
10th UNAOC Global Forum, Cascais, 25-27 November 2024

Thematic Panel 9:

“Speaking in harmony: Embracing multilingualism in the 21st Century as an enabler of multilateral diplomacy and a vector for cultural diversity”

27 November 2024, 16:00 – 17:30, Estoril Convention Centre

Draft

Multilingualism, the ability to communicate in multiple languages, is more than just a skill¹; it is a key enabler of multilateral diplomacy, a cornerstone of cultural diversity and a vital tool for fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. Beyond its practical function, multilingualism is deeply rooted in the relationship between language and culture. Each language opens a window into the culture from which it emerges, making multilingualism a gateway to increased cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability in an interconnected world.

Multilingualism plays a crucial role in promoting intercultural dialogue by enabling deeper engagement with diverse cultural perspectives and fostering close connections with multiculturalism.² As multiculturalism celebrates the coexistence of diverse identities, multilingualism provides the tools for meaningful exchanges within these diverse settings, fostering empathy and respect. This connection between multilingualism and multiculturalism is essential for building inclusive societies.

Building on its ability in bridging cultural and linguistic divides, multilingualism aligns closely with the mission of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), to promote intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among people and communities around the world. Multilingualism promotes global citizenship by broadening perspectives, fostering empathy and allowing interactions with a variety of cultural narratives and viewpoints, which are essential for advancing UNAOC's mission of promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.

There is growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development by ensuring cultural diversity, fostering intercultural dialogue, strengthening cooperation, and providing quality education for all. In 2007 the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/61/266 called upon Member States "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world".³ The Pact for the Future, recently adopted by the UN General Assembly, emphasizes the importance of promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the digital space.⁴ It acknowledges the essential role that languages play in preserving cultural

¹ King, Lid “Cambridge Assessment English Perspectives: The Impact of Multilingualism on Global Education and Language Learning,” p.8, 2018.

² Ana Drobot, Irina, “Multilingualism and Awareness of Cultural Differences in Communication,” p.2, 2021.

³A/RES/61/266, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 May 2007, p.4

⁴ Pact for the Future, p. 49, 2024. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sof-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf

heritage and fostering inclusion, particularly through artificial intelligence systems and digital accessibility initiatives.

This panel will explore various dimensions of multilingualism, including its pivotal role in fostering inclusive societies, bridging cultural gaps, and enhancing multilateral diplomacy. The session will begin by addressing how multilingualism strengthens intercultural dialogue and multilateral diplomacy, bridging cultural and linguistic divides in an interconnected world. It will then explore how multilingualism promotes empathy, respect, and global citizenship, contributing to more inclusive societies.

Building on these foundations, the session will examine the role of multilingualism in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the final decade of the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on how linguistic and cultural inclusiveness are key to achieving global goals. By exploring key challenges and opportunities in preserving linguistic and cultural diversity, participants will engage with strategies to promote multilingualism through policy, education, and community-based initiatives. Lastly, practical strategies and good practices from different sectors will be discussed, showcasing how multilingualism can foster social cohesion, intercultural competence, and prepare global citizens to address pressing challenges.

The speakers will address the following guiding questions:

- How can multilingualism be harnessed to strengthen multilateral diplomacy and bridge cultural divides in today's interconnected world?
- What role does multilingualism play in promoting empathy, respect, and global citizenship? How can it contribute to creating more inclusive societies?
- How can multilingualism be leveraged as a tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the final decade of the 2030 Agenda?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities related to preserving linguistic diversity in a globalized world?
- What are the practical strategies or good practices in promoting multilingualism within different sectors (education, policy, community engagement) that have proven effective in fostering social cohesion?