



## The Hague International Model United Nations

**Forum:** Special Conference on Culture & Heritage 1 (SPCCH1)

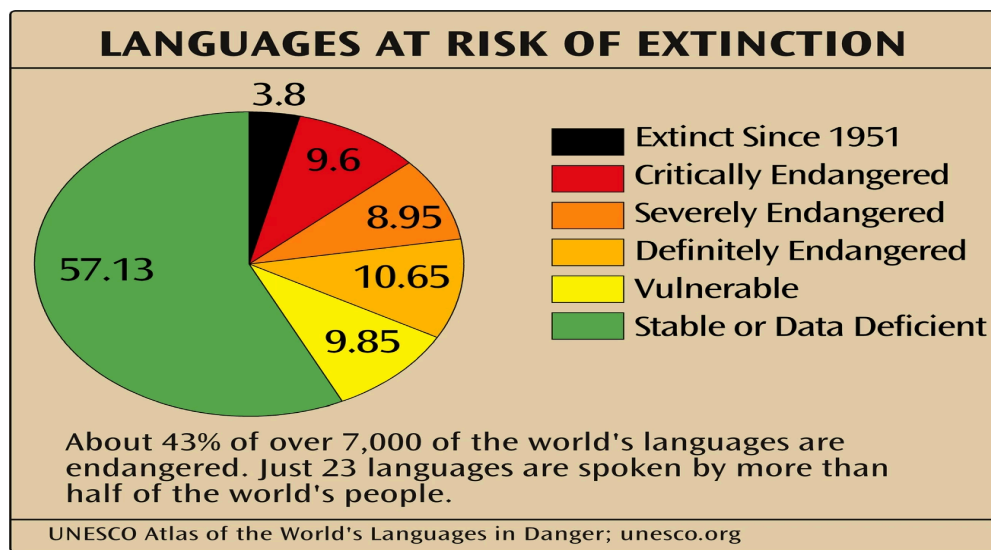
**Issue:** Addressing the Threat of Language Loss and Promoting Language Diversity

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**Position:** Deputy President

### Introduction

Language is the foundation of cultural identity, social continuity, and knowledge transmission. As globalisation continues to increase, simultaneously linguistic diversity decreases, and at a concerning high rate. UNESCO estimates that more than 40% of the world's spoken languages are endangered, with many at risk of becoming extinct within the next century.<sup>1</sup> Out of the more than 7,000 languages spoken globally, nearly half of them are estimated to be endangered.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1: Endangered Languages Data Chart**

Source: <https://www.theglobaleducationproject.org>

The decline of minority and indigenous languages is caused by multiple factors, including the dominance of global languages, urban migration, assimilationist policies, insufficient intergenerational

transmission, limited representation in education systems, and technological marginalization.<sup>3</sup> Language loss is linked to the marginalization of the communities that speak these native languages, which results in reduced civic participation, limited access to resources, and reduced control over cultural identity.<sup>4</sup>

This issue is significant due to its long term impact. Once a language becomes extinct, its cultural memory and historical narratives disappear permanently.<sup>5</sup> Language diversity is recognized as a foundational concept of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to inclusive education, reduced inequalities, and strong institutions.<sup>6</sup> Addressing language loss is therefore not limited to cultural protection; it also supports inclusive policies and equitable access to public services.<sup>7</sup>

## Definition of Key Terms

### Endangered Language

A language classified as vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered, or extinct according to UNESCO's scale. An endangered language is a language at significant risk of falling out of use, typically due to decreasing numbers of native speakers or sociopolitical pressures.<sup>8</sup>

### Language Revitalization

The process of reversing language decline through community based education, documentation, policy support and cultural initiatives.<sup>9</sup>

### Linguistic Rights

The rights of individuals and communities to use, maintain and develop their languages in private and public life. This includes access to education, media, and legal systems in one's language.<sup>10</sup>

### Mother-Tongue Education

Instruction provided in a learner's first language. Mother-tongue education strengthens language maintenance.<sup>11</sup>

### Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Non-physical cultural elements such as oral traditions, performing arts and rituals. Many aspects of ICH depend on language for it to be passed down generations.<sup>12</sup>

### Intergenerational Transmission

The passing down of a language from older generations to younger members.

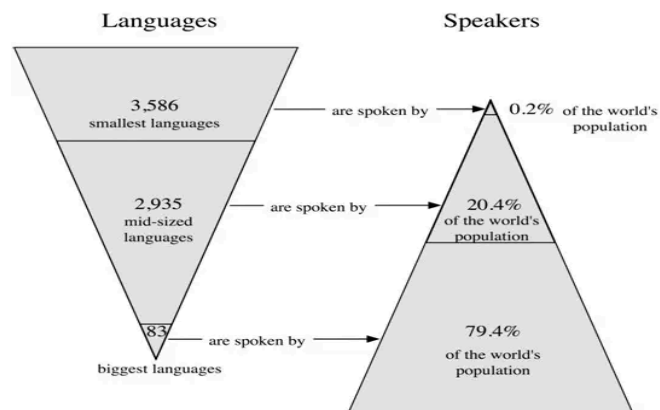
## Background Information

Currently the pace of language loss is accelerating dramatically. UNESCO estimates that a language disappears every two weeks.

### Global Causes of language loss

#### *Globalization and Dominant Languages*

The growing use of major global languages like English, Mandarin, Spanish, and French has led many communities to change their language preferences, particularly among younger generations that are seeking economic opportunities. While multilingualism can be beneficial, it can also create situations where smaller languages are overlooked or considered less important. The digital world also has an impact, as most online platforms and tools support only a few major languages, making endangered languages harder for young speakers to access or use.



**Figure 2: Effect of Globalization on Global Languages**

Source: <https://zinglanguages.com/effects-of-globalization-on-language/>

#### *Forced Assimilation and Colonial Legacies*

Historical assimilation policies play a major role in decreasing linguistic diversity. Residential school systems, language restrictions, and punitive policies in past colonial regions affected the process of passing on Indigenous languages.

#### *Climate Change and Displacement*

Environmental damage, rising sea levels and resource scarcity have displaced many communities whose languages are already vulnerable. Moreover, migration due to climate issues disrupts generational learning and reduces the contexts in which minority languages are spoken.

## Impacts of language loss

When a language disappears, people can lose access to important knowledge that has been passed down through generations, such as traditional medical practices and cultural traditions. Losing a language can also weaken a community's sense of identity, making it harder for people to feel connected to one another. There are practical consequences as well: the disappearance of a language limits learning opportunities for minority groups and makes it more difficult for them to take part in public affairs.

## International response

UNESCO has led many efforts, including creating the 'Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger' and declaring 2022–2032 as the "International Decade of Indigenous Languages" to encourage cooperation between governments, researchers and communities<sup>13</sup>. Regional bodies such as the African Union, the European Union, and ASEAN have developed programmes to support multilingualism and promote minority language rights. However, progress is still inconsistent, as many languages continue to be at risk due to limited financial resources, political barriers and a lack of long term institutional support.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United Nations (UN) and International Involvement

UNESCO remains the leading UN agency addressing language endangerment through research, initiatives, and global awareness campaigns. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the Human Rights Council also play central roles in protecting linguistic rights within their mandates.

- UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 17 October 2003
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 13 September 2007 (A/RES/61/295)

### Canada

Canada faces major challenges related to Indigenous language loss, mainly affecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The Indigenous Languages Act (2019) created federal support mechanisms for revitalization and established the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. Canada promotes bilingual programs but continues to face barriers rooted in the historical legacy of residential schools.

### India

India is one of the world's most linguistically diverse countries, with hundreds of languages at risk. While the Constitution recognizes 22 scheduled languages, many minority languages lack institutional support. India has made progress through digital archiving and bilingual education initiatives.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1953	UNESCO releases its first major report supporting the use of mother tongues in education.
December, 18 <sup>th</sup> , 1992	Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
November, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2001	UNESCO Universal declaration on cultural diversity.
2019	International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL 2019) declared by the UN General Assembly to highlight risks to Indigenous languages worldwide.
June, 2024	UNESCO convened an Ad-Hoc Expert Committee meeting for the World Atlas of Languages in Danger.
March, 2025	National and global consultations on Indigenous language preservation and technology integration organised by UNESCO.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

### UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. 1992 (A/RES/47/135)

This UN resolution affirmed the rights of minority groups to freely use, maintain, and develop their languages. It called on states to protect linguistic identity through education, culture, and public participation. Despite its strong principles, it is non-binding, meaning that several states did not fully implement language protections in national law.

## UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). September 2007 (A/RES/61/295)

UNDRIP affirmed Indigenous peoples' rights to use, develop, and revitalize their languages and to establish education systems in their mother tongues. However, as a declaration rather than a treaty, compliance varies, and some states have been slow to adopt Indigenous-language legislation.

## Possible Solutions

### Integrating Minority and Indigenous Languages into National Sustainable Development Policies

Integrating linguistic diversity into development planning ensures minority- language speakers can access essential services and participate fully in national programmes. Multilingual approaches in education, health, and local governance help reduce exclusion and strengthen community participation.

### Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks

Strengthening legal and policy frameworks provides protection for minority and Indigenous languages. Legislation supporting mother-tongue education and multilingual public services helps prevent language loss. Effective policies could encourage governments to allocate resources and maintain long-term commitments to safeguarding linguistic diversity.

## Endnotes

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## Appendix

- <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-hosts-ad-hoc-expert-meeting-world-atlas-languages>  
[UNESCO](#)
- <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-launches-world-atlas-languages-celebrate-and-protect-linguistic-diversity> [UNESCO](#)
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