**UNESCO’s Contribution to the UN Report on the implementation of UNGA A/RES/74/165 on “Effective Promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic Religious and Linguistic minorities”**

1. This report focuses on UNESCO’s recent actions undertaken to promote the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic and linguistic minorities, notably those rights falling into its mandate on education, social and human sciences and information and communication. More specifically, UNESCO is engaged in ensuring their right to education, fighting racism and various forms of discriminations they might be victims of as well as ensuring them the right to universal access to information through promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism.

**EDUCATION**

1. UNESCO supports its Member States in ensuring the **right to education** of persons belonging to national or ethnic religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities), to foster inclusion, quality and equity in education. This is done in line with the *United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,* which specifies in the field of education, that “States should take measures to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory”, and ensure that, “wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue”.
2. UNESCO works towards upholding its mandated role to lead and coordinate the implementation of SDG 4 and the international commitment to ‘*ensure an inclusive and equitable quality education’*. To advocate globally for inclusive education, UNESCO in cooperation with the government of Colombia, fostered international dialogue and expanded knowledge and information sharing notably through the International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education (Cali, September 2019) and the Fourth International Conference on Learning Cities (Medellin, October 2019). The 2019 Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education, expressed the shared definition of inclusion as a transformative process that ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all children, young people and adults, respecting and valuing diversity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education. Medellin Manifesto echoed the message of the Cali conference, focusing on how education and innovation can transform cities to make inclusion a reality, both for youth at risk and vulnerable populations, and build social cohesion for all.
3. Bellow some of recent activities undertaken by UNESCO to promote and protect minority rights, in the field of education through international normative frameworks and obligations as well as on multi-lingual and mother-tongue education.
4. **Promotion and fulfillment of right to education of persons belonging to minorities:** The *1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination* was the first legally binding international instrument to lay down some of the core elements of the right to education, while prohibiting any discrimination in the field of education and expressing the principle of equality of educational opportunities. Under article 5, national minorities have expressly the right “to carry on their own educational activities, […] and, depending on the educational policy of each state, the use or the teaching of their own language”, providing that this right does not prevent members of these minorities “from understanding the culture or language of the community,[…] or prejudice national sovereignty”.
5. In 2018, the global report published [Ensuring the right to equitable and inclusive quality education](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000251463/PDF/251463eng.pdf.multi), with analysis of the findings of the ninth consultation on the *1960 Convention and Recommendation*. Elaborated as part of the right to education monitoring mechanisms, this publication includes a section specifically dedicated to measures adopted by States to enforce the right to education of people belonging to minorities in its various dimensions. The tenth consultation with Member States also includes elements on the advancement of the right to education of persons belonging to minorities, and its conclusions will be reported to UNESCO’s governing bodies at the end of 2021.
6. UNESCO is finalizing **a thematic report dedicated to the right to education of minorities** as part of a series of thematic mappings on the implementation of the right to education of vulnerable groups. The report: i) defines the term “minorities”; ii) presents the international legal framework protecting the right to education for minorities and related obligations and aspects; iii) provides a thematic analysis of measures supporting the right to education for minorities taken at national level, including using and teaching minorities languages in education; and iv) provides guidance for action. Through it, UNESCO aims to support advocacy, foster information sharing and promote enforcement of international legal obligations in this field.
7. To enhance support and guidance to States and other stakeholders on the implementation of the right to education for all, new [Guidelines to strengthen national frameworks](https://en.unesco.org/news/guidelines-strengthen-right-education-national-frameworks) have been published on the 2021 International Day on Education (January 24), as part of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the *Convention Against Discrimination in Education*. The objective is to strengthen national frameworks by assisting countries and stakeholders in conducting assessment of the compatibility of their national education legal and policy framework with international standard-setting instruments on the right to education. Furthermore, UNESCO maintains an [Observatory](https://en.unesco.org/themes/right-to-education/database) on the right to education, an online monitoring tool informing of the level of implementation of the right to education at country level, including components on inclusion in education and minorities rights to education.
8. **Inclusion in Education and Multilingual education based on mother tongue****:** TheInternational Mother Language Day (21 February) is the annual occasion for UNESCO to reaffirm and advocate for the importance of inclusive and multilingual education systems to advance the participation and achievement of all learners and address all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. In 2019, focusing on both Romani language speakers, the Day brought forward the added value of digital tools and of a platform used to facilitate exchange of knowledge on Romani language and culture. The 2020 celebration of the Day emphasized cross-border languages such as regional variants of Maori spoken in New Zealand and in the Cook Islands, and Sami, spoken across Northern Europe, which have benefitted from efforts of governments to revitalize these indigenous languages. In 2021, the Day highlighted the importance of the right to education in sign languages as mother tongue and the need for advocacy for inclusive learning in sign languages in a multilingual approach to allow inclusion in the family and in the society at large.
9. UNESCO regional Office in Bangkok, as a chair of Asia Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group (MLE WG), has worked collaboratively to raise awareness regarding persistent inequalities in the educational attainment of ethnolinguistic minorities and to promote good practices in increasing access and quality of education for these disadvantaged groups. Over the past 20 years, interest in first language/mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) had grown dramatically. This has resulted in numerous pilot projects in linguistic minority communities across the Asia-Pacific region, yielding rich longitudinal evidence for the validity of the MTB-MLE approach. UNESCO developed many regional knowledge products including 1) [MTB MLE Resource Kit](https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mtb-mle-resource-kit-including-excluded-promoting-multilingual-education), 2[) Mother Tongue and Early Childhood Care and Education: Synergies and Challenges](https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mother-tongue-and-early-childhood-care-and-education-synergies-and-challenge), 3) [Tools for Planning and Monitoring Programmes of Multilingual Education in Asia](https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/tools-planning-and-monitoring-programmes-multilingual-education-asia) and 4) [Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: The Key to Unlocking SDG 4 - Quality Education for All](https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education-key-unlocking-sdg-4-quality-education-all) to enhance the understanding and generate innovative solutions for evidence-based policy planning.
10. As a result of consistent advocacy, the [Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion](https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/bangkok-statement-language-and-inclusion) was adopted by sixteen (16) countries during the third high-level Policy Forum on Multilingual Education in 2019. The statement represents a key development in governmental commitment to including languages spoken by minority, migrant and refugee communities in the formal and informal sectors, with particular attention to early childhood literacy. Recognizing the importance of multilingual education in achieving the SDGs, the statement recommends seven actions that educational stakeholders may adopt in their respective countries: i) highlighting languages-of-instruction issues; ii) fostering investment for multilingual education; iii) enhancing the quality of multilingual education; iv) diversifying the teacher workforce and building teacher capacity; v) gathering data disaggregated by home or first language; vi) strengthening partnerships with relevant stakeholders and partners; and vii) preparing national progress reports. As the first regional statement on multilingual education, it is a milestone for the region to strengthen inclusive quality education for ethnolinguistic minority children and has been translated into seven regional languages (Thai, Myanmar, Malay, Bahasa Indonesia, Khmer, Tetun and Sundanese).
11. In response to COVID-19, UNESCO as part of MLE WG has: i) collected non-English COVID-19 response materials; ii) co-organized two regional webinars on addressing the digital divide for ethnolinguistic minority children in the post COVID-19 era through development of digital learning materials and multilingualism for inclusion: translating policy dialogue on the Bangkok Statement into action; and iii) developed the guidance note on enduring inclusive education for ethnolinguistic minority children in the COVID-19 era to support learning continuity of ethnolinguistic minority children.
12. **Literacy promotion for linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities:** UNESCO supports countries in promoting literacy and education in multilingual contexts. Some examples of its activities are as follows: In South Sudan, in collaboration with the local authorities and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNESCO has piloted a study programme for pastoral societies, paving the way for the establishment of educational systems to adapt to transhumant peoples. In Thailand, UNESCO’s project “Mobile Literacy for Out-of-School Children” supported by Microsoft in collaboration with True Corporation (telecommunications service provider) and the Thai Ministry of Education, is enhancing basic literacy and numeracy skills of 4,000 migrants, ethnic minority, stateless and disadvantaged children along the Thai-Myanmar border areas through mobile learning and ICT devices (tablets, satellite TV and internet). Content app with over 1,000 books and learning resources was also developed in 3 languages (Thai, Burmese and Karen) to provide flexible education for these specific target learners at 60 migrant/community learning centers and schools. In Nepal, UNESCO is supporting literacy and skills development programmes, designed based on indigenous knowledge from marginalized communities and delivered through Community Learning Centers. In Guatemala, UNESCO is empowering indigenous girls and women by establishing a sustainable local educational model in rural areas, building on indigenous girls’ needs and contexts and using indigenous languages. The ‘Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE)’, a network of national education quality assessment directors across the region coordinated by UNESCO, published two reports regarding learning achievement of indigenous children.
13. The UNESCO International Literacy Prizes is a window through which UNESCO recognizes and disseminates outstanding programmes that have contributed to the promotion of literacy. For instance, one of the prizewinners, BASABali, from Indonesia, contributes to promote literacy and literate environments through a multimedia Balinese-Indonesian-English wiki dictionary and encyclopedia. By engaging people in content development of BASAbali Wiki, it aims at enabling them to value local (Balinese), national (Indonesian) and international languages (English) and contributing to revitalization of the endangered local language.

**COMBATING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATIONS**

1. UNESCO also addresses the realization of the rights of persons belonging to minorities within the framework of its action to combat racism and different forms of discriminations. Efforts in this field have been upscaled as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic impact on these groups but also in view of the enhanced global anti-racism movement. Three main areas of action are described below.
2. This effort was primarily pursued through the **leveraging of UNESCO’s International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR)** and more than its 500-members worldwide. ICCAR cities contributed to the success of the **Master Class Series Against Racism and Discriminations** with 13 editions since the inauguration of this programme in November 2019. They shared good practice from the ground and helped shape several initiatives, including a global research project on youth city councils with UN Habitat, a Toolkit for Urban Inclusion in Arab Cities and a strategy against racism for cities of Latin America and the Caribbean supported by the Inter-American Development Bank. An important partnership with Gwangju (South Korea), lead city of the Asia-Pacific Coalition, resulted in the organization of the World Human Rights Cities Forum co-hosted with UNESCO (October 2020). Finally, ICCAR cities responded to UNESCO’s call to raise awareness about the rise of inequalities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to 17 webinars on Inclusion in the time of COVID-19 and 19 web stories on the same topic.
3. Secondly, UNESCO reinforced its **cooperation with other United Nations entities**. An illustrative example was the convening in January 2021 of an Online Frontier Dialogue (FD) to address racial and ethnicity-based discrimination through COVID-19 recovery plans. This was organized under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Task Team on Leave No One Behind, Human Rights & the Normative Agenda and implemented by UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO) (as co-leads) with the participation of the International Organization of Migration (IOM), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Development Coordination Office, (UNDCO) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). A new UN stamp “United against racism and discrimination” was issued on 21 March, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. It uses the visual identity of the UNESCO Master Class Series against Racism and Discriminations.
4. Finally, **UNESCO’s** **efforts to strengthen its own work while connecting more efficiently with the multitude of actors engaged against racism** was marked by the convening on 22 March 2021 of a global multi-stakeholder forum. Co-hosted by UNESCO and the Republic of Korea, the Forum was an important step in a process to identify policy actions and benchmarks against racism and discrimination, in line with international standards and supported by the findings of evidence-based research in the social and human sciences. These will be captured in the UNESCO Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination that was launched in the Forum, developed in line with UNESCO Member States’ recently adopted “[Global Call Against Racism](file:///C:/Users/eminc/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/IS9QXED7/Global%20Call%20Against%20Racism).” The roadmap is composed of a scoping/scanning study to understanding and assess the existing institutional, legal and informal frameworks that create individual and collective barriers to inclusion and explain the successes or failures of the antiracism and anti-discrimination agendas of countries and regional institutions, as well as of a universal toolkit, conceived jointly with partners around the world, targeting policymakers at all levels as well as other social actors such as NGOs, women’s and youth associations, and educational institutions in both formal and non-formal sectors, to support in combatting racist ideologies and discriminations, and their impacts on the ground.

**PROMOTING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND MULTILINGUALISM**

1. To promote universal access to information, UNESCO works to foster linguistic diversity and multilingualism, including in support of languages used by linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples. Here UNESCO’s efforts to protect rights of persons belonging to minorities are focused in promotion of multilingualism, including in the context of the International Year of Indigenous Languages as well as in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. In 2003, UNESCO Member States’ agreed on a normative instrument that promotes linguistic diversity, the ***Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace****,* whichinvites UNESCO and its Member States to focus its interventions on four areas: (i) Development of multilingual content and systems; (ii) Facilitation of access to networks and systems; (iii) Development of public domain content; and (iv) Reaffirmation of equitable balance between the interests of rights-holders and the public interest. UNESCO regularly prepares consolidated reports for its governing bodies (the Executive Board and the General Conference), on measures taken to implement the Recommendation.
3. **UNESCO World Atlas and World Report of Languages:** UNESCO has developed a *World Report of Languages* that will be released by summer 2021. The report will include new information and detailed data on languages, including official, unofficial, spoken and sign languages, as well as key recommendations for policy-making in the area of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, contributing to the integration of issues related to the rights of linguistic minorities in standard-setting and development frameworks at different levels.
4. UNESCO will also launch at the end of 2021 an online platform, the *World Atlas of Languages*, which will serve as a repository of data and information on linguistic diversity and multilingualism. It will be based on a global data collection initiated by UNESCO, in close cooperation with leading experts.
5. **International Year (2019) and International Decade (2022-2032) of Indigenous Languages:**UNESCO served as the lead UN Agency for the implementation of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (pursuant to UNGA [A/RES/71/178](file:///C:/Users/eminc/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/IS9QXED7/A/RES/71/178)), that represented a unique opportunity to raise global awareness of the importance of indigenous languages for sustainable development, peace building and reconciliation processes, as well as to mobilize stakeholders and resources worldwide to support them. A holistic approach to programming, based on a full spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms, was adopted in the framework of the International Year and enshrined in the Action Plan for its organizations. Activities organized in this framework affirmed the understanding that languages are essential contributors to the development of peaceful, resilient and inclusive societies, and that it is essential to respond to the endangerment of indigenous languages.
6. In the context of the International Year, key recommendations in the area of promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism for policy-making in the area of education, environment, justice, gender equality, social development and other, were elaborated and included in the [Strategic Outcome Document](https://en.iyil2019.org/release-of-the-strategic-outcome-document-of-the-iyil2019-2/), resulting from consultations carried out at the regional and global level, and the [Los Pinos Declaration](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/los_pinos_declaration_170720_en.pdf), the outcome document issued in the closing event of the International Year (Mexico, February 2020). UNESCO, in cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, implemented several activities for the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity worldwide, and particularly in support of minority, lesser-used and indigenous languages. More than 900 events took place across some 78 countries worldwide in the framework of the Year. Key results are outlined in the [Summary Report of the IYIL2019](https://en.unesco.org/news/taking-stock-iyil2019-78-countries-actively-promoted-indigenous-languages). New levels of cooperation have also been forged among existing human rights mechanisms such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) and the Human Rights Council. In 2019, UNESCO organized an event entitled “Normative frameworks for language protection, support and promotion: latest developments at the national and international level” in the context of the 12th EMRIP session.
7. A key outcome of the International Year was the proclamation of the **International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)** through the UNGA [A/RES/74/135](file:///C:/Users/eminc/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/IS9QXED7/A/RES/74/135), and UNESCO has launched the preparations towards this upcoming Decade. UNESCO facilitated the organization of several consultations at the regional and global level, with the direct involvement of indigenous peoples, in view of the preparation of a Global Action Plan to ensure international cooperation and joint action at all levels. A Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages including representatives of Member States, indigenous peoples from seven socio-cultural regions, UN mechanisms, UN Agencies, and other stakeholders, will serve as the future international governance mechanism for the Decade.
8. **Response to COVID-19:** On 9 February 2021, UNESCO organized an online event in cooperation with FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in the framework of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum, on the role of indigenous languages for the eradication of hunger, and of indigenous food systems for enhancing their resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The online event enhanced participants’ understanding on the linkages between indigenous food systems and languages.
9. UNESCO has created a webpage titled “[Covid-19 Pandemic: Language Matters](https://en.iyil2019.org/all-resources/covid-19-pandemic-language-matters/)”, which includes a collection of good practices and resources in and about indigenous languages related to COVID-19 prevention, and information about relevant initiatives that aim to tackle the negative impact of the pandemic on indigenous communities worldwide. The page is regularly updated with new resources, and an associated social media campaign is carried out daily on the [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/IYIL2019/), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/IYIL2019), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/indigenouslanguages/) accounts of the International Year of Indigenous Languages.
10. On the occasion of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples on 9 August 2020, UNESCO produced a [Bulletin on “Indigenous Peoples and the COVID-19 Pandemic”](https://en.unesco.org/news/indigenous-peoples-and-covid-19-pandemic), featuring relevant initiatives and targeted actions undertaken by UNESCO Sectors and Field Offices to address the negative impact of the global crisis on indigenous peoples. The section [“Media and Communications”](https://en.unesco.org/news/media-and-communications-indigenous-peoples-pandemic) covers issues related to access to accurate preventive information on the internet and through digital technologies for users of indigenous languages. A new Bulletin will be released in 2021.

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