

Multilingualism and COVID-19

Lessons Learned and Looking Forward

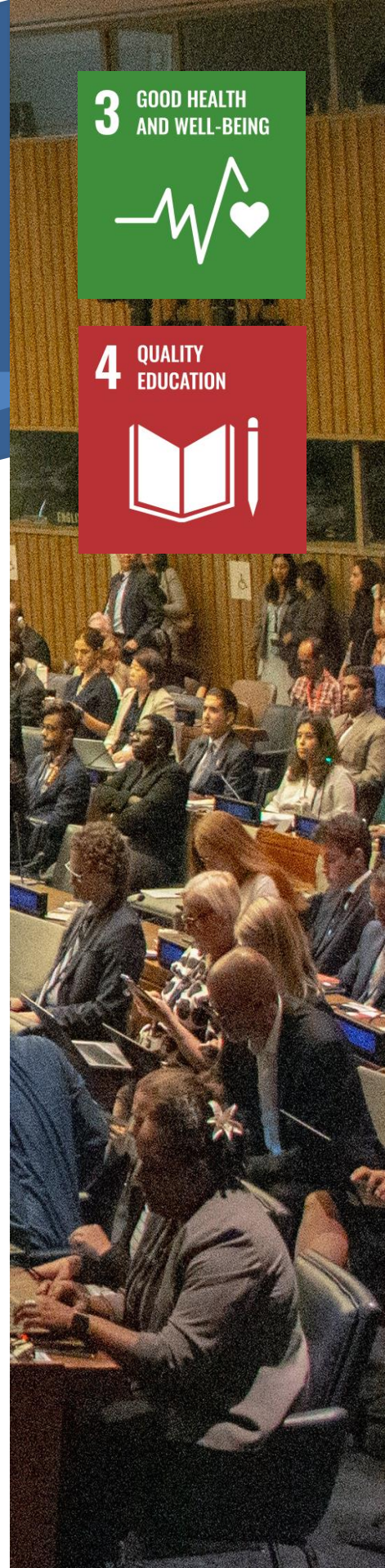
3-4 May 2022

Symposium of the Study Group
on Language and the United Nations

3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



Focusing on the essential role that multilingualism must play in fostering sustainable development in the wake of COVID-19, this two-day virtual symposium brings together stakeholders including United Nations staff members, government officials, university scholars, and members of civil society to address linguistic challenges and innovative solutions with respect to Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3) and Quality Education (SDG 4).

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08:15-13:00 – New York 14:15-19:00 – Geneva
15:15-20:00 – Nairobi 19:15-12:00 – Bangkok

Multilingualism and COVID-19: Lessons Learned and Looking Forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a powerful impact on humanity. In addition to the direct effects of infection, there has been a wide range of indirect effects on both individuals and social institutions throughout the world. Pre-pandemic inequalities have been exacerbated, and new challenges have emerged as people attempt to cope with living and working through a public health crisis. The United Nations is currently prioritizing ways forward, including how Agenda 2030 and the related work of continuing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be put back on track from the major setbacks of the pandemic, as emphasized in Our Common Agenda, the recent report by the Secretary-General and the focus of the upcoming July 2022 High-Level Political Forum.

The present symposium draws attention to the essential role that multilingualism must play in initiatives by the United Nations, Member States, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders to foster peri-pandemic and post-pandemic development. Language mediates all human experience. Fully inclusive dialogue and problem-solving must involve substantive use of multilingualism to ensure that people can understand one another, access information equitably, and participate democratically. In addition, all development initiatives must take linguistic minorities into account explicitly so that “nobody is left behind” due to their language background.

The symposium focuses on multilingualism with respect to Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3) and Quality Education (SDG 4), with attention to linguistic challenges that have occurred during the pandemic as well as creative and inclusive solutions that have emerged and can be built upon going forward. The two-day virtual event brings together a spectrum of stakeholders including United Nations staff members, government officials, university scholars, and members of civil society to address issues and innovations. The symposium follows a panel format through which experts present their perspectives, engage in dialogue with each other, and prompt general discussion with participants.