From the Government of France:

**The status of French in the world**

**A language spoken on all five continents**

French is one of the very few languages spoken all over the world, ranked the **sixth most widely spoken language** after ­Mandarin Chinese (over a billion speakers), English, Hindi, Spanish and Arabic. There are currently over **220 million French speakers** worldwide, including **72 million so-called partial French speakers**. Europe accounts for 39.87% of the French-speaking population, sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean for 36.03%, North Africa and the Middle East for 15.28%, America and the Caribbean for 7.66% and Asia/Oceania for 1.16% (OIF, *La langue française dans le monde*, 2010).

As a result of population growth, the OIF estimates that the number of French speakers will rise to over 700 million by 2050, 80% of whom will be in Africa. This would take the proportion of French speakers in the world population from 3% to 8%.

French is unusual in that it often exists alongside other languages in multilingual contexts. In Europe (excluding France), the largest populations of French speakers are essentially to be found in Belgium (45% of the population), Switzerland (20% of the population) and Luxembourg. French is Europe’s**second most widely spoken mother tongue with over 77 million speakers**, after Germany (around 100 million) but ahead of English (around 61 million). Demographers forecast that France’s birth rate will make French the most widely spoken mother tongue in Europe, ousting German, by 2025. French is an **official language of 29 countries**, second only to English in this category.

**A language taught throughout the world**

**French shares with English the distinction of being taught as a foreign language in the education systems of most countries around the world.**French is thus the second most widely learned foreign language in the world, with almost 120 million students and 500,000 teachers.

An estimated 2 million school pupils in some 50 foreign countries are enrolled in bilingual sections with French as one of the languages of instruction.

French is also taught at establishments run by France’s cultural network abroad (Instituts Français and Alliance Française schools), which provide courses for close on a million language students, and in the 481 establishments of the French school network abroad, which provide an education based on the French national curriculum for 310,000 pupils, half of whom are foreign nationals, in 133 countries.

**An international language of reference**

French is one of the **working languages of the United Nations** alongside English, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese.

French is **one of the three procedural languages of the European Union**, along with English and German, and **the sole language used for the deliberations of the Court of Justice of the European Union.**

French is the sole official language of the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

It is one of the working languages of many other international institutions: the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Council of Europe, the African Union (AU), the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA).

It is also one of the preferred working languages of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

French plays a special role in international sporting life as an **official language of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and hence of the Olympic Games**. The inauguration in 1989 of the Francophone Games has underscored the existence of **a real international French-speaking sports community.**

France and the French-speaking countries play an active part in the world economy, accounting for some **20% of world trade in goods.**

A study entitled "The global economic importance of the French language" conducted by the Foundation for International Development Study and Research (FERDI) in 2012 shed useful light on the **positive correlation between a country’s membership of the French-speaking community and its trading position.**Sharing a common language would appear to boost trade flows **by some 33% on average**, mainly by bringing down export costs, making it easier for businesses to penetrate a new export market and helping to sustain existing flows.

Membership of the French-speaking community, which accounts for 15% of the world’s wealth and one tenth of its agricultural land, is thus a source of great potential, particularly in periods of economic crisis, and particularly so for our **partners in the Global South who stand to benefit the most**.

French also has a role to play in global communication, thanks to **international media channels TV5Monde (55 million weekly viewers), France 24 (45.4 million weekly viewers) and RFI (40.1 million listeners)**.

French also accounts for 5% of **Internet pages**, ranking between **sixth and eighth of the languages most widely used on the Internet**.