



Scripture translations for 1.7 billion people completed by United Bible Societies over the past five years

****PLEASE NOTE: This information is embargoed for public release until March 31. This allows all Bible Societies the time to translate and adapt this information for their national audiences. Please do not publish it until that date. Thank you.****

The text below is part of a resource package that your Bible Society can adapt and use with your audiences. Please see the bottom of this story for details about the contents of the package, including graphics and social media posts, which are available for download.

Bible Societies have completed Scripture translations for more than a fifth of the world's population within just five years. Translations in 270 languages used by over 1.7 billion people have been completed since 2015.

First Scripture translations were completed in 154 languages used by 186 million people, including 57 million people who saw the full Bible in their language for the first time. Another 116 languages received new or revised translations, with a potential audience of 1.5 billion people.

These figures show the significant progress being made in Bible translation by the United Bible Societies (UBS) Fellowship – a global network of Bible Societies operating in more than 240 countries and territories.

“The generosity of supporters across the world and the dedication of Bible translators, many of them working in difficult circumstances, has made Scripture available in the languages of an incredible 1.7 billion people over the past five years,” said UBS Director General Michael Perreau. “That’s a big number. But what really excites and motivates us is how God will use his Word to transform the lives of individuals, churches and communities.” (*Information about Bible Society translation launches in 2019 can be found further down.*)

Bible translation landscape

At the start of this decade, the full Bible is available in 694 languages used by 5.7 billion people. Nearly three-quarters of these were translated by United Bible Societies.

The number of people with the New Testament in their language now tops 793 million, and another 463 million have portions of Scripture. More than half the world's languages have no Scripture at all.

It means that, altogether, 1.5 billion people are still waiting for the full Bible in their language.

United Bible Societies and other Bible translation agencies are determined to make Scriptures available in every language. For the first time in history, this is a realistic goal in our generation.

Increasing collaboration and the generous support of donors has led to unprecedented momentum in Bible translation. Today, shared tools, resources and processes mean that Bible translation is happening at a faster pace and more accurately and effectively than ever before.



Completing 1,200 translations by 2038

Building on the increasing momentum in Bible translation, Bible Societies have embarked on the Bible Translation Roadmap: a bold, 20-year journey to complete 1,200 translations, which will make Scripture accessible to 600 million people.

Sixty-three Scripture translations were completed by February 2020, and another 277 are in progress. Much work is ahead, however, with another 860 projects yet to begin.

“Our mission is not to fill bookshelves but to fill hearts with the life-changing words of Scripture,” says UBS Director of Global Bible Translation Alexander Schweitzer. “The clear and ambitious vision of the Bible Translation Roadmap will help us to work even more effectively towards fulfilling that mission.”

Translation launches in 2019

Last year marked a five-year high for the number of translations launched in a single year by the UBS Fellowship: 90 languages used by nearly 617 million people. First translations in 50 languages were published, with a potential reach of 29 million people. Six of those languages, used by 4.2 million people, received the full Bible for the first time.

One of these was Ellomwe – a language spoken by nearly 2.3 million people in Malawi. Overjoyed Ellomwe speakers marched around the town of Chiringa, carrying a giant replica of the new Bible to symbolise the arrival of God’s Word in their midst.

Just five years earlier, they had welcomed the first New Testament. The impact it has had was evident during the dedication ceremony of the full Bible, when young people proudly recited verses from the New Testament from memory.

“It was only when our New Testament was published that people realised their language can be written down and used in the media and in church activities,” said Hayes Metani, one of the translators. “Bible translation has done pioneering work among minority languages and peoples.”

On the other side of the world, in Myanmar, translator Rev Thang Ngai Om wept as he held the first Bible in his language – Cho Chin. Years of travelling long distances between his home and the translation office and taking great risks in crossing flooded rivers in the rainy season had all been worth it, he said through his tears.

“I have seen the Bible in my lifetime, and it’s my legacy for the next generations,” he added.

The day after the official launch, a number of Cho Chin Christians hiked to the peak of Mount Victoria, the highest mountain in Chin State, taking copies of the Cho Chin Bible to lift high in thanks to God.

The number of languages which received first or additional portions of Scripture reached an all-time annual high in 2019, at 33. This has been steadily rising over the past few years for two main reasons: teams working on New Testaments or full Bibles are increasingly publishing portions of Scripture as they are completed in order to put them into the hands of the community faster and get valuable



feedback; and more and more sign language translation projects are underway, making Scripture accessible to this largely unreached audience for the first time. *(See further down for more information about progress in Sign Language translation.)*

Revisions help increase Bible engagement

Languages evolve over time and it can be very difficult for younger generations to understand older Scripture translations. That is why revising existing translations or producing a completely new translation in a language that already has Scripture is also an important focus for Bible Societies. In 2019, Bible Societies published new or revised translations in 40 languages used by 588 million people.

“With tears of joy I can now distribute these new Bibles to teenagers during next summer’s confirmation camps,” said Erva Niittyvuopio, Executive Secretary for Sámi issues in Finland, during a dedication service to launch the new Northern Sámi Bible in September. She had seen first-hand the difficulties that young people have had in reading the 125-year old Northern Sámi Bible.

The new translation makes it easier for the 30,000 Northern Sámi speakers in Finland, Norway and Sweden to engage with Scripture, and has also created a standard written form of the language for the first time.

A revision of a popular French translation was also launched in 2019. With more than 77 million French-speakers worldwide, ‘La Bible Nouvelle Français courant’ (new contemporary French Bible) has the potential to reach a wide audience in Europe, Canada and Africa.

Increasing Scripture access for Deaf and visually impaired people

Only around 10% of sign languages have any Scripture. This makes the estimated 70 million Deaf people one of the largest unreached people groups on the globe.

In 2019, 11 sign languages used by around 2.8 million Deaf people received portions of Scripture. The Book of Acts in Thai Sign Language was completed, giving the 200,000 users of this language access to four books of the Bible so far: Mark, Acts, Ruth and Jonah.

“When I read Bible text there are many words or terms that I find hard to understand,” shares Vichet Sandjamnai, an elder at a church for the Deaf in Bangkok. “But now, the Thai Sign Language Bible is really enhancing my understanding and I can compare it with what the text says. It is also making me more confident to teach other Deaf people about the Bible.”

Making Scripture accessible to people with visual disabilities continues to be an important focus for Bible Societies. In 2019, the Bible Societies in Germany, India and Japan produced first or new Braille Scriptures.

Braille Scriptures in three Indian languages were published, including the first Braille Assamese New Testament and eight Old Testament books. Twelve Indian languages have the full Braille Bible so far.

German Braille users gained more access to the 2017 Luther Bible: the Braille Deuterocanon was completed in 2019, following the publication of the Braille New Testament in 2018. In addition, nearly the whole 2017 Luther Bible was put



into DAISY format (Digital Accessible Information System), which enables people to listen to the audio version or read it in Braille, with the help of a Braille display.

“More than 500 years ago, Martin Luther wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible in their own language. Two hundred years ago, Louis Braille developed the system of raised dots to give blind people access to printed text. Today, Luther’s vision and Braille’s aspiration are united with the digital technology of our time,” said Ingrid Felber-Bischof, who co-ordinates UBS’s global Braille ministry. “The Bible in an accessible format is vital because the Bible is for everyone.”

The Digital Bible Library® has doubled in five years

The number of Scripture texts in the Digital Bible Library® (DBL) has doubled in the past five years. By the end of 2019, it hosted 2,424 texts in 1,589 languages used by 5.7 billion people.

The number of audio Scriptures has grown exponentially, to 1,180 in 780 languages used by 5.5 billion people. Following the upload of the very first sign language translation in 2018, translations in five more sign languages were uploaded in 2019.

Set up in 2011 in partnership with the Every Tribe Every Nation (ETEN) collective impact alliance, the DBL enables safe storage and efficient sharing of Scripture translations by UBS and about 60 other contributors. Hundreds of millions of people are able to access Scripture in the DBL through websites and apps such as [Global.Bible](#) and [YouVersion](#).

United Bible Societies is a fellowship of Bible Societies working in more than 240 countries and territories. Together, they are the world’s biggest translator, publisher and distributor of the Bible. Bible Societies are also active in areas such as HIV/AIDS prevention, trauma healing and literacy. Bible Societies work with all Christian Churches and many international non-governmental organisations. For more information visit <http://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org/>