

PRESERVING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY TO SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The [International Mother Language Day](#) has been celebrated on February 2018 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. In particular, UNESCO has focused the 2018 celebrations on the theme "Preserving linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism to support the SDGs".



To realize the targets of the [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG4\) on education](#), UNESCO supports language policies, particularly in multilingual countries, which promote mother languages and indigenous languages. It recommends the use of these languages from the first years of schooling, because children learn best in their mother language. It is through the mastery of the first language or mother tongue that the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy are acquired. Local languages, especially minority and indigenous, transmit cultures, values and traditional knowledge, thus play an important role in promoting sustainable futures.



To this end, UNESCO and United Nations underline the importance of the linguistic diversity and its protection to achieve as a whole the goals of sustainable development identified by the 2030 Agenda. Languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. The dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world. Languages are of strategic importance for sustainable development and their progressive disappearance, due to globalization processes, determines the loss of valuable resources for ensuring a better future as traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression.



In its message for the International Mother Language Day [the UNESCO General Director](#) reported that every two weeks, one of the world's languages disappears and with it goes part of our human history and cultural heritage. In particular, official data from UNESCO report that at least 43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered. Only a few hundred languages have been given a place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world.



The International Mother Language Day has been an occasion to promote the use of the [UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger](#). Implemented in 2010 in a digital and interactive version, the Atlas has become a powerful tool to raise awareness about language endangerment and the need to safeguard the world's linguistic diversity among policy-makers, speaker communities and the general public.



The Atlas is a tool to monitor the status of endangered languages and the trends in linguistic diversity at the global level. [A useful brochure](#) presents the main characteristics of the Atlas and how the



world's linguists and language communities can make their interactive contributions.

The International Mother Language Day 2018 has also been an occasion for UNESCO to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and its declaration of "non-discrimination on the basis of the language" and pay tribute to its translation in more than 500 languages.

Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed [2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages](#) inviting UNESCO to serve as the lead agency for the initiatives of the Year. For the organization of the 2019 International Year, a range of stakeholders will be involved in the preparation of the Action Plan which would provide guidance for a joint collaborative action in order to achieve maximum coordinated impact and social change regarding the indigenous languages and their speakers. Information on the preparation of this important UN initiative can be found on the UNESCO web site.

To now more

[International Mother Language Day 2018 in UNESCO website](#)

[Mother Language Day in un.org website](#)

[Celebrating multilingualism in un.org website](#)

[Si no entiendes, ¿cómo puedes aprender? Seguimiento de la Educación en el Mundo, UNESCO 2016](#)

[Education in a multilingual world. UNESCO](#)

[ATLAS of the World's Languages in Danger](#)

[Brochure of the Atlas](#)

[Message from UNESCO General Director](#)

[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

[2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages](#)

[2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages Resolution](#)

