

Many tongues, one family

Languages in the European Union



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Living languages

The language we speak helps define who we are. The European Union respects this right to identity of its 450 million citizens. While committed to integration between its member states, the EU also actively promotes the freedom of its peoples to speak and write their own language. The two aims are complementary, embodying the EU's motto of *United in diversity*.

In addition, the Union actively encourages its citizens to learn other European languages, both for reasons of professional and personal mobility within its single market, and as a force for cross-cultural contacts and mutual understanding. In an ever-growing and more diverse EU, it is important that its citizens can communicate with each other. The Union also promotes the use of regional or minority languages which are not official EU languages, but which are spoken by up to 50 million people in the member countries, and as such form part of our cultural heritage.

The EU as an organisation operates in 20 official languages. Each country decides, when joining the European Union, which of its national languages it wishes to be used as an official EU language or languages. The complete list of the European Union's official languages is then agreed by all the EU governments. It thus includes at least one of the national languages of each country.

This means EU citizens can use their national language when dealing with the EU institutions, just as they can when dealing with their national authorities at home. Similarly, all legislation adopted by the EU is directly

accessible to each citizen in his or her national language.

No other body at regional or global level uses as many official languages as the European Union. No other body spends so much on translation and interpretation, although the cost remains surprisingly modest. But then, no other body or grouping adopts legislation which applies directly to citizens in all its member states the way the EU does.

Some of the many languages used in Europe.



The 2004 enlargement of the EU, which nearly doubled the number of official languages from 11 to 20, focused attention on the role of languages in the EU as never before. In this booklet, we look in turn at the wide array of languages spoken in the EU, at the choice and challenge of learning a second (or third) language, at the EU's programmes for language teaching and language learn-

ing, and finally at what it takes to run a multilingual Union.

The care the EU takes to sustain its linguistic diversity provides an eloquent response to those critics who allege that the Union is bent on erasing national or regional characteristics and imposing a 'European' uniformity.

In the beginning was the word

The languages of the EU come from a wide variety of roots. Most are members of the vast Indo-European group, whose main branches are Germanic, Romance, Slav and Celtic. Greek and the Baltic languages, Lithuanian and Latvian, are also Indo-European, although not part of any of the principal branches. Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian come from the Finno-Ugrian group of languages. Maltese is close to Arabic with Italian influences.

Most of the 'regional' and 'minority' languages in the EU also belong to one or another of the above groups. A principal exception is Basque, spoken on both sides of the Franco-Spanish border, whose roots are still being researched. The notion of 'minority' language covers not only lesser-used languages like the Sami language of Lapland or Breton in France, but also the use of official EU languages when spoken by a minority in another member country.

The 20 official EU languages are Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish.

Celtic languages are spoken in the western confines of Europe – Ireland, Brittany in France and western parts of the United Kingdom. None is an official language of the European Union. However, Irish Gaelic has a special status: the EU treaties and some key texts have been translated into this language, which can also be used by Irish citizens for certain contacts with the EU institutions.

The EU has fewer official languages than member countries. This is because Germany and Austria share German, the United Kingdom and Ireland use the same language, Greece and Cyprus share Greek, and Belgium and Luxembourg have common languages with their French, Dutch and German neighbours. The result is 20 official languages for 25 countries.

The tongues of Europe

German is the most widely spoken mother tongue in the European Union with about 90 million native speakers. French, English and Italian are each the mother tongue of around 60 million EU citizens.

However, English is spoken by about one third of EU citizens as their first foreign language, putting it well ahead of German and the others as the most widely used language of the European Union. German and French are each spoken as a first foreign language by about 10% of the EU population.

The emergence of English as a *lingua franca* in the European Union has accelerated over the years. The most recent estimates, which pre-date the

2004 enlargement of the EU, show that more young people now choose to learn English as their first additional language compared with their elders. The figures come from a survey published by the European Commission.

Thus, 66% of 15-24 year-olds in the EU-15 claim to speak English, compared with 53% of 25-39 year-olds, 38% of 40-54 year-olds and only 18% of the over-55s.



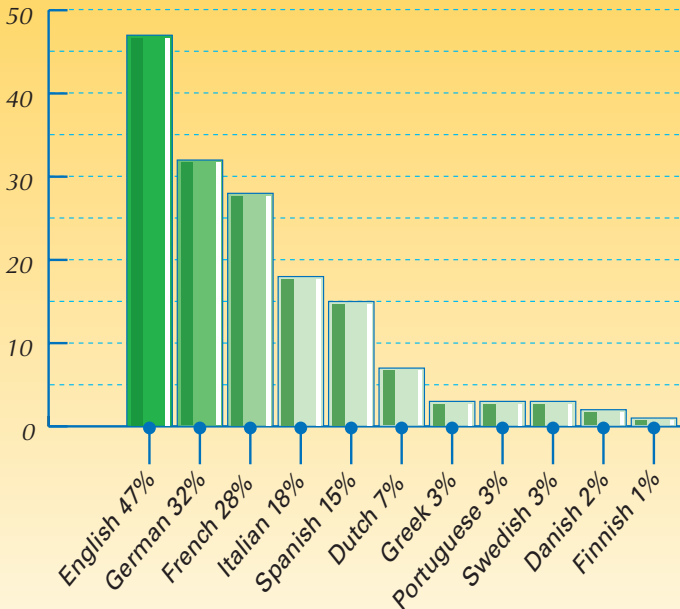
Germany is home to the most widely spoken mother tongue in the EU.

The chart shows the total proportion of EU citizens who claim to speak each language as a mother tongue or well enough to hold a conversation. English is well ahead with 47% of those polled.

Not surprisingly, the best language skills are found in countries that are relatively small or whose language is not

well known elsewhere. Virtually the whole population of Luxembourg knows a second language well enough to hold a conversation. The same is true for 80% of the Dutch, Danes and Swedes. These figures are also influenced by how close two neighbouring languages might be to one another.

The best known EU languages in 2001



Proportion of people in the 15 EU countries (in 2001) claiming to speak each language either as mother tongue or well enough to hold a conversation.

Source: European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer Survey 54*

Although most Europeans learn English, followed by German and French, as their first foreign language, this is not necessarily the most suitable choice. For EU citizens seeking to move around in order to find work, the language of a neighbouring country might be more appropriate. This is why the European Commission is encouraging people to learn two foreign languages if possible on top of their mother tongue. According to the Eurobarometer survey, 26% of those polled said they knew two other European languages in addition to their own language.

However, the survey also shows that among people in the EU who know only one language, more than half (54%) did not think they would benefit from learning an additional one.

Some of the other headline items from the survey include the following:

- a total of 71% of those polled said everyone in the EU should speak one other European language in addition to their mother tongue;
- 32% said everyone should speak their mother tongue plus two other languages;
- according to 69% of those polled, everyone in the EU should be able to speak English;
- 64% of participants said EU enlargement means we must do more to protect our own languages;
- 93% of parents say it is important for their children to learn other European languages;
- the age at which language teaching begins in EU schools has fallen over the past 20 years. The vast majority of courses now begin at age 7-10;
- most EU citizens practise their language skills while on holidays abroad (47%), followed by those who use their knowledge to watch films (23%), and those who speak a foreign language at work, either in direct contact or by phone (21%).

Regional and minority languages

Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is enshrined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted by EU leaders in 2000. It covers not only the 20 official languages of the Union but also the many regional and minority languages spoken by segments of its population. There are said to be about 150 of these, spoken by up to 50 million people, but the exact number depends on how you define a language (as opposed to a dialect, for example).

There are three accepted categories of regional and minority languages:

- Languages specific to a region which may be wholly or partially in one or more member states. This would cover languages like Basque, Breton, Catalan, Frisian, Sardinian, Welsh and so on.
- Languages spoken by a minority in one state but which are official languages in another EU country. This definition covers, for example, German in southern Denmark, French in the Vallée d'Aoste in northern Italy, Hungarian in Slovakia, etc.
- Non-territorial languages such as those of Roma or Jewish communities (Romany and Yiddish), or Armenian.

EU countries provide language courses for immigrants.



The notion of regional and minority languages does not include dialects of any of the official languages, or any of the languages spoken by immigrant communities in the European Union (see below).

In order to promote the use of these languages and to preserve them as part of the EU's cultural heritage, the European Commission set up the *Mercator Network* in 1987. The aim of the network is to meet the growing interest in minority and regional languages in Europe and the need for these language communities to work together and to exchange experiences. The network gathers, stores, analyses and distributes relevant information and documents.

The three centres chosen for the network are in Catalonia, Friesland and Wales – all regions with vibrant regional languages. Each has a speciality. The Catalan centre in Barcelona is responsible for language legislation, the Frisian one looks at language education at all levels, while the centre at the University of Wales does research into minority languages and the media.

Non-indigenous languages

A wide variety of languages from other parts of the world are spoken by immigrant communities in EU countries. Turkish is spoken as a first language by an estimated 2% of the population in Belgium and the western part of Germany and by 1% in the Netherlands. Other widely-used migrant languages include Maghreb Arabic (mainly in France and Belgium), Urdu, Bengali and Hindi spoken by immigrants from the Indian sub-continent in the United Kingdom, while Balkan languages are spoken in many parts of the EU by migrants and refugees who have left the region as a result of the recent wars and unrest there.

In general, these 'non-indigenous' languages are not given formal status or recognition in EU countries and they are not covered by EU language-teaching programmes. However, many national and local authorities provide classes to help immigrants learn the language of their adopted country and thus integrate into the workforce, the local community and national life in general. Being residents in an EU country, they also benefit from European Union social and regional development programmes.

Many immigrant communities in the EU have been in place for several generations now and their members are bilingual, at ease both in the local language and in that of their community.

Language and mobility

EU citizens have the right to live and work in a member state other than their home country. Having created the world's largest single market, the EU enables people to go to where the jobs are, thereby helping achieve the aim of making the EU the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy.

Knowing other European languages is the key to real mobility in the EU. It enables you to take maximum advantage of job, study and travel opportunities across the continent. It helps give your company a competitive advantage in international business.

Learning the local language is not only the key to getting a job in another country, but it also puts you in direct contact with local people. This often gives a whole new perspective on what it is to be European and on what it is we are creating together. Our national histories and cultural heritage may differ, but our aspirations and hopes for the future are closely in tune. Being able to speak to one another raises our awareness of what we have in common, and at the same time increases our mutual respect for cultural differences.



Knowing languages is good for business.

Promoting language learning

It is a high priority for the EU to help people move around for work and pleasure, to speak to each other across borders and to reinforce their sense of belonging to a single community.

So the EU funds a number of programmes to promote the teaching and learning of European languages. These programmes have at least one common feature: they cover cross-border projects involving partners from at least two, and often three, EU countries.

The EU programmes are designed to complement the national education policies of the member states. Each

member government is responsible for its own national education policy, including language teaching. What the EU programmes do is to create links between countries and regions via joint projects which enhance the impact of language teaching and learning.

People involved in teaching languages run up against the same problems everywhere in Europe, and EU programmes help them learn from one another and to exchange information and best practice.

Good morning EU

How people greet each other in the EU's 20 official languages

Czech	<i>Dobře ráno</i>	Italian	<i>Buon giorno</i>
Danish	<i>God morgen</i>	Latvian	<i>Labrit</i>
Dutch	<i>Goedemorgen</i>	Lithuanian	<i>Labas Rytas</i>
English	<i>Good morning</i>	Maltese	<i>L-Ghodwa t-tajba</i>
Estonian	<i>Tere hommikust</i>	Polish	<i>Dzień dobry</i>
Finnish	<i>Hyvää huomenta</i>	Portuguese	<i>Bom dia</i>
French	<i>Bonjour</i>	Slovak	<i>Dobré ráno</i>
German	<i>Guten Morgen</i>	Slovene	<i>Dobro jutro</i>
Greek	<i>Kalimera</i>	Spanish	<i>Buenos días</i>
Hungarian	<i>Jo reggelt</i>	Swedish	<i>God morgon</i>

The programmes, which began in the 1980s, help to bring together national assets and resources from different countries which might otherwise remain separated.

At the same time, the EU actively supports the use of minority and regional languages as part of Europe's cultural reality. In short, the European Union is committed to maintaining its multilingual character.

Socrates meets Leonardo da Vinci

Two programmes provide the main framework for promoting language learning and language teaching: *Socrates*, which is a wide-ranging educational programme, and *Leonardo da Vinci*, which focuses on vocational training. Between them, these two pro-

grammes spend about €30 million a year on language learning.

The EU has been actively promoting the expansion of language learning and the improvement of teaching methods since 1990, when it created the *Lingua* programme. *Lingua* was incorporated into *Socrates* when the latter was created in 1995. Its activities cover all 20 official languages.

Lingua supports different elements of the *Socrates* programme through cross-border projects and activities involving teachers and students in order to:

- raise awareness of the EU's multilingual wealth;
- encourage people to learn languages throughout their lifetime;
- improve access to language learning resources throughout Europe;

*Belgium has many beers
– and more official
languages than any
other EU country (Dutch,
French and German).*





- develop and disseminate innovative teaching techniques and good practice;
- ensure that a sufficiently wide range of learning tools is available to language learners.

Other *Socrates* activities with a language dimension include *Comenius* (named after Jan Amos Comenius or Komensky, a 17th century educationalist from what is now the Czech Republic) which deals with school and pre-school education. Another is *Grundtvig* (called after N.F.S. Grundtvig, a 19th century Danish pioneer of adult education) which specialises in lifelong learning and teaching adults.

Language courses are a feature of the EU's highly successful *Erasmus* programme, named after the 16th century humanist, which began in 1987. It has enabled more than one million students to study abroad in another coun-

try as part of their university or post-graduate courses. *Erasmus* provides grants for students to undergo intensive language training before their stay abroad. The language courses can be in any of the 20 EU official languages or in the languages of other Erasmus countries. These are EU candidate countries Bulgaria and Romania, plus Norway and Iceland.

Erasmus is now also part of *Socrates*, whose present programmes run from 2000 to 2006.

The *Leonardo da Vinci* programme implements an EU vocational training policy which is based on, but additional to, the actions of individual member states. It assists public and private vocational training bodies which take part in international partnerships: training centres, universities, businesses and chambers of commerce.

The EU's action programme on education is named after Socrates – one of Europe's earliest educators.



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Stickers publicising the 2004 European Day of Languages – promoting language learning and awareness.

As the mastery of languages is now a key skill in an increasingly demanding labour market, *Leonardo* has developed an important linguistic dimension. It funds cross-border projects which aim at developing new methods and new aids for language teaching and the assessment of the linguistic needs of businesses. *Leonardo* funds training periods abroad for language teachers as well as the development of language-learning tools for vocational training, especially those for use in the workplace.

The cultural programmes of the European Union also promote linguistic and cultural diversity in a number of ways. The European Commission's *Media* programme funds the dubbing and subtitling of European films for showing in cinemas and on television in other EU countries. The *Culture 2000* programme opens cross-cultural doors by supporting the translation of modern authors into other EU languages.

A programme called *eContent* seeks to use the growing spread of digital technology to improve multilingual access to high-quality digital productions, particularly, but not only, on television. Thanks to digital compression techniques, a single television channel can now carry a film plus several different language versions of the soundtrack.

It's in the bag

Each year, the Council of Europe, with the support of the European Union, organises a European Day of Languages on 26 September. The slogan chosen for 2004 was *Pack an extra language in your luggage*. Launched in 2001, the number of events taking place on this day has risen steadily each time.

The idea behind the European Day of Languages is to raise public awareness of the importance of language learning in an increasingly interdependent Europe. The event recognises that linguistic diversity is one of Europe's strengths and that language learning can spread tolerance and mutual understanding.

A new plan of action

In July 2003, with an eye to the EU's imminent enlargement, the European Commission launched an Action Plan for promoting language learning and linguistic diversity in a Union of 25 members. The Commission recognised that with 450 million citizens from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds it is more important than ever to provide them with the skills to understand and communicate with each other.

The Action Plan, which covers the period 2004-2006, spells out action to be taken by EU countries, with support from the EU institutions. It aims to build on what is already being done, to coordinate the action better and to use the available financial resources more effectively.

The message of the Action Plan is that, while learning one language in addition to your mother tongue is good, learning a second additional language is even better. It also argues that the younger you start, the better.

It notes that, at the moment, language skills are unevenly spread across countries and social groups. The range of foreign languages spoken by EU citizens is narrow: relying on one *lingua franca* alone is not enough. When asked in the Eurobarometer survey which two lan-

guages they thought they should learn in addition to their mother tongue, 75% of those polled said English was the most useful to know followed by French (40%), German (23%) and Spanish (18%).

Mother tongue-plus-two

The Commission recognises that the goal of mother tongue-plus-two is ambitious, but not beyond reach. Language learning has to be seen as a life-long activity. Teaching should start as early as possible, even at pre-school level, and should continue through school, higher education and adulthood. Learners with special needs should get particular attention.

While teaching should begin early, this will be of benefit only if teachers are specially trained to teach languages to young children. Moreover, class sizes should be relatively small, and enough time must be devoted to language teaching.

Schools also need to respond to the challenge by offering as wide a range of languages as possible. They should also recruit and train more teachers – and here border regions can usefully cooperate with each other.



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To achieve the goal of learning two foreign languages, teaching must start young.

Adults too should have more opportunities for acquiring and using their language skills. Steps must be taken to promote all languages, including regional and minority ones, to provide more venues for learning languages, to make greater use of the internet for language teaching and learning, and to provide more subtitling on television and in the cinema.

The Action Plan promotes activities in all these areas. The European Commission is convinced that the cost of promoting the use of a second or third language by EU citizens along the lines set out in the Action Plan is modest compared with the opportunities missed through a lack of linguistic knowledge and the negative effect on the EU economy of business lost due to a lack of language skills.

A multilingual European Union

The reasons why the European Union needs 20 official languages are not hard to find: they are democracy, transparency and the right to know.

EU legislation applies throughout the EU, and therefore to all its citizens. New legislation must be published and made available to them in their own language. As in any democracy, each citizen has a fundamental right to know why a particular item of legislation is being adopted and what it requires him or her to do.

It is also a basic tenet of the European Union that all its citizens and their elected representatives must have the same right of access to the EU and be able to communicate with its institutions and authorities in their national language. There cannot be double standards, say, between big and small countries or between those with well-known and lesser-known languages.



Ministers can speak their own language in the Council of the European Union.



Latvian or Greek members of the European Parliament must be able to speak on behalf of their voters in their own language in the same way as a member from Germany, Britain or France. The same holds good for a government minister at an official EU meeting or a citizen who takes a grievance to the European Ombudsman. The 14% of Irish citizens who consider Irish Gaelic as their mother tongue can use it to complain to the Ombudsman if they so wish.

Its law-making function and the direct involvement of its citizens explain why the EU uses more languages than multinational bodies like the United Nations or NATO, which operate only at the intergovernmental level. Although it has more than 190 members, the UN uses only six languages. The Council of Europe and NATO, each with more members than the EU, publish official documents only in English and French.

The EU institutions have therefore honed procedures over the years for operating in a rising number of official languages without creating a veritable Tower of Babel. They have also striven to give citizens and governments quality translation and interpretation efficiently and cheaply.

Mobilising resources

Given their obligations towards EU citizens and governments, it is not surprising that the EU institutions employ large numbers of linguists. In fact, about one in three of the university graduates employed by EU institutions is either a translator or an interpreter. Translators work with written texts, interpreters with the spoken word. Each of them must be able to work into their mother tongue from at least two other EU languages.

Before the 2004 enlargement, the main institutions – the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament – together translated nearly three million pages of text a year. The annual cost of translation and interpretation was about two euros for every EU citizen, or a little more than the price of a cup of coffee.

With the increase in official languages from 11 to 20, the price is going up. But it will not double. This is because, in their internal work, the EU institutions streamline the use of languages, and enlargement has brought more cost-cutting devices. The very public use of all 20 languages is only the visible tip of the iceberg.



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In fact, on a day-to-day basis, the European Commission uses three working languages – English, French and German. Draft policy papers and draft legislation are produced in one or more of these languages. Only at the final stages are the texts translated into all 20 official languages.

The European Parliament, which often needs to produce documents rapidly in all official languages, has developed a system of six 'pivot' languages. The six are English, French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish. A document presented in, say, Slovak or Swedish will not be translated directly into all other 19 languages. Instead it will be translated into the pivot languages and then retranslated from one of them into the others.

This removes the need for translators able to work directly from Maltese to Danish or from Estonian to Portuguese, and hundreds of other combinations as well. If texts were translated directly from all official EU languages into all the others, this would give a total of 380 bilateral combinations.

By word of mouth

EU interpreters use a similar system when providing full interpretation to and from all 20 official languages. For instance, a Finnish speaker's words will be interpreted into a limited number of 'relay' languages. A Slovenian interpreter, for example, will plug into one of these as the source language, removing the need for people who can interpret straight out of Finnish into Slovenian.

Interpreters and translators are vital to the EU's daily work.

Using linguistic shortcuts of this kind makes practical and economic sense – provided standards are maintained. Quality control of both interpretation and written translation is therefore a major activity.

Interpreters also provide slimmed down services for informal and working meetings. In some cases, only the most widely known EU languages are used. In others, participants may be able to speak a larger number of languages but these are only interpreted into two or three of the widely used ones. The idea here is that speakers are free to express themselves in their own tongue, or a language they feel comfortable in, while it is assumed they have enough passive knowledge of a major EU language to follow the rest of the proceedings in that language.

On any one day, the interpretation service of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers has to cover about 50 separate meetings in Brussels or at other EU locations. An event which provides full interpretation into and out of the EU's 20 official languages requires a team of 60 interpreters.

With enlargement, more use is being made of translators and interpreters able to translate out of as well as into their mother tongue. Previous standard EU practice for translators was to work into their mother tongue only. As another money-saver, private agencies are increasingly being used to translate less essential documents .

Mind still triumphs over matter

Ever conscious of the need to keep costs down, the institutions of the European Union have been using machine translation systems for the past 20 years. During this period the systems have improved, but they are still not good enough to be used for producing texts for publication. Nor are they available in many EU language combinations. The quality of the output from the different combinations also varies, and usually requires a lot of editing by translators. It is often faster to redo the work from scratch.

Machine translation is much more popular among non-linguists, as a quick means to get the gist of a text where high levels of clarity and accuracy are not essential. Others use it as a source of relevant terminology, although separate terminology databases also exist.

In short, machines are not about to replace human translators.

Meeting the challenge

Languages and their use lie at the very heart of the European Union. While committed to European integration, the EU also has a formal responsibility to respect the cultural and linguistic diversity of its citizens.

This means, amongst other things, giving all citizens equal access to EU legislation and EU institutions in their national language, just as they have access to their national laws and authorities.

It also means allowing all EU citizens to use and develop their own language as part of their cultural identity and her-

itage, irrespective of whether their language is an official language of the European Union or not.

The Union in fact goes further. It actively promotes the teaching and learning of additional languages in order to help individual citizens understand and communicate with their neighbours and to increase their own professional skills and mobility within its single market. Action of this kind has been stepped up as the EU has expanded to include 450 million citizens from widely different backgrounds and traditions.

Many people practise their language skills while on holiday.



© Helga Kay / Van Parys Media

While recognising the emergence of English as the most widely-spoken language in Europe, the Union also wants to make sure that this does not become, over time, a factor limiting linguistic diversity within its frontiers. This is why the Commission's Action Plan has set

the target of 'mother tongue-plus-two'. According to a survey, 26% of Europeans claim to know their own language and two others. The challenge for the EU is to expand this base solidly and effectively, in as short a time as possible.

Further reading



Many sources of further reading can be found on the EU's website at europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/guide/liste_en.html. This includes information on programmes like *Socrates* (plus its individual actions), *Leonardo da Vinci* and *Media*, as well as on the 2004-2006 Action Plan.

See also *Languages: Europe's asset* at europa.eu.int/index_en.htm

A short brochure (in English and French) on EU interpreting procedures and the impact of enlargement, entitled *Giving the new members states a voice in Europe*, is available at europa.eu.int/translation_enlargement/deleg_bw2.pdf

The Commission's Directorate-General for Translation has produced its own booklet *Translating for a multilingual community* available at europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/bookshelf/brochure_en.pdf

The Magazine of Education and Culture No 22: *Europe unties tongues* is available at europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/mag/22/en.pdf

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Many tongues, one family

Languages in the European Union

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While committed to integration at European level, the EU promotes the linguistic and cultural diversity of its peoples. It does so by promoting the teaching and learning of their languages, including minority and regional languages. The EU's ambitious goal, set out in a new Action Plan, is that as many of its citizens as possible should speak one – and ideally two – languages in addition to their mother tongue.

The European Union as an organisation now works with 20 official languages. This is because, in a democracy, the laws it applies must be understandable to all its citizens. There can be no discrimination, for instance, between the way people in big and small countries are treated. In their dealings with the EU institutions, all citizens have the right to use their own national language – as do their elected representatives in the European Parliament.

Other information on the European Union



Information in all the official languages of the European Union is available on the Internet. You can access it through the Europa server: europa.eu.int



All over Europe there are hundreds of local EU information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at this website: europa.eu.int/comm/relays/index_en.htm



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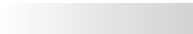
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The European Union



-  Member states of the European Union
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While committed to integration at European level, the EU promotes the linguistic and cultural diversity of its peoples. It does so by promoting the teaching and learning of their languages, including minority and regional languages. The EU's ambitious goal, set out in a new Action Plan, is that as many of its citizens as possible should speak one – and ideally two – languages in addition to their mother tongue.

The European Union as an organisation now works with 20 official languages. This is because, in a democracy, the laws it applies must be understandable to all its citizens. There can be no discrimination, for instance, between the way people in big and small countries are treated. In their dealings with the EU institutions, all citizens have the right to use their own national language – as do their elected representatives in the European Parliament.



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