

The Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World

In today's interconnected world, the ability to speak multiple languages and communicate across linguistic divides is a critical skill. Even partial knowledge of more than one language is beneficial. Proficiency in additional languages is a new kind of global literacy. Language learning needs to be expanded for all – young and old.

However, millions of people across the globe are denied the inherent right to maintain, enjoy and develop their languages of identity and community. This injustice needs to be corrected in language policies that support multilingual societies and individuals.

We, the participants of Salzburg Global Seminar's session on *Springboard for Talent: Language Learning and Integration in a Globalized World* (December 12-17, 2017 salzburgglobal.org/go/586), call for policies that value and uphold multilingualism and language rights.

The *Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World* will be supported by a comprehensive report and blogs on key topics published during 2018.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD IN WHICH:

- All 193 UN member states and most people are multilingual.
- 7,097 languages are currently spoken across the world.
- 2,464 of these are endangered¹.
- 23 languages dominate, spoken by over one half of the world's population.
- 40% of people have no access to education in a language they understand².
- 617 million children and adolescents do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading³.
- 244 million people are international migrants, of whom 20 million are refugees, a 41% increase since 2000⁴. Migrants and refugees alone would constitute the 5th most populous country in the world⁵.

Our world is truly multilingual, yet many education and economic systems, citizenship processes and public administrations disadvantage millions of people due to their languages and language abilities. We must tackle this challenge if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals⁶, adopted in 2015 by 193 countries to “end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all.” A just education system built on strong and fair language policies is fundamental to inclusive progress.

PRINCIPLES

- Multilingualism denotes both the explicit teaching of languages, and the informal patterns of communication that emerge in multilingual societies.
- Plurilingualism is the knowledge of multiple languages by individuals.
- Historical, geographic, and socio-economic circumstances lead to many different forms and uses of multilingualism.
- Multilingual education, and support for social multilingualism by states and international organisations, promotes exchange of knowledge and intercultural understanding and strengthens international relations.

Targeted language policies can enhance social cohesion, improve educational outcomes and promote economic development. Additive language learning approaches allow children to build strong literacy skills in their mother tongues; help communities retain their languages of identity, knowledge and belief; and create opportunities to learn new languages of personal, recreational, cultural or economic benefit. Multilingual policies can sustain the unique and vital resource of language diversity and drive positive change in the world, economically, socially and politically.

We urge individuals, corporations, institutions and governments to adopt a multilingual mindset that celebrates and promotes language diversity as the global norm, tackles language discrimination, and develops language policies that advance multilingualism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Making

Successful language policy needs input from specialists and active participation of community stakeholders. Making rational and clear decisions about languages in society means:

- Negotiating clear goals that are realistic and achievable.
- Including all stakeholders in the policy process, with a prominent role for teachers at all stages.
- Sequencing policy from pre-school to post-schooling and non-formal and lifelong education.
- Focusing on all language assets and needs, including maintenance, learning and usage of the mother tongues of minority communities.
- Utilizing insights from educational and cognitive research for mother tongue and other tongue learning.
- Harnessing the potential of communication technologies.
- Securing adequate resources for full policy implementation.
- Monitoring and evaluating policy aims and implementation regularly.

Teaching and Learning

The full scope of language policy is social, economic and cultural as well as educational. Lifelong learning of languages is essential for societies to sustain and benefit from multilingualism. Education, skills and labor policies should promote and recognize language learning for all, alongside positive appreciation of language diversity. Children and adults should be able to access integrated and continuous opportunities to develop, enrich and extend their language abilities throughout their lives.

A new paradigm of education is needed that includes traditional and alternative systems of knowledge and leverages modern technologies. Sites for active language learning go well beyond schools and higher education institutions. Streets, homes, social networks, digital environments, and refugee support settings can all actively promote learning and appreciation of languages.

Translation and Interpreting

These services are integral to the design and delivery of public services and information exchange in multilingual societies. Equitable participation in health, education, economic and legal environments relies on freely available and professional language mediation.

CALL TO ACTION

Stakeholders who can drive change include researchers and teachers; community workers, civil society and non-governmental organizations; cultural and media voices; governments and public officials; business and commercial interests; aid and development agencies; and foundations and trusts. **We call on them all to help:**

- Develop language policies, practices and technologies that support cohesive and dynamic societies with positive attitudes to multilingualism and plurilingualism.
- Actively support language rights, diversity and citizenship in official documentation and public messaging.
- Tackle all instances of discrimination, prejudice, bias and inequality associated with language and literacy.
- Recognize that minorities, migrants and refugees possess high linguistic capital that is of great value for our present and future world.

In their unique way, each of these stakeholder groups can embrace and support multilingualism for social progress, social justice, and participatory citizenship. Together, we can take action to safeguard the cultural and knowledge treasure house of multilingualism for future generations.

¹ *Language Atlas*, UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>

² "40% don't access education in a language they understand," UNESCO: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/40_dont_access_education_in_a_language_they_understand-1/

³ "617 million children and adolescents not getting the minimum in reading and math," UNESCO: <https://en.unesco.org/news/617-million-children-and-adolescents-not-getting-minimum-reading-and-math>

⁴ *World Migration Report 2015*, International Organization for Migration: <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2015>

⁵ *The Fifth Largest Country*, Population Connection: <http://www.populationconnection.org/article/fifth-largest-country/>

⁶ *Sustainable Development Goals*, United Nations <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>