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# International Mother Language Day 2023

Multilingual education - a necessity to transform education

21 February 2023  
9.30 -17.30 (CET)



UNESCO, Room X

## Background

This event is organized by UNESCO on the occasion of the celebration of the 24<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Mother Language Day (21 February).

In many countries around the world where it is common practice to use more than one language in daily life, education takes place in multilingual contexts. Yet, many countries adopt monolingual systems of education and see multilingualism - the use of several languages within an area - as a challenge. Providing education in only one language that is not necessarily shared by all learners may impact negatively on learning performance, and the development of socio-emotional and foundational literacy skills.

Recognizing these challenges, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages was launched in 2022. Indeed, transforming education through multilingual education based on mother tongue is a necessity in our fast-evolving global contexts. Today, learning environments are increasingly infused with technology and Artificial Intelligence. Crisis contexts, including emergency situations of refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, as well as situations of linguistic and cultural diversity loss, persist. Today, 25% of the world's children live in conflict or disaster-stricken countries. In those contexts, the right to quality, equitable and inclusive education is not usually respected. This is true despite international normative instruments that cover the language in education dimension and are

protective of population groups who are excluded from education, such as ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, girls and women. Under these frameworks, States have an obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil such a right by ensuring that education is not only available, but also acceptable, accessible, and adaptable. Part of the ‘acceptability’ component entails education that is culturally relevant and, according to the United Nations’ independent expert on minority issues, available in linguistic minorities’ mother tongue.

### **Potential of multilingual education**

To address these challenges and needs, UNESCO has been advocating for the mainstreaming of multilingual education based on mother-tongue. It facilitates access to and inclusion in education for population groups that speak non-dominant languages, languages of minority groups and indigenous languages. Multilingual education enhances the quality of education by underlining the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, the relevance of learning to learners’ lives, and mutual understanding. Multilingual education increases dialogue and interaction among learners as well as between learners and teachers. It facilitates participation and action towards sustainable development by giving access to new knowledge and new cultural expressions, thus ensuring global as well as local interaction on traditional and indigenous issues.

The potential of multilingual education is enormous. However, implementation rarely takes place due to misconceptions surrounding multilingualism. Transforming education entails changing the perception of multilingualism, so that it is seen as an asset for learning in formal, informal and non-formal educational settings. There is growing evidence demonstrating the positive outcomes of multilingual education.<sup>1</sup>

### **International Mother Language Day 2023**

The International Mother Language Day 2023 edition will explore the theme ‘**multilingual education - a necessity to transform education.**’ It will explore and debate the potential of multilingualism to transform education from a lifelong learning perspective and in different contexts. It is shaped around the following three inter-connected themes:

- Enhancing multilingual education as a necessity to transform education in multilingual contexts from early childhood education and well beyond;
- Supporting learning through multilingual education and multilingualism in our fast-changing global contexts and in crisis situations including emergencies contexts;
- Revitalizing languages that are disappearing or are threatened with extinction.

## **Objectives**

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The overall aim of the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) 2023 is to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 by recognizing the role of actors in education and in related fields in promoting multilingualism and multilingual education, and in fostering quality, inclusive and equitable learning. More specifically, IMLD 2023 aims to:

- Further sensitize actors in education, teachers, education policy-makers of the transformative power of multilingualism and multilingual education;
- Support actors in education, teachers, education policy-makers in the strengthening of multilingualism and multilingual education by highlighting and sharing promising and innovative policies and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes: the Multilingual education and early childhood background document for the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, and forthcoming UNESCO publications including: a forthcoming Policy brief on Multilingual education and inclusion, forthcoming case studies on successful early exit to the second language in bilingual education or multilingual education, and a new UNESCO’s guide on multilingual education, to be officially announced on International Mother Language Day 2023 and published in 2023.

## Target audiences

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- Key stakeholders in education, education policy-makers, teachers
- Non-governmental organizations, foundations and other bodies supporting multilingualism

## Format and languages

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**Morning session:** Official opening and two panels on 1) Multilingual education as a vector for transforming education and promoting gender equality and 2) Revitalizing local languages to promote multilingual education and transform education.

**Afternoon session:** Two panels on 1) Multilingual Education in Small Island Developing States: Challenges and Opportunities for Transformative Education and 2) Multilingual education - a factor of change - in crisis and emergency situations.

The event will take place in Room X, UNESCO House (Fontenoy).

Interpretations will be available in English, French, Spanish.

### Contacts

Ms Noro Andriamiseza: [n.andriamiseza@unesco.org](mailto:n.andriamiseza@unesco.org)

Ms Anna Cijevschi: [a.cijevschi@unesco.org](mailto:a.cijevschi@unesco.org)

In partnership with



**Provisional Agenda, Tuesday, 21 February 2023**  
**Morning: *The transformative power of multilingual education***

**9.00 – 9.30**

**Welcoming coffee**

**9.30 – 10.00**

**Official opening**

**Master of Ceremony:** Ms Justine Sass, Chief of the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, Division for Education 2030, UNESCO

**Welcoming remarks:** Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

**Keynote remarks:**

- H.E. Mr Nadiem A. Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Republic of Indonesia
- H.E. Mr Nesmy Manigat, Minister of National Education and Vocational Training, Haïti

**Key speeches:**

- H.E. Mr Khondker M. Talha, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to France, Permanent Delegate of Bangladesh to UNESCO
- H.E. Mr Mohamad Oemar, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Indonesia to UNESCO
- Ms Nivine Khaled, Director, French Language and Diversity of the Francophone Cultures, International Organization of la Francophonie

**10.00 – 11.15**

**Theme 1: Multilingual education as a vector for transforming education and promoting gender equality**

**Video 1:** *Tell your story*, UNESCO Guatemala

**Moderator:** Prof. Colette Noyau, Language Specialist, Francophonie Institute for Education and Training

**Panellists:**

- Ms Anna Cijevschi, Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, Education Sector, UNESCO
- Ms Mari Yasunaga, Youth, Literacy and Skills Development, Education Sector, UNESCO
- Ms Tinie van Eys, UNESCO Literacy King Sejong Prize 2015 Laureate, Senior Programme Officer, Associação Progresso, Mozambique
- Ms Barbara Trudell, Consultant in languages and education, SIL Africa Learning & Development

**Dialogue with the audience**

**11.15 – 12.30**

**Theme 2: Revitalizing local languages to promote multilingual education and transform education**

**Video message:** Mr Ali Garcia, Rutu Foundation, Costa Rica

**Moderator:** Sabrina Lipoff, Language Expert, Langues en dialogue Initiative of the International Organization of la Francophonie

**Panellists:**

- Mr E. Aminudin Aziz, Head of Agency for Language Development and Cultivation, Indonesia
- Mr Kazi Ehsanul Haque, Minister, Permanent Delegate of Bangladesh to UNESCO
- Mr Andi Sudirman Sulaiman, Governor, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

**Dialogue with the audience**

**12:45 – 14: 15**

Lunch hosted by the Delegation of Indonesia, UNESCO Restaurant, 7 th floor

14.30 – 16.00

**Theme 1: Multilingual Education in Small Island Developing States: Challenges and Opportunities to transform Education**

**Video 2:** *Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Mozambique*

**Moderator:** Mr Ydo Yao, Director, International Bureau of Education, UNESCO

**Panellists:**

- Ms Véra Lacoëuilhe, Deputy Permanent Delegate, Saint Lucia
- Ms Sabrina Lipoff, Language Expert, Langues en dialogue Initiative of the International Organization of la Francophonie
- H.E. Mr Kassim Mohamed-Soyir Bajrafil, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Union of the Comoros to UNESCO
- Ms Marie Marjorie Thélusma, Director, Curriculum and Quality, Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, Haiti

**Dialogue with the audience**

16.00 – 17.30

**Theme 2: Multilingual education - a key - in crisis and emergency situations**

**Moderator:** Ms Yayoi Segi-Vltchek, Chief of the Section of Migration, Displacement, Emergencies and Education, UNESCO (TBC)

**Panellists:**

- Prof. Alison Phipps, UNESCO Chair in Integration of Refugees through Languages and the Arts (Culture, Literature, Inclusion and Pedagogy)
- Dr Jonghwi Park, Head of Innovation and Education, United Nations University, Japan
- Dr Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, Team Leader, Quality Learning Ecosystems, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)
- Ms Hanna Helttunen, Speech-language pathologist, Child refugees and learners with specific needs, Sweden

**Dialogue with the audience**

**Closing remarks:** Ms Justine Sass, Chief of the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, Division for Education 2030, UNESCO

**Entrance : 125 avenue de Suffren 75015 Paris**