

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 14 December 2023

MIN-LANG (2023) IRIA 5

**EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES**

**Information Document**  
**on the implementation of the**  
**Recommendations for Immediate Action**  
**based on the 7th monitoring cycle**

**Submitted by Germany**



*Mid-Term Report*  
**following the Seventh Report  
of the Federal Republic of Germany**

in accordance with Article 15 (1)

of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

**2023**

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## **A. Preliminary remarks**

The Mid-Term Report following the Seventh Report of the Federal Republic of Germany in accordance with Article 15 (1) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Language Charter) was prepared by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) in cooperation with other federal ministries and the responsible state authorities, and in consultation with the organisations/associations of the speakers of the languages protected by the Charter.

The federal associations were invited to share their views about the implementation of the Language Charter in Germany; their views do not necessarily reflect those of the authorities. The comments by the various associations can be found in Section F of this report.

In accordance with the outlines set out in CM(2019)69, this report covers the period from May 2021 to October 2023 and relates to the recommendations for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts.

General information about the regional and minority languages protected in Germany is included in the First Report of the Federal Republic of Germany in accordance with Article 15 (1) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, pages 3 to 28. That report can be accessed via the website of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt/minderheiten/minderheitenrecht/minderheitenrecht-node.html> (as at 10 October 2023)

## **B. Updated geographic and demographic information**

The geographic and demographic information has not changed in the reporting period.

## C. General developments

The first part of this report addresses general developments concerning the protection and promotion of regional and minority languages in the Federal Republic of Germany since the previous report, which was sent in English translation to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on 27 July 2021.

### I. Changes to the overall framework

#### 1. Second state plan to strengthen the Lower Sorbian language

In June 2022, the *government of the federal state of Brandenburg* adopted the 2nd state plan to strengthen the Lower Sorbian language / 2. Krajny plan k zmócnjenju dolnosěrbskeje rěcy (parliamentary document 7/5738)<sup>2</sup>. This plan replaces the first plan of 2016 and for the first time breaks down the planned state measures according to language planning categories and objectives in order to support the process of revitalising the Lower Sorbian language. The 36 planned measures are to be implemented in addition to legal obligations under the Language Charter and under state law. The individual measures make explicit reference to relevant provisions in the language charter.

#### 2. Paragraph on the protection and promotion of the Low German regional language added to the Brandenburg state constitution

On 5 July 2022, the *Brandenburg* state parliament decided to amend the state constitution. A fourth paragraph was added to Article 34 (Art and Culture). It reads as follows: “The state protects and promotes the cultivation of the Low German language.” Following this constitutional amendment, Brandenburg’s Ministry of Science, Research and Culture (which is responsible for such matters) added a page to its website containing information about Low German and a link to the Council of Europe’s website on the Language Charter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab\\_5700/5738.pdf](https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab_5700/5738.pdf) (as at 10 October 2023)

<sup>3</sup> <https://mwfk.brandenburg.de/mwfk/de/kultur/niederdeutsch-plattdueuetsch/#> (as at 10 October 2023)



### 3. Request to consider a law protecting the Low German language in the federal state of Brandenburg

In 2021, the state parliament of *Brandenburg* asked the state government to consider a law protecting the Low German language. The state government's report (parliamentary document 7/6603)<sup>4</sup>, submitted in November 2022, concluded that such a law would help to protect the Low German language and promote its use. Accordingly, in January 2023, the state parliament asked the state government to prepare a draft version of the law by the end of 2023. The process has begun. An update on the progress of the law can be expected in Germany's Eighth Report on Regional or Minority Languages.

### 4. Multilingualism strategy for Brandenburg

In February 2023, the state government of *Brandenburg* adopted the "Multilingualism strategy: Assessment and strategic development of linguistic diversity in the education system in the state of Brandenburg" (parliamentary document 7/7278)<sup>5</sup>. The strategy makes reference to the Language Charter and provides recommendations for action in the short, medium and long term, including for the minority language of Lower Sorbian and the regional language of Low German. The implementation of short-term recommendations is expected to begin in 2023.

### 5. Adoption of commitments under the Language Charter for Lower Sorbian and Low German

In March 2023, to implement a 2021 parliamentary resolution, the state government of *Brandenburg* approved a report on the adoption of new commitments under Part III of the Language Charter with respect to the minority language of Lower Sorbian and the regional language of Low German. The report was then submitted to the state parliament (parliamentary document 7/7476)<sup>6</sup>. On 21 September 2023, the state parliament of Brandenburg

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab\\_6600/6603.pdf](https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab_6600/6603.pdf) (as at 10 October 2023)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab\\_7200/7278.pdf](https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab_7200/7278.pdf) (as at 10 October 2023)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab\\_7400/7476.pdf](https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladedoku/w7/drs/ab_7400/7476.pdf) (as at 10 October 2023)

agreed to adopt 13 commitments for the Lower Sorbian language and 13 commitments for the Low German language (parliamentary document 7/8437).

## **6. Promotion of the Upper and Lower Sorbian languages as part of measures to support structural change in the coal-mining region of Lusatia**

Federal funding has been made available to support structural change in coal-mining areas. Since 2022, this funding has been used to plan and carry out projects promoting Upper and Lower Sorbian language and culture in the lignite-mining region of Lusatia (which includes parts of Saxony and Brandenburg).

Under section 17 no. 31 of the Coal Region Investment Act (InvKG), the Foundation for the Sorbian People will receive federal funding of up to 19 million euros by the end of 2031 for the implementation of measures to preserve the Sorbian language, culture and tradition in the relevant areas of Brandenburg. Funding will now be available for the following projects in the state of Brandenburg based on the funding guidelines “Sorbian language and culture as an aspect of structural change”, which were adopted by the foundation’s board on 2 March 2022:

- “Establishing a department for regional development and the protection of minorities as part of the Sorbian Institute”
- “Digital archive of Sorbian and Lusatian language and culture (documenting and enhancing the value of cultural heritage)” – the Sorbian Institute
- “Enhancing the value of intangible cultural heritage in the German-Slavic context” – the Domowina Lower Lusatian project
- “Pilot project: Master plan to revitalise the Lower Sorbian language, including the development of innovative forms of language teaching to expand regional multilingualism” – the Domowina Lower Lusatian project
- “Pilot project to develop Sorbian cultural tourism”
- “Expansion of the Sorbian-German film network “Łužycofilm” – the Foundation for the Sorbian People

The projects listed above were chosen by Brandenburg’s Ministry of Science, Research and Culture, which is responsible for the national minority of Sorbs and Wends in Brandenburg,

together with Lower Sorbian civil society representatives. The projects were then recommended to the Federal Ministry of Interior and Community for implementation in the state of Brandenburg.

Under section 17 no. 31 of the Coal Region Investment Act (InvKG), the Foundation for the Sorbian People will also receive federal funding of up to 42.5 million euros by the end of 2038 for the implementation of measures to preserve the Sorbian language, culture and tradition in the relevant areas of Saxony.

The funding guidelines “Sorbian language and culture as an aspect of structural change” for projects in the **Free State of Saxony** were drawn up by the Foundation for the Sorbian People and adopted by the foundation’s board on 2 March 2022. It is up to the foundation’s board to decide which projects should receive funding based on these funding guidelines. On 24 March 2022, the foundation’s board decided to convene an advisory committee. That committee is now drawing up a recommendation on facilitating the selection of projects for funding.

Currently, the following measures are being implemented based on the funding guidelines for projects in the state of Saxony:

- “Sorbian experiMINT campus in Radibor – creation and development of an attractive Sorbian language environment outside of the family and educational institutions in the municipality of Radibor” – the Sorbian parents’ initiative, Radibor
- “Sorbian\_Media\_Innovation – promoting media skills in the Sorbish language” – the Sorbian Schools Association
- “Building a network for the management of regional identity and language” – the Domowina association of Lusatian Sorbs
- “Feasibility study – pilot project for culture across state borders in Lusatia – languages – cultural cycling route ‘Serbske impresije / Sorbian Impressions’” – the Sorbian cultural tourism association
- “Digitalisation centre” – the Sorbian Institute in Bautzen
- “The KRABAT experience – strengthening the economy and tourism in bilingual Lusatia” – the KRABAT association
- “Regeneration – reproduction – innovation – promoting the Sorbian cultural and creative economy across state borders”

## 7. Funding for the post of Academic Commissioner for Sater Frisian

Since 2020, the *federal state of Lower Saxony* has provided 30,000 euros annually to fund the post of an Academic Commissioner Sater Frisian. The post is funded through the Oldenburgische Landschaft, a regional association. The 2022 Federal Budget Act made it possible to ensure continuous federal funding for the post of Commissioner for Sater Frisian at the Oldenburgische Landschaft and to extend it to a full-time position. Thanks to this additional funding from the budget of the *Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI)*, the position has now been full-time since November 2022.

In the 2023 financial year, the 50.000 euros in funding provided by the BMI will be fully co-financed by the state of Lower Saxony.

In 2021 and 2022, under a joint initiative by the state of **Lower Saxony** and the **Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media (BKM)**, the municipality of Saterland was awarded state funding for projects of the Commissioner for Sater Frisian in the amount of 4,000 euros (2021) and 10,000 euros (2022) to develop an online grammar resource. In each year, the BKM provided twice that amount in federal funding. In addition, in 2022 and 2023, the municipality of Saterland has received state funding of 2,500 euros to train people interested in the Sater Frisian language to support teachers and carers in schools and day-care centres. The courses are provided by the Seelter Buund organisation.

## 8. Evaluation of the 2plus strategy of the Free state of Saxony

The “2plus” strategy (Konzept 2plus) has been evaluated since the 2022/23 school year. The aim of the evaluation is to record, analyse and assess how well the strategy is being implemented and to draw conclusions for the further work of schools and school supervisors. The evaluation includes surveys of school directors, teachers, pupils and parents on the following areas:

- School as a Sorbian language environment
- Conditions and support for schools in implementing the 2plus strategy
- Cooperation between schools and with preschool and public institutions
- Cooperation between schools and parents

The University of Leipzig agreed to carry out the survey.

The evaluation also includes an assessment of the language skills of all pupils in grade 8 – in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) – in the areas of listening, reading, speaking and writing. In the 2022/23 school year, a pilot phase has begun at three of the seven secondary schools in which the strategy will be implemented. The pilot phase of the language skills assessment has been successfully completed. During a 2plus event on 16 August 2023, the strategy, methodology and selected results of the language skills assessments were presented.

From the school year 2023/24 onwards, the language skills assessment of the grade 8 pupils is to be conducted every year for quality assurance purposes. The Sorbian Institute of Bautzen, the WITAJ Language Centre Bautzen and the University of Jena agreed to help carry out the language skills assessments.

## 9. Further developments

The federal state of **Rhineland-Palatinate** reports that since Germany's *Fifth Report on Regional or Minority Languages*, project funds have been made available for the first time to promote the culture and Romani language of the German Sinti and Roma<sup>7</sup>. The relevant funding guidelines were published in the Ministerial Gazette of the state government of Rhineland-Palatinate, 5 April 2023.

On 14 February 2023, the state cabinet decided to enter into negotiations with the Rhineland-Palatinate Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti & Roma, Landesverband Rheinland Pfalz e. V.) to further develop the framework agreement of 25 July 2005 with the aim of making it a state treaty. These negotiations will address questions concerning the protection, promotion and strengthening of the minority language Romani and the improvement of educational options for the national minority of German Sinti and Roma.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that some German Sinti and Roma consider themselves to be two distinct ethnic groups. At European level, the Council of Europe and others use the term "Roma" collectively to refer to Sinti and Roma as well as other groups. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community has consciously decided against this practice. As a result, the term "Roma" used in some of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee and the Committee of Ministers has been translated into German as "Sinti and Roma".

During the reporting period, a legally binding structure for the implementation of the Language Charter was implemented in the federal state of **Saarland**. On 13 April 2022, the state government of Saarland concluded a framework agreement with the Saarland Association of German Sinti and Roma.<sup>8</sup>

The protection and preservation of the Romani language as an expression of identity and cultural heritage is enshrined in Article 4 (“Language, Education and Culture”) of the framework agreement signed on 13 April 2022 between the state government and the Saarland Association of German Sinti and Roma. The state government of Saarland therefore considers it important to preserve and protect the language of the Sinti and Roma. Accordingly, in Saarland the Romani language is protected pursuant to the Language Charter and is an expression of cultural richness.

Article 7 of the framework agreement specifies the types of funding to be provided by the state government of Saarland: subject to budgetary legislation, the state government of Saarland strives to ensure long-term funding for the Saarland Association of German Sinti and Roma; the Saarland Association of German Sinti and Roma receives funding for staff and material expenses; and applications for funding will be granted, subject to the available budget, for projects addressing the historical legacy of the Sinti and Roma, projects to protect and preserve the Romani minority language and projects in the cultural and social spheres.

As regards the usage and teaching of the Romani language outside the minority community, Saarland refers to the position of the Saarland Association of German Sinti and Roma, which is neither to teach nor use the Romani language outside the minority community.

At the end of March 2023, thanks to the budget passed by the state parliament of **Schleswig-Holstein**, the Frisian Foundation received funding to establish and build an “educational institution for Frisian language teacher training, the development of teaching materials and the expansion of Frisian language classes”. The budget available for this project is 158,000 euros in 2023; 339,000 euros in 2024; and 481,000 euros as of 2025. To implement the project, the North Frisian Institute plans to set up a new department, the “Nord-

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.saarland.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/msgff/tp\\_familie\\_gleichstellung/downloads\\_integrations/download\\_rahmenvereinbarung\\_sinti\\_roma.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=3](https://www.saarland.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/msgff/tp_familie_gleichstellung/downloads_integrations/download_rahmenvereinbarung_sinti_roma.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3) (as at 10 October 2023)

friisk liirskap”; it drew up a preliminary plan in April 2023. This plan will be further developed together with Schleswig-Holstein’s Ministry of General Education and Vocational Training, Science, Research and Culture (MBWFK), the Institute for Quality Development in Schools in Schleswig-Holstein (IQSH), the Ferring Foundation, and with the participation of Friesisch language teachers. The aim is to conduct the first calls for tender in the third or fourth quarter of 2023 so that building work can get started.

In the second half of 2023, the state of *Schleswig-Holstein* is to provide funding for the building and launch of the “Low German media service – PLATTRADIO”, a project of the Schleswig-Holstein Heritage association (SHHB). Platradio will start operating on 1 September 2023 and will broadcast a programme every day between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. (“Söven bet Acht”) until the end of 2023. The programme will focus on current world and regional affairs, with news in Low German at 7:00 a.m. and 7:30 a.m., and with music and other spoken offerings. Also cooperating on the project are Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) and Offener Kanal Schleswig-Holstein, which will broadcast the programme. Platradio will also be broadcast via DAB+ and will have its own internet radio channel on PLATTRADIO.COM, where related texts, pictures and podcasts will also be available. Platradio uses Low German in its written and spoken forms according to the conventions of SASS (a publisher of Low German teaching materials). The project also has the strategic aim of expanding the use of Low German. An advisory committee supports this aim and also ensures that the programme relies on independent reporting. The target audience of the radio programme (and the associated online content) is not just speakers and learners of Low German but also educational institutions, which continuously need up-to-date and authentic materials for the teaching of Low German in Schleswig-Holstein.

The state of Schleswig-Holstein is providing this project with 125,000 euros in 2023.

## **II. Debate on the Charter languages in the German Bundestag, March 2023**

On 2 March 2023, to mark the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Language Charter in Germany, a debate on the Charter languages was held in the German Bundestag.

In the past, Bundestag debates on these languages have always been held in standard German. However, this debate was not just about the Charter languages but in some cases actually in those languages. Speeches and addresses were given in Low German, North Frisian, Danish and Sorbian. All parliamentary groups exercised their right to speak.

The Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities stressed that the Language Charter, together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Framework Convention), was the central agreement in Europe to preserve and promote national minorities and their specific languages and regional languages.

The initiative for the Bundestag debate came from the *Plattdeutsch* (Low German) working group, which was founded on 1 February 2022 by some Members of the Bundestag and native speakers of Low German. During the current parliamentary term, around 15 Members of the Bundestag have come together regularly from across different parliamentary groups and different regions in order to speak Low German. The *Plattdeutsch* working group is not part of the parliamentary structure and is therefore unofficial.

### **III. Discrimination against Frisian in the application of patent and trade mark law**

In June 2021, the chairman of the local heritage and culture association “Öömrang Ferian” brought to the attention of the minorities commissioner of the state of Schleswig-Holstein a current legal dispute between Öömrang Ferian and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO). The dispute concerned the fact that several descriptive terms and/or phrases from the Frisian language had been registered for EU trade mark protection by various applicants. Two specific cases were brought to the attention of Schleswig-Holstein’s minorities commissioner in June 2021: first, the registration of the term “Öömrang” by an American wine and spirits company; second, the registration of the phrase “Rüm hart, klaar Kiming” by a souvenir seller on the island of Sylt. The term “Öömrang” is a descriptive indication of people or things that come from the island of Amrum (Amrumer, Amrumian). The phrase “Rüm hart, klaar Kiming” is a traditional Frisian seafaring expression commonly used in colloquial Frisian, especially in the North Frisian Islands (“Broad heart, clear horizon”). In both cases, the trade mark applicant prohibited other persons from using the term for the marketing of



goods produced locally in North Frisia. In the light of these two cases, ethnic Frisians are now concerned that their language will be exploited for commercial profit, while they themselves are no longer allowed to use the protected terms to generate income for the preservation of their language and culture.

On hearing of this, the state of *Schleswig-Holstein* immediately contacted the President of the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA) and the Executive Director of the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) to discuss the “Öömrang” case. In August 2021, the EUIPO explained that regional and minority languages were generally taken into account under Regulation (EU) 2017/1001 (Article 7 (1) (c) on descriptive terms to designate goods or services), but that decisions on such matters were made according to the size of the population affected. The EUIPO said that in reaching its decisions it analysed the circumstances of each individual case.

In both cases, the size of the population affected was apparently considered too small for the descriptive indications in question to be refused registration. The DPMA also mentioned that regional or minority language expressions could often be registered in cases where the standard German equivalent of the term in question would not describe the product sufficiently and/or where the term in question was to be combined with a superimposed image to make its meaning clear. In view of this, it was said that in the case of the “Öömrang” trade mark application it should be borne in mind that although this term refers to a particular North Frisian dialect, in terms of the specific goods in question (in this case: “alcoholic drinks other than beer; wines, spirits, fruit-based spirits, brandy”) it is not directly descriptive, or at least does not distinguish them more closely. The mere fact that the word has a linguistic connection to the island of Amrum, or to the Frisian language spoken on that island, does not make it a descriptive geographical indication. According to the DPMA, the above-mentioned points support the eligibility for protection under trade mark law of the two applications and do not sustain the objections raised by the Öömrang Ferian association and the minorities commissioner.

From the end of 2021 to mid-2022, this issue was discussed in numerous committees at state and federal level. At a meeting of the Consultative Committee on Issues concerning the Frisian Ethnic Group at the BMI in August 2022, the Frisian Council North Section reported on the

discrimination against the Frisian language by the DPMA and the EUIPO. In response, Schleswig-Holstein's minorities commissioner agreed to propose to the EU Commissioners that the Commission should conduct an evaluation of Directive 2000/43/EC on implementing equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. In September 2022, he addressed the relevant EU Commissioners. The minorities commissioner proposed an amendment of the Directive to include discrimination on the grounds of "language". Next, the letters sent by the minorities commissioner were forwarded to the MEPs Niclas Herbst (of Germany's CDU party) and Rasmus Andresen (of Germany's Alliance 90/The Greens). Niclas Herbst then raised the issue with Loránt Vincze, an MEP and President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN). Mr Vincze proposed a presentation of this issue at a meeting of the "Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages" in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 14 September 2023. The Minister-President of Schleswig-Holstein also raised the matter during the first official visit by the Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Germany in November 2022.

In January 2023, Schleswig-Holstein's minorities commissioner contacted the head of the relevant EUIPO department to bring to her attention the EUIPO's discriminatory practice and to request that the current types of proceedings be changed in favour of regional and minority languages. The commissioner pointed out that the speaker populations of these languages were, by their nature, significantly smaller than the speaker populations of official EU languages, and that therefore the criterion of "speaker population" could not serve as the sole basis for assessing such matters. Later, in March 2023, the minorities commissioner sent a letter to the European Commission's Director-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. In this letter he proposed an amendment to Regulation (EU) 2017/1001 to strengthen the protection of regional and minority languages protected under international agreements or under national law in the member states. He proposed that a provision be added to the Regulation to the effect that regional and minority languages were not obliged to fulfil the criterion of having a large enough "population size".

In late March 2023, the EUIPO and the European Commission (Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs) sent replies to Schleswig-Holstein's mi-

minorities commissioner providing guidance on possible options for the Frisian side. The minorities commissioner then informed the central Frisian organisations in Schleswig-Holstein and proposed a joint initiative by all three of the main Frisian communities. The specific details of such an initiative is still under discussion.

As this issue is not only relevant for the Frisian communities, but could also affect the languages of other minorities in Europe, the minorities commissioner campaigned hard for the support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities during his visit to Flensburg in May 2023.

In early 2023, having first been informed of this matter during the meeting of the Consultative Committee on Issues concerning the Frisian Ethnic Group at the BMI in August 2022, the ***Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities*** wrote two separate letters to the Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ) and the EUIPO. In those letters she referred to the replies of the DPMA and the EUIPO to Schleswig-Holstein's minorities commissioner and pointed out that current trade mark registration practice did not take sufficient account of the fact that the North Frisian language was not a dialect of the German language but a separate minority language, granted special protection in Germany under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In her letter to the BMJ, the Federal Commissioner also explained that the DPMA – an executive agency of the BMJ – had not sufficiently acknowledged in its letter to the Minister-President of Schleswig-Holstein that the word “Öömrang” not only refers to the variety of North Frisian spoken in Amrum but is also used as a geographical indication of origin (Amrumer/Amrumian) in the North Frisian language. In both letters she referred to the special obligations to protect the North Frisian language under, among others, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and expressed her expectation that names in any of the minority or regional languages recognised in Germany should be granted the same safeguards against registration under trade mark law that were granted to names in standard German. She requested that steps therefore be taken to modify trade mark registration practice so as to allow full legitimacy and effectiveness for the special protection of minority and regional languages recognised in Germany.

In its reply of March 2023, the BMJ stated that there was no established case law on the eligibility for protection of descriptive terms from recognised minority languages. However, the BMJ added, such terms could be excluded from trade mark registration if they were recognised by a significant share of the relevant population as descriptive or customary in advertising. This would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Based on previous decisions by the Federal Patent Court regarding terms from other non-German languages, a term used in a minority language can, in principle, meet this criterion, said the BMJ. According to the BMJ, anyone can trigger a review of decisions made by the DPMA and the EUIPO on registered trade marks; this can be done by requesting that a trade mark be declared invalid. Moreover, even before a trade mark is registered it is possible, after publication of the trade mark application in the trade mark register, to indicate any circumstances preventing registration. If it transpires that terms from minority languages are systematically disadvantaged by the decision-making practice of the DPMA, the BMJ would take up this issue with the DPMA.

In its reply of April 2023, the EUIPO pointed out that, according to EU court rulings, grounds for refusing registration are not only applicable to official EU languages. What mattered, said the EUIPO, was that the language in question be understood in at least part of the EU by a significant share of the relevant population. The EUIPO claimed that all languages, regardless of their status, were treated equally in this respect. The EUIPO said that it might become aware of the meaning of a word contained in a trade mark either through the language test carried out during the examination procedure (before registration) or through observations from third parties. It was not yet possible for the EUIPO to carry out a language test as part of the examination procedure in all regional or minority languages of the EU. However, third parties may, in the pre-registration procedure, point to circumstances which preclude registration as an EU trade mark. According to the EUIPO, even after registration, an EU trade mark may be declared invalid if it is shown that it was registered in breach of an absolute ground for refusal. The EUIPO claimed to have rejected trade marks in the past because of their meaning in the Frisian language. This presumably refers to a word in the West Frisian language spoken in the Dutch province of Fryslân (Friesland).

In its opinion on Germany's Seventh Report in accordance with Article 15 (1) of the Language Charter, the Committee of Experts, in margin no. 58, called on the competent authorities to

examine and report on the legal situation in this case in the light of Article 7 (2) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The ***Federal Ministry of Justice*** sets out as follows the legal situation concerning the DPMA's registration of names in minority languages as trade marks:

During the registration procedure, the DPMA examines whether there are any absolute grounds for refusal of trade mark protection. Under section 8 (2) no. 2 of Germany's Trade Mark Act (MarkenG), trade marks are not eligible for registration if they "*consist exclusively of signs or indications which may serve, in trade, to designate [...] geographical origin [...]*", which is the purpose for which they are to be registered. That ground for refusal is in line with the public interest objective that all signs or indications which describe the characteristics of the goods or services in question may be freely used by all commercial businesses and are not reserved for one business only by virtue of their registration as a trade mark.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that, to date, there is no established case law on the eligibility for protection of descriptive terms in recognised minority languages. However, the Federal Patent Court (BPatG), in disputing the eligibility for protection of the Russian-language indication Секрет красоты (meaning "secretness of beauty") argued that a significant share of the general population within Germany's borders, especially those who learned Russian as a foreign language at school in East Germany, could understand the sign without difficulty.<sup>10</sup> Concerning Danish, on the other hand, the Federal Patent Court assessed that, at most, a low six-digit number of persons within Germany's borders had a basic knowledge of Danish vocabulary, and so the vast majority of the general population did not understand the phrase in question, and there were no grounds to refuse registration.<sup>11</sup>

Case law shows that geographical indications in minority languages can in fact be refused registration as a trade mark. This is on condition that the indications in question are descriptive in meaning and that they are recognised as such by at least a significant share of the relevant population. This must be decided on a case-by-case basis.

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<sup>9</sup> See ECJ Judgment 2004, 680 – BIOMILD – margin no. 35 et seq.; ECJ Judgment 2011, 1035 – no. 1000 – margin no. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Decision of 15 July 2014 – 24 W(pat) 503/13; see also ECJ Judgment 1999, 723 – Chiemsee – margin no. 52: "significant share"

<sup>11</sup> BPatG BeckRS 2016, 08845 – Lille Smuk

In terms of the current case, with a view to protecting North Frisian as a recognised minority language, existing legislation does provide opportunities to challenge the granting of trade mark protection for terms in regional and minority languages, making a review of the decision in the current case possible. For example, anyone can challenge decisions made by the DPMA by requesting that a trade mark be declared invalid (in accordance with section 50 (1) in conjunction with section 8 (2) nos. 1 and 2 of the Trade Mark Act). If, upon such a challenge, it should be found that “Öömrang” is a descriptive indication and therefore an absolute ground for refusal, the DPMA would declare the trade mark invalid.

With regard to the protection of other descriptive terms in minority languages, it should also be noted that natural or legal persons and certain associations may submit written observations before a trade mark is registered, in accordance with section 37 (6) of the Trade Mark Act, once the trade mark application has been published in the trade mark register. For example, it is possible to explain prior to a registration that a trade mark containing a name in a regional and minority language should not be registered due to its descriptive character. Should the Committee of Experts be of the view that any unequal treatment of descriptive terms in standard German and minority languages could be contrary to Germany’s Basic Law (GG), it should be pointed out that the characteristics referred to in Article 3 (3) sentence 1 of the Basic Law – which include language – must not be used, either directly or indirectly, as a basis for unequal treatment under the law.<sup>12</sup> However, according to prevailing doctrine, this does not include such rules which, despite being applied in the context of a stigmatised characteristic, do not discriminate between persons but apply uniformly to all individuals subject to the law.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG), the following can be added: According to Section 1 of the General Act on Equal Treatment, the purpose of the Act is to prevent or to stop discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. However, in principle, the Act is applicable only to

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<sup>12</sup> Federal Constitutional Court Decision (BVerfGE) 85, 191, marginal no. 52; Federal Constitutional Court Decision (BVerfGK) 1, 331, margin no. 17.

<sup>13</sup> See Langenfeld, in: Dürig/Herzog/Scholz, GG, 100th supplement, January 2023, Article 3 (3) margin no. 16; Boysen, in: v. Münch/Kunig, GG, 7th edition 2021, Article (3) margin no. 136; Starck, in: v. Mangoldt/Klein/Starck, GG, 6th edition 2010, Article 3 (3) margin no. 392; Sachs, in: Handbook of Public Law (HStR) VIII, 3rd edition 2010, section 182 margin no. 25.

certain civil-law contractual and employment relationships. And in view of this scope, it is unclear to what extent the Act would be applicable in the current case and to what extent a case could be made for discrimination in terms of a contract.

#### **IV. Annual implementation conference**

The implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Language Charter is accompanied by annual implementation conferences at the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community. These conferences are attended by: the federal ministries tasked with the protection of minorities and of minority and regional languages; the responsible state authorities; the associations and organisations of the minorities and language groups protected by the Convention and Charter, and their research institutions.

During the 2022 implementation conference, specific recommendations by the Council of Europe's Consultative Committee and Committee of Experts were discussed in the presence of the Secretariats of the Framework Convention and the Language Charter.

The main focus of the discussion in terms of the Language Charter was the recommendation to ensure that a sufficient number of adequately trained teachers were available to teach lessons in regional or minority languages.

#### **V. Brochure published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community**

To raise public awareness of Germany's national minorities and their languages, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community produces a brochure entitled "National minorities, minority and regional languages in Germany", the fourth edition of which was published in 2021.

## D. The Committee of Experts' recommendations for immediate action

### I. Danish in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein

#### 1. Article 9 – Judicial authorities

*The Committee of Experts recommends providing a clear legal basis for the use of Danish in civil and administrative court proceedings, in accordance with the undertakings ratified.*

With regard to this recommendation by the Committee of Experts, the **Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ)** and the federal state of **Schleswig-Holstein** point out that the legislative competence to amend/extend the existing legal basis for the use of Danish (and possibly other languages) in civil and administrative court proceedings lies with the Federal Government. However, it should also be noted that there is already a clear legal basis for the use of Danish in civil and administrative proceedings. The Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of 5 November 1992, which entered into force on 1 September 1999, was ratified by Germany by means of a law from 9 July 1998<sup>14</sup>. Germany thereby undertook to promote such languages. With a declaration on the Language Charter, Germany has already committed itself to promoting the use of other minority and regional languages. A legislative amendment with regard to civil and administrative proceedings would therefore merely specify those commitments. Article 9 (1) of the Language Charter already contains more detailed provisions pertaining to areas where regional and minority languages are spoken, including the Danish language area.

To the extent that documents and evidence drafted in the Danish language are presented in a form that rules out any misunderstandings or errors in translation, the undertaking under Article 9 (1) (b) (iii) and (c) (iii) and (2) of the Language Charter is already fulfilled by the current legal situation in Germany. This in line with *point E.I.4. in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*. Furthermore, the Courts Constitution Act (GVG), the

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<sup>14</sup> Federal Gazette (BGBl.) 1998, II, p. 1315 et seqq.



Code of Civil Procedure (ZPO) and the Code of Administrative Court Procedure (VwGO) already provide various rules to address the particular needs of regional and minority languages.

Section 184 sentence 1 of the Courts Constitution Act states that the language of the court is German. Beyond the limited scope of section 184 sentence 2, which guarantees “the right of the Sorbs to speak Sorbian before the courts in the home districts of the Sorbian population”, under current law, any person with insufficient German language skills is entitled to the help of an interpreter. This also applies to those who only speak a regional or minority language (in this case Danish) and who therefore cannot sufficiently understand or participate in court proceedings conducted in German.

Under current legislation – and in line with the undertaking in the Charter – this entitlement also extends to records or documents. Under the terms of section 142 (3) of the Code of Civil Procedure, it is permissible to produce documents in Danish during civil proceedings. The same applies to section 173 sentence 1 of the Code of Administrative Court Procedure with regard to administrative proceedings. Under section 142 (3), of the Code of Civil Procedure, the court may order a translation to be produced of documents drafted in a foreign language. The court may also decide not to order a translation if it is able to work with the original document. If this is not the case, the court may order the relevant party to provide a translation from a translator authorised or publicly appointed by the relevant federal state. In accordance with section 144 (1) sentence 1 of the Code of Civil Procedure, the court may also order a translation under its own initiative.

Other evidence, such as that provided by witnesses and experts, is also taken into account under current legislation. If a Danish-speaking witness is appointed, the court must provide an interpreter in accordance with section 185 of the Courts Constitution Act (in conjunction with section 55 of the Code of Administrative Court Procedure). The same applies to the oral hearing of an expert. Under current legislation (section 185 (2) of the Courts Constitution Act), the hearing may be conducted in Danish (“foreign language”, i.e. also in any other regional or minority language) if all participants have sufficient command of that language.

## 2. Article 11 – Media

*The Committee of Experts recommends taking further steps to develop the offer of radio and television programmes in Danish, in particular with respect to duration and frequency.*

The **federal state of Schleswig-Holstein** refers to section 5 (2) sentence 1 of the NDR Interstate Treaty, which stipulates that the culturally diverse regions of northern Germany, with their regional and minority languages – including Danish – are to be catered for regularly and adequately in the programming of the broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR). Since the government may not intervene in broadcasting, the state government has no power beyond this to directly influence the programming of media providers in Schleswig-Holstein. This also applies to programmes in Danish, including their frequency and duration. The state government endeavours to take due account of the interests of national minorities when amending relevant interstate treaties under media law.

## II. Upper Sorbian in the Free State of Saxony

### 1. Article 11 – Media

*The Committee of Experts recommends increasing the offer of television programmes in Upper Sorbian, in particular in terms of frequency and duration.*

Section 14 of the Saxon Sorbs Act (SächsSorbg) stipulates that the Sorbian language is to be adequately reflected in the media. Under Section 4 (1) of the MDR Interstate Treaty, the broadcaster Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk (MDR) is obliged to produce regionally specific programmes of a regionally specific character. This regional specificity includes the Sorbian language and culture.

Both MDR and Berlin-Brandenburg Broadcasting (RBB) provide Sorbian-language television programmes. Once a month, MDR's broadcasting centre for Saxony produces the 30-minute programme "Wuhladko" on Sorbian topics in the Upper Sorbian language. The programme is broadcast on MDR and also airs twice on RBB. The programme is also available for live streaming or viewing on demand in the media library of the MDR website. Among other things, this allows young Sorbs living in other parts of Germany – or anywhere else in the world – to keep up with current events at home. In addition, the MDR programme "Sachspiegel" addresses topics of interest throughout the state of Saxony which are also relevant in the Sorbian areas.

Thank to its regional studio "Serbski Rozhlós" (Sorbian broadcasting) in Bautzen, East Saxony, MDR Saxony is always present in the Sorbian-speaking region of Oberlausitz. Also, a reporter for "Sachspiegel" covers eastern Saxony and reports on issues of interest in this region.

The programme "Unser Sandmännchen" airs every Sunday on all terrestrial MDR stations (analogue and digital) with a choice between Sorbian- and German-language broadcasts. MDR's Sorbian programmes are also available for live streaming or viewing on demand in the media library of the MDR website.

### III. Lower Sorbian in the federal state of Brandenburg

#### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends extending and strengthening the offer of Lower Sorbian in pre-school, primary and secondary education, including by providing for it as an integral part of the curriculum more consistently.*

In pre-school education, a number of day-care centres offer different language options in Sorbian/Wendish. These are supported by Brandenburg's state programme for the promotion of Sorbian/Wendish education in day-care centres, which aims to strengthen and expand language learning opportunities, as well as supporting other educational processes in the Sorbian/Wendish language, from day-care centres to primary school and after-school facilities. Some institutions that had no previous involvement with language preservation are becoming involved as a result of this programme.

As regards the school sector, Sorbian/Wendish language learning is offered at various schools at primary and secondary level in the Sorbian/Wendish areas (depending on the level of demand and the availability of trained teaching staff). Teaching is based on the standard modern languages curriculum and the standard Sorbian/Wendish curriculum. There are also opportunities for bilingual lessons in various non-language subjects.

*The Committee of Experts recommends ensuring that a sufficient number of teachers is available for Lower Sorbian education at all levels.*

The state of Brandenburg runs programmes to upgrade the skills of existing staff (intensive language courses, advanced courses, etc.) and offers similar training to other interested teachers and pedagogical staff. To ensure that there will be enough Sorbian/Wendish teachers for the future, Brandenburg also promotes the recruitment of new teachers through scholarships and targeted campaigns, and encourages students from a Sorbian teacher training institute to work in schools in the Sorbian/Wendish areas. Also, since 2022, the rural district of Spree-Neiße / Wokrejs Sprjevja-Nysa has awarded a scholarship for trainee teachers specialising in Sorbian/Wendish in order to encourage interest in that subject area and to help recruit teachers. Starting in the winter semester 2023/24, the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg will develop a degree course for primary

school teachers. Course elements for Sorbian/Wendish can potentially be integrated at a later stage. The feasibility of this is still being assessed.

## IV. North Frisian in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends strengthening the offer of North Frisian in education, including by providing a sufficient number of teachers and the required teaching materials.*

The **federal state of Schleswig-Holstein** reports that at the beginning of the 2021/22 school year, all model schools for Frisian teaching (nine public schools and three schools belonging to the Danish minority) were awarded a model school plaque and a logo for their websites to increase publicity for the fact that they provide lessons in the minority language of Frisian.

In the 2022/23 school year, 809 pupils are to be given 80 hours of Frisian classes a week by 23 teachers. The number of learners has increased compared to the previous year (759 pupils). The annex “Frisian lessons in Schleswig-Holstein in the school year 2022/23” provides further information on the number of teaching hours per week and the number of learners in each grade.

In the 2022/23 school year, a teacher in Sylt provides Frisian classes in both a public primary school and a Danish minority school.

The only secondary school in Schleswig-Holstein offering Frisian as a regular subject is the “Eilun Feer Skuul” (EFS) in Wyk on the island of Föhr. In the academic year 2022/23, eight voluntary oral exams (university entrance level) were successfully conducted for the subject of Frisian.

The following educational materials (approved by the institute for quality development at schools in Schleswig-Holstein; IQSH) are available for Frisian teaching at primary schools:

- Mainland Frisian (“frasch”): “Paul an Emma smååke frasch” (published by Quickborn-Verlag Hamburg).

Extensive complementary materials for use with the textbook are available on the IQSH “learning network” website.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://paulunemmafering.lernnetz.de/> (as at 10 October 2023)

- Föhr Frisian (“fering”): “Paul an Emma snaake ferling” (published by Quickborn-Verlag Hamburg). Extensive complementary materials for use with the textbook are available on the IQSH “learning network” website.<sup>16</sup>
- “Paul an Emma ööwe ferling” – accompanies the textbook “Paul an Emma snaake ferling”. The workbook was created in the 2022/23 school year and is expected to be published in February 2024, in time for the second half of the following school year. The production of the workbook will be possible thanks to financial and human resources support from the IQSH and from Schleswig-Holstein’s ministry of education and minorities commissioner.
- “Diar sweemd en müs uun’t moolkoon” (“A mouse swam in the milk can”) – a text and exercise book with seven new Föhr Frisian children’s songs to be used in Frisian classes for the third and fourth grades at primary schools on the islands of Föhr and Amrum.

Audio files of the songs can be downloaded free of charge from the website of the Ferring Foundation.<sup>17</sup> The exercise book was published in October 2022 by the Ferring Foundation in Alkersum (on the island of Föhr). It is the first in a series of planned text and exercise books focusing on different topics.

- “Dibe-dibe-dap! At kikanink snaaket ferling” (“Dibe-dibe-dap! The rabbit speaks Föhr Frisian”). This second workbook was published in August 2023 for use in the first and second grades at primary schools in Föhr and Amrum, and in day-care centres. This material accompanies 26 episodes of the children’s programme “KiKaninchen” which were dubbed into Föhr Frisian and released in January 2023. This was commissioned by the TV channel KiKa.
- One-sided and double-sided sets of 100 flash cards each to accompany the Paul and Emma books. The double-sided sets have a picture on the front of the card and translations on the back in standard German, Low German, mainland Frisian, Föhr Frisian and Danish. All model schools for Frisian teaching were provided with free sets of flash cards by the IQSH.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://paulanemmaferling.lernnetz.de> (as at 10 October 2023)

<sup>17</sup> <https://ferring-stiftung.de/aktivitaeten/friesischunterricht/diar-sweemd-en-mues-uunt-moolkoon/> (as at 10 October 2023)

- Sylt Frisian (“sölring”): Materials translated from English to Sylt Frisian (published by Finken Verlag).

All materials produced since 2018 have been made thanks in large part to financial and human resources from the IQSH and from Schleswig-Holstein’s Ministry of General Education and Vocational Training, Science, Research and Culture (MBWFK). The materials produced were provided to the schools free of charge.

Over the next few years, additional materials for Frisian classes in all school grades will be produced in various varieties of Frisian, in analogue and digital form, at the “Nordfriisk liirskap” (the new department created at the North Frisian Institute). This will be done in accordance with the guidelines of the MBWKF and the IQSH.

The decree on “Frisian at Schools in the District of Nordfriesland and Heligoland” remained in force until 31 July 2023. An updated version of the decree was sent to the Frisian-speaking associations for consultation in June 2023. The new decree, which was amended based on feedback from the consultation, entered into force on 1 August 2023 and will expire on 31 July 2026. The plan is that a further update of the decree will follow on from that period, based on developments resulting from the newly available resources for producing teaching materials and strengthening Frisian teaching.

At the Europa-Universität Flensburg, “Frisian as a subsidiary subject” is to be introduced from the spring semester 2024.

## **2. Article 11 – Media**

*The Committee of Experts recommends taking further steps to increase the offer of programmes in North Frisian in broadcasting media, with a sufficient frequency and duration.*

The **federal state of Schleswig-Holstein** refers to section 5 (2) sentence 1 of the NDR Interstate Treaty, which stipulates that the culturally diverse regions of northern Germany, with their regional and minority languages – including North Frisian – are to be catered for regularly and adequately in the programming of the broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR). Since there is no government intervention in broadcasting, the state government has no power beyond this to directly influence the programming of media providers in Schleswig-Holstein. This also applies to programmes in North Frisian, including their frequency



and duration. The state government endeavours to take due account of the interests of national minorities when amending relevant interstate treaties under media law.

On the island of Föhr, the radio programme “FriiskFunk” has been funded by the Ferring Foundation for 13 years. This two-hour Frisian language radio programme is broadcast live from Monday to Friday, 8:00 to 10:00, and repeated in the afternoon from 14:00 to 16:00. The programme can be received in North Frisia on VHF radio or can be streamed via the internet. Previous broadcasts are available for listening on demand via the internet. The Ferring Foundation cooperates with the broadcaster Offener Kanal Schleswig-Holstein and has set up its own radio studio for this purpose. The project receives 40,000 euros in annual funding from the Foundation for the Frisian Ethnic Group in the Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein (Friesenstiftung). Funding is also contributed by the broadcaster Offener Kanal and a private donor. FriiskFunk’s broadcasts are an important part of the North Frisian language environment. They also reach an audience far beyond North Frisia; this is clear from the many messages received from Frisian listeners around the world.

## V. Sater Frisian in the federal state of Lower Saxony

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends encouraging the provision of at least a substantial part of pre-school education in Sater Frisian and strengthening the educational offer for Sater Frisian at all appropriate levels.*

In **Lower Saxony**, data on the use of Sater Frisian in Saterland’s institutions are still not collected due to the lack of a uniform structure of child-care centres (for more information see *Germany’s Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*). As a result, no reliable statements can be made.

Saterland schools still receive support from the Regional State Office for Schools and Education in Osnabrück, and teachers are still granted remission from teaching duties to work on preparing language instruction. Specialist advisers on Low German and Sater Frisian give the schools advice and support with the purchasing and production of teaching materials. All schools in Lower Saxony can access a constantly expanding pool of materials on the federal state’s new education website.<sup>18</sup>

Since the beginning of the 2022/23 school year, “Seeltersk lopt”, a four-volume series of textbooks for Sater Frisian, has been available to Sater Frisian schools. Lower Saxony’s ministry of education and cultural affairs provided 42,000 euros in funding for the preparation and publication of the textbooks.

Also, Sater Frisian is now included in the Low German training courses for teachers provided by the institute for quality development at schools in Lower Saxony (NLQ) on behalf of Lower Saxony’s ministry of education and cultural affairs, together with Oldenburg University. A new and improved training programme is being planned.

### 2. Article 11 – Media

*The Committee of Experts recommends taking further steps to increase the offer of programmes in Sater Frisian in broadcasting media, with a sufficient frequency and duration.*

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<sup>18</sup> <https://bildungsportal-niedersachsen.de/> (as at 10 October 2023)

The *state of Lower Saxony* points out that, as already explained in previous reports, government influence over programming is not permitted due to the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy of broadcasting and the freedom of the press in Germany. Within these limitations, Lower Saxony has adopted permissible rules for the relevant broadcasters to strengthen the regional language of Low German and the minority language of Sater Frisian. These rules can be found in section 5 (2) of the NDR Interstate Treaty and section 15 (2) of the Lower Saxony Media Act.

The radio program “Middeeges” is broadcast every two weeks, on Sunday, on the station “Ems-Vechte-Welle” in Sater Frisian and in Low German.

## VI. Low German in Brandenburg

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends strengthening efforts to develop an adequate educational offer for Low German.*

During the reporting period, the expansion of the legal and political framework for Low German began (see *point C.I.2–5*). That framework explicitly addresses educational issues (especially in terms of the multilingualism strategy, see *point C.I.4*). At the same time, there was continued support from the state of Brandenburg and its municipalities for voluntary forms of instruction in schools and for people who wish to learn in their free time. The state education offices in the Low German-speaking areas provide teacher training based on requirements and resources. In addition, initial contacts have been established with Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania to explore possibilities for cooperation with other German federal states. In 2021, the state parliament of Brandenburg formulated a request to consider legislation with respect to this.

## VII. Low German in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends continuing efforts to develop an adequate educational offer for Low German.*

First of all, it should be noted that Low German is not a regular school subject in **North Rhine-Westphalia**.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of this, the curricula for German and basic science classes offer diverse and sometimes explicit opportunities to address aspects of Low German within the framework of existing subjects at various types of schools and school levels. In addition, an extensive framework for optional subjects enables interested schools to provide Low German language instruction outside compulsory subjects, e.g. by offering study groups. It is up to individual schools to determine the content of the training in such study groups.

From 2014 to 2022, the regional government of Münster in North Rhine-Westphalia ran the project “Low German at primary schools in Münster and the Münsterland region”; this was done in cooperation with the Centre for Low German at the University of Münster. As part of this project, in primary schools and the fifth and sixth grades of secondary schools in Münsterland, Low German was offered in voluntary study groups.

In connection with this, see *point E.VI.b.1(f) of Germany’s Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*.

At the Centre for Low German (CfN) at the University of Münster’s Institute of German Studies, extensive teaching materials were developed on Low German for primary schools and the fifth and sixth grades of secondary schools as part of the aforementioned school project.

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<sup>19</sup>North Rhine-Westphalia has not ratified Part III of the Language Charter. On the basis of curricula, the training and examination regulations determine which subjects can be offered as compulsory subjects at schools. As regards languages, these subjects are German, the official language, and essential foreign languages. Since Low German is not spoken everywhere and the training and examination regulations have a state-wide regulatory character, there are no plans to adjust their scope to the different language areas.

The materials were then published on the website of the University of Münster. The teaching materials were designed for face-to-face learning and focus on the Münsterland dialect. The materials are available for teachers to use in their lessons free of charge.

Although the project is over, the schools continue to offer Low German in voluntary study groups at primary schools and in the fifth and sixth grades of secondary schools in Münsterland.

## VIII. Low German in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends taking resolute action to develop an adequate educational offer for Low German.*

With regard to the development of adequate educational offerings for the Low German regional language in **Saxony-Anhalt**, see *point D.I.5. of Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*.

In addition, during the reporting period, the Union for Local and Regional Traditions in Saxony-Anhalt has developed a pilot project to reinstate extra-curricular activities in Low German at primary schools. The project, which is to run over several years, is now in the process of being finalised. The project will bring together volunteer speakers of Low German with teachers, who will then, ideally in tandem, offer a study group for Low German at selected schools over the course of three school years (2023–2026). Now that COVID-19 restrictions are no longer in place, this is an opportunity to re-establish Low German study groups in schools and to strengthen the promotion of Low German teaching.

## IX. Low German in the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends taking measures to provide at least for a substantial part of education in Low German at pre-school level, and provide for the teaching of Low German in primary and secondary education as a separate subject and as an integral part of the curriculum.*

In order to further strengthen and refine the curriculum for teaching Low German, systematic guidelines will be introduced for teaching Low German at child-care centres and primary schools. This is part of the development of the “0-10” education plan, which is based on the standards of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states (KMK), and which is expected to be adopted in time for the school year 2024/25. This will provide child-care centres with a basis for fostering early language acquisition in Low German, which can then continue into primary school.

The following curriculum for teaching Low German in primary schools will also be available soon:

The 2015 “Education plan for primary schools – home languages” provides the basis for teaching the languages of children’s home regions. It is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Language awareness is just as important a principle as the focus of communication.

The “home languages” education plan sets standards in the areas of translating/interpreting, speaking, writing, reading, listening/seeing. The aim is for pupils to attain level A1 of the CEFR by the end of the fourth grade.

The “Education plan for primary schools – home languages” is currently being expanded to include Low German as a regional language. Soon, it will be able to serve as a binding curriculum for the teaching of Low German.



**2. Article 11 – Media**

*The Committee of Experts recommends facilitating the offer of television programmes in Low German on a regular basis.*

Radio Bremen's public television service does not create its own TV programming. Instead, it creates regional television programming (as referred to in section 28 (2) of the Interstate Agreement on Media (MStV)) jointly with NDR. But as Radio Bremen is by far the smallest public service broadcaster, it provides only a very small contribution to programming. With the entry into force of the NDR Interstate Treaty, which now provides for minority languages to be regularly and appropriately taken into account in programming, a provision corresponding to section 4 (8) of the Radio Bremen Act (RBG) was introduced. As a result, Low German has been given more broadcasting time in regional public service television programming. The improvements described in the Committee of Experts' Seventh Report on Germany to the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 11 July 2022, paragraph 34) therefore also relate to the city state of Bremen.

## **X. Low German in the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg**

### **1. Article 8 – Education**

*The Committee of Experts recommends taking concrete measures to promote the Low German language in education, at pre-school, primary and secondary level, including by ensuring adequate teacher training.*

In the **Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg**, the Low German language is promoted in education by means of the following specific measures:

#### *1. Low German as part of German lessons:*

All pupils in Hamburg are taught Low German language and culture as part of their German lessons from grade 1 to grades 12/13.

Hamburg has achieved this in several steps:

- a) In December 2022, new curricula for German were published for primary schools and the lower and upper levels of secondary school. These curricula will be compulsory in Hamburg schools from the 2023/24 school year onwards. The teaching of Low German language, literature and culture is specified with reference to both the teaching principles and the required skills (especially in the new core curricula, which refer to compulsory teaching content).
- b) In November 2022, all directors of German departments at Hamburg schools were given comprehensive information on the new requirements regarding Low German. This information was presented during state-level conferences. Since directors pass on such information to their departments, all Hamburg German teachers receive information presented at state-level conferences. In order to help teachers implement the new requirements, the education authority's German division invited representatives from various institutions to provide information on the different kinds of support available. Representatives came from the education authority's Low German division; Hamburg's

institute for teacher training and school development; the Low German centre for the federal states (LZN); the Carl-Toepfer Foundation; and the Ohnsorg Theatre.

- c) To help implement the new curricula for German, key teaching materials are being developed and made available to schools, including a literary and cultural reader (the first version of which was made available to the heads of German departments at the state-level conferences). One of the texts for this reader is called “Hamburg und die Niederdeutsche Sprache” (Hamburg and the Low German language). The text was created exclusively for German-language teaching at upper secondary level in Hamburg. It was written by Christianne Nölting (LZN) and Dr Ulrike Möller (Carl-Toepfer Foundation). Teaching materials will continually be developed/refined and made available to teachers in digital form. This includes links to information or materials from the LZN (such as educational films) and Hamburg’s public libraries (Low German literature in school libraries and book boxes).

## 2. *Low German as a school subject:*

As a “Hamburg subject”, Low German is becoming more attractive to pupils and teachers alike thanks to the following factors: new curricula which are more closely tailored to the situation and needs of Hamburg pupils; regular assessment of Low German teaching by reviving the “Round table” and “Low German forum”; the creation of the “Low German network meeting”; and measures to qualify teachers of Low German. This has all been helped by cooperation with institutions in Hamburg and northern Germany which promote Low German.

### a) Curricula for Low German:

As part of the revision of Hamburg’s educational plans, new curricula for Low German in primary schools were published in December 2022. These will be compulsory as of the 2023/24 school year. The lower secondary level curricula are currently still in preparation. First drafts are expected to be published during the course of the school year.

These curricula are due to become compulsory as of the 2024/25 school year. A key innovation here are the core curricula, which specify compulsory elements of language learning and the study of regional culture, both of which form the basis of the skills to be acquired. A key principle is to enable bilingual teaching. This lowers the threshold for learning Low German, and this is necessary in view of the diverse Hamburg school population, which includes a growing proportion of immigrants. The aim is to significantly increase the number of learners by expanding the available teaching.

At the same time, bilingualism makes it possible to address more complex regional cultural matters. It makes it easier to understand the role of Low German language past and present, including its interdependence with northern German and northern European culture: for example, Low German and the Hanseatic League; the “Missingsch” dialect of Hamburg; Low German within standard German; similarities to other northern European languages, and so on.

Another aim is to strengthen regional cultural identity, especially Hamburg’s. The draft core curricula for lower secondary level provide general and optional modules of varying degrees of difficulty, which can be used flexibly in the classroom according to the school timetable.

At the same time, language learning remains directly related to the proficiency levels set out in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), in line with the Language Charter. Lower secondary pupils thus continue to learn up to proficiency level B1, like with all other languages taught at school in Hamburg. In the long term, this means it will be possible to offer classes at upper secondary level as well.

b) Teaching materials and textbooks:

Hamburg primary schools use the “Fietje” textbooks for teaching Low German. These were developed by the city state of Hamburg. Copies of the workbook and teacher’s guide are currently out of print; however, the teacher’s guide is available to all teachers in digital form. For lower secondary level, the textbook “Snacken Proten Kören” is available. An assessment is being made of

what additional teaching materials, tailored to the new Hamburg curricula, might be added to the existing materials. At the very least, digital teaching aids will be provided. These will either be connected with materials developed by the Low German centre for the federal states (LZN) or contain customised content developed by the city state of Hamburg. It has not yet been decided whether the “Fietje” textbooks will be reissued or revised, or whether it is preferable for primary schools to switch to the “Paul und Emma” series used in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony.

- c) Evaluation and refinement through regular meetings of the “Round table” and the “Low German forum” and the creation of the “Low German network meeting”:

The “Round table” format is being revived to enable schools that teach Low German to discuss the current situation and developments affecting that subject. The last “Round table” took place on 17 April 2023 at Hamburg’s institute for teacher training and school development. The following were invited to attend the “Round table”: all model schools that receive regular resources to deliver Low German language teaching; all schools that deliver Low German language teaching; the head of the LZN; and a representative of Hamburg’s institute for teacher training and school development. The aim of the “Round table” was to take stock of the current situation and to look ahead at new developments. It was also intended to revive the “Low German forum”, whose participants were extended to include the University of Hamburg, the Carl-Toepfer Foundation, the Low German Council and the Ohnsorg Theatre. This is a forum for discussing issues such as teacher qualification.

And once every quarter, a “Low German network meeting” of representatives from different authorities is to be held.

There is also a regular meeting of federal states that support the LZN. This is called the “Low German meeting of the federal states” and is held at the invitation of the LZN.

- d) Teacher qualification:

Hamburg in particular, many of whose teaching staff do not come from northern Germany, faces a challenge in qualifying its teachers. So far, students of German have been given the option to focus on Low German. In addition, Hamburg's institute for teacher training and school development, in close cooperation with the Low German centre for the federal states (LZN), offers training which has been very well received. Interest in this increased noticeably after the state-level conferences for German teachers in November 2022. The aim is to systematically develop teacher qualifications. Initial discussions on this have been held with the University of Hamburg.

In addition, the northern German federal states took part in a vote at the Low German meeting of the federal states on 26 April 2023. One idea is to award certificates according to the CEFR language levels.

## **2. Article 11 – Media**

*The Committee of Experts recommends encouraging the publication of newspaper articles, including online, in Low German on a regular basis.*

The ***Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg*** encourages the regular publication of newspaper articles in Low German as follows:

Hamburg's authority for culture and the media has for many years promoted the "Quickborn" magazine, which is published in Low German four times a year by the Quickborn association for Low German language and literature. A comprehensive online edition of the printed magazine is also available. Current structural changes in the media landscape have had a profound impact on the content of newspapers and magazines, with some Low German media content moving to television, radio and the internet.

A good example of this can be seen in the programming of Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR). To promote the spread of Low German, NDR broadcasts scheduled programmes in Low German as well as ad hoc Low German content. Examples include the fortnightly "Niederdeutsche Hörspiel" (Low German audio play) or the podcast "Platt Schnack Mucke", broadcast since December 2021, in which moderator Yared Dibaba speaks to guests in Low German about their lives and music. Other Low German programmes,

such as “Wi snackt Platt”, “Hör mal’n beten to” or “Narichten op Platt”, have also been available as podcasts for several months via the usual podcast platforms. The aim is to go beyond the more traditional forms of broadcasting to reach a broad, diverse and online audience.

In addition, NDR provides all of its TV and radio content related to Low German (including the news in Low German) on a single web page.<sup>20</sup> The idea is to make it as easy as possible to access Low German content.

SAT.1 Regional also regularly broadcasts programmes in standard German and Low German.

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<sup>20</sup> [www.ndr.de/plattdeutsch](http://www.ndr.de/plattdeutsch) (as at 10 October 2023)

## XI. Low German in the federal state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends continuing measures strengthening Low German in education at all levels, including by ensuring adequate teacher training.*

#### a. Article 8 (1) (e) (ii)

In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the strengthening of Low German in education is carried out by the two state universities and the Institute for Quality Development in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Institut für Qualitätsentwicklung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, IQ M-V). See also *point E.VI.f.2 in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter.*

#### Practical measures

- The University of Rostock provides teaching through the professorship and chair for Low German language and literature. In this case, Low German is taught as part of German studies.
- The University of Greifswald has established Low German as an adjunct study programme.<sup>21</sup>
- The new degree programme for primary school teaching at the University of Greifswald, starting in the 2020/21 winter semester, offers Low German as a third or fourth subject.<sup>22</sup>
- In order to support and strengthen good quality Low German teaching in schools in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the Competence Centre for Low German Teaching (Kompetenzzentrum für Niederdeutschdidaktik, KND) has developed and established various support systems. See also *point E.VI.f.1(g) in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter.*

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.uni-greifswald.de/universitaet/information/zahlen-fakten/studierende/> (as at 10 October 2023)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.uni-greifswald.de/> (as at 10 October 2023)



**b. Article 8 (1) (h)**

See point E.VI.f.2(g) in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter.

**Practical measures**

*Additional remarks:*

- Teacher training is also implemented by the KND, which was set up at the University of Greifswald in 2016. In addition to individual courses, the KND offers a “certificate course”<sup>23</sup> as part of its training for teachers and educators. This means that a teaching qualification is acquired while teaching, as part of the teaching degree in question. The course is divided into two parts. As of 27 February 2023, 17 teachers and three private individuals were enrolled on the beginners course and eight on the advanced course of the “certificate course”.
- In the 2021/22 school year, a total of 21 training courses were offered for Low German, with 204 teachers and other participants enrolled. In the 2022/23 school year, a total of 22 training courses are being offered for the first half of the school year, with 139 teachers enrolled. The training courses are coordinated and offered by the Institute for Quality Development in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (IQ M-V).

**c. Article 8 (1) (g)****Practical measures**

See point E.VI.f.2.(f) in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter.

*Additional remarks:*

- In 2018, the workbook *Paul un Emma Schnacken Plattdüs* was financed, among others, by the IQ MV, edited by the KND, and translated into the variety of Low German associated with Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

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<sup>23</sup> Fort- und Weiterbildungen - Institut für Deutsche Philologie - Universität Greifswald ([www.uni-greifswald.de](http://www.uni-greifswald.de)).

- A detailed teachers' guide to *Kasper un de Klabauterkatt* (2019) has also been drawn up. This is supplementary to the children's book of the same name, which is contained in the *Heimatschatzkiste* (treasure chest).
- In addition to the materials supported by IQ MV, the KND produces its own teachers' guides, for example for primary schools a guide to the children's books *Kumm, wi sägeln!* and *Mäh! Maa! Möh! - Versteihst?* Also the textbooks *Paul un Emma schnacken Platt* (grades 1–2) and *Paul un Emma un ehre Frünn* (grades 3–4).
- For secondary schools there are diagrams from the project "Jugend Verkloort Platt"; a teachers' guide to Fritz Reuters epic poem *Kein Hüsung*; and a novel for young readers called *Hein Hannemann*.
- The Institute for Quality Development in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (IQ MV) financed the prestigious project to produce the comic *De Abrafaxe up Platt*, a Low German translation from the comic series *MOSAİK*. The purpose of this publication is to teach Low German and northern German culture and history in the European historical context of the Hanseatic League.

**d. Article 8 (1) (i)**

**Measures in the fields of policy and/or legislation**

*See point E.VI.f.2.(h) in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter.*

*Additional remarks:*

- In accordance with the government coalition agreement for the current (eighth) parliamentary term in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the coalition partners are committed to preserving and promoting Low German (see point 282) and to continuing the objectives of the federal state programme (see point 335).

**Practical measures**

- The advisory board for the preservation of local heritage and Low German (Beirat für Heimatpflege und Niederdeutsch) was convened by the state ministers for "children's child day-care centres and education" and for "science, culture,

federal and European affairs” in April 2023. An independent advisory body, not subject to instructions, it comprises seven experts and typically meets twice a year.

## XII. Low German in the federal state of Lower Saxony

### 1. Article 8 – Education

*The Committee of Experts recommends further strengthening the educational offer for Low German at all appropriate levels.*

The state of **Lower Saxony** still does not collect data on the use of Low German in its institutions due to the lack of a uniform structure of child-care centres (for more information see *Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*). As a result, no reliable statements can be made.

Schools still receive support from the four Regional State Offices for Schools and Education (Regionale Landesämter für Schule und Bildung; RLSB), and teachers are still granted remission from teaching duties to work on preparing language instruction. Specialist advisers on Low German and Sater Frisian give the schools advice and support with the purchasing and production of teaching materials. All schools in Lower Saxony can access a constantly expanding pool of materials on the federal state's new education website.<sup>24</sup> As part of the programme *Startklar in die Zukunft* ("ready for the future"), additional teaching materials for Low German were developed and made available on the education website.

In 2021, the lower secondary level textbook *Snacken, Proten, Kören*, developed with the support of the state of Lower Saxony, was published. It is now available to schools for Low German teaching at lower secondary level. In June 2023, another edition was published, based on the East Frisian variety of Low German.

There has also been an expansion of the Low German teacher training courses provided by the Institute for Quality Development at Schools in Lower Saxony (Niedersächsisches Landesinstitut für schulische Qualitätsentwicklung; NLQ) on behalf of Lower Saxony's ministry of education and cultural affairs, together with Oldenburg University. New and improved training is planned. Starting in 2023, a compulsory qualification course will be provided for the Low German advisers of the Regional State Offices for Schools and Education (RLSB). The development of curricular requirements in Low German for lower secondary level and the pilot project "Low German at lower secondary level" (*Niederdeutsch in der*

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<sup>24</sup> <https://bildungsportal-niedersachsen.de/> (as at 10 October 2023)

*Sekundarstufe I*), involving 16 model schools, help to prepare for regular Low German teaching at secondary schools.

In 2019, the University of Oldenburg submitted a plan for a degree course that would allow Low German to be taught at university level as part of its training for teaching posts at primary and secondary schools. The introduction of Low German as a degree subject is to take place in two steps: firstly as an extension or a third subject, and then as a subject in its own right. To achieve the first step (Low German as an extension subject), the University of Oldenburg has established a professorship for the study of literature.

For the 2023/24 winter semester, the University of Oldenburg has created a basic bachelor's degree course for the study of Low German. For Low German there are also plans to create a Master of Education for primary and "Realschule" secondary schools and a Master of Education for "Gymnasium" secondary schools in time for the winter semester 2026/27. Admission to the degree course does not require accreditation.

According to the plan submitted in 2019, once the basic bachelor's degree course has been introduced in the winter semester 2023/24, the second step is then to proceed, with the second professorship and corresponding staff positions.

From 5 to 9 September 2022, the first ever "Summer Academy for Low German: Language - Literature - Teaching" (*Sommerakademie Niederdeutsch: Sprache - Literatur - Didaktik*) was held at the University of Oldenburg's Institute of German Studies (Institut für Germanistik). A total of 15 students (including PhD students) from Berlin, Flensburg, Freiburg, Göttingen, Groningen, Kiel, Marburg, Oldenburg, Rostock and Wuppertal took this opportunity to meet and talk with academics from the field of Low German philology from Berlin, Greifswald, Flensburg, Hamburg, Kiel, Oldenburg and Rostock. The event included language, literature and teaching components of Low German in equal measure; it also looked at Low German from a diachronic and synchronic perspective; and it was specifically aimed at a young academic audience. In holding this event, the Low German department in Oldenburg established a completely new format in the field of Low German research and teaching in the northern German academic landscape. The participants particularly praised the language exercises, the diversity and breadth of the teaching on offer and the "constant discussions that broadened [their] horizons". The Summer Academy was possible thanks to funding from the society of the University of Oldenburg (Universitätsgesellschaft Oldenburg).

Students in the third year of the “Police Service” bachelor’s programme at the Police Academy of Lower Saxony (Polizeiakademie Niedersachsen) have the option to take language courses of their choice. The language courses serve as an alternative to completing a year of work experience abroad. The students are responsible for the courses they choose. Every year since 2017, a language course on “Plattdeutsch” (Low German) has been run at the University of Oldenburg. This language course is also planned for 2023.

The Police Academy of Lower Saxony highly values these language courses and encourages its students to take them.

### **XIII. Low German in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein**

#### **1. Article 8 – Education**

*The Committee of Experts recommends further strengthening the offer of Low German in education at primary and secondary levels, including by ensuring adequate teacher training.*

In **Schleswig-Holstein**, in the 2022/23 school year, Low German was taught at 46 model schools, of which 36 were primary level and 10 were lower secondary level. In 265 classroom hours, 3,442 pupils were taught Low German by the 82 Low German teachers working at the model schools.

In the 2021/22 school year, Low German was taught at 44 model schools, of which 34 were primary level and 10 were lower secondary level. In 276.5 classroom hours, 3,565 pupils were taught Low German by 69 of the 84 Low German teachers working at the model schools.

For the 2023/24 school year, five new schools (including two primary schools, one school from primary through secondary levels, and a secondary school) have applied for model school status and will start teaching Low German at the beginning of the school year. Unfortunately, one of the model schools will no longer be able to offer its voluntary lessons in Low German in the coming school year, as there are no longer any Low German teachers there. In total, 50 Low German model schools, of which 38 are primary level and 12 lower secondary level, will offer Low German classes in the 2023/24 school year.

Every school year, the following certificate courses are offered: “Plattschool för Lehrers” (consisting of two face-to-face classes and ten online classes over a half a school year) and “Plattdüütsch in den Ünnerriicht” (six days of modules on various topics spread over one school year). These courses are provided by the Institute for Quality Development at Schools in Schleswig-Holstein (Institut für Qualitätsentwicklung an Schulen Schleswig-Holstein; IQSH). On average, 10 to 15 teachers obtain a certificate with each course. This often means that Low German can then be taught at the schools where those teachers work, or that teachers already working in model schools obtain a further qualification.

As part of their training, all teachers in the preparatory service for German take a module in Low German. This is delivered by IQSH heads of studies and is tailored to the type of school in question.

The institutions involved closely coordinate with one another regarding teacher training for Low German. These institutions are: Schleswig-Holstein's Ministry of General Education and Vocational Training, Science, Research and Culture (Ministerium für Allgemeine und Berufliche Bildung, Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur; MBWFK), the IQSH, the Europa-Universität Flensburg) and the University of Kiel.

At the Europa-Universität Flensburg, Low German is to be introduced as a subsidiary subject from the spring semester 2024.



## XIV. Romani

### 1. Article 7 – Objectives and principles

*The Committee of Experts recommends identifying, in co-operation with the speakers, ways of strengthening the educational offer for the minority language of the German Sinti and Roma.*

The **Free State of Bavaria** refers to the proposal made by Bavaria's Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Bayern e.V.) that local initiatives by Sinti and Roma should provide easily accessible services which promote the use of Romani within the minority, e.g. a "lunchtime care" service for children from families who could benefit from this. Due to reservations within the Sinti community about the Romani language being learned by non-Sinti, only those projects are to be funded in which both learners and teachers/carers belong to the Sinti and Roma community. A "lunchtime care" service for Sinti children was offered at a Nuremberg school until 2012, and there is currently a similar initiative in the city of Würzburg.

For **Baden-Württemberg**, please refer to the comments in *point D.I.4. In Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*. There is still a language school in operation which was set up by Baden-Württemberg's Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Baden-Württemberg e.V.; VDSR-BW) and which is funded through the association's agreement with the state government. In 2021 alone, the school offered 20 language courses. In the coming years, the language school will be expanded to include training for language teachers. In addition, a project called "Romani as an identity language" (*Romanes als Identitätssprache*), funded by the EVZ Foundation, is working to create a comprehensive curriculum for the Sinti variety of Romani as an identity language, based on an established system of curricular for second and foreign languages. Baden-Württemberg's Association of German Sinti and Roma has for many years maintained an advisory service for Sinti and Roma in Mannheim. In addition, since July 2020, the association has been running the project "Regional promotion of inclusion and participation" (*Regionale Förderung von Inklusion und Teilhabe; ReFIT*), funded by the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. The project aims to improve the inclusion and equal participation

of the national minority of Sinti and Roma at municipal level and is implemented in four cities – Mannheim, Stuttgart, Ulm and Freiburg. It examines current levels of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma immigrants and refugees, including in the field of education. Project participants are expected to contribute to improving the participation of Sinti and Roma in society by making the education offered by local authorities more accessible to recently arrived Roma immigrants and refugees. The fact that the project participants are predominantly Sinti and Roma themselves ensures that advisory services can also be provided in Romani, where appropriate.

The ***federal state of Berlin*** has not received any requests regarding Romani language teaching. The population of speakers concerned is settled here and does not wish to have official Romani lessons. It is therefore not necessary at present to develop curricula for Romani.

In the context of support provided by Berlin's Association of German Sinti and Roma (Landesverband Deutscher Sinti und Roma e.V.), the state of Berlin is making education more accessible to the German Sinti and Roma minority by providing them with advisory services.

As far as the ***federal state of Brandenburg*** is aware, representatives of the Romani-speaking population maintain that there is no desire for language teaching provided by the official authorities.

The ***Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg*** has a specific action plan to encourage school attendance by Sinti and Roma. Under this plan, members of the Sinti and Roma community are employed as teachers or educational advisers at schools, where they work together with other teaching staff; act as a link between schools and the Sinti and Roma children's families; support Sinti and Roma children in class (including in their native language); teach Sinti and Roma history, culture and music; and advise teaching staff on working with Sinti and Roma children and their families. Currently, 11 members of the Sinti and Roma community are working as school social workers and educational advisers in schools in Hamburg. Some of them also teach Romani as part of their duties, depending on the school in question.

Providing Romani classes at schools in **Hesse** is a rather unlikely prospect and would be a lengthy process at best. This is due to the ongoing debate within the German Sinti and Roma community on the public use of the Romani language. For historical reasons, many members of the minority have long been opposed to using the Romani language in public.

The State Treaty concluded by the Hesse state government and the Hessian Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Hessen e. V.) emphasises the importance that Hesse attaches to preserving and protecting the language of the Sinti and Roma. In this treaty, the federal state of Hesse undertook to expand educational offerings for Sinti and Roma. For its part, the Hessian Association of German Sinti and Roma declared that it would “take further measures to promote Romani”.

In the **federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia**, teaching in the pupils’ native language is an essential part of integration policy. Such teaching takes place at primary and lower secondary level and currently comprises 30 languages, including Romani. With this kind of teaching, native language teachers not only promote pupils’ ethnic, cultural and/or linguistic identity, but also act as a bridge between parents and schools in a kind of joint educational partnership.

For **Rhineland-Palatinate**, see point D.I.4 in Germany’s Seventh Report on implementing the *Language Charter*. In addition, Rhineland-Palatinate’s Ministry of the Interior and Sport (Ministerium des Innern und für Sport) reports that discussions on this issue are being held with the state’s Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Rheinland-Pfalz e. V.).

The protection and preservation of the Romani language as an expression of identity and cultural heritage is enshrined in Article 4 (“Language, Education and Culture”) of the framework agreement signed on 13 April 2022 between the state government of **Saarland** and Saarland’s Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Saarland e.V.). In this context, the state government of Saarland is committed to improving education for young and adult Sinti and Roma in order to ensure equal opportunities for them at all levels of education (nurseries, schools and universities). Additional measures and projects developed by Saarland’s Association of German Sinti and

Roma for the individual levels of education are supported within the limits of financial resources.

As stated in *point C.I.9* and set out in the framework agreement between Saarland's state government and the Association of German Sinti and Roma, Saarland's Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Health (Ministerium für Arbeit, Soziales, Frauen und Gesundheit) is currently providing the Association with funding of 50,000 euros to create a management office and advisory service. It is thus helping to safeguard the organisational structure of Saarland's Association of German Sinti and Roma. The management office receives funding for staff and material expenses. The management office and advisory service of Saarland's Association of German Sinti and Roma – which was established by Saarland in 2021 and also receives funding from that federal state – aims to provide the most comprehensive possible advice and assistance to members of the Sinti and Roma minority. This service acts as a contact point for German Sinti and Roma and non-German Roma in Saarland. The office's key areas of action include political advocacy vis-à-vis the federal state, combating antigypsyism, remembrance and historical-political education, and education and empowerment of Sinti and Roma. Furthermore, applications for funding are granted, subject to the available budget, for projects addressing the historical legacy of the Sinti and Roma, projects to protect and preserve the Romani minority language and projects in the cultural and social spheres.

With its intercultural education programme, Saarland's Association of German Sinti and Roma is also introducing the subject of Sinti and Roma in the classroom and in teacher training at schools. In addition, the association offers individual support for young people during their transition from school to work. The aim of this support is to open up new spaces and opportunities for young people starting out in the world of work, thereby increasing their participation in education and work. Another component of the association's educational work is to develop new approaches to promoting culture, music and language for children and young people so as to build their self-confidence and resilience.

Remembrance work is also part of the association's educational work. In cooperation with the city administration of the state capital Saarbrücken, the association will set up a memorial in the Echelmeyer Park at St Michael's Catholic church ("Pfarrkirche") in memory of the Sinti and Roma who were persecuted and murdered under the Nazi regime. The location is

a place of historical significance in Saarbrücken. The purpose of the monument is to remember the victims and raise historical awareness of the fate of this minority. It is also intended to serve as a memorial on annual remembrance days and as a place of remembrance and education for school classes. At this stage, it is still unclear when the memorial will be inaugurated.

Other measures to promote the cultures of national minorities are as follows:

- Saarland's Association of German Sinti and Roma participates in remembrance events at federal state and local level and organises its own memorial trips and educational events at historical locations.
- On the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma, on 2 August, the Sinti and Roma murdered under the Nazi regime are regularly commemorated at a wreath-laying ceremony held at the former Gestapo camp of Neue Bremm, which is attended by high-level representatives of the Saarland state government, the city administration of Saarbrücken and others.
- The victims of the Sinti and Roma genocide are also commemorated in Saarland at a remembrance ceremony on 27 January. In addition, in 2019, Saarland's Association of German Sinti and Roma worked together with the University of Saarland to hold a "Cultural remembrance day; unwitnessed witnesses" (*Tag der Erinnerungskultur, Zeugen ohne Zeitzeugen*).

There is a pilot project currently funded in the **Free State of Saxony** to promote the language, culture, history and self-empowerment of Sinti and Roma. The project experiments with ways for minority representatives to give talks at schools about themselves and their culture/history/language – in the classroom and in the context of projects. At the same time, minority-member children should also be involved. During this process, materials will be developed that can be made available to other schools in the future.

The **federal state of Schleswig-Holstein** states that there was discrimination against German Sinti and Roma children at school throughout the war and post-war period, and well into the 1970s. Some of the consequences of this in the field of education, even in recent times, have included absenteeism, and the associated educational disadvantages; cultural barriers due to a lack of communication and trust; fear on the part of parents for their own

children; and sometimes also language barriers. Out of a sense of historical, ethical and practical responsibility for this state of affairs, Schleswig-Holstein, in close cooperation with representatives of the minority, has taken measures to improve educational opportunities for the children of German Sinti and Roma: As early as 1995, female members of the German Sinti and Roma minority acted as mediators to support Sinti and Roma children at schools in Kiel. In 2014, an updated version of this initiative was launched: the “educational counselling” project. Currently, two mediators and eight qualified educational counsellors support German Sinti and Roma children in schools in Kiel and Lübeck. Schleswig-Holstein’s Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma e.V., Landesverband Schleswig-Holstein) agreed to manage the “educational counselling” project.

The ***Free State of Thuringia*** does not record statistics on members of ethnic minorities at its school. In Thuringia, all school-age children and adolescents are required to attend school regardless of their nationality and residence status. Newly arrived school-age children and adolescents are required to attend school three months after arriving in Germany. There are no special projects and measures aimed at German Sinti and Roma, Roma from EU member states and Roma from third countries. However, pre-school and school measures to promote language skills, one-to-one support in each of the different types of school and support when transitioning from school to vocational and higher education can, where necessary, be provided to those groups.

In Thuringia, no classes are held in pupils’ native languages. Accordingly, there are no trained teachers for Romani.

Upon request, teaching could be organised during the school day.

The technical schools for social pedagogy do not record whether their students who are training to become nursery school teachers are Romani speakers. So they do not know whether there are any such cases.

According to the state associations of recognised adult education institutions in Thuringia, there is no information that the Romani language is taught at those adult education institutions.

For schools in Thuringia, Romani language and cultural mediators are available for cooperation with parents and schools under a cooperation agreement with SprIntpool Thuringia.

This work is financed by Thuringia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport; TMBJS).

The TMBJS cooperates with Thuringia's RomnoKher Association (RomnoKher Thüringen e.V.) on educational issues concerning Roma children in Thuringia. This happens in the context of talks with the state's education offices on issues of migration, particularly in connection with the arrival of many Roma families from Ukraine and the prevention of educational disadvantage.

*The Committee of Experts recommends supporting initiatives using Romani in the media, in co-operation with the speakers.*

Government influence over programming is not permitted due to the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of broadcasting in Germany, under which public service broadcasters enjoy autonomy of programming. Under the rule of governmental non-intervention in broadcasting, due to freedom of broadcasting, the government may not exercise influence over the programming or programme content of autonomous broadcasters. For private broadcasters, this general principle of non-intervention under media law, which applies to the Federal Government and to all the federal states, applies in a particular way.

After consulting Bavaria's Association of German Sinti and Roma (Landesverband Deutscher Sinti und Roma Bayern e.V.), it can be concluded that there are currently no requirements in this regard in the **Free State of Bavaria**. The association also states that it subscribes to the position of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma.

Since 2020, under the state programme "Democracy. Diversity. Respect" (*Demokratie. Vielfalt. Respekt*), the **federal state of Berlin** has co-financed the funding project "Diversity in Media – pilot project to raise awareness of antigypsyism (*Diversity in Media – Modellprojekt zur Sensibilisierung von Medienschaffenden für Antiziganismus*). This project is funded as part of the federal programme "Live Democracy!" (*Demokratie leben!*) The pilot project aims to raise awareness among media professionals and journalists of antigypsyism, making them more aware of discrimination when reporting on issues relating to Sinti and Roma.

The revised version of the RBB Treaty of the *federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg*, which has yet to enter into force, is to include a mandate for the public service broadcaster RBB (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg) to better reflect social diversity in its programming. The Federal Constitutional Court's requirements regarding the composition of the supervisory bodies in public service broadcasting must also be respected, according to the revised Treaty. Although the revision does not specify that greater use should be made of the Romani language, it can broadly be understood as an initiative in line with this aim.

The *Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg* is committed to ensuring that the cultural diversity of society is reflected more closely in the programming of public service broadcasters. The broadcaster Norddeutsche Rundfunk (NDR) is mandated, under section 5 (2) sentence 1 of the NDR Interstate Treaty (concluded with the federal states of *Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein*), to ensure that regional and minority languages are taken into account regularly and appropriately in NDR programming. Among several amendments made to the NDR Interstate Treaty in September 2021, the term "language" was changed to "regional and minority languages". This was based on the definition given in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of 5 November 1992.

The Romani language, too, is considered a minority language within the scope of the NDR Interstate Treaty. The wording of the NDR Interstate Treaty concerning the broadcaster's mandate is intended to emphasise the protection and promotion of regional and minority languages and the need for them to feature throughout the NDR's programming. But the Treaty also takes into account the constitutional principle of programming autonomy.

The *federal state of Hesse* is not in a position to influence the structure or content of programming due to the principle of non-intervention by government in broadcasting. Instead, the state of Hesse has informed the public service broadcaster Hessischer Rundfunk (HR) about Germany's obligations and initiated a dialogue between HR and the Hessian Association of German Sinti and Roma (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Hessen e. V.), while respecting the constitutional principle of government non-intervention in broadcasting.

However, according to the information available, representatives of the Sinti and Roma have not yet asked representatives of the public service broadcaster Hessischer Rundfunk



to produce programmes in the Romani language. Hessischer Rundfunk remains open to engaging in dialogue with the association on this matter.

According to **Lower Saxony's** state media authority (Niedersächsische Landesmedienanstalt; NLM), which is responsible for developing and promoting private broadcasting, the programme "Latscho Dibes" is the only Sinti programme available on public-access radio in Lower Saxony. The programme can be heard on Radio Tonkuhle (Hildesheim) every four weeks on a Sunday and on Radio Okerwelle (Braunschweig) every four weeks on a Tuesday.

In **North Rhine-Westphalia** there are no legal requirements concerning use in the media of non-German languages, in this case Romani.

However, the public service broadcaster Westdeutsche Rundfunk Köln (WDR) is committed to diversity, and in accordance with its legal mandate must provide a comprehensive overview of international, European, national and regional events in all key areas of life. WDR's programming aims to promote peaceful and equal coexistence between people of different cultures and languages in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and to reflect this diversity in a constructive way. In line with WDR's mandate, the radio programming on its "Cosmo" channel focuses mainly on topics of intercultural coexistence.

The diversity content in programming is also based on decision-making by North Rhine-Westphalia's media authority (Landesanstalt für Medien Nordrhein-Westfalen; LfM). Thus, from the point of view of diversity in programming, the LfM must take into account the content of the programme in question, in particular its share of information, education, advice and entertainment, the geographical coverage of the reporting, the treatment of minority and target group interests, and the contribution to diversity of the overall range of programming. It must also consider how the programming contributes to diversity in areas of interest, diversity in the geographical area broadcast to, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

**Rhineland-Palatinate** reports that, due to the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of broadcasting and the rule on governmental non-intervention in broadcasting, the federal states have no influence on the structure or content of the programming of public and private broadcasters. Control over public service broadcasting in Germany is exercised by

broadcasting bodies which have pluralistic membership together with independent representatives from many socially relevant groups.

With regard to the role of minority representatives in the public service broadcaster Südwestrundfunk (SWR), in Rhineland-Palatinate's broadcasting board (Landesrundfunkrat Rheinland-Pfalz) and in Rhineland-Palatinate's state media authority (Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz), please see *point D.III.3. in Germany's Seventh Report on implementing the Language Charter*.

Any influence on the structure or content of print media is ruled out by the constitutional principle of freedom of the press. The aims of the Language Charter in this area cannot be government mandated.

Promoting the Romani language to the young generation of Sinti and Roma living in **Saarland** is a key objective of Saarland's Association of German Sinti and Roma (Landesverband Deutscher Sinti und Roma Saarland e.V.). The federal state of Saarland works towards this objective by supporting the association's management office and advisory service, which also provides education and language work. This implies teaching the Romani language in line with the aims of the Language Charter. Participants in language courses can thus be regarded as multipliers in the social and media environment.

As part of ongoing efforts to implement the mandate of **Saxony's state government** (under the government coalition agreement) to support and promote the Sinti and Roma minority (with regard to their culture and acts of remembrance), discussions and consultations have been held since 2021 with the Romano Sumnal Association (Verein Romano Sumnal e. V.) in Leipzig. The association represents the interests of Sinti and Roma in Saxony and is a member of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. Support for Sinti and Roma in Saxony serves to strengthen their self-representation. So far during these consultations, no request has been made for the use of Romani in the media, as there is apparently no demand for this.

## **E. Comments by the associations**

The comments are included in Germany's current Report on implementing the Language Charter irrespective of the views held by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), which has editorial responsibility for the report.

## ***1. Comments by the Danish minority***



29 June 2023

Dansk Generalsekretariat / JAC

Contact: Secretary-General Jens A. Christiansen

[jac@syfo.de](mailto:jac@syfo.de)

0461 14408-110

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

### **Comments by the Danish minority on the recommendations for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe**

The South Schleswigan Association (Sydslesvigsk Forening; SSF) expresses thanks on behalf of the Danish minority for the opportunity to comment on the Report of the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Schleswig-Holstein.

The Danish minority supports the recommendations for immediate action:

- a. Take further steps to develop the offer of radio and television programmes in Danish in particular with respect to the duration and frequency.

The Danish minority refers to its previous comments.

- b. Provide a clear legal basis for the use of Danish in civil and administrative court proceedings, in accordance with the undertakings ratified.

The request to expand the scope of section 184 is being processed slowly at the Federal Ministry of Justice.

Again, the Danish minority refers to its previous comments.

**2. Comments by the Frisian association Frasche Rädj/Friesenrats Sektion Nord e.V.**

Friisk Hüs, 6 July 2023

**Subject: Comments on the Mid-Term Report**

on implementing the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,  
from the perspective of **Frasche Rädj / Friesenrat Sektion Nord**

Frasche Rädj / Friesenrat Sektion Nord is grateful for any opportunity for political participation in general and for the opportunity to comment on the above Report.

With reference to the last implementation conference on 29 November 2022, at which both the Framework Convention and the Language Charter were discussed, we expect that this group of topics will continue to be addressed this year. We would therefore like to mention another three issues (again, grouped together) that are of immediate importance to us: education, the media and trade mark registrations of Frisian terms.

In general, we welcome the continued efforts of the Schleswig-Holstein state government to ensure the long-term preservation of Frisian language and culture. This is particularly evident in the establishment of the Frisian Foundation (Friisk Stifting/Friesenstiftung) and the clear intention on the part of the state and federal consultative committees overseeing our organisation, especially when it comes to efforts to strengthen Frisian language and culture. We are very pleased to note the improvements that have been made in specific areas. However, we are still far from considering the issues of education, the media and trade mark registrations of Frisian terms as being resolved.

We believe that, instead of interim solutions, only long-term goals can help to save and sustainably preserve the Frisian language and culture from the very real risk of extinction that it faces. We set out these goals as follows:

**EDUCATION**

1. Frisian must be upgraded to a regular school subject with appropriate curricula.
2. In order to be able to offer Frisian in the regular curriculum, and to achieve the objective set out in the Language Policy Action Plan, namely that Frisian be offered at secondary schools (from lower-secondary level up to the *Abitur* university entrance certificate), the necessary additional staff hours need to be made available.
3. Prospective Frisian teachers must receive a guarantee of employment in the teaching of that language as well as a financial allowance of the kind already given to teachers in certain regions.
4. Prospective Frisian teachers must be given an advantage with respect to the *numerus clausus* regulation (limiting numbers of students), as is already the case for prospective Sorbian teachers.

5. The federal state of Schleswig-Holstein must set up and maintain a professional institution for the production of textbooks, teaching materials and language promotion similar to the West Frisian “afûk” organisation and the Sorbian “Witaj” language centre.
6. In the medium term, Frisian classes must be offered in selected schools throughout the Frisian-speaking region.

### **MEDIA (radio and television)**

Public service broadcasting in Germany has a legal mandate to provide basic media services to the population. This mandate is also the legal basis for the broadcasting licence fee. The task of providing basic media services is not limited to meeting the needs of the majority population and their language, but also takes into account – at least in principle – the needs of Germany’s autochthonous minorities and their languages. In practice, however, the broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) still refuses, for example, to provide daily radio news programmes in Frisian and does not offer any television programmes fully in Frisian (not even with German subtitles). Political leaders argue that Frisian programmes would violate the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of broadcasting. But this argument is unconvincing, as the use of a language other than the dominant one does not affect the content of programmes or violate the principle of independent reporting.

Another argument used by broadcasters against the regular scheduling of Frisian programmes is that Frisian-language programmes have a switch-off effect. In our view,

- a) this argument reflects an anti-minority perspective;
- b) it is also a self-perpetuating argument because unless NDR broadcasts programmes in Frisian, the language will remain alien to the majority population, and thus allegedly inappropriate for public use.

The efforts made so far by publicly funded radio and television broadcasters have been limited to temporary and one-off initiatives. In terms of staff it makes available to produce such programmes, NDR uses only interns, voluntary workers and, at best, freelancers. The resulting programmes tend to be occasional projects and one-off initiatives that fill a certain broadcasting niche.

Project funds available for social media campaigns and for the niche radio broadcaster Offener Kanal (open channel) are not sufficient to meet the programming needs of the Frisian ethnic group.

### **TRADE MARK REGISTRATIONS of Frisian terms**

The background to this is that, in 2021, an American wine company was granted the right under trade mark law to use the Frisian term “Öömrang” (a term indicating origin from the island of Amrum) for the marketing of its wines and spirits. This was much to the chagrin of the Frisians of Amrum, who now risked having to pay fines when using their own language term.

It would therefore be welcome if the European Commission and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) would amend the Regulation on the European Union trade mark so that the

criterion of “population size” is applied less strictly to regional and minority languages such as Frisian when it comes to assessing trade mark applications.

In our view, the long-term preservation of the Frisian minority / ethnic group can only be ensured by long-term objectives, which have already been communicated and discussed on several occasions in the consultative committees at state and federal level.

**Frasche Rädj**

**Friesenrat Sektion Nord e.V.**

Friisk Hüs

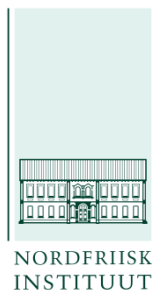
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### 3. Comments by the North Frisian Institute (Nordfriisk Instituut)



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**Ref.: European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**

Bräist / Bredstedt, 7 July 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute these comments to the *Mid-Term Report following the Seventh Report of the Federal Republic of Germany in accordance with Article 15 (1) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*.

The Seventh Evaluation Report on Germany, by the Committee of Experts on the European Language Charter, to which our comments refer, includes the following recommendations as a matter of priority:

1. *strengthen the educational offer for Sater Frisian, North Frisian, Lower Sorbian, Low German and Romani;*
2. *ensure that a sufficient number of adequately trained teachers for regional or minority language education is available;*
3. *take further measures to strengthen the offer of media in regional or minority languages;*
4. *strengthen the use of regional or minority languages in the administration in practice.*

For North Frisian, the recommendations are further specified as follows:



a. Strengthen the offer of North Frisian in education, including by providing a sufficient number of teachers and the required teaching materials.

b. Take further steps to increase the offer of programmes in North Frisian in broadcasting media, with a sufficient frequency and duration.

**We have the following comments to make regarding points 1 and 2 and point a:**

In March 2023, Schleswig-Holstein's state parliament agreed to provide additional funding to set up a professional institution to produce teaching materials and to promote the Frisian language in North Frisia in general. The funding is designed to increase over time and, according to current discussions, five new posts at the North Frisian Institute (Nordfriisk Instituut) and one at the Ferring Foundation (Ferring Stiftung) are expected to be created and filled by 2025, with an average of 80 per cent of full-time working hours per post.

We greatly welcome this decision. However, this alone will change the situation only in certain areas. Further steps will be needed in the coming years to increase the attractiveness of Frisian language teaching both for learners and teachers. Such steps should include the upgrading of Frisian to a regular subject at schools and universities and – in order to avoid the otherwise inevitable competition with leisure activities and logistical problems in rural areas – the integration of Frisian into morning classes at schools. It is also essential to continue Frisian teaching from primary into secondary education if Frisian classes are to have a truly positive impact on the number of speakers. We hope and expect to receive political and administrative support in this regard. We also recommend setting minimum criteria for the “Model Schools for Frisian” award in order to give the award real added value. Useful criteria for this would be: integration of Frisian teaching into the regular curriculum as described above; a progressive teaching approach (from all levels at primary school through at least three years at secondary school); and an increased regional focus in the teaching of subjects such as history and geography.

**Regarding points 3 and b, we have the following comments:**

As regards the presence of the Frisian language in broadcasting and the media, there has so far been no sign of a fundamental policy change on the part of the public service broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR). Individual items in the Frisian language with German subtitles, as were broadcast some time ago in the regional news programme *Schleswig-Holstein-Magazin*, are a step in the right direction, but do not go far enough. One argument still being made against the regular production of Frisian-language programmes is that it would compromise the freedom of the press. This argument is made despite the fact that programming in regional and minority languages does not affect the content of broadcasts but just the language in which the content is presented. As far as we know, provisions and agreements to this effect are legally possible in the relevant state treaties. Another argument is that such programmes are already made by Offener Kanal, but Offener Kanal is a public-access radio broadcaster which lacks the funds to compete with professional stations. And still, when asked about its Frisian-language programming, NDR can only point to its three-minute weekly programme *Frasch for enarken*. In terms of transmission time, these three minutes do not even reflect the proportion of Frisian-speaking people among the total population of the area covered by the broadcast. Neither the Offener Kanal broadcaster nor the three-minute format constitute a sufficient broadcasting offer in line with the Language Charter.

We expect programming in the Frisian language to be extensive, professionally produced and regularly broadcast, both on television and on the radio. Such TV and radio programmes should also, of course, be made available for access in the stations' online media libraries after they have been broadcast. But media libraries are no substitute for a clear and regular presence in programming schedules, as this makes it clear to the majority population that languages other than German have a tradition in Germany and that they enjoy special protection and rights (for instance in the form of multilingual road signs on federal and regional highways and local place signs in North Frisia).

Currently, the few productions being made in the Frisian language rely mostly on the work of freelancers or volunteers. In order to produce an adequate offer of programming in line with the Language Charter, it will be essential to create professional employment positions at NDR that specifically cater for North Frisian. To create such positions would send a powerful message. In our view, this is the only meaningful criterion for measuring the commitment of public service broadcasters to minority language programming. We expect that a clear political position should be taken on this issue.

We would be delighted if our comments were taken into account in future to help promote the Frisian language in Germany.

Yours sincerely,

Christoph G. Schmidt, Director

for the North Frisian Institute (Nordfriisk Instituut) and the North Frisian Institute Association (Verein Nordfriesisches Institut e.V.)

*4. Comments by the Sater Frisian association (Seelter Buund)*



## Heimatverein Saterland Seelter Buund

Karl-Peter Schramm  
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Oldenburg, 27 March 2023

**Germany's Mid-Term Report following its Seventh Report on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Germany.**

**Seelter Bund welcomes the recommendations of the Committee of Experts to improve the protection and promotion of Sater Frisian in Lower Saxony. This letter contains comments by Seelter Buund on those various recommendations.**

We would like to begin by emphasising that the appointment of an Academic Commissioner for Sater Frisian at the Oldenburgische Landschaft (a regional association), at the end of 2020, was an important step for the professionalisation of Sater Frisian organisational structures. The Commissioner for Sater Frisian Henk Wolf now carries out his work according to the precedence set by the Low German office of the Ostfriesische Landschaft organisation under the name "Seeltersk-Kontoor". The original half-time post was made into a full-time post at the end of 2022, thanks to funding from the Federal Government. And with the aid of project funding, the Seeltersk-Kontoor gained the independent project staff member Tjallien Kalsbeek. In addition, the municipality of Saterland has said it would be willing to provide the Seeltersk-Kontoor with its own building, provided the office is guaranteed to exist in the long term.

However, Henk Wolf's contract will expire in November 2023. This makes long-term planning difficult and poses a risk to the infrastructure that has been built so far, as well as to many ongoing language-promotion projects. **For Seelter Buund, therefore, the long-term security of the commissioner's post is a matter of urgency and essential for future language promotion.**

Below, the recommendations of the Committee of Experts are addressed specifically.

### **1. Recommendation for immediate action:**

**Encourage the provision of at least a substantial part of pre-school education in Sater Frisian and strengthen the educational offer for Sater Frisian at all appropriate levels.**

Seelter Buund supports this recommendation. However, we would like to point out that the implementation of this recommendation is hampered by a lack of trained educators. This is a problem that cannot be solved in the short term by political means. In order to implement this recommendation in the medium term, we recommend the following:

- In Saterland there is a reliable infrastructure of older women who work as language assistants, teaching Sater Frisian to children in day-care centres. These women are paid an allowance for this service by the municipality of Saterland. However, the pool of assistants is ageing, and therefore shrinking.

A campaign to attract new volunteers would be helpful.

- However, neither the volunteers nor the regular nursery staff have any training in how to teach Sater Frisian. Seelter Buund and the Seeltersk-Kontoor have jointly organised language courses for teachers. They will receive funding for this from the federal state of Lower Saxony until the end of 2023. If these funds were secured for the long term, in a straightforward, unbureaucratic manner, it would increase the professionalism of Sater Frisian language teaching at day-care centres over the coming years.

- The Seeltersk-Kontoor and the University of Oldenburg are preparing training courses on how to teach Sater Frisian for staff at day-care centres and schools. The long-term security of the post of the Commissioner for Sater Frisian is a necessity in order to be able to implement this plan.

- In order for staff at Saterland day-care centres to learn more about current practice in other regions and develop new ideas, it would be helpful for the state of Lower Saxony to provide or support exchange programmes with day-care centres in regions such as the Dutch province of Friesland (Fryslân), Sorbian-speaking Lusatia, and South Schleswig (with its Danish minority).

- Article 14 of Lower Saxony's law on child day-care centres provides that day-care centres have an obligation to record the language skills of the children and to plan language support with the parents. Seelter Buund sees the possibility at state level of implementing the recommendation of the Committee of Experts by explicitly including the languages of Sater Frisian and Low German in this framework.

- Seelter Buund sees the possibility for a municipality, district or state to run a purely Sater Frisian-speaking day-care centre, of the kind which are common in the Dutch province of Fryslân.

- Seelter Buund would be grateful if the Committee of Experts would repeat this recommendation in its next report so that efforts to implement it are continued.

### **2. Recommendation for immediate action:**

**Take further steps to increase the offer of programmes in Sater Frisian in broadcasting media, with a sufficient frequency and duration.**

Seelter Buund supports this recommendation, but we do not expect it to lead to major steps. The broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) has, under the terms of the revised Interstate Treaty, promised a slightly wider range of programmes in minority languages. But Sater Frisian does not feature in this. And the use of minority languages in such programmes is limited to very traditional

domains and topics of local concern aimed at older audiences. Seelter Buund thus recommends the following:

- Seelter Buund has its own radio studio, from which it broadcasts the programme *Middegjes* in Sater Frisian and Low German every two weeks. The technical work and moderation are done by volunteers and it is increasingly difficult to find enough people to make the programmes. By paying an allowance to volunteers and studio guests, Seelter Buund could make this work more attractive. A small amount of financial support for this purpose would be welcome.
- In order to reach a younger audience, a social media presence would be useful, ideally with content organised at state level and professional support in Low German and Sater Frisian. The Seeltersk-Kontoor could play an important role in this.

### **3. Further recommendation:**

**Provide a clear legal basis for the use of Sater Frisian in civil and administrative court proceedings, in accordance with the undertakings ratified.**

In Saterland there is no legal basis for the use of Sater Frisian in this context. And experience from the Netherlands shows that a clear legal basis still does not create an atmosphere in which people feel confident enough to speak their own language. This requires major efforts, including language training for staff in the justice system. There is currently no one available for this work. In order to ensure that (human) resources are used where they contribute most effectively to the protection and promotion of the Sater Frisian language, the implementation of this recommendation is currently not a priority for Seelter Buund.

### **4. Further recommendation:**

**Take practical measures to encourage the use of Sater Frisian in administration, in line with the undertakings ratified.**

Seelter Buund supports this recommendation and sees opportunities in the short term for using the minority language in new domains, especially through the use of Sater Frisian in council assemblies. The Seeltersk-Kontoor is currently assisting the municipality of Saterland in raising the profile of Sater Frisian at the town hall. Documents in the Sater Frisian language are submitted only in a few cases and processing them is not a problem. In the medium term, we would recommend that a number of staff in the municipal administration be given language instruction, including in the written language. Seelter Buund would be happy to help with this.

### **5. Further recommendation:**

**Make provision in cultural policy abroad for Sater Frisian and the culture it reflects, in particular at federal level.**

Seelter Buund supports this recommendation and believes that international exchange programmes between the Frisian-speaking minorities in Germany and the Netherlands (at the level of child day-care centres, schools, teacher training courses and youth organisations) would lead to new ideas and insights.

**6. Further recommendation:****Set up a supervisory body responsible for monitoring the progress achieved in the teaching of Sater Frisian and for drawing up public periodic reports of its findings.**

Seelter Buund supports this recommendation unreservedly. We recommend that the Seeltersk-Kon-  
toor of the Oldenburgische Landschaft be entrusted with this task. The Commissioner for Sater Fri-  
sian is well connected with Saterland schools and is well-informed about the schools' learning mate-  
rials and requirements. He is already working with some schools to increase language teaching.  
There is no need for a large organisation to report on such developments. However, it is absolutely  
essential that the post of the Commissioner Sater Frisian be secured for the long term.

For the board of Seelter Buund  
Karl-Peter Schramm

## **5. Comments by the Federal Council for Low German (Buunsraat för Nedderdüütsch)**

### **Comments by the Low German Speakers' Group on the recommendations for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts**

#### ***Wat de nedderdüütsche Sprekergrupp to de unmiddelboren Vörslääg vun de Fachlüüd vun'n Europaraat seggen deit***

#### **Brandenburg / Brannenborg**

*a. Strengthen efforts to develop an adequate educational offer for Low German.*

The Low German Speakers' Group is disappointed that there is currently no prospect of a curriculum in Low German or of teachers who could teach the subject. At present, there is no possibility in Brandenburg to study Low German as a specialist subject as part of training to become a teacher. Since 2021, the University of Greifswald, with its Competence Centre for Low German Teaching (Kompetenzzentrum für Niederdeutschdidaktik, KND), has made no progress in its attempts to establish cooperative initiatives on training and teacher training. There is an urgent need for a coordinated sequence of steps to develop a teaching concept in the model regions (Wittstock, Prenzlau) based on the agreed multilingualism strategy of learning at every age. All language teaching aimed at the preservation and promotion of Low German – whether at child day-care centres, schools or adult education centres – is still carried out on a voluntary basis.

#### **Bremen / Bremen**

*a. Take measures to provide at least for a substantial part of education in Low German at pre-school level, and provide for the teaching of Low German in primary and secondary education as a separate subject and as an integral part of the curriculum.*

*b. Facilitate the offer of television programmes in Low German on a regular basis.*

In Bremen, Low German is offered in various forms at four “profile schools”. One school offers one hour of lessons per week for each class. Another school regularly offers Low German classes as part of the weekly school schedule. Two schools offer voluntary lessons based on the *Paul un Emma* textbooks. Unfortunately, the Bremerhaven profile school no longer has a Low German profile due to staff changes.

On 6 December 2022, a conference was organised by the SKB with guest speakers from different contexts, including from the State Centre for Low German (Länderzentrum für Niederdeutsch; LzN). For three years, Bremen has been working together with Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony to organise a series of interstate training courses for all teachers from the above-mentioned federal states.

At the University of Oldenburg, teachers and trainee teachers have the option to study Low German (a cooperation between the universities of Bremen and Oldenburg).

There are no regular TV programmes available in Low German.

#### **Hamburg / Hamborg**

*a. Take concrete steps to promote Low German in education, at pre-school, primary and secondary level, including by ensuring adequate teacher training.*

*b. Encourage the publication of newspaper articles, including online, in Low German on a regular basis.*

New education plans for Hamburg were published at the end of 2022. In the education plans for the subject German, a focus on the Low German regional language is compulsory at all types of school. However, time spent focusing on the language is inconsistent. The Low German Speakers' Group is not aware of how many schools provide Low German teaching and in what form. Even after several enquiries with the education authority, no figures could be obtained on this. Low German teaching is not evaluated. The Low German Speakers' Group is not aware of any new teacher training schemes. As part of their training, teachers from Hamburg can attend some of the online courses provided by the State Centre for Low German (Länderzentrum für Niederdeutsch; LzN). Overall, the situation of Low German at all school levels is unsatisfactory.

Hardly any newspaper articles are published in Low German.

### **Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania / *Mäkelborg-Vörpommern***

*a. Continue measures strengthening Low German in education at all levels, including by ensuring adequate teacher training.*

*b. Take practical measures encouraging the use of Low German in administration, in accordance with the undertakings ratified.*

The Low German Speakers' Group considers that there is insufficient language training for teachers, trainee teachers, pupils, and in adult education. There is a lack of sustained opportunities to use the language, which are needed in order to strengthen Low German in the education system. Low German has not been taught at the University of Rostock for years. In schools, a continuous offer of Low German that goes beyond the four "profile schools" would help. This would allow many students living in sparsely populated, poorly connected rural areas the opportunity to learn the regional language. A clear list of Low German classes/training available in the education system would also be helpful.

The authorities barely use any Low German. Many employees of administrative authorities, public services and judicial authorities are unaware of the undertakings entered into under the European Language Charter. The Low German Speakers' Group is not aware of any measures to promote the use of Low German in these domains, such as designated contact persons, Low German documents (e.g. forms) or a Low German online presence.

### **Lower Saxony / *Neddersassen***

*a. Further strengthen the educational offer for Low German at all appropriate levels.*

In the field of education, the Low German language, or mother tongue, was not explicitly included in the training plan when revising the curricula for generalist training in the nursing professions. The positive results so far of including Low German as part of training for geriatric nursing were not taken into account. The curriculum now only mentions culturally sensitive nursing.

On the other hand, recent developments at universities have been encouraging. Starting in the 2023/24 winter semester, a new Bachelor's degree course in Low German will be offered at the University of Oldenburg. Two master's degree courses in teaching Low German at secondary school level are expected to follow. In autumn 2023, training for Low German teaching at schools is expected to begin. Low German will then soon be introduced as an optional subject at secondary schools in Lower Saxony. Thus, the state of Lower Saxony is making an important contribution to the further expansion of Low German as a subject at all types of school.



A supervisory body chaired by a representative of the working groups of the regional associations in Lower Saxony (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Landschaften und Landschaftsverbände; ALViN) stipulates in the Decree of 1 June 2019 (entitled “The region and the languages of Low German and Sater Frisian in school education”) that the implementation of the undertakings entered into under the European Language Charter in the field of education are to be reviewed. However, it does not specify what, if any, concrete steps will be taken.

### **North Rhine-Westphalia / Nordrhien-Westfaolen**

*b. Continue efforts to develop an adequate educational offer for Low German.*

In the school sector, Low German is not offered as a school subject and there is no training for teachers. Existing educational offers in activity groups and at open all-day schools are not centrally recorded. In addition to the “project primary schools” in Münster, projects are carried out at secondary schools (lower and upper secondary level) in other towns, too. The project “Low German in schools in Münster and the Münster region” (*Niederdeutsch in den Schulen in Münster und im Münsterland*) ended in March 2023. For this purpose, the University of Münster produced teaching materials for testing. Quantitative and qualitative data on the use of these were also collected. The results are not yet available. Approaches to language teaching are also sought in early childhood education. In the district of Lippe, for example, a brochure entitled *Platt in’n Kinnergoorn* was produced with funding from the state and made available to child day-care centres free of charge.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, the Low German Speakers’ Group is currently working on two other topics. The Low German advisory group, which was established in 2019, has not met again since the state elections in May 2022. Multiple questions regarding this, including from the Federal Council for Low German (Bundesrat für Niederdeutsch; BfN), have remained unanswered.

The Higher Social Court of North Rhine-Westphalia (Landessozialgericht Nordrhein-Westfalen; LSG) has ruled that a job centre does not have to issue written communications in Low German and dismissed the appeal brought by a recipient of income support against an identical judgment by the Social Court of Detmold (Sozialgericht Detmold; SG). The LSG confirmed a fee of 500 euros already set by the SG against the plaintiff (judgment of 8 September 2022, ref. L 7 AS 1360/21). The judgment is now final. The plaintiff had requested that the job centre should issue written communications in Low German. The LSG pointed out that the official language was German and that only standard German was admissible in written communications. In the view of the Low German Speakers’ Group, this contradicts the undertakings under Article 7 of the European Language Charter, which the state of North Rhine-Westphalia has adopted.

### **Saxony-Anhalt / Sassen-Anholt**

*a. Take resolute action to develop an adequate educational offer for Low German.*

The Low German Speakers’ Group sees a particular need for action at primary school level – to expose children to the language there and help them learn it. Therefore, from July 2023, the multi-year project “Low German at School” (*Niederdeutsch in der Schule*) will be implemented with state funding from the State Chancellery / Ministry of Culture. The project can be considered a first step towards strengthening the educational offer for Low German at primary school. Through the systematic involvement of Low German speakers, the project will support activity groups for Low German in selected primary schools in rural areas. The Low German Speakers’ Group particularly welcomes the multi-year nature of the project (which runs until the end of 2026) and the willingness of the State

Chancellery to support it. At the same time, greater commitment from the state's Ministry of Education would be welcome, as the project falls within its area of responsibility. The problem remains of how to continue Low German into secondary schools. The number of Low German-speaking teachers has fallen sharply, but the current teaching community still generally has a positive attitude towards the language. In order to reach a sufficient number of adequately trained teachers, the Low German Speakers' Group considers that two measures are needed. Firstly, the continued provision of teaching and learning material, especially at child day-care centres and primary schools. To this end, it is essential to continue the cooperation between the Union for Local and Regional Traditions in Saxony-Anhalt (Landesheimatbund Sachsen-Anhalt e.V.) and the University Magdeburg (Low German as part of German studies; continuation of the *Plattdütschbüdel*), which is currently still ongoing. Secondly, language learning courses for adults must be developed and provided, especially for teachers and using online methods. The Low German Speakers' Group welcomes the fact that this is a priority in the above-mentioned state-level project. There is an urgent need for support from the education sector (spreading information, recognising training qualifications, allowing study leave).

### **Schleswig-Holstein / Sleswig-Holsteen**

*a. Further strengthen the offer of Low German in education at primary and secondary levels, including by ensuring adequate teacher training.*

The Federal Council for Low German (Buunsraat för Nedderdüütsch) welcomes the further expansion of the offer of Low German to primary and secondary levels at the model schools in this federal state. However, there is currently an imbalance between the offer at primary schools and at secondary schools. The majority of primary school pupils no longer have access to Low German lessons when they move to secondary school. There is an urgent need to further develop a continuous programme of Low German teaching. To this end, more model secondary schools need to be engaged, especially in the catchment areas where Low German is offered in primary schools. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for an assessment of the Low German teaching offered by model schools, as some model schools do not appear to have a continuous offer. It is also necessary to identify which schools offer Low German teaching outside the model school project. Teacher training should aim to ensure that students have the opportunity to work as a teacher at a model school after completing their training. So far this has not always been possible.

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# DOMOWINA

## **6. Comments by the Domowina Federation of Lusatian Sorbs (Domowina – Bund Lausitzer Sorben e.V.)**

**Comments by the Domowina Federation of Lusatian Sorbs (Bund Lausitzer Sorben e.V.) for the Mid-Term Report following the Seventh Report of the Federal Republic of Germany in accordance with Article 15 (1) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; comments in response to the recommendations for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts**

### **Recommendations for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts**

#### *1. Upper Sorbian in the Free State of Saxony:*

- a) Ensure that a sufficient number of teachers is available for Upper Sorbian education at all levels.
- b) Increase the offer of television programmes in Upper Sorbian, in particular in terms of frequency and duration.

#### *2. Lower Sorbian in the federal state of Brandenburg*

- a) Extend and strengthen the offer of Lower Sorbian in pre-school, primary and secondary education, including by providing for it as an integral part of the curriculum more consistently.
- b) Ensure that a sufficient number of teachers is available for Lower Sorbian education at all levels.

**Re. points 1a) and 2b):** The Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages rightly notes that ensuring a sufficient number of teachers at all levels is the biggest challenge facing both the Lower Sorbian and Upper Sorbian languages. Despite various commendable measures taken by the authorities in both Saxony and Brandenburg, the trend remains negative. We are aware that this challenge is not purely a Sorbian problem but affects the entire education system in Germany. The shortage of teachers is certainly being addressed with creative measures. Such measures are also being implemented where possible for Sorbian teaching. But this is not enough to solve the problem. While the measures taken by the authorities are welcome, they are not sufficient in the short and medium term to ensure adequate quantity and quality of Sorbian language teaching. And it is important to ensure the quality of Sorbian teaching.

With regard to the measures taken, the newly established Sorbian language school at the Regional State Office for Schools and Education (Landesamt für Schule und Bildung) in Bautzen is an important initiative. It is commendable that not only teachers but also childcare workers are able to use its services free of charge. However, it should also be noted that the willingness of teachers and childcare workers to learn Sorbian languages is limited. Appeals to school directors and personal requests to teachers to use these language services have not had the desired effect. Additional incentives are needed for this. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play an important role in this regard.

Possible incentives could include:

- Allowing participation in Sorbian language courses during working hours or in return for a reduction in working hours. In the current situation of teacher shortages, hardly anyone is willing to use their free time for language courses; and they are well aware that learning another language to teach later requires extra effort. Employers should therefore allow their staff paid time off from work to complete language courses.
- Each language course ends with a test. Staff who complete the certified course are then paid by their employer according to that qualification.
- Teachers with a command of the Sorbian language are supported throughout their professional life and may attend specialist courses for teaching Sorbian during working hours in order to enlarge their vocabulary in that language.
- Teachers who are qualified in the Sorbian language, who teach bilingually or in the Sorbian language receive a bonus (e.g. in the form of time off, more holidays, special payments or a top-up of their monthly salary).
- Educational institutions with qualified language staff receive a bonus (e.g. a higher rate for providing Witaj groups) in order to encourage institutions to offer their staff language training.

In order to safeguard education in Sorbian, it must be made easier for native speakers of Sorbian coming from other careers and for Czech and Polish teachers to train for teaching posts in schools that offer Sorbian. This is the only way to maintain Sorbian education in line with requirements over the coming decades.

Further incentives need also to be put in place during training. Any student who enrolls at a university in Saxony or Brandenburg, especially for teacher training or another teaching-related course, should be given the opportunity to indicate during the enrolment process that they speak Sorbian, have Sorbian language skills or wish to learn Sorbian. These students should then be provided with information about language courses during their studies, as well as information about Sorbian contact points and Sorbian student associations.

The guiding principle here is long-term planning and help for teachers and childcare workers in learning the Sorbian language as part of on-the-job training in their daily working routine.

There is also a need to improve cooperation between different government authorities (also across federal states). With regard to university training for people coming from other careers (master's degree in Lower Sorbian), the Ministry of Education needs to coordinate with the university on enrolment requirements. Every (future) teacher should be aware of the options for language training at every stage in their career: when making the decision to train as a teacher; during the training course; during their work experience; and while actually working. Additional language training for this should be explicitly encouraged and rewarded. The state authorities (from the ministry through the education office to the educational institutions themselves) should keep each other informed and coordinate with each other.

In addition, a regular assessment (half-yearly or quarterly?) of the deficit in teaching hours available for Sorbian at the relevant schools is necessary in order to be able to take quick remedial action.

**Re. point 2a):** An expansion of the offer of Lower Sorbian at school is a worthy, desirable and, in our view, necessary goal; but it is currently unattainable – not only because of the precarious staff situation. At present, we are looking at ensuring and strengthening a basic offer of Sorbian. Lower Sorbian as a foreign language is currently taught as an optional subject outside core school hours (i.e. in the 5th, 6th or 7th lesson of the day). Students are often exhausted at that point and their motivation is therefore low. This makes teaching hard work, and in turn has a negative impact on the teacher’s motivation. To remedy this, there is an urgent need for greater appreciation of Sorbian teaching, and for Lower Sorbian to be put on an equal footing with other languages in the curriculum. Another problem in Brandenburg is the fact that WITAJ teachers in schools with WITAJ programmes are required to stand in for missing teachers in other subjects. As a result, Sorbian/bilingual lessons get cancelled. Here, again, there is a lack of appreciation of Sorbian/bilingual lessons.

**Re. point 1b):** The Committee of Experts rightly recommends an increase in the offer of television programmes in Sorbian. One 30-minute TV magazine show per month is not sufficient.

We would like to point out that people, especially of the younger generation, now consume a wide range of (digital) media. And these are not limited to one medium – such as television – but are interconnected. We need a media offer in Sorbian that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so that users do not have to constantly switch to other languages in order to get the information they want. There is a large gap in the provision of such media.

The following should be aimed for in the provision of media:

- Development of digital news offers in Sorbian, e.g. a daily Sorbian video format for social media or the ARD media library, podcasts, etc.
- Dubbed versions of films or TV series (of the fictional genre) made by public service broadcasters, especially films or programmes for children.
- Creation of a dedicated music platform for Sorbian-language musical offerings (including MDR and RBB productions)
- Creation of a video platform for Sorbian-language offers (magazine shows, films, series, music videos, etc.) provided by public service broadcasters (this could be part of the ARD media library)

Not only is the provision of specific media formats in Sorbian language necessary; it is also necessary to have a Sorbian-language presence, specific Sorbian themes and Sorbian music as part of the general programming of public service broadcasters.

### **Information on new developments since the early 2021**

Given the increase in digitalisation, it is essential to increase the presence of Sorbian languages in the digital world.

From 2019, strategic work was carried out on which areas should be further addressed in future. As a result, the Sorbian digitalisation concept was presented in 2021. It set out nine areas of action with 24 thematic areas, for each of which a benefit analysis was carried out.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://konzept.serbski-inkubator.de>

A focus of future activities will be on modern language technologies, which are increasingly present in everyday life but do not include Sorbian languages. The three most important technologies are the automatic recognition of spoken language (speech recognition), the machine translation of texts (machine translation) and the automatic generation of spoken language (text-to-speech). The challenge for Sorbian languages lies in the fact that the amount of data available for training these technologies in Sorbian is significantly smaller than for more widely used languages. Such data therefore will not be used by leading global companies. We Sorbs are therefore breaking new ground and doing pioneering work not only for the Sorbian languages but for minority languages in general.

**Voice recognition** for Sorbian: A voice recognition programme for Sorbian and a virtual simultaneous interpreter are being designed; and evaluations are being carried out on two prototypes of an interactive toy for pre-school children who speak Sorbian or are learning Sorbian.

**Machine translation of texts:** Since 2021, there has been a promising first version of a two-way machine translation tool for translating texts between Upper Sorbian and German. Since 2022, it has also been available for Lower Sorbian. The main focus of the project is the creation of a high-quality corpus of bilingual texts with several hundred thousand sentence pairs in Upper (and Lower) Sorbian and German, which is constantly being expanded. This corpus is technologically neutral, which has allowed Microsoft to integrate the two Sorbian languages into its multilingual translation service “Bing”.

This will allow translations between Upper (and Lower) Sorbian and all of the languages that Microsoft supports.

**Text-to-speech:** A Sorbian text-to-speech tool has been in development since 2018. This tool is expected to be ready for use by the public in 2023.

In order to continue developing these pioneering measures in the coming years, additional funding will be essential.

While the development of our own solutions proves that modern language technologies can also be used for small languages, we aim to integrate the data generated into global databases. Although we have already succeeded with Microsoft as a first step, we have yet to make any progress with Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. To achieve this, we are hoping for strong support from political actors, who have much greater lobbying power than Sorbian groups.

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**7. Comments by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma e.V.) and the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma)**

**Comments on the Romani minority language**

**by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in response to the recommendations for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe for the Mid-Term Report following the Seventh Report of the Federal Republic of Germany on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Germany**

-- Comments from 17 July 2023 --

**1. The importance of the Language Charter for the protection of the Romani language:**

The Central Council and the Documentation Centre would like to stress the importance of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages as a set of rules in the context of our democratic system. Since 1998, the Language Charter has recognised Romani as a language with equal status to all other languages in Europe. The preservation and promotion of Romani within its minority community of speakers is an important part of the work of associations seeking to preserve the cultural identity of this recognised national minority. Against the historical background of the Holocaust, the majority of Sinti and Roma members oppose the transmission of their language to non-members of the minority, which means that the direct implementation of certain provisions of the Charter is neither desirable nor necessary at the moment. The provisions of the Charter must not be interpreted against the will of the minority; at the same time, this limitation should not lead to the impression in Germany's report that the minority refuses to implement the Language Charter. On the contrary, the Federal Government and state governments should recognise the work being done by associations to preserve the language within the minority community. This recognition should be reflected in Germany's report, and the authorities should support this work in a targeted way.

**2. The Romani language**

German Sinti and Roma families traditionally speak Romani as their second mother tongue, in addition to German. Owing to historical developments, the Romani language is spoken in a number of dialects and varieties. Romani has no standardised written form and has been handed down orally over centuries. The Romani dialect spoken by German Sinti and Roma differs from other Romani dialects spoken elsewhere in Europe, although all are derived from ancient Indian Sanskrit. They have a common core vocabulary which indicates Sanskrit, Persian, Armenian and Greek origins. Romani and Sanskrit grammar have many close links. The Central Council and the Documentation Centre do not participate in efforts to standardise and reform the language, as pursued by the European Roma Institute for Art and Culture (ERAC). This is because such initiatives make the language accessible

to learners outside the minority community; and our associations prefer to promote language preservation and development within the minority community.

### 3. Historical context: Nazi persecution

In the past, those members of the majority population who did research on the Romani language often did so in an effort to make the minority more vulnerable to attack. Almost all linguistic literature reflected negative “gypsy stereotypes”. Ultimately, the Nazi regime, with its extermination program based on racial ideology, sought not only to wipe out the Sinti and Roma but also to eradicate their culture. A large proportion of older members of the minority group were actually murdered, taking with them a great deal of linguistic knowledge. In 1936, the SS mandated the so-called race researchers of the Third Reich to register all Sinti and Roma. They learned their language in an effort to gain their confidence and gather useful information about them on the basis of which they were later deported to the ghettos and extermination camps of occupied Poland. It is against this background that most of the German Sinti and Roma, in particular Holocaust survivors, refuse to share their language with persons not belonging to their ethnic groups. This is a stance the Central Council and its associated members cannot and will not disrespect.

### 4. Impact of antigypsyism on the minority and its language preservation

Deep-rooted antigypsyism, a specific form of racism (see *Grundlagenpapier Antiziganismus*<sup>26</sup> and the IHRA’s working definition<sup>27</sup>), has for centuries led to stigmatisation, marginalisation and persecution of the minority, culminating in the Holocaust with 500,000 murdered Sinti and Roma in Nazi-occupied Europe. According to the IHRA’s working definition, one characteristic of antigypsyism is the disparaging of Sinti and Roma language and culture. In the past, this led to official bans and restrictions on the use of the Romani language in many European countries, and still today this legacy presents challenges to language preservation. Even after the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany, many forms of exclusion and discrimination against Sinti and Roma continued, in particular by the police and other state authorities. This systematic injustice after 1945 was noted by an independent commission on antigypsyism in its 800-page final report of June 2021 to the Federal Government and the German Bundestag, and was recognised as a “second persecution” by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in his speech of 24 October 2022. The condemnation, combating and prevention of antigypsyism remains one of the most important tasks of our democratic state and our society – to ensure and promote equal participation of Sinti and Roma in political, social and economic life. Protection against antigypsyism is essential for the preservation and development of the cultural identity of the Sinti and Roma, and thus of the Romani minority language. This requires effective measures to overcome antigypsyist prejudices in society; it also requires social recognition of Romani as a minority language and recognition of the cultural achievements of the minority in general.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/grundlagenpapier-antiziganismus/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/zentralrat-deutscher-sinti-und-roma-begruesst-die-verabschiedung-der-ihra-arbeitsdefinition-zu-antiziganismus/>



## 5. Language preservation and promotion of Romani within the minority community

The preservation and promotion of Romani is important to German Sinti and Roma, who want it to be practised and promoted within the framework of the minority group. Romani is an important cultural resource of the minority community. The language is the hallmark of their identity and is highly appreciated within the minority, especially among the younger generations. The education unit of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma, which is responsible for the preservation and promotion of the German variety of Romani, is developing the debate within the minority community on the future of the language by engaging in dialogue with member associations and members of the minority on the preservation and development of Romani, in particular the Romani of the Sinti.

### 5.1 Promotion of language and culture through state treaties with the state associations

Some of the associations of the Central Council at federal state level have formulated language policy objectives in state treaties and framework agreements with their federal states, most recently in Bavaria (2023). The Central Council supports the efforts of other state associations (currently those of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hamburg, Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony) to conclude state treaties with their respective federal states. These state treaties should include the recognition of Romani as a minority language and provide for language promotion and preservation within the minority community.

### 5.2 Educational offers provided by minority organisations.

The associations are constantly producing new learning and teaching formats aimed at members of the minority community. These offerings not only strengthen language teaching, but are important in empowering young Romani speakers and promoting the preservation and appreciation of the language in everyday life. For example, the associations offer language support through (online) Romani teaching for different age groups and target groups. They offer educational support and help with homework, concerts with songs in Romani, and bilingual online discussions; they also organise children's and youth conferences and events in Romani and German (puppet theatre); and they provide information and publications in Romani aimed at the minority community, such as children's books and the annual magazine *Newess*, published by the Documentation Centre together with the Central Council. The Documentation Centre supported Romani translation work for the first travelling exhibition on national minorities, "What is a minority?" (*Was heißt hier Minderheit?*).<sup>28</sup>

The majority of language promotion offers can only be provided through voluntary work on the part of the minority community. The associations support the recommendation for immediate action made by the Committee of Experts to expand the provision of Romani education for the minority by supporting specific projects and programmes of the associations.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://washeissthierminderheit.de/>

### 5.3 Extracurricular tuition in Romani

The Central Council and the Documentation Centre are in favour of extra-curricular teaching to support the Romani language. This takes place outside regular state school teaching, is accessible only to children from the minority, is provided exclusively by minority teachers and organised in cooperation with minority organisations. Participation is always voluntary and the rights of minority members who do not want to participate in these classes are respected. In addition, it is up to the initiators of such language promotion and preservation measures to take account of local conditions and decide whether to teach on or outside school premises. The Central Council aims to intensify exchanges and dialogue within the minority in order to clarify and further develop expectations, conditions, objectives and educational formats.

### 5.4 Training of Romani language teaching staff within the minority

The Central Council and the Documentation Centre are in favour of training language teaching staff from the minority community for the preservation and teaching of Romani. The associations of the Central Council at federal state level and their educational officers should be given support in promoting the culture and language of the minority within the community and in contributing to its preservation. The associations agree with the Committee of Experts' recommendation that Romani teaching staff be supported within the minority community through targeted support of minority organisations.

### 5.5 Promoting linguistic vitality

The publication of a translation of classical poems into Romani has opened up a new chapter on Romani language promotion. Reinhold Lagrene, who was head of the education unit of the Documentation Centre for many years, until his death in 2016, focused largely on the preservation and promotion of the German variety of the Romani language. By translating classic German poetry, Reinhold Lagrene demonstrated to the German Sinti and Roma the linguistic vitality of the Romani language. This work was published posthumously in 2018 under the title *Djiparmissa - Klassische deutsche Gedichte auf Romanes* (classical German poems in Romani) by Wunderhorn, Heidelberg.

## 6. Recognition of the Romani minority language in society

It is an important task of state minority policy, based on the Language Charter, to promote social recognition of the Romani minority language, thus raising public awareness that the Sinti and Roma have resided in Germany for more than 600 years and are a recognised national minority together with the Danes, Frisians and Sorbs. An important basis for this is the December 2022 Joint Declaration, issued by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states and by the Central Council, on teaching about the history and present-day lives of Sinti and Roma in schools. This Declaration will now be taken up and implemented by the state governments in their education plans and textbooks. The associations support the Committee of Experts' recommendation that appropriate measures be taken to further promote awareness-raising in society.

## 7. The role of the media

For years, the Central Council has criticised the disparaging and often antigypsyist media coverage of Sinti and Roma, which has been the subject of empirical research and documentation by the independent commission on antigypsyism. In order to combat antigypsyism and to strengthen the equal participation of the minority in the media, the Central Council calls for the associations to be allowed to sit on the respective broadcasting and media councils (previously this was only possible in Rheinland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia) and to be represented in other cultural policy bodies, such as film funding structures. Some media productions in Romani, such as radio programmes and podcasts, have been created in recent years at the initiative of the minority. The recommendation of the Committee of Experts to promote Romani in the media is therefore supported, on condition that such productions are only implemented at the initiative of or in cooperation with organisations of the minority community. At the same time, the media can play an important role in promoting the recognition of Romani as a minority language.

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*8. Comments by the Sinti Alliance of Germany (Sinti Allianz Deutschland e.V.)*

**COMMENTS BY THE SINTI ALLIANCE OF GERMANY  
FOR THE MID-TERM REPORT FOLLOWING THE SEVENTH REPORT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC  
OF GERMANY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY  
LANGUAGES**

The right of children of the Sinti and Roma minority in Germany to speak the Romani language is essential to the recognition and preservation of the cultural identity of the Sinti and Roma minority in Germany and Europe.

Sinti and Roma are ethnic minorities in Germany who have a long history in this country. Their language, Romani, is a central part of their cultural identity and tradition. However, persecution and exclusion over the centuries, culminating tragically in fascist terror in Germany and Europe, led to the marginalisation of the Romani language and of Sinti and Roma culture.

Germany has recognised the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, partly in reparation for the genocide of the Sinti and Roma in Germany and Europe. In doing so, Germany has taken a first step towards protecting the rights of Sinti and Roma and strengthening their cultural identity. **One of the most important tools for this is the recognition of Romani as a minority language.** This recognition makes it possible to ensure that the Romani language is taken into account in educational institutions, media and other public areas.

But in these domains there are still considerable gaps. The **right to education in the mother tongue** is a crucial factor in maintaining and promoting the Romani language among the Sinti and Roma. However, the German education system is very slow and hesitant in accepting the importance of **teaching in the "home language" for children's learning process.** So there is still too little awareness of this point in the education system in Germany – at schools and in teacher training.

**The opportunity to learn in their own language allows children to strengthen their cultural identity and build their self-confidence.** This can help to improve their performance at school and facilitate their integration into society without them losing their own sense of identity.

In addition, the **majority of teachers are still unaware that the German Sinti and Roma are a recognised national minority.** The same is true in the field of vocational training.

Another important right of children of the Sinti and Roma minority is that **the Romani language be promoted in the media.** Modern access to radio, television, newspapers and online offerings in the Romani language is not only an opportunity for Sinti and Roma to celebrate their own culture, but also helps to break down prejudices and stereotypes that are often associated with this minority.

Efforts to protect the Romani language therefore face problems.

## CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

- The German **education system remains structurally unfair** by separating children according to their performance after four years.
- Teachers generally have **no contact with the everyday life of the minority**. So what **qualified teachers are available**?
- In order to teach Sinti and Roma children well, it is important that teachers have the **skills and attributes** to promote inclusion.
- **Stigmatisation and prejudice**: Sinti and Roma still face prejudice and discrimination in education and other domains, just as they did in the past. This can lead to members of these minorities hiding their cultural identity and language for fear of exclusion or stigmatisation.
- **Linguistic assimilation**: Globalisation and urbanisation may mean that younger generations of Sinti and Roma no longer speak the Romani language as well as previous generations.
- **Lack of support** from the political domain and from society at large.
- **Lack of legal enforcement**: Although there are laws designed to ensure the protection of minorities and their languages, these laws are not necessarily enforced effectively.

In **current school curricula**, Sinti and Roma mostly appear as victims of the Nazi regime, and thus almost exclusively in history books.

There are still **textbooks in Germany** in which the perspectives and language of perpetrators (e.g. of Himmler) or antigypsy stereotypes are presented without students and teachers being required to question and discuss them. This can unintentionally lead to the spread of racist attitudes.

There is no requirement in any German school curriculum to address the issue of **antigypsyism** (see *Schulbücher und Antiziganismus: Zur Darstellung von Sinti und Roma in aktuellen deutschen Lehrplänen und Schulbüchern*, Dossier 3 (2021), Rath, | Spielhaus, BS 2021).

Furthermore, **teaching materials and curricula make no mention of the rich cultural history** of the Sinti in Germany. There is also no mention of the vitality and diversity of this minority, and no expression of the idea that the Sinti and Roma make our country culturally richer and more diverse.

## WHAT CAN SINTI AND ROMA DO *THEMSELVES*?

By proudly living and preserving their cultural identity, Sinti and Roma can help overcome prejudices and stereotypes. Preserving their own language, traditions, music and customs contributes to the **visibility and recognition** of their community.

By informing themselves about their **rights as a minority**, Sinti and Roma can better defend their interests and fight discrimination. This can also help to protect and promote the rights of their children in educational institutions.

## STEPS TOWARDS FAIR AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The enforcement of the **minority rights of Sinti and Roma children** who speak the Romani language is an important step towards a more inclusive and diverse society in Germany.

The **structure of the German education system hinders the equality of Sinti and Roma children.**

Although Germany strives for inclusive education, there are still the same barriers that make it difficult to ensure equal education for all students, including children of Sinti and Roma.

We, the Sinti Alliance of Germany, see the main reasons for this in the following factors:

- **Selective secondary schools based on pupils' performance; segregation and special needs schools:** Many Sinti and Roma children are still placed in special-needs schools or specialised institutions.
- **Educational inequality at schools:** There are still differences in the educational quality and equipment available at different schools in Germany.
- **Lack of cultural sensitivity:** The education system does not sufficiently address the cultural needs and particular situation of Sinti and Roma children.

Therefore, in order to promote equality between Sinti and Roma children in the German education, there is an urgent need to improve the **structure of the education system** while promoting **inclusive approaches** to education.

In our view, the greatest obstacle, apart from the unfair structure of the education system itself, is the broader educational landscape and its stakeholders. The fact that education policy in Germany is decided at federal state level is a great asset in some respects. But in this context it is a hindrance.

All the relevant issues have repeatedly been raised over the years, and the question now is why so little has changed in the situation of German Sinti and Roma children.

Why is there such disregard for our children's fundamental right to equal participation in education and their right to think and learn in their own language? It is high time to make changes **in practice**.

Bergisch Gladbach, 14 July 2023



Oskar Weiss  
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**9. Comments by the Federal Union of German Sinti and Roma (Bundesvereinigung deutscher Sinti und Roma e.V.)**



Bundesvereinigung der Sinti und Roma e.V.  
 RomnoKher gGmbH  
 The Baden-Württemberg Association of German Sinti and Roma  
 (Verband Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesverband Baden-Württemberg e. V.)

**Comments for the Mid-Term Report following the Seventh Report of the Federal Republic of Germany in accordance with Article 15 (1) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

14 July  
 2023

*It is necessary to fund the systematic training of language teachers in accordance with the proposed plan of the Baden-Württemberg Association of German Sinti and Roma (VDSR-BW) and in accordance with a nationwide adult education institute (Volkshochschule). This funding needs to come from the Federal level, state level and from the municipalities. There also needs to be funding for Romani language content in public service media.*

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Language Charter) aims to protect and promote the regional or minority languages spoken in countries that are signatories to the Language Charter in order to promote European cultural heritage. The Romani language of the German Sinti and Roma is one of the minority languages protected in Germany. The comprehensive set of rules provided by the Language Charter is designed to guarantee the preservation of these languages and to promote their use in public and private life. With regard to the Romani language of the German Sinti and Roma, little has been done by the state to achieve this goal. The commitments arising from the Language Charter have not been met. Among the few exceptions to this is the treaty between the state of Baden-Württemberg and the VDSR-BW, which explicitly mentions the teaching of language and culture.

Based on empirical evidence and their own extensive experience, the Federal Union of German Sinti and Roma (BVSr) and RomnoKher gGmbH (the initiator of nationwide studies on the situation of the Sinti and Roma in Germany – last updated and expanded in 2023) call for urgent action and the need to comply with the Language Charter. It must become a state task to support the preservation, use and teaching of Romani, the language of the German Sinti and Roma. This support could build on the steps already taken by the minority organisations themselves.

Pioneering steps have been taken by two BVSr members: RomnoKher gGmbH (with its robust empirical studies showing the importance of Romani as an identity language) and VDSR-BW



(which has established its first Romani language school and developed a language school strategy and learning material in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)). These considerable advances were made with the support of the EVZ Foundation. State funding must be provided without delay to support these endeavours.

Background:

For historical and cultural reasons, there has for a long time been no standard variety of the Romani language. The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities commit all their signatory states, including the Federal Republic of Germany, to recognise and promote minority languages. This includes the Romani language of the Sinti in Germany as an autochthonous national minority. Not only must linguistic/cultural activities be supported, but also, at the request of the spokespersons of the minority, the preservation of the language through school teaching must be made possible.

Owing to their historical persecution, for a long time the German national minority had no desire for their language to be taught. However, this attitude is changing among the younger generations. Against this historical background, there was, until recently, no standardised form of the Sinti variety of Romani. This is in contrast to some Eastern European varieties of Romani. And even now, due to the specific characteristics of the Sinti variety, the standard can only serve as an orientation and does not provide any specific guidance. In the absence of any initiatives on the part of the state, the organisations commenting in this Mid-Term report try to address these issues in their projects.

These projects have been able to build on important steps taken in recent years. The Sinti community's growing online communication via social media is limited in the extent that it can help develop a standard language variety; or rather, it demonstrates the urgent need for such a variety. However, the translation of the entire Bible into Sinti Romanes, which was completed in 2021, was a milestone in establishing a standard variety. The VDSR-BW language school already bases its teaching (successfully) on this recently established standard variety. This has led to the development of a language learning curriculum in line with the CEFR.

There is also urgent need for action in another area. Only recently, the *Handbuch der Sprachminderheiten in Deutschland* (Handbook of Language Minorities in Germany; Tübingen 2020), written by leading experts, identified a lack of concrete measures to develop minority languages. Since then, the VDSR-BW and RomnoKher projects have tried to remedy this fundamental shortcoming. These projects must now serve as the basis for support in line with the commitments under the Language Charter.

This first step represents a turning point in establishing concrete measures to develop the Sinti variety of Romani. This means resolving the contradiction that Romani, like other minority languages, is increasingly valued as an identity symbol and expression of cultural self-reliance, but in the absence of a reliable basis, the efforts of associations and committees have often remained purely symbolic without lasting results. This was also the conclusion of the authors of the Handbook mentioned above.

The comprehensive approach of "Romani as an identity language" (*Romanes als Identitätssprache*), developed by the VDSR-BW under the supervision of minority academics working as teachers, responds to this acute need. In view of our experience and the huge expectations placed upon us, there is an extremely great need (especially for Sinti who do not speak Romani as their

mother tongue, and who therefore feel a loss of cultural identity and expression, but also for Sinti who do speak Romani) to deepen their linguistic/cultural personal development.

Standards for Romani as an identity language have been set by the above-mentioned language learning curriculum (in line with the CEFR), whose approach is based on curricula for second and foreign languages. On this basis, a professional teaching and learning system for Romani as an identity language is being developed; this, in line with the CEFR, will bring a sense of dedicated empowerment because language is linked to culture, history and identity. This project represents the “arrival” of Romani teaching, by and for the minority, as part of the “mainstream” system, as desired by a large proportion of the minority community. The “Romani as an identity language” approach has also been shown to improve the educational success of members of the national minority of German Sinti and Roma.

The historical peculiarity of the linguistic situation of Romani explains the lack of state support it has received in recent years. However, the demands and preparatory work now coming from the minority community require that this situation change and that support be immediately provided for the preservation, use and teaching of the Romani language.

Language promotion under the terms of the Language Charter is also considered a top priority in the federal-level draft treaty submitted by the BVSJ together with the Sinti Alliance of Germany. (The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community is familiar with this draft treaty).

1. Our most urgent demand is therefore the establishment and funding of a minority-organised institute for adult education (Volkshochschule), which can also deliver decentralised and online courses, provide the necessary staff, and develop learning materials. Romani is the identity language of the German national minority, and the VDSR-BW approach of “Romani as an identity language” provides a foundation on which to build without delay.
2. A second key demand, derived from the above, is the development of Romani content in public service media, in cooperation with Romani-speaking members of the German national minority. Here, Germany is lagging behind the efforts of other countries, such as Austria with its Romani programmes provided by the public service broadcaster Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF). There is also an urgent need to catch up with other minority language communities, such as the Sorbian community. The financing of such programmes should be a governmental task in the spirit of the Language Charter. In this context too, the above-mentioned approach “Romani as an identity language” should be built upon in order to consolidate the Romani standards already developed.

Academic material and curriculum:

- Unequal participation. *Zur Lage der Sinti und Roma in Deutschland* (RomnoKher study, 2021, forthcoming); in particular: David Strauß, *Konzeptionelle Schriftlichkeit in der gesprochenen Sprache – die Hochsprache im Romanes* (Written language concepts in the spoken language – a standard variety of Romani).
- ROI – Romanes als Identitätssprache. Rahmenplan und Handreichung für den Unterricht Romanes als Identitätssprache. David Strauß and VDSR-BW, 2022.

Minority voices:

Self-identity conference 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcKcpM8Cqbg&t=11s>

The self-identity discussion on RomnoKher-News:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt2kGShY5Qw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH1MyjJhedE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOcJp2kDZuM&t=18s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkfjXLHyEXg&t=15s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkfjXLHyEXg&t=25s>

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## **F. Concluding remarks**

The responsible federal and state authorities will address the critical comments made by the representatives of the national minorities and the Low German Speakers' Group and will describe further progress in the next report. Efforts will continue in implementing the Language Charter.



Frisian lessons in the school year 2022/23		Authority/organisation	Type/details of classes	No. of teachers	1st grade		2nd grade		3rd grade		4th grade		5th grade		6th grade		7th grade		8th grade		9th grade		10th grade		≥ 11th grade		Total	
Hours per week (Hrs/wk) and number of pupils (No. pupils)					Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils
4.	Rüm-Hart primary school with Wyk special school	Föhr-Amrum authority	Frisian study group in 1st+2nd grades, in weekly rotation	1 <sup>ii</sup>	0.5	17	0.5	16	0.5	7	0.5	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	50
5.	St Nicolai primary and special school, Westerland/Sylt	Municipality of Sylt	Frisian lessons in 1st-4th grades, also 2 hours of bilingual teaching in 3rd+4th grades for basic science (voluntary; no. of pupils in brackets)	1	0.5	12	0.5	12	0.5	6	0.5	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	45
	Nordkamp primary school: St Nicolai premises	Municipality of Sylt	Mixed study group for 1st+2nd and 3rd+4th grades	1 <sup>iii</sup>	0.5	1	0.5	8	1	3	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	12
6.	Norrdörfer primary school, Wenningstedt/Sylt	Norrdörfer school association		1 <sup>iv</sup>	-	-	-	-	2	30			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	30
7.	Boy-Lornsen primary school, Tinnum/Sylt	Municipality of Sylt	Mixed study group for 3rd+4th grades	1	2	47	2	39	0.5	15	0.5	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	112	
8.	Amrum primary and comprehensive school	Niebull town authority	Mixed study group for 3rd+4th grades; mixed lessons (as optional subject) in 7th+10th and 8th+9th grades	3	1	26	1	16	0.5	8	0.5	8	-	-	-	-	1	3	0	0	2	4	1	7	-	-	7	72

Frisian lessons in the school year 2022/23		Authority/organisation	Type/details of classes	No. of teachers	1st grade		2nd grade		3rd grade		4th grade		5th grade		6th grade		7th grade		8th grade		9th grade		10th grade		≥ 11th grade		Total	
Hours per week (Hrs/wk) and number of pupils (No. pupils)					Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils	Hrs/wk	No. pupils
9.	Eilun Feer Skuul, Wyk/Föhr (comprehensive and secondary school)	Föhr-Amrum authority	Optional lessons in 5th+6th grades divided into two courses (one for native speakers and one for beginners); mixed lessons (as optional subject) for 9th+10th grades; beginners' foreign language classes for 11th-13th grades; one teacher on secondment from the Ferring Foundation	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	9	1	17	-	-	-	-	1	8	1	3	10	41	14	78
10.	Danske Skole Sylt	Dansk Skoleforening for Sydslesvig e.V.	Frisian lessons in mixed groups for 1st+2nd grades	1 <sup>v</sup>	1	14	1	11	1	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	35
11	Risum Skole	Dansk Skoleforening for Sydslesvig e.V.	Lessons in mixed groups for 1st-3rd, 5th-6th and 7th-9th grades	4	0.5	3	0.5	7	1	8	-	-	1	5	1	5	1	5	0.5	1	0.5	2	-	-	-	-	6	36
<b>Total for all schools</b>				<b>23</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>809</b>

<sup>i</sup> Frisian teacher on secondment from Südtondern special school

<sup>ii</sup> Frisian teacher on secondment from Föhr-Land primary school: Midlum premises

<sup>iii</sup> Frisian teacher on secondment from St Nicolai primary school, Westerland

<sup>iv</sup> Frisian teacher on secondment from Boy-Lornsen primary school, Tinnun/Sylt

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∇ Frisian teacher on secondment from Boy-Lornsen primary school, Tinnum/Sylt

Note: Frisian lessons are no longer taught at the Alwin-Lensch school (Niebüll), the Niebüll comprehensive school and Öömrang Skuul (due to retirement, parental leave and secondment of teachers).