

C 2025/8 Annex 9: FAO language policy and multilingualism

1. In the 2022-23 biennium, FAO further elevated the importance of multilingualism as part of the corporate approach to support the implementation of its Strategic Framework 2022-31 with a view to the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind. During this period the Organization experienced continued growth in the demand for multilingual products and services further to the extraordinary surge of outputs in the previous biennium. This Annex provides an illustration of measures taken to fulfill FAO's pledge to the implementation of multilingualism as a core, defining characteristic of the Organization.

2. After being appointed in November 2021, the Coordinator for Multilingualism spearheaded the preparation of the Corporate Strategic Policy Framework for Multilingualism, which was endorsed by the 171st Session of the Council in December 2022. The strategic policy framework is a significant milestone in reaffirming FAO's commitment to multilingualism as an integral part in the governance, operation and communication of the Organization. It offers clear guidance on the types of multilingual products and services provided by the Organization, as well as approaches and measures to ensure and improve delivery and performance. Moreover, the framework emphasizes the multilingual skills of FAO staff, in an effort to support the fulfillment of their mandates and foster FAO's identity as an inter-governmental international organization. Furthermore, it positions FAO well for participating in United Nations system-wide efforts to enhance multilingualism, and for engaging with stakeholders of a vast linguistic diversity worldwide.

Documents and translation

3. In 2022-23, as shown in *Table 1*, the demand for quality multilingual products and services in FAO witnessed a further growth of just under 10 percent over the surge of 75 percent experienced in the previous biennium.

Table 1: Comparison of documents translated in the 2020-21 and 2022-23 biennia

2020-21	2022-23	Increase in documents translated	Percentage increase
21 193	23 090	1 897	8.95%

4. To accommodate such further increase in workload, FAO's internal language service housed in the Governing Bodies Servicing Division (CSG) has implemented various measures to improve coordination with client divisions, centres and offices while optimizing resource utilization and enhancing operational efficiency. This includes providing both proactive and on-demand assistance to internal partners with the planning of documents and flagship publications; supporting the scheduling for in-session translation services; and continuing the promotion of discounted rates to encourage early submission of originals. In addition, continuing collaboration mechanisms with clients have been established to cultivate effective and efficient practices, while resource planning provides coverage for both anticipated translation needs and contingencies. These actions have effectively guaranteed the delivery of major translation products and services to facilitate governance, decision making and communication efforts of FAO.

5. *Table 2* provides a comparison between the 2020-21 and 2022-23 biennia of translation output by word count. As shown, the total output increased by 8.93 percent between the two biennia, with increases seen in each FAO language, beyond English.

Table 2: Comparison between the 2020-21 and 2022 -23 biennia translation output by word count

		Arabic	Chinese	English	French	Spanish	Russian	Other	Total
2020-21	Meeting documents	3 866 000	3 313 365	160 070	4 427 505	3 984 592	3 594 337	113 400	19 459 269
	Publications	866 508	814 980	16 650	1 023 771	899 259	804 468	3 500	4 429 136
	Other documents	1 746 951	1616279	349 050	2 113 133	1 866 114	1 589 555	215 694	9 496 776
	Total words	6 479 459	5 744 624	525 770	7 564 409	6 749 965	5 988 360	332 594	33 385 181
2022-23	Meeting documents	3 422 096	3 244 559	94 170	3 908 522	3 699 761	3 443 548	8 643	17 821 297
	Publications	655 209	580 389	29 000	642 209	636 759	595 859	3 000	3 142 424
	Other documents	3 064 393	2 879 965	183 135	3 350 494	3 024 309	2 784 476	117 150	15 403 922
	Total words	7 141 698	6 704 913	306 305	7 901 224	7 360 829	6 823 882	128 793	36 367 642
Percentage increase (decrease) in translation output by word	Meeting documents	(11.48)	(2.08)	(41.17)	(11.72)	(7.15)	(4.20)	(92.38)	(8.42)
	Publications	(24.39)	(28.78)	74.17	(37.27)	(29.19)	(25.93)	(14.29)	(29.05)
	Other documents	75.41	78.18	(47.53)	58.56	62.06	75.17	(45.69)	62.20
	Total words	10.22	16.72	(41.74)	4.45	9.05	13.95	(61.28)	8.93

Interpretation

6. In the 2022-23 biennium, responding to the emergence of new types of meetings following the pandemic, FAO continued to provide interpretation for in-person, hybrid and virtual meetings. The modalities of providing interpretation were adapted to best fit each category of meetings. A large number of virtual meetings were serviced by connecting interpreters online, which enabled the Interpretation Group in CSG to satisfy demand in peak periods. In addition, alternative modalities continued to be used to optimize time management, such as the discussion of agenda items through the written correspondence procedure with translation of Members' inputs in all languages.

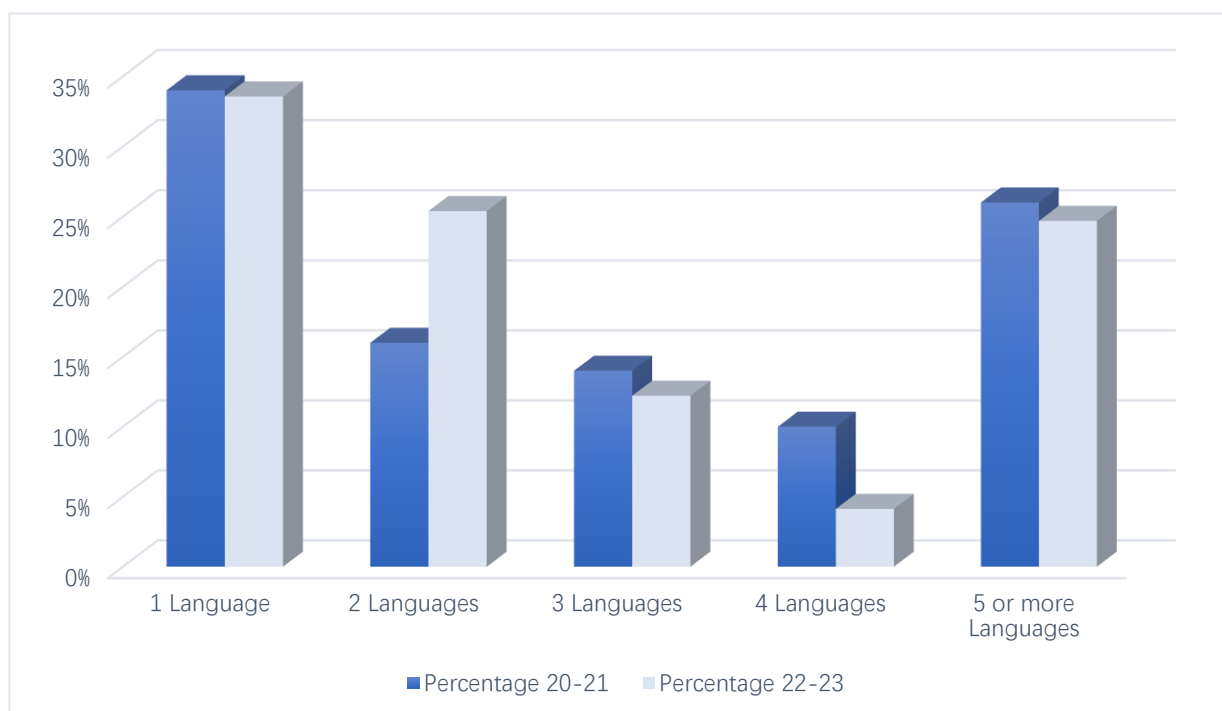
7. *Table 3* provides an overview of sessions held at headquarters and in decentralized locations during the 2022-23 and the previous biennia. Of particular note is the continued increase in the number unscheduled sessions, including a plethora of informal meetings requested by Members on an ad-hoc basis. Such meetings increased by 78 percent in 2022-23 compared to 2020-21, and have now come to form nearly half of the total set of meetings, including those serviced by simultaneous interpretation. This trend has significant cost implications on the Regular Programme budget allocation for multilingualism and meetings services, and poses undue pressure on planning and arrangements for delivery of both.

Table 3: Sessions held at headquarters and in decentralized locations

	2020-21	2022-23
Sessions approved in PWB	191	169
Cancelled sessions	(41)	(4)
Unscheduled sessions	40	71
Total	190	236
Headquarters		150
Decentralized locations		86
Total	190	236
Percentage decentralized meetings		36.5%

8. *Figure 1* provides an indication of language balance by the percentage of meetings held in several FAO languages. In 2022-23, over 60 percent of meetings were held in more than one language, including 25 percent of meetings in five or more languages, and 41 percent in between 2 and 4 languages.

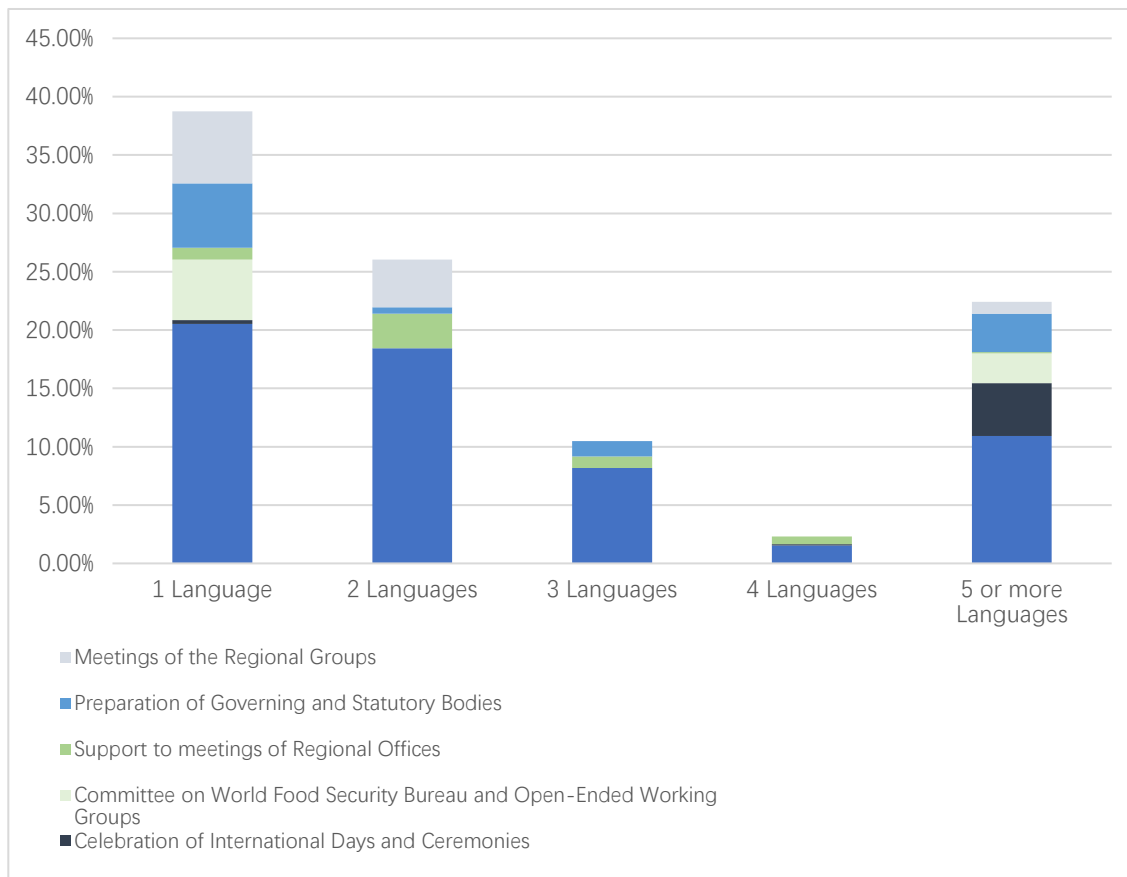
Figure 1: Proportion of meetings by number of languages (percentage)



9. As shown in *Table 4* and *Figure 2*, during the 2022-23 biennium the Organization held a large number of meetings such as multistakeholder flagship events, informal consultations, briefings held on FAO premises, as well as celebration of International Days, technical meetings, trainings, workshops and other events, including meetings of the Regional Groups, for a total of 906 meetings, representing an increase of 46.5 percent compared to the previous biennium. Of these meetings, more than 60 percent were supported by interpretation and 24 percent had interpretation in all FAO languages. When needed, in particular for technical meetings, interpretation was also provided in local languages, such as Catalan, Croatian, Farsi, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Turkish and Ukrainian.

Table 4: Other meetings

Meeting Categories	2020-21	2022-23
Meetings of the Regional Groups	110	102
Preparation of Governing and Statutory Bodies	146	97
Support to meetings of Regional Offices	39	52
Committee on World Food Security Bureau and Open-Ended Working Groups	66	70
Celebration of International Days and Ceremonies	69	45
Technical Meetings, Workshops and Trainings	365	540
Total	795	906

Figure 2: Proportion of other meetings by number of languages (percentage)

10. In total, 14 865 interpretation days were provided in all FAO languages during the 2022-23 biennium, resulting in an increase of 31 percent compared to the previous biennium.

Media products

11. Multilingualism remains essential to corporate communications. During the 2022-23 biennium, a total of 483 press releases, 479 web stories, and about 16 Op-Eds were published and translated into all FAO languages, with many also translated into Italian. Moreover, 234 speeches of the Director-General were timely translated into all languages and published on FAO's webpage.

12. As an innovative approach, 11 senior-level feature interviews were conducted and published on FAO website while stories were solicited from decentralized offices and released on FAO's homepage to showcase the delivery of the *four betters* across all locations. All these stories plus 173 feature stories were translated into FAO languages during the reporting period.

FAO digital media and public engagement

13. FAO's revamped corporate website is a central gateway for Members, partners, the media and the general public to access information on the Organization in all languages. In 2022-23, the total number of visitors on FAO.org increased by 143 percent, reaching more than 64 million, and the number of visitors to FAO's homepage increased by 139 percent, reaching over 5 million. There was a notable increase in visitors for the Chinese, English and French content in FAO.org, as well as the Arabic and English homepage content, as shown in *Table 5*.

Table 5: Overview of visits to the corporate website and homepage content

Language	Visits on FAO.org in 2022-23 ¹	Increment over 2020-21	Visits on Homepage in 2022-23 ¹	Increment over 2020-21
Arabic	2 913 199	124%	148 827	150%
Chinese	1 765 959	253%	200 253	104%
English	37 137 734	175%	3 953 611	147%
French	4 296 514	153%	228 468	118%
Russian	1 656 439	82%	75 610	99%
Spanish	15 720 236	104%	638 242	117%
Other languages ²	1 370 237	74%		
Total	64 860 318	146%	5 245 011	139%

14. FAO is also present in social media in all official languages and beyond. As in the previous biennium, compelling and engaging multilingual assets were created using key messages, producing multilingual Trello boards, posting across all channels and in all official languages. Social media followers on FAO's multilingual channels grew by 957 000 in 2023, reaching a total of 8.2 million followers across the various multilingual accounts. More than 13 000 posts were sent out via the corporate social media channels, and over 1 500 new multilingual social media assets were produced to ensure FAO's key messages reach the right audience in the right formats and languages. Thanks to the efforts by account managers from both headquarters and decentralized offices, posts were sent out in one or more of the FAO official languages and the key messages were frequently localized for target audiences in their local languages. In 2023, over 106 500 multilingual posts were shared by all FAO social media channels, with a potential reach of 7 billion, and received over 2.6 billion mentions in other accounts.

FAO publications

15. During the 2022-23 biennium, a total of 3 968 publications (books and brochures) were published via the Publications Workflow System ranging from authoritative analysis for policy makers and expert guidance for farmers to general knowledge for young people, as shown in *Table 6* together with the breakdown by languages.

Table 6: Number of publications in 2022-23 by languages

Language	2022	2023	Total	Sharepercentage
Arabic	89	96	185	4.66%
Chinese	61	93	154	3.88%
English	1 039	1 364	2 403	60.56%
French	180	229	409	10.31%
Russian	63	67	130	3.28%
Spanish	165	210	375	9.45%
Other	137	175	312	7.86%
Total	1 734	2 234	3 968	100%

¹ The 2023 data was collected through two different analytic tools. January 2023 numbers were collected through Google Universal Analytics, while February – December 2023 numbers were collected through Google Analytics 4. Google Universal Analytics was dismissed by Google in July 2023.

² Other languages include Georgian, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Macedonian, Portuguese, Romanian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese.

16. The FAO Publication Taxonomy sets out that Tier 1 publications (flagship, high-profile, corporate general interest) must be published in all six official languages. Efforts have been made to prepare Long-Term Agreements (LTAs) with suppliers for digital-first publications and for the design and layout of flagship publications and corporate brochures in non-Latin languages to facilitate and improve the design, production and branding of publications in all official languages.

Outreach and promotion campaigns

17. Multilingualism and awareness of cultural differences is essential to enhance understanding and to reach a global audience. Languages used for FAO international outreach and promotion campaigns (including International Days, Years, and UN Decades) have been increasing in order for FAO's messages to reach a larger audience over the past biennium. Efforts were made to regularly and extensively liaise with more than 100 decentralized offices to ensure effective, wide-reaching campaigns in all regions, working together to translate campaign content into local languages. Examples of languages used in some major campaigns in the biennium include:

- World Food Day 2022 translated and promoted in 50 languages (44 non-official languages);
- World Food Day 2023 translated and promoted in 45 languages (39 non-official languages);
- International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 translated and promoted in 15 languages;
- International Year of Millets 2023 translated and promoted in 23 languages.

18. During the week of the World Food Day and the World Food Forum in 2023, there was an increase of 2.5 million views on the FAO website, while the World Food Week multilingual products reached 2.7 billion social media accounts, with an increase of 300 million views on social media platforms. Based on the interest expressed by the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) and the strong support from the host country to FAO, the entire World Food Day communication package was translated into Portuguese and Italian.

19. Youth is an important audience for FAO. A multilingual music video entitled *Water is life, water is food* (the third in a series) was produced in 8 languages (2 non-official languages: Portuguese and Italian) to engage youth in FAO's work, encouraging them to become change-makers and advocates for a more sustainable world. The video was viewed over 1.5 million times and performed live at the Junior World Food Day, promoting the importance of multilingualism to a youth audience.

Terminology products

20. During the 2022-23 biennium, the Terminology Team in CSG continued, with the adoption of more advanced terminology criteria, to improve the FAO Terminology Portal and the database of Names of Countries and Territories (NOCS). The terminology work included maintenance, revision and deletion of thousands of already existing entries as well as the addition of thousands of new entries, terms, name forms, sources, remarks and definitions in all the FAO languages. The maintenance of the Term Portal is done in close collaboration with concept owners as well as technical and linguistic experts, both in FAO and around the world. As a result, the Term Portal's reliability as a knowledge tool has been further elevated, which has contributed to a greater terminology accuracy and consistency across the Organization. In this regard, successful partnerships have not only facilitated the improvement of the terminology database but have also raised the visibility of relevant work both inside and outside the Organization.

21. Bearing in mind the key role of terminology vis-à-vis multilingualism, the growing demand to produce reliable and high-quality terminology, resulting from the increasing amount of translation requests, as well as the need to ensure equal representation of all FAO languages in the Term Portal, terminology work remains indispensable towards ensuring the necessary linguistic support in all the FAO languages. *Table 7* shows the evolution of the number of terms in all languages during the last biennium.

Table 7: Terms in the Term Portal by language

Biennium	English	Arabic	Chinese	French	Russian	Spanish	Scientific	Italian
2020-21	135 287	95 838	80 037	120 502	55 333	118 385	20 624	15 199
2022-23	131 809	95 077	78 086	117 294	56 619	115 101	19 921	14 706
As compared to January 2022	(3 478)	(761)	(1 951)	(3 208)	1 286	(3 284)	(703)	(493)
Language ratio as related to English at January 2022	–	70.8%	59.2%	89.1%	40.9%	87.5%	15.2%	11.2%
Language ratio as related to English at January 2024	–	72.1%	59.2%	89.0%	43.0%	87.3%	15.1%	11.2%

E-learning courses and linguistic skills of staff

22. As an important source of knowledge and expertise, the Organization is making continuous efforts to deliver multilingual versions of its e-learning courses through its corporate learning platform. In addition, a multilingual home page supports the navigation of FAO's mandatory training curriculum, comprised of eight courses, and provides content in the six FAO languages. Such efforts have promoted a steady growth in the use of these courses for education, training, and capacity building.

23. In addition, the Organization provides language training (individual and group classes) to staff members in all FAO languages funded through corporate staff development funds. During the 2022-23 biennium, 1 556 staff at headquarters attended language training,³ with 142 attendees obtaining FAO certification upon examination (*Table 8*). Correspondingly, a total of 54 326 hours of language training was offered in 602 courses between 2022 and 2023 (*Table 9*). E-learning language training was provided to a total of 135 participants in decentralized offices (*Table 10*)⁴.

Table 8: Number of headquarters staff who attended language training and obtained FAO certification in 2022-23

Levels	Individual class registrations 2022	Group class registrations 2022	Number of staff attending individual/group courses certified in 2022	Individual class registrations in 2023	Group class registrations in 2023	Number of staff attending individual/group courses certified in 2023
Level A	70	108	n/a*	73	173	n/a*
Level B	106	248	26	97	207	28
Level C	33	184	45	43	214	43
Total	209	540	71	213	594	71

*No official examinations offered at level A

³ Since March 2020, all language courses (group and individual) are delivered online via Zoom.

⁴ Decentralized offices coordinate their own language training directly using the divisional staff development budget.

Table 9: Number and type of language training courses for headquarters staff and overall hours delivered in 2022-23

Course Type	Number of courses in 2022	Total training hours in 2022	Number of courses in 2023	Total training hours in 2023
Individual	208	4 735	213	4 831
Group courses	87	21 260	94	23 500
Total	295	25 995	307	28 331

Table 10: Number and type of e-learning language courses for decentralized offices staff in 2022-23

E-learning course type	2022	2023	Total
Speexx	70	65	135

Innovation and new technologies

24. During 2022-23, FAO's commitment to leverage technology to improve its multilingual capabilities resulted in actions being taken through the partnerships between CSG and the Digital FAO and Agro-informatics Division (CSI) as well as an external provider to upgrade the document processing (E-DPR) and computer-assisted translation (CAT) systems, respectively, to improve efficiency in the workflow, enhance stability and functioning, strengthen monitoring and reporting, and harness the power of technology.

25. Efforts also continued to implement innovative and effective solutions for on-site and remote interpretation on virtual platforms. The Interpreter Management System, a software that supports the recruitment of interpreters and their assignment to meetings, was further enhanced with new functionalities.

26. By modernizing FAO's multilingual infrastructures, these approaches seek to ensure greater consistency in terminology use, streamline processes, improve resource planning and utilization, and maximize effectiveness. They can also support data-driven initiatives for informed decisions on future improvements.