

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: THRIVING IN A DIGITAL AGE

28 January 2021



WEBINAR – CONCEPT NOTE

28 January 2021

16.00 – 17.30 (GMT UK time)

17.00 – 18.30 (CET Paris time)

[Online registration](#)

PURPOSE

To inform and structure a public webinar event on preserving, promoting and protecting Indigenous languages, co-organised by the Scottish Government's Nordic and Arctic Unit, the Scottish Government's Paris office and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

CONTEXT

In the spirit of the Scottish Government's [Arctic policy framework](#) published in September 2019, and the commitments made in the document, the Scottish Government have hosted and organized a series of digital panel discussions that serve as an opportunity to promote knowledge and policy exchange between Scottish and international speakers in relation to issues concerning community resilience, wellbeing and sustainability.

The Arctic policy framework reflects on the challenges that Scotland shares with the Arctic region, encouraging greater cooperation with a view to developing joint solutions to shared issues. The digital events organized to date have focused on issues such as rural repopulation, mental wellbeing in rural areas, circular economy and community-level climate action. Each webinar has featured a combination of Scotland-based and international experts, often involving representatives of Indigenous communities.

Reflecting the approach taken by the policy framework, the webinar series seeks to offer a combination of academic insights and on-the-ground contributions, bringing first-hand community expertise fully within the scope of the discussions.

Promoting and protecting Indigenous languages is a key area of policy development reflected within the Arctic policy framework, and will be the focus of the next installment of the Arctic webinar series. In order to facilitate a discussion and lay the foundation for longer term knowledge-exchange between Scottish and Arctic communities, the Scottish Government intends to partner with UNESCO in the organization of this webinar, considering UNESCO's role as lead UN agency for the organization of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032) proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (Ref.: A/74/396).

The UNGA resolution invited Member States to consider establishing national mechanisms with adequate funding to successfully implement the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, in partnership with indigenous peoples. It further invites Indigenous peoples, as custodians of their own languages, to initiate and develop appropriate measures for the implementation of the International Decade.

As an immediate response to the UNGA resolution and to facilitate concrete action towards the implementation of the International Decade, UNESCO invites all stakeholders to engage in the preparation of the Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. This Global Action Plan will outline the strategic approach, define major actions, provide guidance on implementation, monitoring and governing structures, and suggest measures to be taken together by United Nations entities, Governments, indigenous peoples' organizations, the broader civil society, academia, the private sector and other interested actors, in order to achieve jointly the objectives of the IDIL 2022-2032.

BACKGROUND

Scotland and the Arctic have a proud multilingual tradition, which enriches the vibrancy of their culture and international profile. The Arctic is home to a wealth of Indigenous languages and dialects, while Gaelic and Scots are cherished parts of Scotland's heritage.

Whilst it is recognised that culture and cultural practise must preserve its independence, it is important for institutions to put long-term planning, infrastructure and policies in place to help tradition and culture flourish. Indigenous languages are under pressure and require support to help strengthen connections between people, empower communities through creativity and be leaders in encouraging international dialogue.

Indigenous languages are not simply a cultural resource but a way of life. They drive social, economic and educational benefits.

The United Nations proclaimed 2019 as the Year of Indigenous Languages, in order to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote them; and to take concrete steps in this direction at the national and international levels. The high-level closing event "*Making a decade of action for indigenous languages*" organized on 27-28 February 2020 in Mexico City to conclude the International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019 (IYIL) served to present a [Strategic Outcome Document](#), paving the way for the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022 – 2032).

A key theme within the framework of the IDIL 2022-2032 is entitled "*Digital empowerment, language technology, freedom of expression and media development*". It focuses on the role digital technology and digital empowerment can have in promoting and protecting centuries-old languages. This interconnects clearly with the Scottish Government's Arctic Policy Framework, whereby the Scottish Government is committed to promoting transnational cooperation on how new technologies and digital solutions can contribute to preserving and promoting centuries-old languages.

The Scottish Government is also promoting several initiatives to increase the use of Gaelic and Scots, raising their status in everyday life. The National Gaelic Language plan 2018-2023 identified several avenues through which the awareness and profile of Gaelic can be strengthened, ranging from greater use in the leisure industry to family learning. The 2015 Scots language policy is currently being revised to include commitments to support all Scots dialects, including those spoken in Shetland and Orkney.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives webinar, organized jointly by The Scottish Government and UNESCO, will aim to achieve the following objectives:

- Bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, including representatives from the Gaelic and Scots community, as well as the Sami and Inuit community, to facilitate a dialogue that raises awareness of the importance of preserving, supporting and protecting Indigenous languages, linguistic diversity and multilingualism.
- Retain a focus on language users within this dialogue – particularly young users and young girls and women, considered as key stakeholders in ensuring transmission and continuity of language use.
- Establish a transnational exchange of views and expertise on the role of digital technology to enrich education, learning and cultural regeneration.
- Facilitate a dialogue that embeds the concepts of modern technologies and indigenous languages within the context of the IDIL 2022 – 2032.

- Serve as one of the regional meetings which will contribute to the development of a series of recommendations that can inform the next phases of delivery of the IDIL 2022-2032.
- Promote an inclusive and accessible event that aims to attract a diverse international audience, including the general public who may not have a detailed knowledge of language policies or Scottish and Arctic cultural links.

FORMAT

The suggested format is a 90-min webinar event on ZOOM, with one chair/moderator and 4 panellists representing the Gaelic, Scots, Sami and Inuit communities respectively. Each speaker would be invited to share insights on how new technologies and digital skills (e.g. film-making) are used to promote their language.

Discussions will be shaped in a way wherein each speaker sets out challenges and practical solutions, thus sharing ideas other communities can draw inspiration from. By so doing, the event can serve as a platform for exchanging best practices and expertise, establishing opportunities for longer-term exchanges and partnerships that can be strengthened during the IDIL 2022 – 2032.

AGENDA

Short opening remarks and welcome

17.00 – 17.15 (CET) / 16.00 – 16.15 (GMT)

Chair: Professor Rob Dunbar, Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities at the University of Edinburgh

Mr Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary, Scottish Government

Mr Xing Qu, Deputy Director-General and Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO

Thematic presentations and discussions among panelists

17.15 – 18.10 (CET) / 16.15 – 17.10 (GMT)

Ms Fiona MacKenzie, Gaelic Singer, Archivist and Manager, Canna House for the National Trust for Scotland (UK)

Mr Michael Dempster, Director, Scots Language Center (UK)

Ms Aile Javo, Secretary General, Saami Council (Norway)

Inuit representative (TBC)

Questions and Answers discussion with the audience

18.10 – 18.30 (CET) / 17.10 – 17.30 (GMT)

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Official Website:

[Arctic Connections: Scotland's Arctic policy framework - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot)
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