

01. Language policy

Language coverage policy for Europa

The language coverage policy for Europa comprises a set of principles, which are designed to ensure that relevant legal obligations are met and that resources for the translation of online content are allocated where they have the most impact. European Commission departments and those working for them should always respect them when publishing multilingual content on Europa.

Policy principles

Principle #1: Some translations are required by law.

Consult Annex 2 to the 2016 Communication *Translation as part of the Commission's decisionmaking process* [1] to check whether the type of content that you intend to publish is covered by any legal obligation regarding translation.

Principle #2: Aim for less (and better) content.

Think twice before putting content online, because the more content you have, the more financial and human resources you will spend keeping it up to date and having it translated.

Contact DG COMM Unit B.3. Europa web communication for advice on identifying relevant content and DGT Unit S.3. Editing service for help producing shorter, betterdrafted texts.

Principle #3: Content in one language only should be the exception not the rule.

Think twice before publishing content in, for example, English only, because nearly 10 % of visitors to our websites do not have it as a 1st or 2nd language.

Publishing content in one language only might, however, be justified if user data demonstrate that translation is not needed [2].

Principle #4: Wherever possible, translation choices should be based on data about real website visitors.

Use whatever sources of information you have about the languages used by visitors to your websites.

Before content goes online, DG COMM Unit B.3. Europa web communication can provide languagerelated information for each of 77 user tasks polled in 2014. After content goes online, analytics can tell you what pages visitors to your site are trying to view in what languages.

Principle #5: If you can't provide all languages, select the languages that a high proportion of users can understand.

If you do not have detailed user data, a sensible first step can be translating into languages that have large numbers of native speakers or that are widely known foreign languages.

Principle #6: Users should be able to identify content that they are interested in, even if it is not in their language.

Make it as easy as possible for users to find content that they might be interested in, even if the content itself is not translated into their language [3]. They can then choose to view that content in a language other than their native language or find some way to translate the content (e.g. machine translation).

Principle #7: Content in nonEU languages can be useful but requires extra attention.

There are many circumstances in which it might be desirable to publish content in nonEU languages. For example on the websites of a DG that provides humanitarian aid outside Europe or an organisation whose members include nonEU countries. Or to communicate and promote EU policies in countries where no EU language is spoken. The acceptance characters that are not used in EU-languages (japanese, chinese, arabic...) will depend on the platform used to build the website. Check if a platform fulfills your needs before choosing one.

Principle #8: Machine translation as a complement to human translation.

Machine translation is getting better all the time, and it can complement human translation on websites.

The European Commission offers an online machine translation service, [eTranslation](#), which is available to EC information systems and online services through an Application Programming Interface (API).

Europa pages where human translation is not required under the above criteria could offer machine translation versions, provided that the request for a machine translation is triggered by the user and the fact that the resulting text is machine translated is clearly indicated.

*Please note that regarding **multilingual content on a single page**, it is recommended to avoid mixing languages wherever possible. Usability testing carried out in the past has shown while users are not necessarily confused by two languages on the same page, from 3 languages on, it becomes disturbing for them.

Purpose

DG Communication, DG Informatics and DG Translation work with other Directorates General to make the Commission's online communications and services as relevant, coherent and cost-effective as possible. The aim is to provide high-quality online content and services that achieve the Commission's organisational goals and meet the expectations of stakeholders and citizens, thereby strengthening their trust in the EU.

The goals of the language coverage policy for Europa are to:

- ensure that content that concerns citizens' rights or obligations or that is subject to legal or political requirements is provided in all official EU languages
- ensure insofar as possible that other types of content are provided in a language that visitors understand (whether or not their native language)
- strike a sensible balance between the number of EU languages provided and the cost of providing them
- provide objective, explainable criteria justifying choices to translate content or not into different languages

Based on those goals, the relevant legislation and data regarding the languages spoken by visitors to Europa, a number of principles are applied to decide what content to translate into what languages.

Legal obligations

From the very beginning of the European institutions, the use of languages and respect for linguistic diversity have been of primary importance. Regulation No 1 [4] dating from 1958 has been amended as new member countries joined the EU, but *vis-à-vis* citizens its guiding principle has remained the same: every citizen of the EU has the right to write to any of the institutions or bodies of the EU in any official language and receive an answer in that same language.

Annex 2 to the Commission Communication '*Translation as part of the Commission's decisionmaking process*' [5] lays down what type of documents must be translated into what language. The number of required languages can range from all official languages for documents to be adopted by the Commission (Communications, Green and White Papers, notices published in the Official Journal, etc.) down to one language for documents not to be adopted (staff working documents, impact assessment reports, etc.).

Background

The language coverage policy for Europa reiterates some high-level goals that have long applied to translation, such as ensuring that content that concerns citizens' rights or obligations or that is subject to legal or political requirements is provided in all official EU languages.

What makes the policy new is that it addresses the specifics of *online* content and introduces the notion of making translation choices based on data about the behaviour of visitors to Europa and other EU websites. It also introduces the use of machine translation.

(1) "Translation as part of the Commission's decisionmaking process": <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/?fuseaction=list&coteld=3&year=2016&number=2000&version=ALL&language=en>

(2) If, for example:

- a large percentage of the most interested users have English as a first or second language.
- data show that few users are trying to view a webpage in languages other than English.
- the information targets a specific, specialised audience (e.g., the Commission's Information Providers Guide for webmasters).
- the content is 'consumed' faster than it could be translated (e.g., a press release), is online for a limited time only and/or targets a particular country only.

(3) The 'Language Coverage' webtool is one way to do this: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/display/webtools/Language+Coverage>.

(4) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31958R0001>

(5) <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/?fuseaction=list&coteld=3&year=2016&number=2000&version=ALL&language=en>