The international language Esperanto

Some news and numbers

• There are about 2 million Esperanto speakers round the world following several estimations. https://www.ethnologue.com/language/epo

• Esperanto speakers live in more than 120 countries.

• The World Esperanto Association has now member associations in around 70 countries. In 1950 this was only 20 countries. https://eo.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landaj_asocioj_de_UEA#Listo_de_aktualaj_landaj_asocioj_de_UEA

• Nowadays there are Esperanto associations in many countries around the world like Nicaragua, Brazil, Togo, Burundi, Iran, Nepal and Indonesia - not to mention the traditional ones in the US, Japan, China or Vietnam.

• There are about one thousand native Esperanto speakers, see e. g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzDS2WyemBI like the former German Ambassador to Russia, Ulrich Brandenburg.
There are even **second and third generation native Esperanto speakers of the**. (One parent or grandparent was also a native Esperanto speaker.)


There is a **family** that speaks Esperanto for **more than one hundred years** now.

- Over one million people registered on **Duolingo** to follow the Esperanto course there.
  English version https://www.duolingo.com/courses/en
  Spanish version https://www.duolingo.com/courses/es

- **China publishes daily news in Esperanto.**
  http://esperanto.china.org.cn/
  More Chinese sites in Esperanto
  http://www.espero.com.cn/
  http://esperanto.cri.cn/

- In Poznań, Poland, it's possible to **study Esperantology and Interlinguistics (the study of international and planned languages).**
  http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~interl/interlingvistiko/index.html
  In Amsterdam there is a **chair for interlinguistics and Esperanto**
• The Esperanto wikipedia has more than 240,000 articles. This means place 32 and more articles than e. g. the Danish version.
  http://eo.wikipedia.org/

• There is an Esperanto version of the entire English wikipedia, automatically translated. (It's quite accurate.)
  https://epo.wikitrans.net/

• Over 10,000 Esperanto books have been published to date. Last year there were 150 more Esperanto books.
  ovu+en+la+reta+katalogo&post=2015&antau=2017&pl
  i=48

• The Concise Encyclopedia of the Original Literature of Esperanto
  presents about 300 Esperanto authors.

• The Esperanto PEN Centre is part of
  PEN International
  http://www.pen-international.org/centres/esperanto-
  centre/

• On YouTube, you can listen to Esperanto music, Esperanto speeches and discussions.
There are some films in Esperanto or with subtitles.

- **Google Translate** also supports Esperanto.

- Nowadays nearly every language site or app offers Esperanto, if there are at least 25 languages offered, e.g. Drops or Memrise
  [https://eo.wikipedia.org/wiki/Listo_de_ofertataj_Esperanto-lerniloj](https://eo.wikipedia.org/wiki/Listo_de_ofertataj_Esperanto-lerniloj)

- Many online dictionaries offer Esperanto.
  In the phrase book **Tatoeba** there are now over half a million Esperanto sentences which means Esperanto is the third largest language of this project.

- The Paris-based monthly "**Le Monde Diplomatique**" has an Esperanto version.
  [http://eo.mondediplo.com/](http://eo.mondediplo.com/)

- Among famous people who learned Esperanto are **George Soros** and **J.R.R. Tolkien**. Soros’ father wrote a book about how he and his son evaded Nazi terror in Hungary.
  [https://www.amazon.com/Masquerade-Incredible-](https://www.amazon.com/Masquerade-Incredible-)
Soros succeeded in leaving Hungary by attending an international Esperanto meeting. **Tolkien** learned Esperanto at the age of 15, before he began to build up his languages. He read a lot in Esperanto and he even left at least one paper written in Esperanto, the so called *Book of the Foxrook*; there he presents his first new alphabet. [http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Book_of_the_Foxrook](http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Book_of_the_Foxrook) [https://www.triposo.com/loc/Oxford/person_author-j2e_r2e_r2e_tolkien/background](https://www.triposo.com/loc/Oxford/person_author-j2e_r2e_r2e_tolkien/background)

Now maybe you'll ask: But wasn't the dream that Esperanto should become the first international language, shouldn't everyone in the world speak Esperanto? Well, who didn't dream...?

No one knows, if this dream will come true one day - but this won't be next year, as usually language communities spread by a maximum of only 5% per year. Esperanto had times of a faster growth, but this is not easy to achieve, even if the growth rate went up with the internet.

For the international Esperanto language community this may be a pity - but they mainly just enjoy their language Esperanto, many of them everyday. Facebook published that around 300,000 people indicated Esperanto knowledge there - so there are many opportunities to write and read in Esperanto there. Here is the general Facebook Esperanto group
Esperanto speakers also meet in congresses and conventions, they travel, they Skype. And they enjoy Esperanto culture - books, music, films...

Why did Esperanto continue to spread?

The main reason Esperanto keeps on spreading is probably the fact that it is so quick to learn. You need only about a quarter of the time to reach the same level of competence as in e. g. French or Spanish. This is due to a reduction of forms for nouns and verbs, to a regular pronunciation and to a ingenious word-building system, which cuts down the number of word roots to be learned.

Learning time: a quarter of the time needed for other languages

A reduction of around 75% can convince a lot. Most Esperanto speakers nowadays study Esperanto after English. After around five years their Esperanto knowledge usually becomes better than their English knowledge (or whatever is their best other foreign language).

If two people do not know each other’s language or not very well, Esperanto is probably the quickest way to reach an adequate understanding.
Contact all over the world

Additionally there are international contacts wherever you wish to go. You plan to travel through Albania - well, look it up in the Esperanto Yearbook or ask Esperanto friends, if they know someone who knows someone…

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Welt

A reporter of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung traveled through Georgia. On his way he met an Esperanto speaker from Iran who was on his way to an Esperanto meeting in Kutaissi, north western Georgia. The reporter and his girlfriend, also a reporter, decided after getting consent of their editors to turn this into a story.


(The reporter even learned some Esperanto and joined Amikumu,
https://amikumu.com/en/

a modern app which links language enthusiasts to practice a language in person, on the road...

So a friend of mine from Santander, Spain, who was traveling through Georgia some time later, met the reporter and spoke with him.)

The reporters of Süddeutsche Zeitung didn't travel - they just interviewed Esperanto speaking people in Munich.
The reporter of Die Welt interviewed people in a local Esperanto club.

Beside this larger report Die Welt reports news about Esperanto quite often.

**And why isn't Esperanto more widespread?**

There are several reasons:

- For quite a long time Esperanto was mainly presented as a possible general-purpose international language. Then English took this role, due to its better starting position (around 45% of the world production in the UK and the US already in 1900, most used language of scientific publication already in 1880, huge immigration to the US which went from around 76 million inhabitants in 1900 to 150 million in 1950 to 300 million in 2000).

So obviously this role wasn't for Esperanto in the foreseeable future - and as many outside people linked Esperanto only to this role, they erroneously thought, it wouldn't have any future at all. But they had overlooked
the worldwide Esperanto speaking community which didn't see any reason to abandon their common language, easy to learn, which linked them to friends around the world.

- Quite often so called "language experts" give their opinion about Esperanto which seems to be based on the scarce information they got around thirty years earlier -- without looking to reality or even just to read a wikipedia article about Esperanto.  
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esperanto
  This strengthens the false impression the public already has.
  One example is the French linguist Barbara Cassin who obviously didn't get the fact that there are more than 10,000 books published in Esperanto.  
  The British author Philip Gooden is certainly well informed about English, but seemingly didn't have a look at the international Esperanto community of today.  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SlOwS58R0g

- Certainly the interest of language experts to promote another language than the one they are making their living from is rather counter-productive. So it's not astonishing that it's among these persons where
misinformation about Esperanto abounds without anyone ever sticking their head out of their ivory tower.

If you want to read a book about Ludwik Zamenhof and Esperanto and the international Esperanto speaking community: Maybe the 2016 book of Esther Schor, professor of English at Princeton, will be interesting.

*Bridge of Words: Esperanto and the Dream of a Universal Language*

https://www.amazon.com/Bridge-Words-Esperanto-Universal-Language/dp/0805090797

Here are some of its reviews:

**The New York Times, New Yorker, Slate Magazine and LA Review of Books.**


http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/a-language-to-unite-humankind

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2016/10/esther_schor_s_bridge_of_wordsReviewed.html

https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/esperanto-language-of-hope-esther-schors-bridge-of-words/#
More reviews on
http://www.esperantic.org/en/publications/esperanto-in-the-media/ (link is external)
(Search for "Schor")

Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information and sources.

Louis v. Wunsch-Rolshoven
Press Officer, German Esperanto Association

Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit
Deutscher Esperanto-Bund e. V.
Wiclefstr. 9, 10551 Berlin
Tel. 030 - 685 58 31
0173 - 162 90 63
0 800 - 3 36 36 36 111 (toll-free in Germany)

Press Releases (in German)
https://www.esperanto.de/de/pressemitteilungen

Press Information about Esperanto (in German)
http://www.esperantoland.org/presse/
Populäre Irrtümer über Esperanto

(Popular Errors about Esperanto)

http://www.esperantoland.org/dosieroj/PopulaereIrrtuemerUeb erEsperanto__EsperantoLand.pdf