

Languages of the European Union

The languages of the European Union are [languages](#) used by people within the member states of the [European Union](#).

They include the 21 official languages of the European Union plus many others.

EU policy is to encourage all its citizens to be multilingual; specifically, it encourages them to be able to speak two languages in addition to their [mother tongue](#). The reason for this is not only to promote easier communication between Europeans, but also to encourage greater tolerance and respect for diversity.

A number of EU funding programmes actively promote language learning and linguistic diversity. The content of educational systems remains the responsibility of individual Member States. Further information can be found at [Language Policy](#)

Official languages of the European Union

The official languages of the [European Union](#) are

- [Czech](#)
- [Danish](#)
- [Dutch](#)
- [English](#)
- [Estonian](#)
- [Finnish](#)
- [French](#)
- [German](#)
- [Greek \(Demotic\)](#)
- [Hungarian](#)
- [Irish](#) (from [1 January 2007](#))
- [Italian](#)
- [Latvian](#)
- [Lithuanian](#)
- [Maltese](#)
- [Polish](#)
- [Portuguese](#)
- [Slovak](#)
- [Slovene](#)
- [Spanish](#)
- [Swedish](#)
- see also: [Names of the official languages of the European Union in the official languages respectively](#)

All decisions by the institutions are translated into all official languages, and European citizens may contact the institutions and receive a reply in any official language.

For top-level meetings, interpreting into any official language is arranged as needed. Simultaneous interpreting between all official languages is always arranged for sessions of the [European Parliament](#) and the [European Council](#).

Away from these formal meetings, a more flexible language regime is used. The primary working languages of the institutions are English, French and to some extent German, but other languages are used as befits the situation and the language skills of the people involved. The 1995 and 2004 expansions of the Union to countries where French is less used have strengthened the position of English and German as working languages.

The process of creating documents in this multilingual environment is described at: [1](#)
http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/bookshelf/brochure_en.pdf

You can find a description of how conference interpreters work at: [1](#)
http://europa.eu.int/comm/scic/index_en.htm

See [Names of the European Union in the official languages](#).

Status of other languages

In [2004](#) there were moves by the Spanish and Irish governments to seek the status of 'official' EU languages for Basque, Catalan, Galician and Irish.

Irish

Although The [Irish language](#) had not been one of the official languages of the European Union prior to 13 June 2005, it is the [Republic of Ireland](#)'s first official language, and has minority-language status in [Northern Ireland](#). Since the [Republic of Ireland](#)'s accession to the [European Economic Community](#) (now the European Union) in [1973](#), EU treaties have been published and authenticated in Irish as well as the EU official languages, and one has been able to make written submissions to Union institutions in Irish. On 13 June 2005, following a unanimous decision by EU foreign ministers, it was announced that Irish will be made the 21st official language of the EU. The decision means that legislation approved by both the [European Parliament](#) and the [Council of Ministers](#) will now be translated into Irish, and interpretation from Irish will be available at European Parliament plenary sessions and some council meetings. The new arrangements will come into effect on [1 January, 2007](#). The cost of translation, interpretation, publication and legal services involved in making Irish an official EU language has been estimated at just under ?3.5 million a year.

Irish will be the first working language of the Union that is not the most widely spoken language in any member state - census returns ([2002](#)) in the Republic of Ireland number speakers of Irish at 1,570,894 out of a population of 3,750,995, though the number of

fluent speakers is probably closer to 260,000, and much fewer than that make daily community use of the language.

Catalan

The status of Catalan, spoken by many millions of citizens, but not accorded the status of official language, has also been the subject of debate. On [11 December 1990](#), the use of Catalan was the subject of a [European Parliament](#) Resolution (resolution A3-169/90 on languages in the (European) Community and the situation of [Catalan](#) (OJ-C19, [28 January 1991](#)).

Provision in the Constitution

The draft [European constitution](#) is available in the 21 official languages, and the languages of three candidate countries: [Romanian](#), [Bulgarian](#), and [Turkish](#).

The version approved by the [European Council](#) contains the following provision:

Article IV-10(2): This Treaty may also be translated into any other languages as determined by Member States among those which, in accordance with their constitutional order, enjoy official status in all or part of their territory. A certified copy of such translations shall be provided by the Member States concerned to be deposited in the archives of the Council.

Other languages of the European Union

Besides the languages of Spain (see above), there are other [regional languages](#) spoken within the EU that do not have official recognition at EU level (although they may have some official status within the member state). Some of these count many more speakers than some of the lesser-used official languages.

These include:

- the regional [languages of France](#)
- [Languages in the United Kingdom](#)
 - [Scottish Gaelic](#)
 - [Welsh](#)
 - [Scots](#)
 - [Ulster Scots](#) (same language as Scots)
 - [Cornish](#)
- [Minority languages in Sweden](#)
- [Limburgisch Language](#)
- [Low German](#)
- [Luxembourgish](#)
- [Frisian](#)
- [Ladin](#)

- [Mirandese](#)
- [Russian](#)
- [Sami languages](#)
- [Sorbian languages](#)
- [Walloon language](#)
- [List of Languages of Italy](#)

The [Katharevousa](#) variant of Greek is no longer official.

Although not an EU treaty, some EU member states have ratified the [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#).

Language skills of European citizens

This table from the year 2000 shows what proportion of citizens said that they could speak each of the official languages of the Union, either as mother tongue or as non-mother tongue (including as [foreign language](#)):

Language	Proportion of population of the EU speaking it as a mother tongue	Proportion of population of the EU speaking it as a non-mother tongue	Total proportion speaking this language
German	24%	8%	32%
French	16%	12%	28%
English	16%	31%	47%
Italian	16%	2%	18%
Spanish	11%	4%	15%
Dutch	6%	1%	7%
Greek	3%	0%	3%
Portuguese	3%	0%	3%
Swedish	2%	1%	3%
Danish	1%	1%	2%
Finnish	1%	0%	1%

Note: This table relates to the older 15 Member States of the European Union (source: [Eurobarometer](#)). Data for the new Member States are not yet available.

See also

- [European languages](#)

External link

- [Languages in Europe](#)
- [European Union interinstitutional style guide](#)