

The importance of languages of communication and services in the context of Covid-19

As we watch the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world, it is clear that the health and social care sector is under enormous unprecedented pressure-with everyone trying to do their utmost to prevent the impact of the storm that we are facing. At moments like these, we are also reminded of those who are in distress - some seriously ill in hospital, fighting for their lives, others lonely isolating at home or protecting vulnerable family members, whether older people or young children. Some would argue that language is not a priority for them in such challenging circumstances; but the reality is that there has never been a more important time for French, Spanish, Welsh, Basque and many other languages in minority context to receive services in their first language. As anxiety increases, many patients rely increasingly on using their mother tongue to communicate and, giving an ' active offer ' of patients' language services can facilitate valid assessment, accurate diagnosis and a better understanding of treatment and care. This is not just a matter for minority language speakers. Alarming data reveal that patients are being left behind due to lack of communication in their mother tongue. See [here](#). We must also remember those who are frail and isolated at home – they can be highly comforted by words in their mother tongue with carers and volunteers.

Language is a crucial issue in all crisis management. What is more important than being able to communicate with its citizens in their language in order to inform them, give them the instructions to follow and reassure them in order to maintain social cohesion and trust in public authorities? Communication is not incidental. How public authorities and different health and social service providers cope with compliance during this period of instability is important. Admittedly, public authorities and suppliers are under enormous pressure to cope with the daily crisis situation, however, we firmly believe that language standards must be respected alongside other sectoral standards.

We all believe/ We the undersigned believe that fighting for the language is part of a wider fight for social justice. This is at the heart of our campaign. This is why we demand language appropriate services in the public sector, particularly in the context of health and social care, where ensuring justice for people is key at a time when they feel at their most vulnerable and needy.

We urge the WHO, the authorities, and public health services to make a public statement outlining the importance of language services across the sector during this crisis, and remind providers of the way in which language appropriate services can strengthen their ability to deliver effective and high-quality health and social care.

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