

**September 2023**

*The idea of a European Day of Languages was born in 1997 at the Council of Europe. The first edition took place on 26 September 2001 and was organised in tandem with the European Union to celebrate its linguistic diversity. Indeed, in line with its motto 'United in diversity', the EU counts 24 official languages used during proceedings of the European Parliament and for communicating with EU citizens. The EU also boasts about 60 regional and minority languages. Multilingualism Day, first celebrated in the European Parliament in September 2017, focuses on this closely-related concept. Every year, the European Parliament, the world's most multilingual parliament, opens its doors to the public to demonstrate multilingualism, translation and interpretation in action.*

**How language skills make a difference**

*Infographic by Krisztina Binder, EPRS, April 2023*

The EU has 24 official languages, but the European linguistic landscape is broader, including regional and minority languages and those introduced by migrant populations. Respecting linguistic diversity is a core EU value, and supporting language learning has been a constant EU priority, one that is also key to achieving a European education area by 2025, with quality education for all. To support this vision, the EU wants young people to acquire proficiency in two languages in addition to their language of schooling by the time they leave school. Multilingualism is considered a key competence to be developed from an early age and throughout life.

**Multilingualism: The language of the European Union**

*Briefing by Ivana Katsarova, EPRS, April 2022*

Some 7 000 languages are spoken globally today, but half of the world's population speak just six native languages, and 90 % of all languages may be replaced by dominant ones by the end of the century. The harmonious co-existence of 24 official languages is a distinctive feature of the European project. Multilingualism is not only an expression of the EU countries' cultural identities, it also helps preserve democracy, transparency and accountability. No legislation can enter into force until it has been translated into all official languages and published in the EU Official Journal. The provisions on the EU language regime can only be changed by a unanimous vote in the Council of the EU. The EU is committed to promoting language learning but has limited influence over educational and language policies, as these are the responsibility of the individual EU countries.

**European Day of Languages: Digital survival of lesser-used languages**

*Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, September 2020*

Since 2001, Europe has marked European Day of Languages each year on 26 September, in order to focus attention on its rich linguistic diversity. The European Union boasts 24 official languages, and around 60 regional and minority languages are spoken across the Member States. Europe's linguistic mosaic also includes a variety of sign languages spoken by half a million people, heritage languages such as ancient Greek and Latin, as well as Esperanto – an international language created in Europe. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), many world languages, including European ones, are endangered and could disappear because of the dominant role of languages such as English with a huge population of native speakers and other learners. The digital world plays a major role in their promotion and preservation.

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## Further reading

### Linguistic and cultural diversity – Minority and minoritised languages as part of European linguistic and cultural diversity

Study by Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, June 2023

### Ladino: Judeo-Spanish language and culture in Europe

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, January 2023

### What if everyone spoke the same language?

'At a glance' note by Luisa Antunes, EPRS, October 2022

### Yiddish language and culture and its post-Holocaust fate in Europe

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, January 2022

### European Day of Languages : Multilingualism as a cornerstone of better communication

Infographic by Ivana Katsarova, EPRS, September 2021

### International Year of Indigenous Languages – Sami people and languages in the EU

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, January 2020

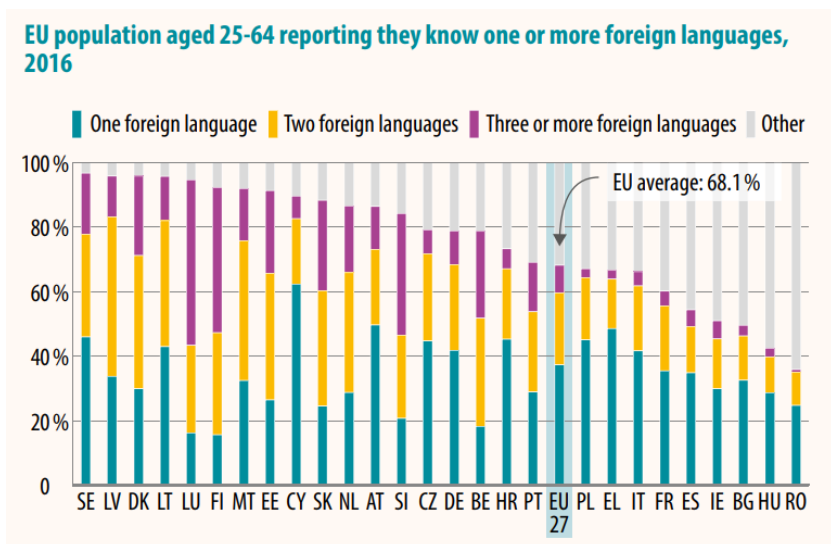
### Sign languages in the EU

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, September 2018

### Multilingualism and lifelong language learning

'At a glance' note by Denise Chircop, EPRS, September 2017

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