

**Workshop for Focal Points for Multilingualism
Wednesday, 8 May 2019**

SYNOPSIS

Opening

Ms. Catherine Pollard, Coordinator for Multilingualism
Under-Secretary-General, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

Attendance

The workshop was facilitated by three university scholars (Lisa McEntee Atalianis, Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom), Francis Hult (Jönköping University, Sweden) and Humphrey Tonkin (University of Hartford, United States of America).

In addition to the Coordination for Multilingualism, representatives from 11 Secretariat entities (Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Department of Global Communications, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance / Office of Human Resources, Department of Operational Support, Department of Peace Operations, Office of Disarmament Affairs, United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, Office of Internal Oversight Services, Office of Legal Affairs and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict) and one additional UN CEB¹ member organization (the UN Development Programme) participated in this workshop. Only focal points at Headquarters could participate.

Discussion summary

1. Multilingualism mandates

All language-related mandates from intergovernmental bodies and recommendations from oversight bodies had been compiled by DGACM/OUSG in a matrix, now available from the UN intranet. The matrix was updated on a regular basis and included the full text of each provision / recommendation and the responsible parties (internal or external to the UN, as applicable).

2. Presentations by guest scholars

The first presentation, by Lisa McEntee Atalianis aimed to introduce participants to language policy and to bring to light the indirect/invisible/unmeasured risks associated with monolingualism. She underscored the triangular relationship between language equity, efficiency and costs and presented the pros and cons of various strategies (use of *lingua francae*, use of flexible multilingualism), and the benefits of a bi/multilingual workforce. The presenter suggested that the needs and challenges faced by the personnel and stakeholders be thoroughly analyzed when designing language policies, with a clear comparison of the effectiveness and fairness of different language regimes in mind.

¹ Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

The second presentation, by Francis Hult focused on language need analysis. It was noted that any language planning should require detailed needs analyses. A linguistic auditing of the organization / unit was also needed. It would help identify the positions, their functions, the activities they accomplish and the languages in which they are and should be conducted. This auditing would result in a reflective inventory, both at the individual staff member level and the work unit level. This inventory would also serve the development of complex language acquisition planning policies.

3. Break-out group discussions and outcome

Participants were divided into three break-out discussion groups, and were asked to collectively identify benefits, challenges and resources needs on a wide range of topics (documentation, websites, language equity, language needs assessment, language training).

After the break-out group sessions, all groups reunited and presented the outcome of their discussions. Overall, it was identified that two factors were deemed of critical importance to strengthening multilingualism at the UN, namely building a nurturing organizational culture of the UN, and developing reinforcing human resources management policies/measures, which would have, in turn, a positive impact on the organizational culture.

Other elements which arose during the discussions were the need for adequate resources (budgetary and time being mostly cited), in particular in relation with multilingual website / social media management.