# GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION!

FOR HERITAGE LANGUAGE EDUCATION
LAUNCHED ON
UNESCO INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE
DAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024



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## **SUMMARY**



Heritage language programs – also called "mother tongue schools" or "weekend schools" – are often non-profit, grassroots initiatives operated by parents and volunteers from a language community outside of regular school hours in order to maintain the language and culture of their children's heritage. In this Global Call to Action for Heritage Language Education, the newly established Global Heritage Language Think Tank gives recommendations for how to achieve more sustainable heritage language teaching worldwide. The call outlines concrete actions that can be taken by students, caregivers, mainstream teachers and principals, heritage language teachers, libraries, non-profit initiatives, universities, journalists, local businesses, and government officials.



# INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT



We live in a world that is increasingly shaped by global forces, with people migrating or being displaced for countless reasons. It is no longer possible to ignore the fact that most people speak more than one language. UNESCO has identified the right to study one's heritage language as universal.

Unfortunately, there are still misconceptions about what linguistic diversity means for individuals, families, education, and governments, and this lack of understanding has far-reaching consequences. For example, a common belief is that the key to success for a child who arrives as a newcomer to a country is assimilation and a commitment to the new national language – even if that comes at the cost of losing the home ("heritage") language.

Language attrition and loss negatively impact the child's self-esteem, identity development, and ability to truly integrate into the new place; language loss also negatively impacts society's linguistic repertoire, its level of intercultural competence, social cohesion, and ability to participate in a global marketplace.

Even in societies where multilingualism is valued, there is potential to improve how effectively the heritage languages are preserved. Persistent challenges of heritage language education can be better dealt with if there are appropriate policies in place, as well as access to enough resources to put these policies into action.

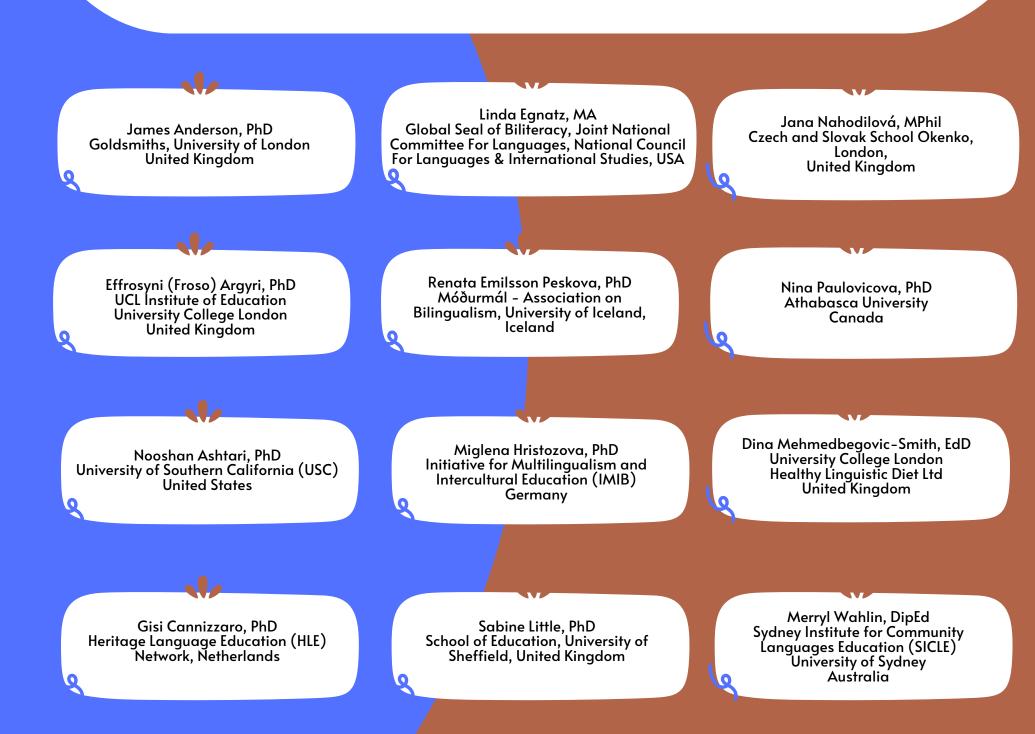
In this Global Call to Action we introduce the Global Heritage Language (HL) Think Tank, explain the goal of the Global Call to Action, sketch the current state of heritage language education, explain what is at stake, and outline what actions you can take.



# HL GLOBAL THINK TANK



The Heritage Language (HL) Global Think Tank is composed of experts on HL education and professionals from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, including academia, advocacy, activism, coalition leadership, assessment testing, grassroots organizations, and school boards across the globe, with years of experience supporting heritage language educators. The members come together regularly to generate ideas about how to improve the recognition, visibility, vitality, quality, and sustainability of Community-Based Heritage Language (CBHL) educational programs worldwide. For a full list of those involved in the Global HL Think Tank, see <a href="https://www.hlenet.org/thinktank">www.hlenet.org/thinktank</a>. This Global Call to Action initiative was led by the professionals listed here:



The HL Global Think Tank advocates for the sustainability of HL education at local, national, and international levels. As part of its efforts to help revitalize and promote HL education, the think tank created the International Guidelines for Professional Practices in Community-Based Heritage Language Schools (2021) to define universal principles and best practices that can be followed by HL programs. The guidelines not only give useful direction to community-based HL educational programs, but they also help maintain trust in these programs by the educational establishment and general public. Note that the authors of this Global Call to Action only advocate for educational programs that aspire to the values and ethics outlined in the international guidelines.



# THE GOAL OF THIS CALL TO ACTION





We are making use of the annual platform of the UNESCO Mother Language Day 2024 to tackle critical questions: How should societies across the world respond to the languages of migrants, immigrants, and refugees, and how can heritage language and literacy education programs be best supported?

The topic of language education in a multilingual world is, of course, complex if we take into account all academic, geo-political, economic, and social perspectives; particularly issues of inclusion, social cohesion, decolonization, linguistic status, human rights, peacebuilding, participation in global dialogue, humanistic and transcultural learning, etc. Nonetheless, our message is simple: HL education must become a fundamental element in official language education policies in societies across the world. This refers to local and national governmental policy, but also to family language policy, mainstream school policy, and social responsibility policy.

This urgently needed Global Call to Action for Heritage Language Education aims to provoke a large-scale change in language education and language policymaking. The concrete recommendations made here demonstrate how students, caregivers, mainstream teachers and principals, HL teachers, libraries, non-profit initiatives, universities, journalists, local businesses, and government officials can collectively work to improve the quality and reach of HL education.



# CURRENT STATUS OF HL EDUCATION



# What is a "heritage language"?

Heritage languages (HL) are languages which are not official languages of the community or country where the speaker is currently residing, and are spoken by individuals and groups living in that community or country. Other terms are also commonly used, such as "home" languages or "community" languages, and some believe that "heritage" refers too much to the past. Our use of the term "heritage" refers not only to ancestral affiliation, but also to language competence and future use of the language. For detailed definitions of terms related to heritage language education see International Guidelines for Professional Practices in Community-Based Heritage Language Schools (2021).

In this call, we are not referring to (1) sign languages, (2) "regional minority languages" like Frisian or Catalan, where there is a large number of speakers of the minority language concentrated in a region, nor are we referring to (3) "indigenous languages," which refer to minority languages that are original to a region but were overtaken in the era of settler colonialism by a dominant language of colonizer(s). What heritage languages have in common with these other types of languages (sign, minority, and indigenous) is that maintenance involves passing on "intangible cultural heritage," which in turn facilitates identity-building for generations of new speakers. However, the circumstances surrounding organizing effective heritage language education are not always shared by the other types of languages.

## Community-based HL education

How can Vietnamese lessons be arranged in an English-speaking country? Or Telugu lessons for children in Germany? HL education can be organized in roughly two different ways: (1) incorporated into the public education system or (2) organized outside the public education system.

When HL education is incorporated into the public education system, it is usually because of legislation that mandates the right to education in the home language. In these circumstances, HL teachers are hired by the public schools and HL learners are sometimes eligible to receive academic credit for formal skills in the heritage language and certification when leaving secondary school.

However, HL education is most often organized outside of the public education system by grassroots community-based HL programs run by parents and volunteers. Sometimes community-based HL programs receive structural support from the local government where they operate and/or from the government of the country of origin, but the type and degree of support varies.

There are other providers of heritage language education outside of the public education system, such as embassies, for-profit businesses, and freelance teachers/tutors. These types of providers are less common than community-based programs.

# Benefits of HL education

HL education has benefits beyond offering language and culture classes to children and beyond the general benefits that follow from being multilingual. In particular, community-based HL programs:

- teach literacy skills, including translation and language awareness
- teach culture, literature, geography, and history of the country of origin
- reward/exercise the intrinsic motivation of students to develop language
- provide a foundation for high-level bilingual and intercultural proficiency
- provide a safe space for bilingual / multilingual communication
- · support communication in the home, including with grandparents
- · develop self-esteem and plurilingual identity
- support the wellbeing and personal development of students from diverse backgrounds who may regularly encounter discrimination
- · value and celebrate students' achievements in the heritage language
- · support children in world citizenship and intercultural communication
- model meaningful volunteer work for students
- help new immigrants to exercise their professional skill set as teachers, managers, and community leaders
- · help immigrants young and old remain meaningfully connected to their language communities
- · help new immigrants understand the new culture and education system
- are well-positioned due to their networks to become first responders in times of crisis
- reimagine cultures
- · support immigrant children to integrate into society of the host country

# Challenges of HL education

There is often a lack of awareness about community-based HL programs, which in many contexts receive little or no recognition or support from the local or national governments where they operate. Community-based HL programs face challenges that negatively impact their sustainability, in that these programs may:

- lack sufficient funding to maintain a sustainable organization
- lack sufficient management skills to maintain a sustainable organization
- be at risk of closing down if there is insufficient student interest or if funding gets cut
- · lack familiarity with the mainstream education system and the prevailing culture of learning
- · lack professionally trained teachers who are up-to-date about effective teaching methods
- employ professionally trained teachers whose training does not prepare them to give effective lessons in the unique environment of HL learning
- experience a high teacher turnover rate because teachers do not earn a livable wage, if they earn anything at all, and they suffer a lower status than teachers at mainstream schools and lack sufficient training/certification opportunities
- lack initial teacher training and continued professional development opportunities for heritage language teachers
- lack teaching materials and coherent curriculum tailored to the needs of heritage language learners
- lack standardized accreditation options
- suffer from confusion with foreign language education
- struggle to find volunteers
- struggle to recruit students
- struggle to cater for the wide range of proficiency levels in the classroom as well as differing student profiles
- struggle to accommodate non-standard varieties spoken in the classroom
- face overall logistical challenges, such as finding a day and time that suits all interested families
- have too few groups and consequently too large of an age range within each group
- struggle to find affordable lesson locations
- · lack access to computer facilities
- face negative attitudes and misconceptions
- lack support, appreciation, and understanding from the government and community
- struggle to form mutually beneficial partnerships with mainstream schools
- suffer from inequalities exacerbated during the Covid-19 crisis



## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

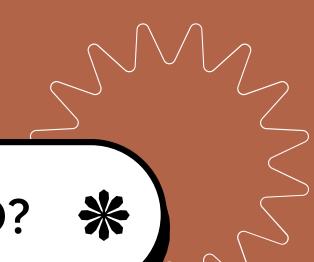


Although numerous policies and frameworks, such as recommendations by the Council of Europe and the United Nations (see References), call for support of linguistic diversity, continued activism is necessary to ensure that the policies are enforced. If no action is taken, we risk seeing decreased linguistic diversity, language attrition and related generational trauma, increased alienation and conflict, and violations of linguistic human rights.

If communities worldwide pledge to take action, we can avoid these larger societal problems. By nurturing linguistic diversity, we can contest simplistic and dangerous ethno-national narratives that cause harm, and thereby leave behind an era of national monolingualism.

We have formulated a set of recommendations ("What can you do?") to help various stakeholders understand what actions they can take to both recognize individual linguistic abilities in multilingual students and to appreciate societal multilingualism at large.







# WHAT YOU CAN DO?

# Everyone

- Familiarize yourself (and your family, students, patients, clients, staff, etc.) with the HL programs that are operating in your community
- Read the debunking of the most common myths about HL education
- Familiarize yourself with linguistic human rights and the United Nations' notion of "intangible cultural heritage"
- Subscribe to newsletters and blogs that follow developments in research about multilingualism
- Support HL education, teachers, learners, and multilingual families with the means available to you (volunteer, donate resources, give visibility, show appreciation, become a sponsor)
- · Form or support language policies that promote multilingualism

## Heritage Language Learners

- Try to form meaningful friendships with other speakers of your HL
- Be proud of all of your languages no matter what the level you speak them
- Be aware of your language rights
- If you attend a HL program, let your teachers and friends at school know about it
- Use available opportunities to receive certification for your skills in your HL
- If you graduate from a HL program, consider going back to volunteer in some way
- Think critically about the comments you hear surrounding the topic of language; do not let people's comments about your language proficiency damage your confidence
- Learn how to speak to people politely about language to inform them and help break the myths and stereotypes surrounding it

# Caretakers of Heritage Language Learners

- Create a language plan for your family and revise it regularly where necessary
- Discuss your family's language priorities with your children's educators
- Have realistic expectations about your child's multilingual development; be aware that language use within families changes over time
- If there is a HL program in your community, do consider this opportunity and visit the program to determine if it is a good option for your child/family
- Understand what can realistically be achieved within a HL program; ask what your role as caretaker is in your child's HL development alongside the HL program
- · Volunteer at your child's HL program where possible
- Show appreciation for the leaders and teachers of your child's HL program
- Inform extended family members not to shame your child for their command of the HL, to avoid negative associations with the HL

# Mainstream Teachers and Principals

- Familiarize your school staff with the HL programs that are operating in your community
- Share information with the parents of your students about available HL programs in your community
- Reach out to the HL programs in your community and explore ways to collaborate
- Open your school building as a lesson location for HL programs in your community; ensure that the HL teachers and students feel welcome in the building
- · Create open and welcoming, inclusive multilingual spaces for all students
- · Make an inventory of the linguistic repertoires of your school's students
- Create opportunities for students to use their HL
- Make the HLs of the students visible across the school in hallways, corridors, and classrooms
- Implement school policies that actively show value and support for the plurilingual repertoires and identities of the students
- Organize activities that celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity in your classroom and school
- Encourage students to acknowledge their own progress in multiple languages by collecting a language portfolio to show to parents and teachers
- Seek opportunities to empower multilingual students across the curriculum, for example, in relation to literacy and global citizenship content
- Include books in students' HLs in the school's library, including dictionaries and study materials
- Seek professional development in teaching in multilingual classrooms: move away from the monolingual focus towards inclusive, multimodal, and plurilingual approaches to teaching
- Invite teachers from HL programs to audit professional development activities organized for your school's teachers
- Be aware of the "ecological view of language education" influenced by social, educational, cultural, economic and political conditions.
- Hire multilingual staff and teachers

# Heritage Program Teachers and Managers

- Follow the suggestions and advice for HL program teachers and managers that have been outlined in the International Guidelines for Professional Practices in Community-Based Heritage Language Schools (2021) to help you maintain a sustainable HL program
- Make it known to stakeholders that you make use of the International Guidelines
- Join coalitions and umbrella associations: Connect and collaborate transregionally and transnationally with programs offering the same HL education and with other HL programs operating in the same region
- Expose your HL students to positive role models, such as former students, successful members of the community, and well-known speakers of the HL
- Give older students opportunities to work with younger students in the program
- · Facilitate digital and open learning environment for HL learning
- Make your HL program visible in the broader community, as this leads to more sustainability, recognition, and appreciation
- Make succession planning a priority, to ensure that the HL program can continue in the long term

### Libraries

- Familiarize your staff with the HL programs that are operating in your community
- Collaborate with HL programs operating in your community, for instance, by giving them visibility and providing space for them to give lessons
- Invite HL programs to hold events in your library, such as storytelling/readings, art exhibitions, and multilingual book exchange markets
- Include multilingual children's books in your collection
- Invite speakers who can enlighten the general/local public about the importance of having multilingual books in the library (to help battle any assumptions that other languages are intruding)
- Raise awareness about your library's multilingual book collections and activities by including announcements about them in all newsletters and publications; do not assume that only certain audiences are interested

# Non-profit Initiatives

- Raise positive awareness about HL education
- Improve connections between HL education programs worldwide, as well as between HL education and compulsory schools, cultural institutions, and other organizations
- Contribute to the development of a global support system to prevent early burnout of HL teachers, principals, or activists
- Promote effective succession planning in order to increase the sustainability of HL programs globally
- Seek partners to help sustain HL international networks and structures



# Universities and Teacher Training Colleges

- Increase the amount of research about HL education, HL learners, and HL education providers
- Include modules introducing what HL education is when training mainstream educators
- Include research about how to incorporate HL education and plurilingualism into general education, subject education, leisure and sport studies, social pedagogy, and other areas
- When carrying out research about HL programs, make sure that the HL programs receive something in return for their participation in the research
- Collaborate with non-profit HL organizations on joint projects and events
- Consider opening an academic program for HL educators, researchers, and activists
- Consider opening courses or academic programs that teach respective subjects in heritage languages
- Offer training for HL teachers and program managers

## Journalists **...**

- Provide coverage of and visibility to the activities of the HL programs in your community
- Help raise the status of HL educators and learners with coverage that highlights achievements and contributions to the local community
- Highlight stories that show how intertwined multiple cultures are within families and beyond
- Avoid constructing divisive rhetoric that pits "locals" against "immigrants"

# **Local Businesses**

- Include in your social responsibility policy ways to support HL education in the community where you operate
- Provide grants and other funding opportunities to local HL programs
- Sponsor local HL programs
- Provide ways for HL programs to have access to suitable and affordable lesson locations
- Hire qualified speakers to educate your employees about the importance of supporting multilingual children in your community in all of the languages they speak



# Local and National Government Officials

- Map the situation of the HL programs in your region and help make the information available to the public
- Collect statistics about HL learners in your region
- Provide grants and other funding opportunities to local HL programs
- Provide ways for HL programs to have access to suitable and affordable lesson locations
- Find paths to the accreditation of competencies in the HL, for example, by organizing testing in the HL or giving students credit for attendance in HL programs
- Revise problematic, divisive, inequitable and discriminatory language policies
- Break down language barriers and dismantle language hierarchies identified in practice such as high- and low-status bilingualism
- Facilitate policies that create equitable alliances and collaboration between indigenous, heritage, and official languagesCreate and update your educational and language policies in consultation with HL educators and activists to reflect multilingual realities of classrooms and schools; engage representatives of HL programs and HL associations in policy-making
- Create pathways toward an inclusive approach to HL education as a part of mainstream education
- Facilitate building partnerships and collaboration between mainstream schools and HL programs
- Coordinate responses to consultation of national initiatives and organize local resources to deal with challenging circumstances, such as the Covid pandemic
- Partner with HL programs to help them improve their work and connect better with the local communities' needs
- Support existing programs to develop and flourish and encourage "invisible communities" to set up new HL programs
- Support sustainable and accessible online resources for HL learners to maintain their languages across the lifespan, whether they are residing in your country or living abroad





February 21, International Mother Language Day, marks the launch of this Global Call to Action. Throughout the year, the Call will be added in other languages, and events will be organized to promote it, discuss it, and raise awareness about it. For updates, follow FOHLC Europe (Forum of Heritage Language Coalitions in Europe): www.facebook.com/FOHLCE

If you want to help heritage language educators and the children they support, please be sure to pledge commitment to the Global Call to Action publicly on social media and share widely within your networks.



#### Find and share the Global Call to Action for Heritage Language Education:

https://menntavisindastofnun.hi.is/is/global-call-hle

#### Hashtags to use on social media when pledging support:

#GlobalCalltoAction #HeritageLanguageEducation #InternationalMotherLanguageDay

#### Social media images:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/ 1aNAazc5FoJG9RZvByzsNLsrJs4l7BqSj?usp=sharing

#### For inquiries:

U.S. Coalition of Community-Based Heritage Language Schools www.heritagelanguageschools.org/coalition joy@peytons.us

Forum of Heritage Language Coalitions Europe (FOHLC Europe) www.hlenet.org/fohlc-europe fohlceurope@gmail.com

This document has been prepared by members of the Heritage Language (HL) Global Think Tank. TheHL Global Think Tank advocates for the sustainability of heritage language education at local, national, and international levels. At the core of the work of the participants is the ambition to ensure that multilingual students receive a high quality of language education that provides them with self-confidence, a strong sense of identity, intercultural competence, and lifelong skills that will benefit them in our increasingly globalized society. The group includes experts on the topic of heritage language education coming from a variety of linguistic and professional backgrounds, including academia, advocacy, activism, coalition leadership, assessment testing, grassroots organizations, and school boards. Participation in the think tank is on a volunteer basis. As part of the think tank's efforts to help revitalize and promote heritage language education, its members authored the International Guidelines for Professional Practices in Community-Based Heritage Language School (2021). For a full list of members of the think tank, see www.hlenet.org/thinktank

#### The members of the Global HL Think Tank have affiliations with:

Athabasca University
Avant Assessment
Brazilian Association for Culture and Education (ABRACE)
British Council

California State University Long Beach — Japanese Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC Chinese School of Delaware

Coalition of Community-Based Heritage Language Schools (U.S.)

Cambridge Research in Community Language Education (CRiCLE) Network

Czech and Slovak School of North Carolina

Czech and Slovak School Okenko, London

Deutsche Schule Charlotte (German Language School Charlotte, North Carolina)

Duke University Graduate School

European Educational Research Association

Fédération FLAM Monde

rederation FLAM Monde

Forum of Heritage Language Coalitions in Europe (FOHLC Europe)

German Language School Conference
German School of Connecticut

Global Seal of Biliteracy

Goldsmiths, University of London

**Healthy Linguistic Diet** 

Heritage Language Education (HLE) Network

Home, Heritage, Community Languages Advisory Group

Initiative for Multilingualism and Intercultural Education (IMIB)

International Language Educators Association (ILEA)

JNCL/NCLIS

Móðurmál – the Association on Bilingualism Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh Qatar Foundation International (QFI), Washington, DC Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education (SICLE), University of Sydney Sydney School of Education and Social Work

UK Literacy Association
University College London
University of Alberta
University of Cambridge
University of Iceland
University of Sheffield
University of Southern California
Western Connecticut State University



# REFERENCES & FURTHER READING



# Related Calls to Action, Rights Declarations, & Policy Documents

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- European charter for minority and regional languages
- Alternative Report on Language Based Exclusion, Punishment and Discrimination in Dutch Education
- The Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy defines priorities for national work on language policy
- The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR), adopted at the World Conference of Linguistic Rights held in Barcelona in 1996

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