

The Humanities in Our Lives

MULTILINGUALISM IN THE WORKFORCE

Until the civil rights era, speakers of minority languages had no legal protections against discrimination based on their mother tongue. The ensuing discrimination against Limited English Proficient individuals (LEPs), as they became known, fluctuated along with the status of the language they spoke and the prevailing sentiments of the time.

In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in a landmark case, *Lau v. Nichols*, that language instruction was a civil right. And in 2000, President Clinton signed an executive order that extended these protections by requiring that any recipient agency of federal funding provide language access to their services without burdening individuals with the costs.

KEY FACTS

- Over the past five years, demand for bilingual workers in the U.S. more than doubled, with Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic in highest demand.
- By one estimate, the language services industry contributes roughly \$15 billion in direct income to the U.S. economy every year and leverages some \$1.5 trillion in overseas exports.

LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICES

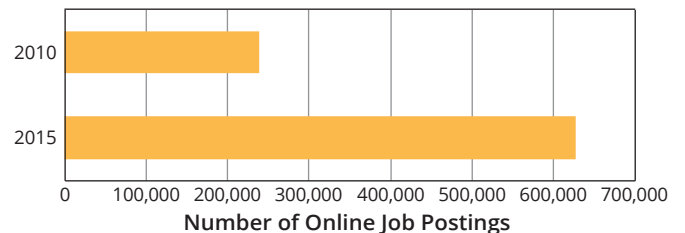
U.S.-based businesses routinely attribute lost business opportunity and unmet international potential to a lack of multilingual human capital. Language access policies, which support the maintenance and transmission of minority languages across generations, help address this demand.

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

A growing number of programs assist LEP individuals in the transition to the workforce. Chicago Public Schools supports a growing Arabic language program, with support from the Center for Arabic Language and Culture, Qatar Foundation International, and others, that draws on the local Arabic-speaking population to supplement classroom learning.

Similarly, a Boston-based nonprofit called **Found in Translation** provides medical interpreter certificate training, job placement, and ongoing career development to low-income bilingual women from the surrounding area, often from immigrant backgrounds. The program is free of charge and features additional supports such as on-site childcare that lead directly to well-paying jobs.

Estimated Number of Online Job Postings for Workers with Bilingual Skills



The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.

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 HUMANITIES INDICATORS
a project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences