

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Council of Europe Language Policy

I. Introduction and statement of purpose

1. Introduction

Under Article 12 of its Statute, English and French are the Council of Europe's official languages.

Bilingualism contributes to the fundamental values of the Organisation and helps to promote democracy, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

The quality of written and oral communication is a crucial factor for the image and reputation of the Council of Europe and plays a part in building trust in the goals and principles set out in its Statute.

2. Statement of purpose

The Council of Europe has adopted the present Language Policy to clarify the application of the principle of parity between the two official languages, ensure the quality of bilingual communication, both oral and written, and promote multilingualism. In the firm belief that its values and many of its activities and international instruments are of universal relevance, the Council of Europe aims with this Policy to improve the effectiveness, outcomes, transparency and accessibility of its activities among a broader range of target audiences and with wider geographical reach.

II. Aim and scope

The Language Policy shall apply to all members of the Organisation's Secretariat,¹ who are responsible for ensuring the proper application of the principles it sets out.

The Registry of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare shall apply the provisions of this Policy in line with the rules that apply specifically to them and with their respective practices.

¹ For the purposes of this policy, "Secretariat members" shall mean permanent, local and temporary staff of the Council of Europe, seconded officials, trainees and study visitors.

1. Use of the official languages

i. Internal communication

The Administration shall seek to communicate with individual Secretariat members in the official language of the latter's choice.

Compliance with the principle of parity between the two official languages shall be ensured at meetings attended by all staff.

The needs of the service may require that Secretariat members use one official language rather than the other when performing their duties.

Regardless of the medium used (print or digital), internal communication resources shall be distributed in both official languages.

As far as possible, the tools provided to staff members shall be available in both official languages.

ii. External communication

In the interest of clear, accurate and effective oral communication, everyone shall be free to express themselves in the official language of their choice.

Where possible, written institutional communication shall be in both official languages. The Organisation shall apply a pragmatic and inclusive editorial and translation policy, giving priority to essential content and adapting to the needs of its target audiences. Depending on its impact and audience, some content may therefore be translated on a selective basis into third languages.

This policy covers communication on social media, sector-specific websites and other types of event-based or specific communication media where financial and human resources so permit.

2. Use of non-official languages

i. Provisions in the Statute

Under Article 12 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, the Rules of Procedure of the Committee of Ministers and of the Parliamentary Assembly shall determine in what circumstances and under what conditions languages other than the official languages may be used.

ii. Working languages

The Parliamentary Assembly,² the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (hereinafter, “the Congress”)³ and the European Audiovisual Observatory⁴ may use working languages in addition to the official languages.

The Council of Europe shall make the appropriate budgetary and logistical arrangements for use of the working languages during meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress and the European Audiovisual Observatory.

iii. Other languages

In accordance with the provisions in force, languages other than the official and working languages may be used by:

- the Committee of Ministers;⁵
- the Parliamentary Assembly;⁶
- the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities;⁷
- Conferences of Specialised Ministers;
- intergovernmental committees.⁸

In exceptional circumstances, the Secretary General may decide that interpreting and translation services shall be provided at the Organisation’s expense for languages other than the official⁹ and working languages.

Depending on needs, languages other than the official languages may be used during visits and activities of the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, country visits by monitoring mechanisms and in co-operation activities.

The Organisation may use other languages, in particular in the work of its external offices, in co-operation activities with the European Union, for translation of case-law and conventions or for the dissemination of key information on certain of its activities.

² See Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, Rule 28.3.

³ See Rules and Procedures of the Congress, Rule 104.

⁴ See Resolution CM/Res(2020)49 concerning amendments to the Statute of the European Audiovisual Observatory, Article 7.3, and Rules of Procedure of the Executive Council of the Observatory.

⁵ See Rules of Procedure of the Committee of Ministers, Rule 12 (b).

⁶ See Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly, Rule 29.2.

⁷ See Rules and Procedures of the Congress, Rule 105.

⁸ See Resolution CM/Res(2021)3-consolidated, Appendix 1, Article 6 (c).

⁹ See Resolution CM/Res(2021)3-consolidated, Appendix 1, Article 6 (b) [budget for non-official languages]

The use of other languages shall be aimed at ensuring the most appropriate dissemination of institutional content and raising its profile. Such use of other languages shall be considered in view of the needs expressed, the resources available and the impact expected.

III. Editorial policy

1. General principles

The Council of Europe shall produce high-quality communication material, in English and French, regardless of the medium used (print or digital), and subject to the available financial resources.

The editorial policy shall be supplemented with guidelines.

2. Quality and effectiveness of written communication

The Council of Europe shall ensure that the process of translation, revision and proofreading of the texts most important for its image and credibility is performed by the language services.

To ensure the effectiveness and clarity of the Organisation's written communication, originating entities shall provide high-quality texts in one of the two official languages, placing emphasis on clarity and conciseness. The language services shall provide the text in the other official language, in partnership with the originating entities.

3. Language checking

The linguistic accuracy of original documents must be checked. Language checking shall be performed for the purpose of producing high-quality bilingual texts. This shall involve checking the logic, accuracy and consistency of texts, and producing documents free of ambiguities, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, in line with the Council of Europe's guidelines. Language checking shall give rise to specific comments made for the purpose of improving drafting skills and eliminating recurring errors.

Language checking shall be performed by qualified individuals with excellent command of the original language of the documents and, where appropriate, relevant expertise.

IV. Use of new technology and artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the context of the Language Policy

The Organisation shall actively monitor developments in the field of language technology and AI. It shall assess the relevance of these innovations for improving the operational effectiveness of the processes of interpreting, translation, drafting and production of documents and publications, without undermining the quality or integrity of the work concerned and while preserving and capitalising on human expertise. Such assessment shall be conducted in accordance with specific quality, efficiency and ethical criteria agreed in consultation with the Organisation's language and IT services.

The Organisation intends to use new technology responsibly, ethically and effectively under its Language Policy. To this end, it shall determine the professional skills and profiles needed to make the best use of new technology and shall provide continued training and professional development for its staff.

In the context of overall AI governance in the Organisation, good practices for the use of new technology and AI shall be put in place, for instance:

- assessing tools before their introduction in line with measurable criteria in terms of performance, reliability, confidentiality, and suitability for specific needs;
- continued training for staff in new technology, including the development of post-editing skills for AI texts and critical review of results;
- implementing a robust risk-management system, involving the identification and mitigation of potential biases, the protection of personal and sensitive data and regular checks to ensure compliance with ethical and regulatory standards;
- ensuring transparency regarding all use of AI in language production, with clear indication of content produced solely or mainly with automatic assistance.

V. Roles and responsibilities

1. Directorate of Human Resources

i. Recruitment

Vacant posts which are to be filled through an international recruitment procedure shall be published in both official languages. Candidates may apply in the official language of their choice.

In order to recruit the best qualified staff while ensuring better representation of under-represented member States, the language requirements in individual recruitment procedures

may be confined to one official language (English or French) depending on the reference job concerned. Where warranted by objective and reasonable needs, a preference for English or French, or a requirement for knowledge of both official languages and, where applicable, a non-official language, may be expressly indicated in the list of eligibility criteria.

A goal of progress in the other official language shall be set and the results achieved shall be taken into account in the assessment performed for the purpose of converting a fixed-term contract into an open-ended contract. Such progress shall be reviewed in the assessment of staff members conducted in accordance with Articles IV and V of the Staff Regulations and the corresponding Staff Rules.

ii. Training

Training in the official languages shall be provided on a priority basis for staff recruited on fixed-term contracts which may be converted to open-ended contracts. Tests of proficiency levels shall be carried out.

The Organisation shall facilitate and, subject to the available resources, finance training in other languages that respond to the Organisation's needs (working languages of the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Audiovisual Observatory, language of the host country for external offices, needs of the Visitors' Service, sign language for greater language accessibility, etc.).

2. Major Administrative Entities

Major Administrative Entities shall ensure the quality and the translation of written communication, regardless of the medium used (print or digital), as well as the protection of intellectual property rights, in particular by allowing the necessary lead time for high-quality written bilingual communication.

They shall also ensure compliance with parity between the two official languages in oral communication at meetings held to implement the Organisation's programme of activities.

Where AI tools are used, Major Administrative Entities shall take all necessary steps to maintain ongoing human oversight.

They shall ensure the linguistic diversity of their staff so as to be able to carry out their remits efficiently and effectively, and provide a diverse, equitable and inclusive working environment.

3. Language services

The language services shall be responsible for implementing the principles set out in this Language Policy and ensuring the quality of the Council of Europe's written and oral multilingual communication.

The language services shall provide the necessary linguistic advice and guidance to guarantee the requisite quality standards for a leading international organisation.

The language services shall ensure the efficient and appropriate use of internal services, outside service providers and IT tools, while taking account of the challenges of oral bilingual or multilingual communication and the categorisation of the documents, publications and webpages of the Organisation's various entities, in line with the editorial policy.

In order to disseminate and promote among all groups the Organisation's principles and fundamental values, particularly equal rights, the right to information and respect for diversity and inclusion, the language services provided shall, where possible, include accessible communication for persons with specific needs.

i. Translation services

The Organisation shall provide translation services that meet professional quality standards, performed by duly qualified individuals recruited for that purpose.

The Registry of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare shall have their own translation and language checking services, which shall provide services that meet professional standards, in accordance with specific conditions and rules.

ii. Interpreting services

The Organisation shall provide interpreting services that meet professional quality standards, performed by duly qualified individuals recruited for that purpose.

iii. Documents and Publications Production

The Organisation shall provide editorial services for the preparation of statutory texts and publications. It shall also provide manuscript proofreading services, in English and French, in accordance with the language rules in force for each language, and in compliance with the Council of Europe's editorial policy and graphic charter and the typographical conventions followed by the publishing/press sector in English- and French-speaking countries. It shall ensure the quality of the texts (original and translated) with the aid of professional tools that guarantee compliance with copyright legislation.

The Organisation shall ensure that editorial co-ordination is performed by duly qualified individuals recruited for that purpose.

iv. External service providers

Translation, interpreting and proofreading services provided by freelance professionals must meet professional quality standards.

External service providers shall be subject to a process of accreditation and assessment of their professional skills, implemented by the relevant language service to meet the needs and requirements of a leading international organisation.

v. Focal Point for Bilingualism

The Secretary General shall appoint a Focal Point for Bilingualism, who shall be the focal point for the proper implementation of the Council of Europe's Language Policy and compliance with the principle of parity between the two official languages. Their role is to liaise between the various stakeholders to ensure compliance with the Language Policy.

To that end, any reports of non-compliance with the Language Policy shall be submitted to them. Such reports must be based on specific and concrete information. The Focal Point for Bilingualism shall analyse the validity of the reports and, where necessary, issue requests for corrective action to the entities concerned to bring them into line with the Language Policy. In addition, on their own initiative or at the request of the entities, the Focal Point for Bilingualism shall offer support and expertise with a view to identifying possible general corrective measures. Lastly, in their annual report, they shall monitor trends in the Secretariat concerning implementation of the Language Policy.

VI. Implementation and monitoring

1. Budgetary and logistical arrangements

The Council of Europe shall make the appropriate budgetary and logistical arrangements to ensure compliance with the bilingualism provided for in its Statute and shall allocate adequate resources for providing services that meet professional quality standards.

The needs and costs associated with implementation of the Language Policy – in particular, language checking, translation, interpreting and publication – shall be included in the draft Programme and Budget submitted to the Committee of Ministers for consideration and approval.

2. Annual monitoring report

An annual monitoring report on implementation of the Language Policy shall be submitted to the Secretary General by the Focal Point for Bilingualism in co-operation with the Directorate of Programme and Budget.

The report shall include monitoring of corrective measures taken to ensure compliance with the Language Policy, a review of compliance with the principle of parity between the two official languages in each Major Administrative Entity and monitoring of the use of the funds allocated for implementing the Language Policy.

3. Communication regarding services

To enable the highest quality standards to be maintained both at Headquarters and in the external offices, requesting entities shall be asked to provide detailed feedback on the standard of service provided by the language services.

4. Guidelines and other implementing rules

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe hereby instructs the Directorate General of Administration to draw up guidelines and other implementing rules, in consultation with the entities responsible for communication, the Staff Committee and the Major Administrative Entities, so as to enable the principles set out in this Language Policy to be implemented.

VII. Final provisions

This policy shall enter into force on the date of its signature. The provisions of the memorandum of 17 October 2017 on the focal point for bilingualism shall be repealed as from the same date.

Alain BERSET
Secretary General of the Council of Europe
26 August 2025