



**government  
communications**

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Department:  
Government Communication and Information System  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT  
COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION  
SYSTEM**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. South Africa is a multicultural society that is characterised by its rich linguistic diversity. Language is an indispensable tool that can be used to deepen our democracy and also contribute to the social, cultural, intellectual, economic and political life of the South African society.
- 1.2. The country's linguistic landscape changed dramatically after the advent of democracy in 1994, when the Constitution provided a legal and regulatory framework for the formal recognition and promotion of linguistic diversity. The current multilingualism dispensation allows for the former marginalised languages to flourish.
- 1.3. Section 6 of the Constitution guarantees equal status to 11 official languages, namely Afrikaans; English; isiNdebele; isiXhosa; isiZulu; Sepedi; Sesotho; Setswana; Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.
- 1.4. By virtue of its constitutional mandate to provide the public with information that is timely, accurate and accessible, the GCIS is responsible for providing strategic leadership and coordinating government communications to ensure that the public is informed and has access to government programmes and policies that benefit them. The organisation has over the past years been consistently producing some of its communication material in all the official languages.
- 1.5. By fostering equitable access to government services, knowledge and information as part of its constitutional and moral obligation, the GCIS actually ensures redress for the previously marginalised languages, which have since been given an official status.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy, except where clearly indicated otherwise, the words and expressions set out below have the following meaning:

<b>“Braille”</b>	English Braille, also known as Grade-2 Braille
<b>“Constitution”</b>	Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996

<b>“DG”</b>	The Director-General of the GCIS
<b>“GCIS”</b>	Government Communication and Information System
<b>“Language Services Unit”</b>	The language unit of the GCIS that was formally established in 2008
<b>“Minister”</b>	Minister of Communications
<b>“Multilingualism”</b>	The use of several or all official languages
<b>“Official language”</b>	Any of the 11 official languages as prescribed in Section 6(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996
<b>“PanSALB”</b>	The Pan South African Language Board established in terms of Section 2 of the PanSALB Act, 1995 (Act 59 of 1995)
<b>“Previously marginalised languages”</b>	isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Siswati, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga
<b>“Sensory disabilities”</b>	A visual, speech and/or hearing impairment
<b>“Sign Language”</b>	South African Sign Language
<b>“The Act”</b>	Use of Official Languages Act, 2012 (Act 12 of 2012)
<b>“Third party”</b>	Includes service providers and prospective employees

### 3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

3.1. The GCIS Language Policy is based on the following principles:

- 3.1.1. Recognition of the linguistic and cultural diversity within the GCIS, and the multilingual nature of the people of South Africa.
- 3.1.2. Development and promotion of all official languages in the spirit of *Batho Pele*.

- 3.1.3. The public's right to use the language of their choice in their interaction and communication with the GCIS.
  - 3.1.4. The public's right to access and/or receive government services and information in the language of their choice, where it is reasonably practicable.
  - 3.1.5. The important role language plays in facilitating communication between government and the people.
  - 3.1.6. The need to provide for the communication needs of people with language barriers, such as the visually and/or hearing impaired.
  - 3.1.7. The legislative and constitutional mandate to promote multilingualism to ensure effective and efficient communication between government and the public.
- 3.2. The GCIS shall use plain language to enhance communication.

#### **4. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

- 4.1. The purpose of this policy is to comply with the legislative and constitutional mandate. It also seeks to promote multilingualism to ensure effective and efficient communication between government and the public in accordance with the objectives of the Act and the Constitution.
- 4.2. This policy is binding on all branches and employees of the GCIS.
- 4.3. It will also serve as an advisory tool for the departments seeking GCIS content-related services.
- 4.4. The Branch: Corporate Services will be the official custodian of this policy.

#### **5. LEGISLATIVE MANDATE**

The policy is based on the following legal frameworks:

- 5.1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996;
- 5.2. Use of Official Languages Act, 2012 (Act 12 of 2012);
- 5.3. The National Language Policy Framework, 2003;
- 5.4. Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000);
- 5.5. National Communication Strategy Framework – 2014-2019.

## **6. ABOUT THE GCIS**

- 6.1. The GCIS was established in 1998 in terms of Section 239 of the Constitution as an organisation that ensures the dissemination of government information and messages to the public in a coherent manner and in line with the constitutional imperatives of the country.
- 6.2. The GCIS is mandated to coordinate, guide and advise on government communication, including media liaison, development communication and marketing. Its goal is to achieve integrated, coordinated and clear communications between government and South African citizens, which enables the public to be involved in the country's transformation.
- 6.3. The main service of the GCIS is to provide accurate and timely government information to the citizens of South Africa through mediated and unmediated communication methods. The GCIS uses different products and platforms to meet the information needs of various target audiences. The GCIS provides this service as a constitutional right to the citizens of South Africa wherein Section 195(g) of the Constitution stipulates that to foster transparency, the public should be provided with information that is timely, accurate and accessible.
- 6.4. By virtue of the aforementioned mandate the GCIS renders services across all geographical areas of South Africa.

## **7. MANDATE OF THE LANGUAGE SERVICES UNIT**

- 7.1. The GCIS Language Services Unit was established in April 2008 with the mandate to provide a translation, editing and proofreading service to the GCIS.
- 7.2. It is also responsible for harvesting, developing and consolidating relevant terminology.
- 7.3. It collaborates with other linguistic organisations, and contributes to the development and promotion of the previously marginalised languages.
- 7.4. The Language Services Unit will be responsible to implement this policy and to advise all stakeholders on the contents hereof.

## **8. POLICY STATEMENT**

- 8.1. **Official languages of the GCIS**

- 8.1.1. As the custodian of government communications, the GCIS shall endeavour to communicate in all 11 official languages, where necessary and practicable. The languages used should also take into consideration people with disabilities.
- 8.1.2. The GCIS will consider the usage, practicality, resources, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the public it serves when deciding on the official language(s) to be used.

**9. COMMUNICATION APPROACHES WITH AFFECTED PARTIES**

**9.1. Communication with the public**

- 9.1.1. The GCIS will communicate as follows with members of the public:

<b>Type of communication</b>	<b>Language</b>
Oral communication, including official proceedings, announcements, public speeches, conferences, etc.	The GCIS will use English interchangeably with any of the official languages, depending on the purpose or the platform.
Official written communication, including electronic communication, all correspondence, press statements, memoranda, invitations, circulars, publications, leaflets, brochures, etc.	The documents will primarily be published in English. All written communication material shall also be translated into the most prevailing language(s) spoken in a particular province. The GCIS Language Unit shall facilitate requests for such translations.
Forms	Will be made available in English.
Signage and Branding	Considering that GCIS wants to communicate with the widest possible audience and the limited space available in these types of publications, all GCIS internal and external signage and branding shall be in English.

GCIS annual reports and other strategic documents.	Will be published in English.
GCIS audio-visual products	GCIS audio-visual communication products shall use subtitles for the benefit of the hearing impaired.

9.1.2. Requests for communications in any other language can be submitted as per the procedure outlined in paragraph 9.4 below.

**9.2. Internal and other formal communication with third parties**

9.2.1. The following communications shall be conducted in English, unless where there is a need and having regard to usage, practicality, resources, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the public, the communication may be translated from English into the requested language(s):

9.2.1.1. All internal official oral, written and electronic communication within the GCIS (memoranda, leaflets, brochures, banners, official announcements, documents, newsletters, posters, notices, official addresses, meetings, etc).

9.2.1.2. All official oral, written and electronic communication where third parties may be involved including meetings, group discussions, presentations, job interviews, training sessions, disciplinary hearings, etc.

9.2.2. GCIS staff members may engage in oral, written or electronic communication among themselves in the language of their choice, provided that all involved in the communication understand the language(s) being used.

**9.3. Communication with members of the public with sensory disabilities:**

9.3.1. The GCIS shall, where there is a need and taking into account usage, practicality, resources, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the public, provide communication material in Braille for the benefit of visually impaired and facilitate Sign Language interpretation for the hearing impaired.

9.3.2. GCIS front-desk officials shall be trained to use Sign Language to communicate with hearing-impaired clients.

**9.4. Procedure for obtaining translations:**

- 9.4.1. Where communications have not been provided in Braille, Sign Language or in a specific language, a request can be made to the DG for a translation of the document, conversion thereof to Braille or Sign Language interpretation.
- 9.4.2. The request must be addressed to the DG and emailed to: [languagequeries@gcis.gov.za](mailto:languagequeries@gcis.gov.za) or submitted at the GCIS Head Office.
- 9.4.3. The GCIS will consider the request taking into account usage, practicality, resources, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the public.
- 9.4.4. If the request is approved taking into account the factors mentioned in paragraph 9.4.3 above, the GCIS will within 10 working days upon receipt of a request, facilitate, as the case may be, translation of the document, sign language interpretation services or the conversion of text into Braille. In the event the GCIS is unable to meet the request within the stipulated days, communication with the relevant applicant will take place to advise when the services will be delivered.
- 9.4.5. Where sign language interpretation is required at a GCIS event, a request must be sent seven working days prior to the date scheduled for the event.

## **10. RECORD-KEEPING**

- 10.1. All official documents of the GCIS shall be placed on record in English and, where applicable, filed with its translated and/or adapted version.

## **11. COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION**

- 11.1. Any person who has a complaint regarding the application of the GCIS Language Policy may lodge a complaint in writing to the DG within three months of the complaint arising.
- 11.2. The complaint must be delivered in one of the following ways to the GCIS:
  - 11.2.1. Physical delivery to the GCIS Head Office situated at Tshedimosetso House, 1035 cnr Frances Baard and Festival streets, Hatfield, Pretoria, 0083; or
  - 11.2.2. By way of registered mail addressed to: The DG, GCIS, Private Bag X745, Pretoria, 0001; or
  - 11.2.3. By way of email addressed to the DG at [languagequeries@gcis.gov.za](mailto:languagequeries@gcis.gov.za)

- 11.3. The complainant's full details – including full names, address and contact details – must be clearly indicated on the complaint submitted.
- 11.4. A detailed description of the complaint must be provided, including the date, time and responsible person, where applicable.
- 11.5. The GCIS may request the complainant to provide additional information or to attend a meeting for the purposes of making an oral enquiry of the complaint.
- 11.6. The DG shall within three months or such shorter period as may be necessary to properly consider the complaint, make a decision regarding the complaint and communicate such decision in writing to the complainant.
- 11.7. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the the DG, the complainant can escalate the matter to the Minister of Communications by submitting a written appeal within one month of receiving the DG's decision as contemplated in paragraph 11.6 above.

## **12. PUBLICATION AND ACCESS TO THE GCIS LANGUAGE POLICY**

- 12.1. The language policy will be available in:
  - 12.1.1. all 11 official languages; and
  - 12.1.2. Braille.
- 12.2. This policy can be accessed:
  - 12.2.1. in any of the 11 official languages online at *www.gcis.gov.za*; or
  - 12.2.2. by perusing a printed copy thereof in any of the 11 official languages or in Braille at the GCIS's Head Office or provincial offices.
- 12.3. A copy of the language policy will be published in English in the *Government Gazette*, and will also be displayed in all designated areas at the GCIS Head Office and provincial offices.

## **13. POLICY REVIEW**

- 13.1. The Language Services Unit shall constantly monitor and evaluate progress regarding the implementation of this policy and submit an annual report to the Minister of Arts

and Culture and PanSALB regarding the use of the official languages on the areas as envisaged in Section 9 of the Act.

13.2. The policy will be reviewed every four years or whenever it is deemed necessary.