

Advocating for linguistic diversity to make Europe stronger

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Introduction

Europe boasts a rich tapestry of linguistic backgrounds, with over 200 languages indigenous to Europe from at least 5 different language families. These languages are repositories of unique cultural identities, histories, and traditions. Preserving linguistic diversity is thus essential for safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage and promoting cultural pluralism.

The fact that Europeans speak that many different languages in Europe might be seen as a challenge to political integration and governance. However, it also reflects the continent's commitment to democratic principles and cultural pluralism. By promoting linguistic rights, language equality, and multilingualism in public institutions, Europe can strengthen democratic participation and ensure that linguistic minorities have a voice in decision-making processes.

Currently, some decision-making processes do not sufficiently take into account the views of users of European languages that are not part of the group of 24 official EU languages. As pointed out by the *European Union of the Deaf* and the *European Language Equality Network* (ELEN), there is still a long way to go regarding minoritised European languages (including sign languages and spoken languages).

Linguistic diversity plays a pivotal role in shaping individual and collective identities. For many Europeans, language is not merely a tool of communication but a core aspect of their identity. Embracing linguistic diversity fosters inclusivity, allowing all speakers of any language to

express themselves fully and participate in societal life without fear of marginalization or discrimination.

Linguistic diversity is not only a fundamental aspect of Europe's cultural heritage but also a source of strength, resilience, and creativity. Embracing and promoting linguistic diversity is essential for fostering inclusive societies, driving economic growth, strengthening democratic institutions, and enhancing Europe's global standing in the 21st century.

Actions made in Europe

As it has been reflected in the Recommendation 1134 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and more precisely on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted in 1992 and signed by 33 member states, European institutions have the duty of promoting all European languages.

This need was also included in the "Report on the final outcome" of the Conference on the Future of Europe, specifically in proposal 48: "Minority and regional languages require additional protection, taking note of the Council of Europe Convention on Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities". This Conference had the participation of 10,000 European young people. Some EU's education and culture programmes have provided support for language learning projects. Through funding programmes, such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, the EU has supported language learning and linguistic diversity, for example through mobility activities, cooperation projects and support for European Capitals of Culture.

Thanks to these programmes, some successful projects are currently promoting learning and the visibility of regional and minority languages in Europe. The Creative Europe programme also supports literary translation to allow wider access to important literary works and maintain linguistic diversity in the EU.

In some cases, the regulation has been successful and has increased the use of the languages, such as Basque, Ukrainian or Latvian. Efforts are also being made for Catalan, Irish and Saami languages. But in other countries, despite these regulations adopted during the 1990s and early 2000s, globalization is damaging the health of some of our languages. In consequence, more efforts are needed to ensure Europe is keeping its diverse languages.

As representatives of Europe's young citizens, the members of the European Youth Forum are fully committed to maintaining and strengthening the linguistic diversity that we inherited from past generations.

Call to action

With the aim of achieving the longevity of all European languages, the YFJ calls on:

- **All the Member States of the Council of Europe to make** efforts so that no European language is lost during this century. This includes signing and ratifying the European

Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and not to oppose proposals for the incorporation of working languages in European institutions. All languages, regardless of the number of speakers, including sign languages, are components of a country's rich cultural heritage, and European countries should take stronger and more concrete steps to recognize all languages within their borders and protect their use.

- **European institutions** to enable and promote further linguistic diversity in their internal working languages and guarantee linguistic rights by accepting languages proposed by member States, such as Catalan, which was proposed by Spain to the Council of the European Union in 2024. European institutions must also invest more resources in producing materials that facilitate language learning, protecting and promoting all languages, and enabling wider citizens' access to translation and interpretation services by those who might need them.

Additionally, The Council of Europe, in collaboration with the European Union, should further promote The European Day of Languages as an opportunity to raise awareness in multilingualism and inclusion. To enhance its impact, greater funding and resources should be allocated for the organization of events and materials for this occasion. This could significantly boost local and regional efforts to preserve linguistic diversity.

- **Its National Youth Councils and other member organizations** to evaluate their current language use policies, consider any potential impacts of language use in their activities, and encourage the use of different national languages in their work whenever possible. This includes the production of informational materials and campaigns in minority languages in the areas within the organizations' scope. Additionally, they are encouraged to regularly organize activities that promote the use of local languages and enable cross-cultural learning.
- **The European citizens and civil society** to be aware of the value of linguistic diversity and to share these values with others. The will of people is that all languages need to be kept alive, such as addressing solutions to language rights issues at international, national, regional and local levels.