

12th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues: Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities

Geneva, 28-29 November 2019

Panel 1: Human rights and minority language education

Intervention by Austria

Austria welcomes this year's theme of the forum.

We believe that the human rights of all persons belonging to minorities, including linguistic minorities, must be implemented fully in accordance with the principles of non-discrimination, equality, participation and consultation. Austria considers equal access to education as well as education in the mother tongue of minorities essential for an inclusive society and for safeguarding our heritage of cultural and linguistic diversity.

In Austria, which is home to six recognized autochthonous ethnic minorities, public education in minority languages has a long tradition. Austria is making major efforts in order to provide all pupils, irrespective of their origin and language, with high-quality education including in their non-German mother tongue. In the school year 2017/2018, for instance, over 32.500 children were taught in their non-German mother tongue in primary and secondary schools throughout Austria. Such schooling was offered in 26 different languages throughout the country. Further measures to ensure high-quality education for linguistic minorities are, for instance, obligatory kindergarten care, measures to ascertain and promote language fluency, school mediators and assistance for vulnerable groups, especially Roma.

Furthermore, the Austrian constitution recognizes Austrian sign language as a specific language which is used as an official or teaching language.

Pursuant to Austria's international treaty obligations requiring specific measures to protect and promote autochthonous ethnic languages, bilingual education is in place for autochthonous ethnic groups, most notably in Carinthia and Burgenland as well as in Vienna. However, special efforts are required where our school system for autochthonous ethnic groups faces challenges, especially on account of progressive assimilation and decreasing language competence.

The rights of individuals to freely use, learn and transmit their languages in public and in private without discrimination are well established in international human rights law including in articles 2, 19 and 27 of the ICCPR and article 30 of the CRC. The 1992 Declaration further elaborates the rights of minorities, including in relation

to language. However, in our opinion this does not represent a sufficient basis for the sustainable and comprehensive protection of minority rights.

In our view, close cooperation with relevant international and regional monitoring and advisory mechanisms is key. Austria has secured the protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minorities through adherence to additional regional instruments, namely the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Both include periodic reporting and evaluation requirements.

In October this year, Austria invited the Committee of Experts under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to follow up on its recent recommendations. As a result, Austria committed to conduct a process of dialogue among relevant ministries and provincial authorities based on a survey of existing measures to protect and promote regional or minority languages in all provinces. In addition, mapping out areas where regional or minority languages are spoken in Austria will be considered.

We also value the work of other regional organizations, such as the OSCE, which provides guidance to participating states through the Oslo Recommendations on how best to ensure the linguistic rights of national minorities within their borders.

Madame Chair,

Before closing let me offer the following **two recommendations**:

States should ratify and adhere to all international and regional human rights instruments that protect and promote the rights of minorities.

States should ensure that persons belonging to minorities are able to access the justice system to pursue claims for linguistically and culturally appropriate education.