

2019 Bible Translation Statistics FAQ: Going Deeper

As with most set of big data, numbers are easily misunderstood and misrepresented. We strive to explain the complex nature of the data while also celebrating the huge achievements of people and organisations around the world, and we praise God as he achieves his mission.

The detailed figures quoted by the Wycliffe Global Alliance are based on data collect by *progress.Bible*. This report addresses many of the Frequently Asked Questions about fact and figures relating to the progress and remaining global need for Bible translation.

1. How do you count languages, Bible and people?
2. How is translation need determined and counted?
3. Why aren't all languages without a full Bible listed as needing translation?
4. Do languages with existing Scripture also have translation needs?

Additional information presented here reflects all that had been reported by 1 October 2019. Comparisons with previous annual reports are challenging and sometimes not possible, due to ongoing changes and improvements in data definitions and collecting methods. Our public statistics summary has been translated into several languages. You are welcome to make additional translations and adapt the information for your own audiences, but we request that you refer people back to www.wycliffe.net/statistics as the source. Please also forward any new translations or adaptations to info@wycliffe.net so that your work can be shared with others.

1. How do you count languages, Bible and people?

Wycliffe Global Alliance uses data from *progress.Bible* and Ethnologue.

Languages: Counts of languages follow the internationally recognised ISO 639-3 standard. However, this only accounted for about 140 of the world's sign languages, so this year following the guidance of a number of organisations, we have also included sign languages that do not yet have an ISO code assigned. (For further reading, see: www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification)

Bible: Some languages have multiple translations or translation in multiple dialect but for our totals we count the maximum know amount published Scripture in a language (Bible, New Testament, or portions and stories).

People: The population figures used are the most recently available figures for first language users' individual languages, and so the totals are well below the current global estimates of 7.7 billion.

2. How is translation need determined and counted?

Translation need is not as simple as determining which languages do or do not have Scripture. Most of languages with only “some Scripture” are in need of more, and even full Bible undergo revisions from time to time. In talking about remaining translation need, most Alliance organisations talk about languages where work has not even begun. Starting in 2018, however, we have also included languages in which some preparatory work had begun, but work stopped with nothing published. Based on what is currently known, assessment of language vitality provides an indicator of whether translation would be needed or indeed used. This allows for an estimate of how many languages remain in need of work begin. Interaction with communities and other agencies help us reclassify languages from **potential need** to **expressed need**, with real targets for initial work, or in some circumstances to determine there is **no immediate felt need**.

3. Why aren't all languages without a full Bible listed as needing translation?

There are a number of reasons why the need for bible translation in a specific language may seem less straightforward. These include:

- The language is no longer used in any community or its use is very weak (such as infrequently or not used in everyday life, or used only by a few people).
- In communities within which the language is used, the majority of those between the ages of 20 and 45 are adequately proficient in another language available to the community, are already motivated to use it, and Scripture is or will be available in that language.

4. Do languages with existing Scripture also have translation need?

For many years Alliance Organisations have sought to highlight needs in terms of languages where Bible translation needs to begin, but there are many languages where work needs to continue or resume. It is easy to see that where only some Scripture exists more may be needed. There are also reasons why an already published piece of Scripture may need revision and/or a new translation:

- Languages are dynamic in nature and change over time. Today's language communities do not use all the same words and phrases used in previous generations. It is therefore common that, over time, a completed New Testament or Bible is no longer readily understandable to modern users and readers, and as such that Scripture qualifies as a re-translation need.
- There is also the occasional situation in which the original translation was not of good enough quality (for example, in areas of accuracy, clarity or having perceived bias to one particular denomination or interpretation).
- In some instances, differences between local dialects of an ISO-recognised language may mean there is a case for additional translation on linguistic or sociocultural grounds.