

Diversity

By now around one billion people use the Internet. Many of these people cannot read or write in English and use languages that do not use Latin scripts. There is a need for all Internet users to access and share knowledge for development in their own language. It is widely agreed that a multilingual Internet will foster an inclusive, democratic, legitimate, respectful and locally empowering information society.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the top 10 languages spoken by Internet users are English (365 million users), Chinese (184 million users), Spanish (101 million), Japanese (86 million), French (59 million), German (59 million), Portuguese (47 million), Arabic (38 million), Korean (34 million) and Italian (31 million). Some 175 million Internet users utilize other languages.

There is general agreement on the need to promote locally developed content, including content that is not commercially viable, as a means of increasing the diversity on the Internet. Language communities should develop multilingual content, including content in indigenous and minority languages.

The Internationalized Domain Names (IDN) – Web addresses using characters different from the seven-bit encoding of the Latin alphabet originally employed by the character encoding known as ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) – are seen as essential for continued Internet development. The challenge is to develop IDNs while preserving the stability and trust of the current Domain Name System.

Other issues include the role of open standards in promoting diversity and public policies relating to User Generated Content (UGC).

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