Secretariat's work.[4] The Framework's scope encompasses all areas of work of the Secretariat, including its interactions with global and local communities and its role as an employer committed to providing a diverse, fair and inclusive work environment. In this regard, the challenge for the Secretariat is to organize its multilingual workplaces in a manner that respects diversity, while ensuring an efficient, results-oriented and transparent allocation of resources at Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters, regional commissions and field missions.

Given that language[5] is one of the distinctive diversity attributes mentioned in several articles of the Charter[6] and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[7] attention has been paid in drafting the Framework to ensuring consistency with other United Nations diversity strategies.[8]

1 See, among others, resolution 76/268 on multilingualism.
2 Ibid.
3 See successive resolutions on the pattern of conferences since the adoption of resolution 70/9, on questions relating to information since resolutions 71/101 A and B, on multilingualism since resolution 71/328, and on cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie since resolution 71/289, as well as resolutions 71/288, 72/161, 72/313, 73/161, 73/210 and 75/144, among others.
4 See, among others, resolution 76/268, para. 5 ("Also underlines the responsibility of the Secretariat in integrating multilingualism into its activities, on an equitable basis"), and resolution 76/84 B, para. 40 ("Underlines the responsibility of the Secretariat in the mainstreaming of multilingualism into all of its communication and information activities, within existing resources on an equitable basis").
5 According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "language" includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages.
6 Articles 1 (3), 13 (1) (b), 55 and 76, alongside sex, race and religion.
7 Article 2, alongside race, colour, sex, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
8 See, among others, the System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Geographical Diversity Strategy and the Strategic Action Plan for Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations Secretariat.

Mandate and approach

In 2020, the Joint Inspection Unit recommended that "the legislative or governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should request the executive heads of their respective organizations that have not yet done so, to prepare a strategic policy framework for multilingualism, accompanied by administrative and operational guidelines for its implementation, and submit this for adoption by the end of 2022" (see JIU/REP/2020/6).[9] The General Assembly had also called for the development of a coherent Secretariat-wide policy framework on multilingualism in 2017 (see resolution 71/328) and 2019 (see resolution 73/346), reiterating that call in 2022 (see resolution 76/268).

Although the Joint Inspection Unit recommended the preparation of a strategic policy framework, within the United Nations system of administrative and managerial issuances, there are no previous documents called "strategic policy framework". Typically, policies are issued as Secretary-General's bulletins (ST/SGB series).[10] Consequently, it was deemed appropriate to proceed with a strategic framework rather than a strategic policy framework, especially as a strategic framework is a broader concept than a policy and encompasses a strategic vision that would determine the policy per se. Therefore, the approach is, first, to present the Strategic Framework and, subsequently, to issue the relevant administrative issuance or issuances under the authority of the Secretary-General based on the Framework.

Under the supervision of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management in his capacity as the Coordinator for Multilingualism, the Strategic Framework was developed on the basis of work carried out by a working group established for that purpose by the Management Committee in 2022 that comprised 63 representatives of 49 Secretariat entities. Insights and input were collected through a desk review of mandates and studies, surveys and extensive consultations. Further details can be found in the annex.

9 The submission of the Framework required broad and labour-intensive internal consultations, including with key stakeholders, to conceptualize the strategic vision set out therein, in accordance with the existing purposes, goals, values, policies and administrative frameworks of the United Nations.

10 See ST/SGB/2009/4, sect. 3.2 ("Secretary-General's bulletins may also be promulgated in connection with any other important decision of policy, as decided by the Secretary-General").

Section 2.

Serving a multilingual international community

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Serving a multilingual international community

Providing a platform where the multilingual international community can come together to cooperate, collaborate and negotiate and responding to the needs of diverse local communities, while upholding the principles of equality and cost-effectiveness, are fundamental aspects of the work of the United Nations. This has implications for the Organization's language regime and all aspects of talent management, including workforce planning, recruitment, learning and career development.

Official and working languages

An estimated 8,000 languages are spoken around the world.[11] Of those, six (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) have been adopted by the General Assembly as the official languages of the United Nations. These are the languages used by United Nations organs and bodies in their official proceedings and in which their official documents are issued. All language versions of documents are uploaded simultaneously on the Official Document System, for example,[12] and the Secretariat is mandated to provide interpretation in all six languages for meetings of United Nations organs and bodies included in the official meeting calendar.[13]

To ensure effective internal communication within and between entities and duty stations and among Secretariat staff, the number of languages designated for internal use is narrowed down to the working languages. Since its inception in 1946, the Secretariat has been mandated to operate in two working languages,[14] English and French, with regional commissions recognizing additional working languages that are relevant to their geographical area of competence. The status of working language means that staff must be able to carry out their duties in one of those languages, as operational needs require. Furthermore, the General Assembly has regularly reaffirmed[15] that job openings should specify the need for either of the working languages (i.e. English or French),[16] unless the functions of the post require a specific one. A clear imbalance

11 See www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-launches-world-atlas-languages-celebrate-and-protect-linguistic-diversity.
12 See, among others, General Assembly resolutions on the pattern of conferences, the latest of which is resolution 78/245, in particular para. 66, as well as paras. 67 and 68 on the simultaneous issuance of documents in all six official languages.
13 See annex I to General Assembly resolution 2 (I) of 1 February 1946 (the original mandate). See also, for example, rule 52 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.20) ("Speeches made in any of the six languages of the General Assembly shall be interpreted into the other five languages").
14 See General Assembly resolution 2 (I).
15 Most recently in para. 71 of resolution 76/268 on multilingualism and para. 34 of resolution 77/278 on human resources management ("Reaffirms the need to respect the equality of the two working languages of the Secretariat, further reaffirms the use of additional working languages in specific duty stations as mandated, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to ensure that vacancy announcements specify the need for either of the working languages of the Secretariat, unless the functions of the post require a specific working language").
16 Except for the regional commissions, where additional working languages apply.

between English and the other official – and working – languages has been observed across the Secretariat and noted by the General Assembly in successive resolutions[17] under different agenda items, as well as by the Joint Inspection Unit,[18] the Board of Auditors[19] and the Secretary-General in administrative issuances.[20]

Official and **working** languages of the principal organs

General Assembly, including committees, subcommittees and subsidiary organs

Official and working languages:

Arabic | Chinese | English | French | Russian | Spanish

Security Council

Official and working languages:

Arabic | Chinese | English | French | Russian | Spanish

Economic and Social Council, including functional commissions

Official languages:

Arabic | Chinese | English | French | Russian | Spanish

Working languages:

English | French | Spanish

Trusteeship Council

Official languages:

Arabic | Chinese | English | French | Russian | Spanish

Working languages:

English | French

Secretariat

Working languages:

English | French

International Court of Justice

Official and working languages:

English | French

17 On questions relating to information, multilingualism, the pattern of conferences and cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie.
18 See JIU/REP/2002/11 and JIU/REP/2011/4, in particular
19 See A/63/5 (Vol. I).
20 In particular Secretary-General's bulletins ST/SGB/201 of 8 July 1983 and ST/SGB/212 of 24 September 1985 on the use of working languages of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat supports multilateral proceedings and deliberations and plays a key role in drafting, implementing and monitoring policies at the global, regional or local level. Accordingly, the Organization needs to have access to and process information from a wide range of geographical locations and cultural backgrounds. It also needs to deliver information in multiple languages to reach its target audiences. These tasks require the capacity to understand, analyse and process a variety of inputs in different languages, including non-official languages, as operational needs require.

Since language is present, one way or another, in all aspects of internal and external communications at the United Nations, the languages that the Secretariat workforce uses, or does not use, affect its impact and performance.

The work of the Organization also requires the capacity to deliver information to linguistically diverse audiences and create outputs in different languages. The official languages play a prominent role in this regard, especially in relation to conference management. Indeed, for practical and financial reasons, the Secretariat is limited to using the official languages for intergovernmental documentation and proceedings and the mandated working languages for internal communications. However, additional language skills and capacity are also needed to address the expectations of the Organization's diverse audiences in other contexts. The Secretariat is expected to meet such language needs, either indirectly, through interpretation and translation services provided by trained language professionals or with the assistance of language tools, or directly, through the language skills of its staff in the relevant work units. Indeed, direct exchanges with stakeholders and communities, using individual language skills, are a contributing factor in establishing strong working relationships based on mutual trust and understanding and are deemed essential by the General Assembly.[21] **The ability of Secretariat staff to communicate effectively in more than one language is therefore of indisputable value:** it facilitates better interactions with stakeholders and local communities and enhances collaboration with individuals and groups from diverse cultures.

21 See, for example, resolution 71/263 on human resources management, para. 11 ("Acknowledges that the interaction of the United Nations with the local population in the field is essential and that language skills constitute an important element of the selection and training processes, and therefore affirms that good command of the official language or languages spoken in the country of residence should be taken into account as an additional asset during those processes"), and subsequent resolutions on multilingualism.

1946

1 FEBRUARY

Chinese **English** **French** **Russian** **Spanish**

Official languages of the United Nations (except the International Court of Justice)
Resolution 2 (I)

English **French**

Working languages of the United Nations
Resolution 2 (I)

24 JUNE

Chinese **English** **French** **Russian** **Spanish**

Official languages of the Security Council
Provisional rules of procedure

English **French**

Working languages of the Security Council
Provisional rules of procedures

1948

7 DECEMBER

Spanish

Working language of the General Assembly
Resolution 247 (III)

1968

21 DECEMBER

Russian

Working language of the General Assembly
Resolution 2479 (XXIII)

1969

24 JANUARY

Russian **Spanish**

Working languages of the Security Council
Resolution 263

1973

18 DECEMBER

Arabic

Official and working language of the General Assembly
Resolution 3190 (XXVIII)

Chinese

Working language of the General Assembly
Resolution 3189 (XXVIII)

1974

17 JANUARY

Chinese

Working language of the Security Council
Resolution 345

1980

17 DECEMBER

Arabic

Official and working language of the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly
Resolution 35/219 A

1982

15 APRIL

Arabic

Official language of the Economic and Social Council
Decision 1982/147

21 DECEMBER

Arabic

Official and working language of the Security Council
Resolution 528

Source: United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Multilingualism at the United Nations (New York, 2023), available at www.un.org/en/library/whyitmatters.

A multilingual staff for a multilingual world

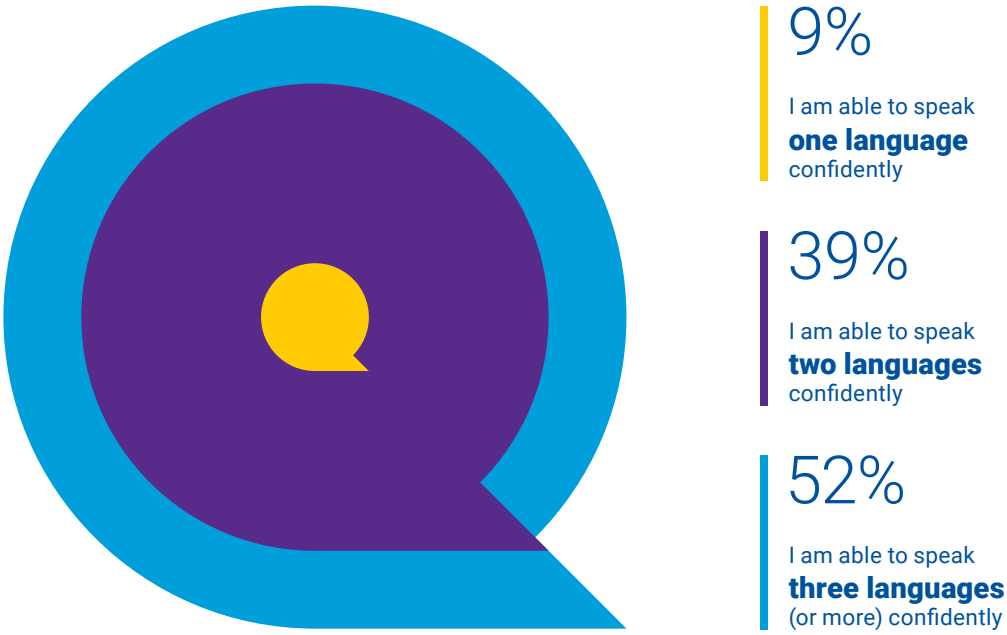
The staff of the Secretariat are far more multilingual than the Organization's regime of official and working languages may suggest. In line with the Organization's commitment to achieving its mandate on equitable geographical distribution for geographical posts and bringing all unrepresented and underrepresented Member States within the desirable range, the United Nations promotes an inclusive and diverse representation of all geographical origins[22] pursuant to Article 101 of the Charter, which states that "the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff … shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity" and that "due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible". Accordingly, the Secretariat workforce reflects the diversity of the peoples whom it serves, including their considerable linguistic diversity. In the 2022 staff survey on multilingualism,[23] for example, more than 200 distinct mother tongues were reported. Over half of the respondents claimed to speak at least three languages confidently, and an additional third (39 per cent) reported speaking at least two languages confidently, while only 9 per cent reported speaking only a single language with confidence.[24]

For the Organization's external communications to be effective, the language skills of its staff must align with the needs of its target audiences at the global, regional, national or local level, with due consideration for the mandated language regimes.

This creates both opportunities and challenges for the Secretariat. Language skills beyond the official languages are valuable assets: in many field locations, staff with competence in the local language or languages play a key role in reaching out to local stakeholders and national authorities. **Matching the needs of linguistically diverse clients with the language skills of a diverse workforce requires a coordinated organizational effort based on operational needs, targeted measures and effective monitoring procedures.**

22 Equitable geographical distribution does not apply to language staff. Pursuant to General Assembly mandates, however, targeted outreach efforts are made to close the wide gap of qualified candidates from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.
23 A total of 3,476 Secretariat staff members (9.5 per cent of all staff) participated in the survey.
24 While the question establishes the multilingual nature of the staff, it does not necessarily imply that such language competence is relevant to one's tasks or used by the Organization.

Figure 1. Staff language competence at the Secretariat, 2022 staff survey on multilingualism



Linguistic diversity and potential language-based disadvantages

There are three dimensions to linguistic diversity at the Secretariat: it operates in a highly linguistically diverse global environment; it employs some 37,000 staff[25] from various linguistic backgrounds; and it operates at duty stations with their own linguistic realities. Responding to the linguistic diversity of the contexts in which it operates and **effectively managing the linguistic diversity of its staff are crucial for the effective and efficient fulfilment of the Secretariat's mandates and ensuring a diverse, fair and inclusive work environment.**

Language, as a central tool for human communication, plays a pivotal role in creating social, cultural and economic linkages. Consequently, communities often coalesce around a common language, and language is generally used as an indicator of who belongs to a community, which, in many cases, is also closely associated with ethnicity or national origin. This, in turn, means that language bias can also often affect other attributes of diversity, and vice versa. In all the Secretariat's activities, whether in the field or in the workplace, **efforts must be made to ensure that measures intended to achieve organizational and communicational efficiency do not unintentionally or inadvertently trigger language-based disadvantages or biases**.

25 In addition, the Organization hires non-staff personnel such as interns, United Nations Volunteers and consultants. Such personnel are beyond the scope of this Framework.

Language as a potential source of discrimination

"Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 2

Expecting local communities to adapt to the dominant working languages, for example, could lead to power imbalances that may undermine local stakeholders' sense of ownership, empowerment or agency. It could also impair the ability of the Organization to be heard, understood and fully accepted locally or could damage its credibility and reputation.

In the workplace, meanwhile, staff members' linguistic background could possibly place them at a disadvantage in different ways:

- While some staff may have begun speaking a specific language shortly after birth or during their early school years as their primary language of education, others may have started learning or using it only in adulthood, giving rise to different levels and types of competence in the language.
- The linguistic distance between a staff member's first (or main) language and the language or languages used at work – in terms of shared vocabulary, grammar, writing system, phonetics and other aspects – may result in significant differences in the investment needed for them to learn and use a given language.
- Learning an additional language is an investment that may come at the expense of acquiring other relevant skills, giving staff who already master that language an advantage in terms of opportunities because they are not expected to invest an equal amount of time and effort into learning an additional language to the same level of proficiency.

United Nations multilingualism policies should be aimed at preventing and counteracting linguistic barriers and biases among three main groups:

- Member States, in view of the diversity of their official languages
- Clients, users and constituents, in view of the diversity of their language needs
- Secretariat staff, bearing in mind their linguistic backgrounds and language skills

Language skills and language learning needs

As the world becomes more globalized and interconnected, language skills have become increasingly crucial in the Secretariat. **Investing in language skills** broadens career opportunities and **brings tangible benefits to the Organization**, enabling individuals to work in different countries and duty stations with specific language requirements, thus contributing to the objectives of the mobility policy[26] and to more effective mandate delivery. Moreover, learning a new language can be an enriching experience for staff, fostering personal growth and skill development.

Language skills generate both direct and indirect benefits, inasmuch as language is a competence in its own right, which is needed for, among other things, interacting with clients and other stakeholders, understanding linguistic inputs, such as written documents and oral statements, and producing outputs (e.g. press releases, statements, reports and social media content). It is also a medium of communication through which collaboration among work units is made possible and the other qualifications, such as "hard" skills, values and behaviours, and even experience, of staff and candidates are assessed.

In an organization that designs and implements human resources strategies and is introducing a mobility requirement for new recruits, language learning needs assessments should not only address present-day learning gaps for a given staff member and a specific position but also anticipate how such needs will probably evolve in the future at the organizational or entity level. This will support efforts to implement the mobility policy and facilitate effective and smooth workforce planning. In that regard, **being able to obtain data on language skills of staff, on an as-needed basis, can be useful for identifying available language resources, anticipating current and expected shortages and informing hiring and capacity-building strategies, as required.**

Language considerations up front

For the Secretariat to operate efficiently and fulfil its mandates effectively, language skills and language learning needs must be given due consideration in all its hiring and capacity-building activities. Furthermore, since language use affects how the Organization interacts and establishes working partnerships with stakeholders and how it is perceived by people, in the field and globally, **languages should be considered up front in the design of any new work processes**. Questions in the design phase might include:

- Which languages can the United Nations reasonably expect its clients, partners, staff and/or potential vendors to use in the new work process?
- In which language or languages would clients best be served?
- In which language or languages should documents ideally be drafted?

26 Administrative instruction ST/AI/2023/3.

- Will translation and interpretation be needed? If so, from and into which language or languages? If not, in which language or languages will internal and external communication be conducted?
- How well do the language skills of the staff involved match the requirements of the new process?
- Do the associated recruitment processes take into account the language skills needed?
- How will language learning needs, if any, be met?
- How cost-effective is the proposed approach for meeting the language requirements of the process?
- Have the costs of ensuring the required multilingual communications been accurately budgeted?

Section 3.

Multilingualism: challenges and opportunities

Section 3.

Multilingualism: challenges and opportunities

A comprehensive review of multilingualism at the United Nations, based on an analysis of existing mandates, policies, regulations, practices and oversight body recommendations, as well as insights collected from Secretariat entities and staff, was conducted in 2022.[27] The main findings, which reveal the multilingual character of the Organization's operations and staff, as well as areas and opportunities for improvement, are presented by topic below.

Multilingualism in action

The United Nations uses multiple platforms, digital and traditional, to build support for its goals, purposes and work across the three pillars of peace and security, development and human rights. It reaches millions of people with trusted, objective information and an inclusive message that enables the public, civil society, the private sector and Member States to engage in the work of the United Nations. The principle of multilingualism allows the Organization to extend its impact to all corners of the world. For example, United Nations information centres are present worldwide, with 59 field offices covering 139 countries, translating or producing material in 134 languages and providing communication guidance on the work of the United Nations to local audiences. Their social media accounts reach some 32 million people.[28]

Furthermore, the Secretariat's conference management operations continue to ensure the smooth provision of conference services for intergovernmental processes in a globally coordinated manner in line with the mandates provided by the General Assembly in its resolutions on the pattern of conferences, guided by the principles of client orientation, cost-efficiency and enhanced quality of services, as well as the accessibility of services and the sustainability of its operations. In 2022, for example, full compliance was achieved with the simultaneous issuance of documents in the mandated official languages. In addition, 243 million words were translated, and 21,511 meetings were serviced with simultaneous interpretation.[29]

The General Assembly has established general principles, such as "the paramount importance of the equality of the six official languages".[30] This equal treatment principle, however, applies strictly to outputs subject to mandated submission, processing and issuance time frames and guidelines, such as official reports, statements of the Secretary-General, and interpretation at meetings of United Nations bodies. For other outputs, as noted by many entities, there are no

27 The methodology is set out in the annex.
28 See www.un.org/en/department-of-global-communications/worldwide/united-nations-information-centres.
29 See the latest report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/78/96).
30 Most recently reiterated by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/268 on multilingualism.

specific mandates, and there is a lack of guidance – and dedicated resources – to appropriately fulfil the needs of clients in terms of language of communication, whether at the global or local level. As a result, translation and localization tasks are often performed by untrained staff or sometimes outsourced to external volunteers or donors.

The Secretariat's ability to process information sources in all six official languages, on an equal footing, may also be affected by the significant disparities across official languages observed by the General Assembly in language requirements in job openings.[31]

Celebrating **multilingualism**

Language days were established in 2010 to recognize multilingualism and cultural diversity, as well as to promote the equality of the official languages throughout the Organization. Duty stations observe six separate days, each dedicated to one of the official languages.

The aim of the language days is to entertain and inform, with a view to enhancing awareness of and respect for the history, culture and achievements associated with each language within the United Nations community.

Other observances that celebrate multilingualism include International Mother Language Day (21 February) and International Translation Day (30 September, pursuant to resolution 71/288.)

Language Days

31 Resolution 76/268, para. 72 ("Notes the significant disparities across official languages observed in language requirements in the job openings published on Inspira, encourages the development and the implementation of the guidelines on setting language requirements in future job openings, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon at the seventy eighth session of the General Assembly").

As for local languages, the General Assembly has recognized the importance of communicating with local populations in the field and affirmed that a good command of the official language or languages spoken in the country of residence is an asset.[32] Field missions should be able to interact with local populations to better serve them, which involves adequate language competence, including, where applicable, in languages other than the working languages. Most field missions operate in an environment where one or more United Nations languages are prevalent, such as Arabic in Northern Africa and Western Asia or Spanish in Latin America. These languages of regional relevance are used for a wide range of purposes. They may be used as procedural languages during meetings, often in combination with one or both Secretariat-wide working languages (English and French). They also play an important role in interactions with local stakeholders, including authorities, civil society, vendors and locally recruited personnel. Qualitative analysis showed, however, that staff with key responsibilities sometimes lacked adequate proficiency in those official languages of regional or local relevance and that competence in those languages was not consistently required upon recruitment. This can result in organizational challenges, efficiency losses and substantial translation and/or interpretation costs.

Multilingualism and the United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework

Launched in 2021, the Secretariat-wide United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework sets out an organizational culture that is both current and aspirational. Multilingualism is embedded in the Framework under the value of inclusion, given its recognition as one of the core values of the Organization that contributes to the achievement of the goals of the United Nations set out in Article 1 of the Charter.

In terms of values, the need to "uphold the commitments of the United Nations to … multilingualism in creating an enabling working environment for all", "take action to mitigate own biases, stereotypes and assumptions about other … languages" and "work effectively with people regardless of … language" is explicitly stressed in the Framework. Furthermore, the need to "actively seek and incorporate a diversity of perspectives, ways of thinking, experiences and opinions in decision-making", "take responsibility for understanding the factors contributing to exclusion and for creating a work environment in which everyone can thrive" and "demonstrate sensitivity to cross-cultural differences and awareness of how actions and behaviour may be perceived in other cultures" is strongly emphasized, all of which indirectly entails sufficient linguistic competence to gain access to a wide range of sources and to understand cultural differences.

Language is also identified in the Framework as a potential factor of abuse of power ("Do not abuse power, privilege or authority, including on the basis of … language"). Language is further indirectly addressed by the need to "recognize the complexity of local contexts and the value of local knowledge, incorporating both into decision-making", which implicitly calls for adequate linguistic competence to better grasp local realities.

32 See, for example, resolution 71/263, para. 11.

Language competence also plays a pivotal role in terms of the behaviour expected of staff under the Framework. To "connect and collaborate" effectively, staff at all levels are invited to "seek out opportunities for collaboration with others, using language … skills to the fullest". To "deliver results with positive impact", they are invited to "take advantage of … language skills to deliver results and maximize impact". All staff are further called upon to "demonstrate a commitment to language learning and multilingualism" under "Learn and develop", and senior managers are called upon to "promote and provide resources for learning opportunities that support the development of an agile, multidisciplinary, values-driven and multilingual workforce". Moreover, while not mentioned explicitly, language skills will be needed by all staff to "gather, analyse and evaluate data from a wide and diverse range of credible sources in order to define the problem and inform evidence-based decision-making" under "Analyse and plan".

Multilingualism in the workplace

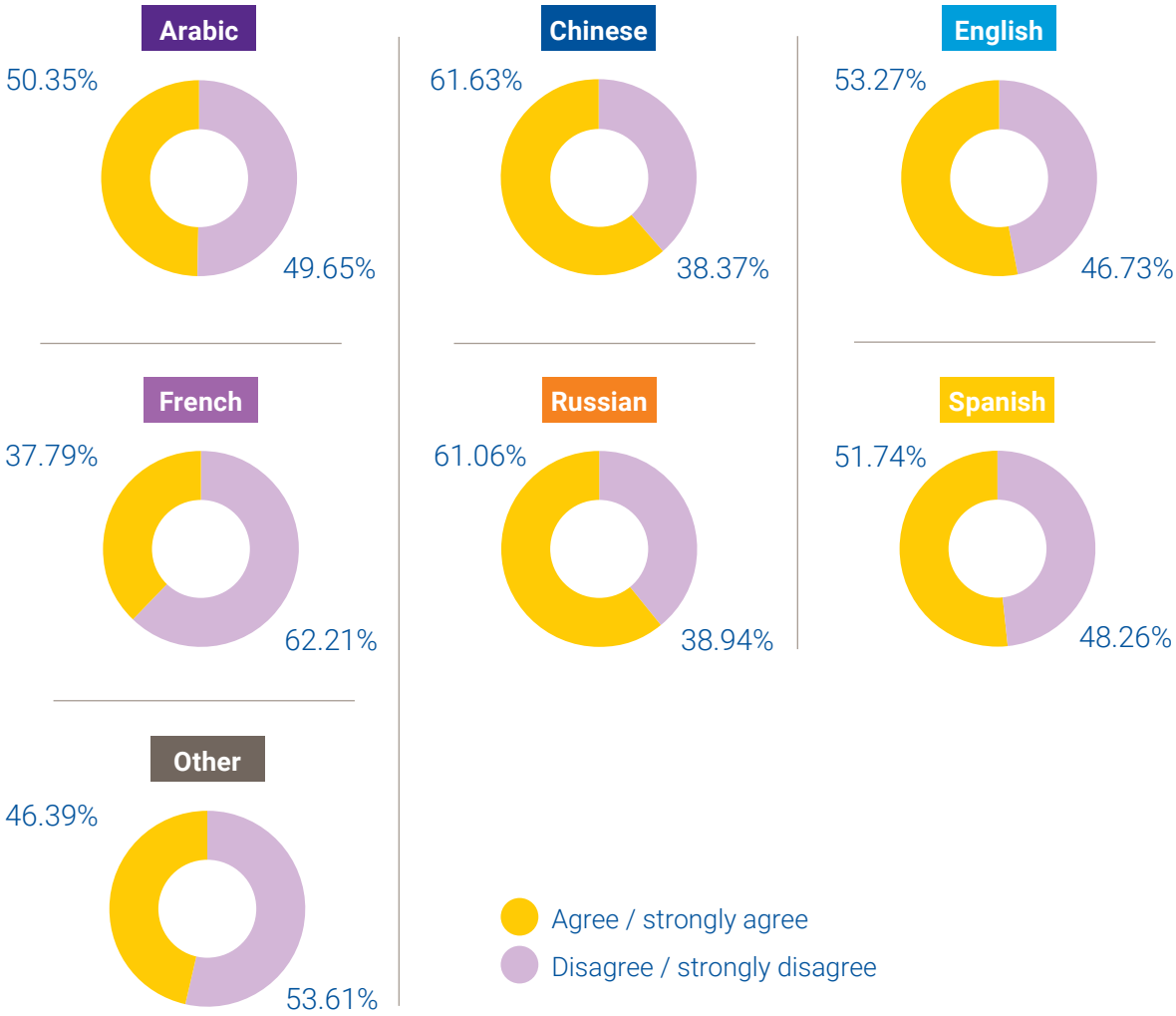
Working languages

The General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed the need to respect the equality of the two working languages of the Secretariat, while reaffirming the use of additional working languages in specific duty stations as mandated (e.g. in the regional commissions).[33] In 1985, in Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/212 on the use of working languages of the Secretariat, the Secretary-General emphasized "once more the importance [he] attach[ed] to ensuring a linguistic balance among staff members of the Secretariat" and reiterated "the policy of the Secretariat regarding the use of its working languages", noting that while it was "well established", it was "not fully put into practice".

Disparities have been noticeable in job openings: for example, 94.8 per cent of openings published on Inspira, the Organization's recruitment portal, in 2019 required English, while 11.4 per cent required French.[34] The 2022 staff survey on multilingualism also revealed some significant differences in perceptions in this regard. Respondents selecting French as their main language, for example, disagreed or strongly disagreed more with the statement "At the UN, I am free to work in any of the working languages applicable to my entity (English or French, additional working languages applying in the regional commissions)" than any other identified language group (see figure 2). These findings were echoed in the qualitative surveys conducted during bilateral meetings with select Secretariat entities (see annex). With regard to the equal treatment of applications regardless of the working language in which they are submitted, the lack of adequate language capacity among hiring managers was cited as an obstacle.

33 See, among others, resolutions 76/268 and 77/278.
34 See A/75/798.

Figure 2. Responses to the statement "At the UN, I am free to work in any of the working languages applicable to my entity (English or French, additional working languages applying in the regional commissions)": distribution by respondents' main language, 2022 staff survey on multilingualism



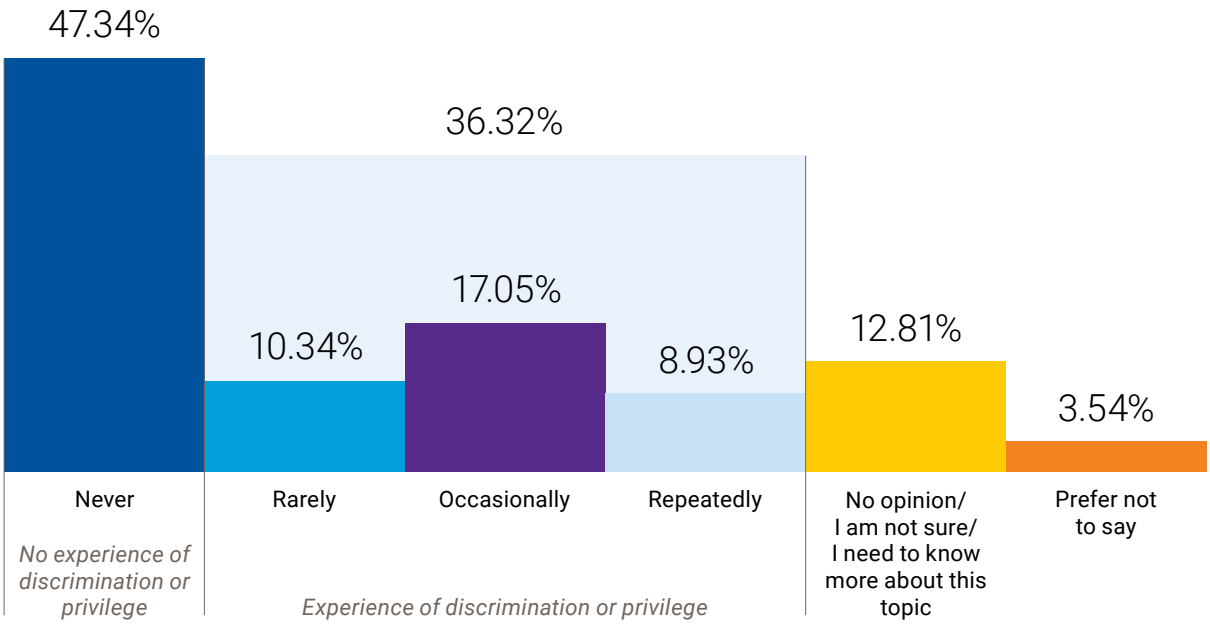
Equal opportunities, inclusion and language bias

Quantitative and qualitative data compiled during the development of this Strategic Framework raise possible areas of concern in relation to language diversity and inclusion. For example, nearly one third of respondents to the 2022 staff survey on multilingualism disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "At the UN, applicants have equal opportunities for employment, regardless of their linguistic background, provided they meet the job requirements" or the statement "At the UN, staff members have equal opportunities for advancement, regardless of their linguistic background, provided they meet the job requirements".

Figure 3. Respondents' rating of eight statements about language diversity and inclusion at the United Nations, 2022 staff survey on multilingualism

In total, 36.3 per cent of respondents also said that they had experienced or witnessed language-based or accent-based discrimination/disadvantage/prejudice or language-based or accent-based privilege/preferential treatment, including nearly 9 per cent who said that they had experienced such acts repeatedly.

Figure 4. Respondents' experience with language/accent-based discrimination, disadvantage or prejudice or with language/accent-based privilege or preferential treatment, 2022 staff survey on multilingualism



In addition to English being listed as a requirement in nearly all job openings (unlike the other working or official languages), staff selection processes, including interviews, are, according to the consultations in thematic subgroups and bilateral meetings, also generally conducted in English. In other words, English is generally used as the medium of communication for assessing whether candidates meet eligibility or suitability criteria. While language requirements are determined on the basis of job functions, this may unintentionally privilege applicants with English as their main language.

A perceived unequal treatment among applicants and among staff based on their linguistic profiles was reported, respectively, by 33 per cent and 31 per cent of respondents in the 2022 staff survey on multilingualism. In addition, 15 per cent of respondents stated that they could not seek assistance in their preferred working language for workplace conflict resolution.

Multilingualism and human resources management

The findings presented here should be read in the light of the fact that a project was undertaken in 2023 to enable hiring managers to align language requirements in job openings and language assessments in recruitment process with the United Nations Language Framework and to contribute to a more effective, fair and efficient staff selection system. In addition, a comprehensive job analysis was under way to update responsibilities and functions, and the associated requirements in terms of capabilities and skills, including language skills.

Language requirements in job openings

Inconsistencies were detected, at the time of the desk review, in how language requirements were reflected in job openings, underscoring the need to provide standardized, ready-to-use and industry-standard means to determine such language requirements, in alignment with the then forthcoming United Nations Language Framework.[35] For example, the descriptors of language competence were not clearly defined and therefore varied considerably across openings, job families and/or entities. In addition, only a minority of openings strictly complied with the existing guidance from the General Assembly regarding language requirements.[36]

United Nations Language Framework – excerpt from ST/SGB/2023/2

"The United Nations Language Framework is aimed at building consistency in the way in which languages are learned, assessed and certified across the Secretariat. The adoption of the Framework is intended to support a more efficient management of staff language skills in all aspects of talent management (e.g. workforce planning, recruitment, learning and career development) by providing a common language learning model for personnel, as well as by allowing common assessment criteria for a more reliable and valid assessment and certification process that enhances the equal treatment of languages and stronger recognition of staff language skills in the Secretariat."

35 The Secretary-General's bulletin entitled "United Nations Language Framework and levels of language competence" (ST/SGB/2023/2) was promulgated in April 2023.
36 Resolution 71/263, paras. 10 and 11.

Language skills assessment during staff selection

The desk review and consultation process demonstrated a need for a standardized procedure across the Secretariat[37] to ensure the consistent assessment of language competence. The 2022 staff survey on multilingualism showed that competency-based interviews were the method most used by hiring managers to assess language skills, especially in languages other than English. This raises questions about the reliability of such assessments, however, given the lack of common assessment methods (e.g. criteria and scoring grids) for evaluating applicants' competence in an accurate, consistent and nuanced manner. Guidance is needed to assist hiring managers in determining minimum language requirements for job openings more consistently and objectively and in reflecting the linguistic specificities mentioned in job openings in the composition of interview panels.[38] Moreover, interviews can, at best, assess the oral dimension of language skills (i.e. listening and speaking), while the job functions may require specific writing or reading skills.

Within the scope of the staff selection 2.0 programme, in 2023 the Office of Human Resources started to align language requirements and language assessments with the United Nations Language Framework, with a view to contributing to a more effective, fair and efficient staff selection system. The specific objectives of the project are: (a) determining language requirements on the basis of job functions, as requested by the General Assembly; (b) aligning language requirements with the Language Framework; (c) verifying applicants' language skills against the language requirements of a specific job opening using the Language Framework; and (d) enabling applicants to accurately indicate their language skill level using the Language Framework.

Geographical representation and client orientation

To deliver on its mandates, the United Nations needs staff with the right skills (including subject matter expertise and language skills) at the right time in the right place. It also needs to meet its diversity goals, including the geographical diversity of its staff. However, competence in the official languages, for example, is not evenly distributed across Member States. This imbalance poses a risk of conflicting needs, where the imperative to serve the Organization's clients may clash with the goal of achieving geographical representation, depending on where the United Nations operates, which constantly evolves as field missions open and close. Data collection systems should be in place to monitor whether and how language requirements may interfere with geographical representation, and efforts should be made to mitigate such risks.

37 Except for competitive examinations for language positions, where applicants' technical skills (e.g. in translation, editing, summary writing or interpretation) are consistently tested.

38 Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/268, para. 84 ("Invites the Secretary-General to take the appropriate measures to consider the linguistic specificities mentioned in job openings during the composition of interview panels for the employment of United Nations staff, notes the difficulty of constituting panels whose members are proficient in the additional language, and in that regard invites the Secretary-General to consider the possibility of addressing this issue in the medium term").

Language training

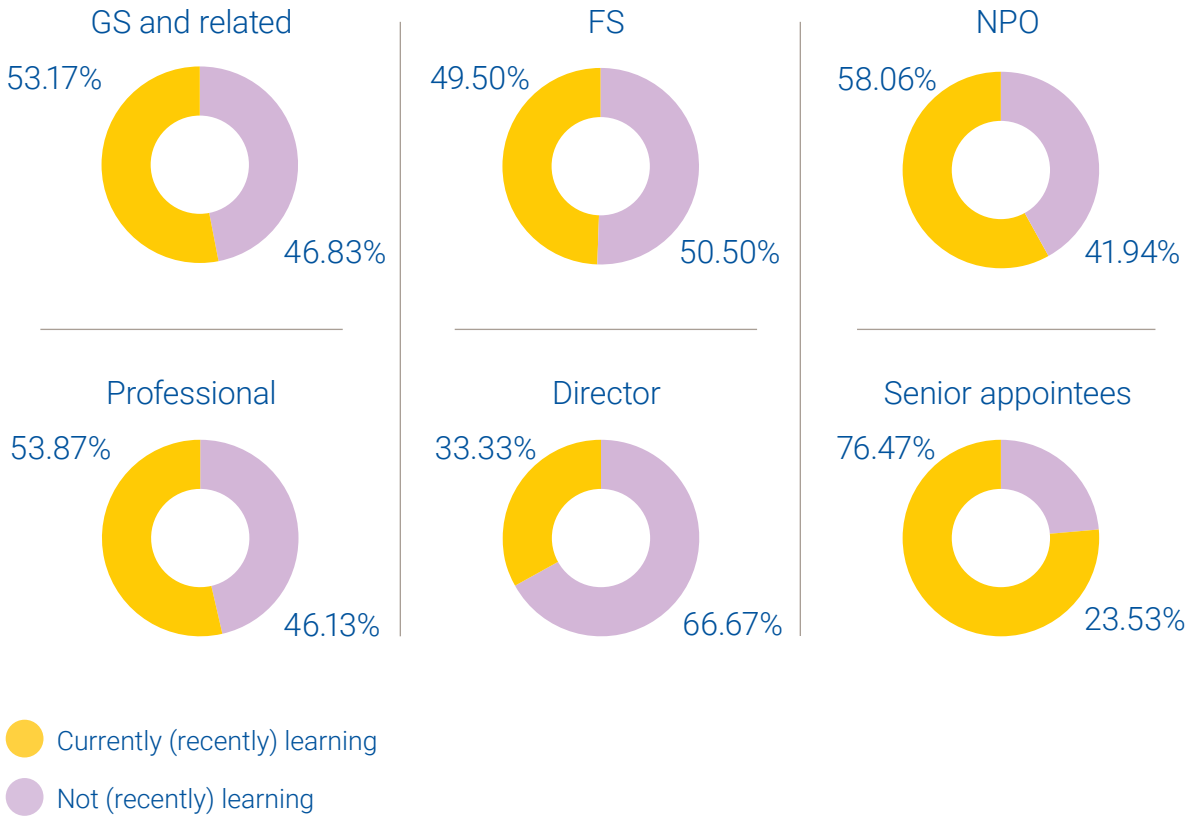
Learning languages nurtures communication abilities and skills, promotes professional growth, is essential for mobility and adaptability and provides staff with the experience of listening to and learning from others. Multilingualism embodies an attitude of curiosity towards acquiring understanding. In this sense, the United Nations Language Framework reinforces the commitment to multilingualism among staff by ensuring that language learning is standardized and has an impact in terms of results and performance at different levels. The Language Framework defines language as a competence (knowledge and ability to use) and establishes four levels of language proficiency, which are common to all languages, consistently used across duty stations and tailored to language learning planning and assessment needs.

Language learning opportunities vary across locations, and difficulties in combining learning with the regular work schedule were reported through such channels as the 2019 and 2022 staff surveys on multilingualism. Nonetheless, a total of 2,510 Secretariat staff members took a language proficiency examination between 2019 and 2022. In addition, over half of the respondents in the 2022 survey indicated that they were learning a language or had done so in the previous two years (see figure 5). This percentage and the number of staff who took a language proficiency examination demonstrate a genuine interest in language learning among staff. However, language learning opportunities are perceived more as an employment benefit unrelated to tasks and duties than as a tool for improving performance. Passing a language proficiency examination entitles staff in the General Service and related categories to the payment of language allowances.[39] To encourage staff in the Professional and higher categories also to acquire new official languages and enable them to work in multiple contexts in accordance with operational needs, similar measures, of a monetary or non-monetary nature, including the possible reintroduction of language incentives, could be considered.[40]

39 See rule 3.8 of the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, including provisional Staff Rules, of the United Nations (ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1).

40 Language incentives for staff in the Professional and higher categories were in place before 2017. In 2022, the International Civil Service Commission decided "to revisit the issue of the language incentive in the next comprehensive review of the compensation package" (see A/77/30).

Figure 5. Responses to the question "Are you currently an active language learner or have been in the last two years?", by staff category, 2022 staff survey on multilingualism



Abbreviations: FS, Field Service; GS, General Service; NPO, National Professional Officer.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic offered new opportunities for remote learning, which were highly appreciated by staff at duty stations with otherwise limited access to language training. However, such opportunities were locally organized and have lacked coordination and the coherence necessary to maximize the number of potential participants.

In addition, while there is demand for local-language training at field missions, especially from internationally recruited staff, entities reported difficulties in attracting qualified candidates to serve as language instructors, especially in crisis zones and/or when rigorous clearance procedures to obtain access to compounds are in place in hardship duty stations.

Multilingualism and accountability, oversight and evaluation

Multilingualism is recognized by the General Assembly as a core value of the Organization, has been elevated to a priority of the Secretary-General and has been consistently included in all senior managers' compacts since 2018. Measuring progress in multilingualism requires access to language-disaggregated metrics to support data-driven decision-making, in line with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. Many Secretariat entities, however, have previously reported difficulty in collecting such data.

Whereas compliance with multilingualism mandates in the Secretariat's outputs such as official documents, publications and press releases can be readily measured, and indeed is measured regularly, there are no standardized quantitative indicators on the multilingualism of the workforce that can be used to set, monitor and evaluate related policy objectives.

Standardized data on language requirements in job openings are periodically collected on an ad hoc basis, and the language competence of applicants is consistently self-reported through candidates' profiles in Inspira. However, while this information is available in Inspira, it is not readily retrievable for analysis at the central or entity level. In addition, a review of language training across the Organization has revealed a gap between the demand (to improve functional performance) and supply. Data about enrolment, examinations and dropout rates are available but do not clearly indicate how training opportunities are intended to fill the language capacity gaps of specific entities or succeed in doing so. This is, in part, because language learning courses are not limited to Secretariat staff but are open to a broader audience, and eligibility criteria and enrolment fees vary across the entities that provide language training. It will remain a priority of the Organization in the future to seek every opportunity to improve decision-making and policy advice by harnessing the potential of data.[41]

41 See the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism (A/75/798).

Section 4.

Strategic vision for multilingualism in the Secretariat

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Strategic vision for multilingualism in the Secretariat

The focus of this Strategic Framework is on targeted action to mainstream multilingualism across the Secretariat, support the client orientation of its work and ensure an inclusive workplace. The following three goals have been identified as key to the strategic vision for multilingualism and for framing and guiding such targeted action.

Goal 1.
The United Nations as a genuinely multilingual organization

The United Nations is perceived as a genuinely multilingual organization, both by its external clients and stakeholders and its staff. The characteristics of multilingualism at the United Nations are:

- Client orientation regarding communication needs as the key driver of workflows, especially in field operations
- The language skills of staff used as a tool and asset for the effective delivery of mandates in a linguistically diverse world
- Equal standing of the official languages reflected in the Organization's external communications and its organizational branding strategy
- Equal standing of the Secretariat's working languages reflected in access to opportunities and the internal functioning of the Organization, with due regard to operational needs

Goal 2.
The United Nations as an effective multilingual workplace

The United Nations recognizes the implications of language diversity across the globe, the linguistic contexts in which it operates and the linguistic backgrounds and language skills of its staff. It values these dimensions of diversity as an opportunity to implement its missions effectively and efficiently at the global and local levels. While job requirements determine the language skills needed in each position, the Organization seeks to leverage the diverse language skills of its staff, including by matching them with its operational language needs, so as to enable:

- The incorporation of diverse viewpoints, through a wide range of sources, in workflows, policies and operations
- The implementation of the Organization's global and local mandates, now and in the future
- The equal treatment of all current and prospective staff regardless of their linguistic backgrounds

Goal 3.
The United Nations as a linguistically accountable organization

Secretariat-wide policies are evaluated through quantitative indicators that are based on accurate and standardized empirical data, and through specific procedures to address issues. Accordingly:

- Standard indicators of language requirements, staff language skills and language learning are established, and data are collected and compiled at the entity level
- Periodic reports are produced on:
  - Language requirements in job openings (in line with the levels identified in the United Nations Language Framework and including both required and desirable languages, where applicable)[42]
  - Staff language skills[43]
  - Language learning, including changes in language learning demand and progress in language learning supply
- Workforce diversity policies, such as those aimed at achieving gender and geographical representation goals, addressing racism and promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities, take into account language-related challenges and opportunities

42 In its resolution 76/268 on multilingualism, the General Assembly noted the significant disparities across official languages observed in language requirements in the job openings published on Inspira, encouraged the development and the implementation of the guidelines on setting language requirements in future job openings, and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon at the seventy-eighth session of the Assembly.

43 In the same resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the invitation of the Secretary-General to all the entities of the Secretariat to build an inventory of staff language skills, while making the best use of existing language databases, as underlined in its resolutions 71/328 and 73/346, welcomed the development of the pilot project but noted that the inventory had not yet been deployed, and encouraged the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance of the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Human Resources Services Division of the Department of Operational Support of the Secretariat, to intensify those efforts, in collaboration with the Coordinator for Multilingualism, and requested the Secretary-General to report on the results at the seventy-eighth session of the Assembly.

Section 5.

Areas of action and next steps

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Areas of action and next steps

Recommended initial actions and measures for making progress towards the three goals of the strategic vision for multilingualism at the United Nations are presented below, grouped by area of action.

For policy matters, as indicated in the subsection entitled "Mandate and approach" under section 1 above, it should be noted that policies in the United Nations are issued in the form of Secretary-General's bulletins (ST/SGB series).[44] These recommendations are made without prejudice to any such administrative issuances being issued at a later date.

AWARENESS-RAISING

Expected result

The United Nations is perceived as a multilateral and multilingual organization

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
A course on multilingualism and language diversity at the United Nations for all staff, including supervisors and senior managers, is developed	Medium term	Course prepared and advertised Completion rates compiled
Awareness-raising campaigns, including on international days and language-related celebrations, are conducted periodically	Continuing	Campaigns conducted Language-related celebrations held
A code of conduct on language use in the Organization is developed	Medium term	Code of conduct developed and disseminated

44 See ST/SGB/2009/4, sect. 3.2 ("Secretary-General's bulletins may also be promulgated in connection with any other important decision of policy, as decided by the Secretary-General").

LEADERSHIP

Expected result

The United Nations encourages its managers to commit to embracing and exemplifying multilingualism

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Multilingualism and language considerations are further integrated into senior managers' compacts[45] with measurable and time-bound targets, as applicable	Medium term	Compacts reviewed Targets set
Senior managers assign annual objectives to the multilingualism focal points serving at their entity	Short term	Objectives set and reported to the Coordinator for Multilingualism
Managers encourage staff to participate in language learning where it could improve organizational effectiveness	Continuing	Language needs and learning rates by entity
Managers serve as a role model by encouraging the conduct of multilingual meetings and using multiple languages in their interventions, as applicable	Medium term	Compact implementation reported

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Expected result

The United Nations includes viewpoints from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in internal processes

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Sources from diverse linguistic backgrounds are consistently integrated into research, analysis and desk reviews to promote inclusion	Medium term	Use of sources from diverse linguistic backgrounds documented, including in methodological reports
Language skills are used to the fullest to advance the work, deliver results and maximize impact at the global and local levels	Long term	Entities report on the benefits of multilingualism in the conduct of their business in the reports of the Secretary-General on multilingualism

45 In addition to the generic indicator on multilingualism.

Libraries at the duty stations and digital subscriptions cover a range of languages, including official languages and those of local relevance	Short term	Library catalogues and subscriptions

Expected result

The United Nations enjoys an enabling work environment conducive to multilingualism

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
The Secretariat's talent management tool (Inspira), along with all guidance documents, tools, policies, job openings and job opening templates, is aligned with the four levels of language competence set out in the United Nations Language Framework	Medium to long term	Inspira, guidance documents, tools and policies updated Percentage of job openings aligned with the United Nations Language Framework
Staff demonstrate a commitment to language learning and multilingualism	Continuing	Language learning rates Staff survey data
Staff are encouraged to develop their competence in the working languages, official languages or local languages of relevance, in alignment with operational needs and resource availability	Long term	Language needs assessments Percentage of staff taking advantage of language learning opportunities by entity
Staff voluntarily indicate those languages, whether official, working or other, of which they possess a good command	Short term	Profile cards on Outlook and email signature templates are updated
Language skills are recognized and contribute to career development	Long term	Language skills recognition schemes such as language allowances and language incentives, if reintroduced Non-monetary incentives Staff surveys

Expected result

The United Nations takes into consideration the language needs and skills of its staff

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Guidelines for addressing language biases are developed	Medium term	Guidelines developed and disseminated periodically to staff

Internal communications are made accessible in the relevant working languages and, where possible, in languages of local relevance	Medium term	Audit of internal Secretariat-wide and entity-specific broadcasts and communications
Interpretation services are provided, where possible, at town hall meetings and events involving the staff at large, to encourage active participation from all	Short term	Percentage of town hall meetings serviced with interpretation
Staff surveys and audit questionnaires are multilingual and integrate language considerations by consistently collecting data on language skills	Medium term	Review of staff surveys and audit questions Capacity to process multilingual survey responses
Job-relevant training is provided in all relevant languages on the basis of identified language and programme delivery needs	Medium term	Assessment of language needs Language(s) in which training activities are provided
Language considerations are given due regard in mediation services and the internal justice system	Medium term	Satisfaction surveys Mapping of language capacity in relevant entities

CLIENT ORIENTATION

Expected result

The United Nations consistently analyses and accommodates the language needs of its clients

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Tools for analysing language needs regarding both internal and external communications are developed, with due consideration given to the language needs of persons with disabilities	Long term	Client surveys and proxy data, such as log files and web analytics
Data on staff language skills are obtained, based on operational planning needs, at the team or entity level, to align language needs (demand) with language capacity (supply)	Medium term	Select data (including, as appropriate, self-reported data) on staff language skills obtained, in accordance with operational needs

Guided tours are consistently offered in the six official languages at Headquarters and duty stations, as well as in local languages, as relevant	Medium term	Tours by language and by location, as annual percentages
Calls for bids are published, where appropriate, in local languages to facilitate the participation of local vendors in the procurement bidding process	Medium term	Data on languages used in calls for bids

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Expected result

The Secretariat attracts candidates with diverse language skills in accordance with its operational needs

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
The Secretariat's talent management platform is made equally accessible in the working languages of the Secretariat	Long term	Inspira equally accessible in the working languages of the Secretariat
If relevant to operational needs, candidates are allowed to take assessment tests[46] in either English or French (or another applicable working language in regional commissions)	Long term	Number of job openings for which applicants were given the option of taking the assessment test in English, French or other applicable working languages
Targeted outreach to stakeholders about recruitment procedures is organized in multiple languages	Medium term	Data on languages used in outreach activities
Partnerships continue to be established with Member States, higher education institutions and other international organizations to build a linguistically diverse workforce	Medium term	Reports on languages involved in the partnerships and how each partnership contributes to the linguistic diversity of the workforce

46 At the present time, for example, the young professionals programme examination is offered in both English and French, and candidates have the option to answer open-ended questions in any of the six official languages of the United Nations.

Expected result

The United Nations ensures equal treatment for all applicants irrespective of their linguistic background

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Guidelines for managers on setting language requirements in job openings based on job requirements are developed in line with the United Nations Language Framework	Medium to long term	Guidelines developed and managers trained Departures from guidelines substantiated
Guidelines for candidates on how to self-assess language skills are developed in line with the United Nations Language Framework	Medium term	Guidelines developed and available on Inspira
Protocols are developed to ensure that applications received in either working language receive equal treatment	Long term	Protocols developed
Composition of interview panels reflects the language requirements outlined in the job opening	Medium term	Composition of interview panels documented
Updated lists of staff who have completed the competency-based interview training for panel members are maintained at the entity level, shared upon request across entities and include information on the official or relevant languages spoken by those staff	Medium term	Lists of potential panel members and their language skills created and regularly updated
Language skills are objectively and consistently assessed during staff selection[47] on the basis of the language requirements set in the job description and in line with the United Nations Language Framework	Long term	Methods, tools and solutions to assess language skills are identified to ensure fairness and accuracy, with due regard given to the needs of persons with disabilities
Central review body and field central review body members receive detailed information, for their review, on language requirements, language assessments and panel composition	Long term	Assessment report templates updated

47 Except for language professionals, who are assessed through competitive examinations for language positions.

Expected result

The United Nations encourages language learning in line with the United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Language training is strategically and coherently planned at the Secretariat-wide level and standardized in line with the United Nations Language Framework to further operational goals	Medium term	Review of language learning planning
Language courses are open to all staff, with different time frames and in different formats to accommodate wider audiences	Long term	Review of the global language training offer and assessment of learners' profiles and affiliation
Language and communications skills are included in yearly development plans and allocated time, subject to operational requirements and budget considerations	Continuing	Number and percentage of staff enrolled in relevant courses in accordance with operational requirements

COMMUNICATIONS

Expected result

The United Nations ensures that conference-servicing requirements are consistently integrated into budgets, timelines and client satisfaction surveys

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Interpretation and translation costs are consistently included by Secretariat entities in all programme budget documents for consideration by the General Assembly	Continuing	Budget documents consistently include interpretation and translation costs
Project management systematically integrates turnaround times for translation, localization or adaptation, and quality assurance in all applicable languages, for official and non-official documents	Continuing	Compliance rates by author departments for submission of official documents Periodic client satisfaction surveys

Expected result

The United Nations conducts conference-servicing operations in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
The Secretariat continues to provide high-quality official documents in a timely manner in all official languages	Continuing	Relevant information provided in reports on the pattern of conferences
The Secretariat continues to provide high-quality multilingual conference services as mandated by Member States	Continuing	Relevant information provided in reports on the pattern of conferences

Expected result

The United Nations leverages new technologies in its language services

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Guidance is developed on quality assurance for outsourced translation and for automated/computer-assisted translation and post-editing	Medium term	Guidance is formulated and disseminated
Multilingual terminology is harmonized and updated across languages and duty stations	Medium term	Terminology output regularly measured and reported
The development of a “user only” version of eLUNa (without editing rights) is explored to improve the quality and quantity of translations for non-official documents or content	Long term	Examination of requirements, conditions and costs
The Secretariat follows advancements in technologies and artificial intelligence and compiles and evaluates possible use cases for specific business processes	Medium term	Use cases compiled and evaluated

Expected result

The United Nations practices multilingualism in its communication products and platforms and in all its premises through signage

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
A coherent visual identity or branding is centrally provided for external communication purposes in all six official languages on an equal footing, as well as in local languages where relevant	Short term	Visual identity and branding designed, promoted and used with consistency across the Secretariat
Guidelines are developed on the use of languages in permanent, temporary and digital signage, as well as in oral announcements at duty stations, including field missions	Short term	Guidelines developed and applied
Template communication products (such as presentation templates and email signatures) are developed in all official languages and relevant local languages	Short term	Mapping of available template communication products
Multilingualism standards are adhered to on United Nations websites, upon launch and throughout the lifespan of websites	Continuing	Compliance rates and documentation of deviations
United Nations entities maintain a multilingual social media presence in the languages relevant to their mandates	Continuing	Entities report on their social media presence
A dashboard tracking the multilingual online presence of entities (websites, iSeek, social media) is developed and regularly updated	Medium term	Centralized dashboard created and kept up to date

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

Expected result

The United Nations delivers on its multilingualism mandates as one United Nations

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
The Coordinator for Multilingualism receives the necessary support from all Secretariat entities in serving as the primary contact for concerns and queries and promoting a coordinated, consistent and coherent approach to multilingualism	Continuing	Number of entities that designated focal points and provided input to the reports of the Secretary-General on multilingualism
Secretariat entities collaborate with each other through the network of focal points for multilingualism, under the guidance of the Coordinator, to monitor progress in implementing multilingualism mandates and identify challenges, opportunities and best practices	Continuing	Number and nature of exchanges within the network Best practices, challenges and opportunities identified

EVALUATION/AUDIT

Expected result

The United Nations collects robust data on multilingualism within the Organization

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Data on language requirements or desirables for all job openings are consistently compiled	Medium term	Disaggregated data compiled
Data on language competence and certification (e.g. language proficiency examinations), based on the United Nations Language Framework, are consistently compiled	Medium term	Language proficiency examination data Self-assessment data

Data on the language in which applications were submitted and in which the hiring process was conducted are consistently compiled	Long term	Number and percentage of applications by language Language distribution of interviews and assessments Languages used by selected candidates in the application, assessment and interview
Questions relating to language background are consistently included in the demographic sections of staff surveys	Continuing	Number and percentage of staff surveys that include language-related questions

Expected result

The United Nations monitors, in a consistent manner, progress made in its multilingualism-related goals

Steps	Time frame	Initial indicators
Progress is regularly evaluated through quantitative and qualitative data	Continuing	Data and resource availability at the central and entity levels
Multilingualism and language considerations are mainstreamed in evaluation and audit processes	Long term	Content of audit questionnaires
Language and multilingualism-related policies, including on the use of working languages, are continuously assessed in the context of actual operational requirements	Long term	Policies assessed and updated

At present, the main challenge in mainstreaming multilingualism is the lack of a coherent Secretariat-wide approach, other than in specific areas such as conference management and global communications. For it to succeed, this Strategic Framework will need the implementation of effective measures, such as those recommended above, with clear, measurable and time-bound performance indicators that are based on standardized empirical data. Once such indicators have been established, periodic assessments will facilitate the monitoring of progress towards the achievement of the strategic goals identified herein.

Annex.

Methodology

Annex. Methodology

Mandate

In its 2011 report on multilingualism (JIU/REP/2011/4), the Joint Inspection Unit issued two recommendations encouraging the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations to "formulate strategies" and propose "strategic action plans for the effective implementation of multilingualism" within their respective organizations.

In 2017, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General "through his role in the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, if necessary by means of the development of a consistent policy framework, to support a comprehensive and coordinated approach on multilingualism within the United Nations system, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on multilingualism" (see resolution 71/328).

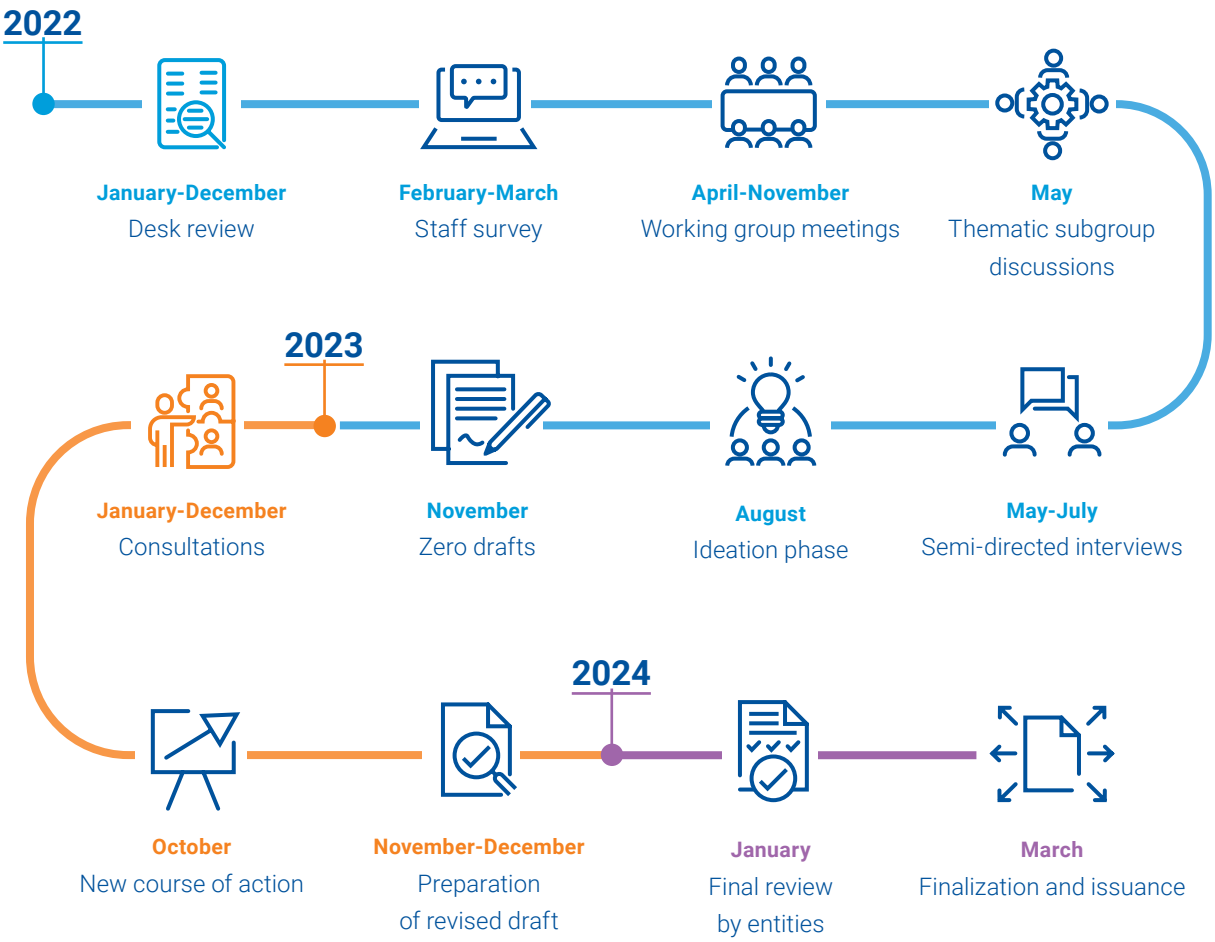
In 2020, the Joint Inspection Unit recommended that "the legislative or governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should request the executive heads of their respective organizations that have not yet done so, to prepare a strategic policy framework for multilingualism, accompanied by administrative and operational guidelines for its implementation, and submit this for adoption by the end of 2022" (JIU/REP/2020/6, recommendation 1).

The General Assembly reiterated its call for the development of a coherent Secretariat-wide policy framework in 2019 (resolution 73/346, para. 14) and 2022 (resolution 76/268, para. 16).

The preparation of the framework required broad and labour-intensive internal consultations, including with key stakeholders, to conceptualize the strategic vision set out therein, in accordance with the existing purposes, goals, values, policies and administrative frameworks of the United Nations.

Preliminary work

Under the supervision of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management in his capacity as the Coordinator for Multilingualism, and as part of a project with the International Organization of la Francophonie, internal reviews based on multiple methodologies (a desk review of relevant mandates and literature, qualitative surveys and quantitative surveys) was conducted in 2018. A report commissioned by the International Organization of la Francophonie was shared with Secretariat entities through the focal points for multilingualism in early 2019. The findings were included in the reports of the Secretary-General on multilingualism in 2019 (A/73/761) and 2021 (A/75/798) and in the outcomes of the 2019 staff survey on multilingualism and language skills.



Working group

A working group was established in 2022 by the Management Committee to develop a comprehensive "strategic policy framework". The Coordinator for Multilingualism appointed the Director of the Division of Conference Management at the United Nations Office at Geneva as Chair of the working group, which comprised 63 representatives of 49 entities.[1] Particular attention was paid to ensuring that its composition reflected the diversity of Secretariat entities. Between April and November 2022, the working group held two plenary and four thematic subgroup meetings (see below). It was supported by a consultant, whose recruitment was made possible through a voluntary contribution received from the International Organization of la Francophonie.

Desk review

The first phase of the project involved a comprehensive review of internal and external sources, including mandates from relevant United Nations organs and bodies and recommendations by oversight bodies. Findings from external reports, including of the Joint Inspection Unit, and reports and studies about similar organizational settings were also examined.

Staff survey

A Secretariat-wide staff survey on multilingualism was conducted in February and March 2022 to complete the external findings from an internal perspective. It was initiated by the Coordinator for Multilingualism with the support of the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Department of Operational Support and the United Nations Office at Geneva. Its aim was to gain a better understanding of the language

1 Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate; Development Coordination Office; Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Department for General Assembly and Conference Management; Department of Global Communications; Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance; Department of Operational Support; Department of Peace Operations and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Department of Safety and Security; Economic Commission for Africa; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; Executive Office of the Secretary-General; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; Ethics Office; United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara; United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; Office of Administration of Justice; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Office of Counter-Terrorism; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States; Office of Internal Oversight Services; Office of the Special Adviser on Africa; Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa; Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; United Nations Disengagement Observer Force; United Nations Environment Programme; United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus; United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon; United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; United Nations Office at Geneva; United Nations Office at Nairobi; United Nations Office at Vienna; United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel; United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia; United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions; Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon; United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia/United Nations Support Office in Somalia; and United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

skills and language learning experiences of Secretariat staff and to gather their views about language diversity and inclusion within the United Nations. A total of 3,476 staff, representing 9.5 per cent of the workforce, participated. During the survey, perceptions on multilingualism and language use were collected and analysed and compared with other information sources, such as the 2019 staff survey on multilingualism and language skills and the data found in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics" (A/75/591), to inform the working group and support the development of the strategic framework.

Thematic subgroups

Based on the findings from the desk review and the outcome of the quantitative and qualitative survey analysis, four thematic subgroups were convened to focus on four sets of questions related to four initially identified areas of action: accountability, oversight and evaluation; organizational culture; human resources management; and multilingual communications. The questions were discussed in breakout sessions composed of randomly assigned representatives of the respective entities. The goal was to identify issues and potential good practice or examples that could serve as measures to address these issues throughout the Secretariat.

Entity consultations

The main issues identified were later discussed with staff from relevant entities, including those serving in Secretariat departments and offices, regional commissions and field missions, situated in different linguistic environments spanning United Nations official languages and non-official languages. The consultations were conducted through semi-directed interviews, with Secretariat-wide pertinent questions and entity-specific questions. Between May and July 2022, 21 meetings were held with a total of 53 participants.

Ideation phase

The conclusions drawn by the working group from the thematic subgroup meetings and bilateral consultations contributed to identifying the most critical issues. They also assisted in formulating preliminary measures. An ideation document was circulated in August 2022 to all entities. The written comments and feedback received were systematically collected, analysed and reflected, as appropriate.

Zero drafts

Following the ideation phase, two working documents were produced: a zero draft strategic policy framework on multilingualism and a zero draft implementation plan. They were disseminated in November 2022 to the working group for feedback.

Consultations with stakeholders and new course of action

After extensive consultations with entities and review of the feedback received, including from key entities such as the Office of Human Resources, revisions were made in 2023 in accordance with the existing rules, administrative frameworks and realities of the Organization. Within the United Nations system of administrative and managerial issuances, there are no previous documents called “strategic policy framework”. Typically, policies are issued as Secretary-General’s bulletins (ST/SGB series). Consequently, it was deemed appropriate to proceed with a strategic framework rather than a strategic policy framework. The two initial documents were therefore restructured into the present United Nations Strategic Framework on Multilingualism.

Finalization and issuance

The revised document was shared with Secretariat entities, through their respective focal points for multilingualism, for final review. The Strategic Framework was finalized and approved in February 2024.

United Nations Strategic Framework on Multilingualism

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