

Submitted by: Catalan National Assembly (Assemblea Nacional Catalana)

The minoritisation of languages

Language is a fundamental element of identity. For unrepresented peoples and nations, whose cultures lack the protection and support afforded by statehood, language becomes an even more essential pillar of collective identity. Without effective protection, the languages spoken by unrepresented peoples can gradually lose ground to the dominant language of the state in which they are located.

Combined with discriminatory policies and deliberate attempts by state authorities to diminish or suppress minority languages, this process can lead to the minoritisation of languages. Language repression and restriction therefore constitute a direct threat to the identity, culture, and heritage of unrepresented peoples and nations.

Linguistic rights form an integral part of the broader framework of human rights. International human rights law protects the rights of linguistic minorities through provisions relating to non-discrimination, freedom of expression, education, private life, and the right to use one's own language.¹

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prohibits discrimination on the basis of language. Likewise, Article 2 and Article 5(e)(vi) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination require States to eliminate discriminatory laws and guarantee cultural rights without distinction based on language or national origin. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects the rights of linguistic minorities to use their own language, while Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights prohibits discrimination on linguistic grounds. Furthermore, the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities affirms the right of minorities to enjoy their own language and culture (Article 2).

Despite these protections, no legally binding international instrument specifically safeguards minority linguistic identity. Consequently, several states continue to target minority languages as a means of weakening or erasing the national identities of unrepresented peoples.

The case of the Catalan language

Catalan is a Romance language with deep historical roots. It is spoken in Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Andorra, Northern Catalonia (France), and Alghero (Italy). In Spain, Catalan enjoys co-official status alongside Spanish. However, despite Catalonia's growing population, the social use of Catalan has steadily declined in recent years.

¹ United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues (2017). "Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities. A Practical Guide for Implementation". Available online at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Minorities/SR/LanguageRightsLinguisticMinorities_EN.pdf

Historically, Catalan has been subject to severe restrictions and prohibitions. Following the Nueva Planta Decrees of 1715–1716, Castilian became the sole official language and Catalan institutions were abolished. During the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), Catalan was prohibited from public life. The 1979 Statute of Autonomy restored Catalan's co-official status, while the 2006 Statute sought to strengthen linguistic rights. However, in 2010 the Spanish Constitutional Court annulled several key provisions.

Today, legal restrictions continue to weaken the position of Catalan in education and public life, prompting concern from the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts monitoring the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in its 2024 evaluation report². At the same time, Spanish language overwhelmingly dominates the media and public administration, and while the number of Catalan speakers decrease, reported cases of linguistic discrimination against Catalan speakers by Spanish public authorities have increased since 2022³.

Proposals

ACKNOWLEDGING the importance of preserving minority and minoritised languages as an essential component of cultural diversity, identity, and human rights,

ALARMED by continuing attempts by states to weaken, marginalise, or suppress minority languages through discriminatory policies and practices,

The Catalan National Assembly therefore:

CALLS on the UNPO to raise awareness of the need to protect and promote minority and minoritised languages,

URGES the UNPO to denounce assimilationist policies and all forms of state-led linguistic discrimination and linguistic erasure,

REQUESTS the UNPO to establish mechanisms for collecting data on linguistic discrimination affecting its members and to monitor and report on violations of linguistic rights affecting unrepresented peoples and nations.

² <https://unpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Submission-on-the-Implementation-of-the-International-Covenant-on-Civil-and-Political-Rights.docx.pdf>

³ https://www.plataforma-llengua.cat/media/upload/pdf/informe-discriminacions-2024_1766415206.pdf