

THE LINGUISTIC INTEGRATION OF ADULT MIGRANTS

Intergovernmental seminar

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1. Integration of migrants has been among the top issues on the political agenda of the European countries in recent years. National and local authorities developed integration policies and programmes, many of which proved to be effective and contributed to strengthening social cohesion. Nevertheless, it appears that there still persists in many member states of the Council of Europe a high level of exclusion of migrants and persons of immigrant background. Council of Europe, as a organisation that promotes the construction of inclusive societies based on respect to human rights, aims to encourage member states to continue their efforts to integrate migrants and offers them its practical assistance and expert advise.
2. Language learning is widely recognised as an essential and integral element of integration and its importance has been repeatedly highlighted at national and international levels. Insufficient command of the languages of the receiving countries has been identifies by the experts of the European Committee on Migration of the Council of Europe (CDMG) as one of the most serious impediments to the integration of migrants and persons of immigrant background in the labour market and a fundamental barrier to effective interaction between migrants and receiving societies. This, in turn, leads to segregation and structural inequalities where migrants often occupy lower disadvantageous positions in the social structures and labour markets of their countries of residence.
3. The knowledge of the language of the host country is not simply a means to facilitate access of migrants to rights and services, but has wider implications for integration and social cohesion. It is a tool to empower migrants and persons of immigrant background to become active, contributing and valued members of societies they live in, to strengthen their political, social and economic participation as well as their participation in civil society, to improve their interaction with the receiving societies and, ultimately, to contribute to eradicating xenophobic and racism sentiments toward migrants and persons of immigrant background.
4. Council of Europe has, in its work in the field of migration, highlighted the importance of developing effective language acquisition programmes. CDMG recently prepared several sets guidelines that contain proposals for practical measures to promote the language learning tailored to the individual needs and aspirations of migrants. In particular, it is worth mentioning the Recommendation on the integration of migrant children and of immigrant background (Rec(2008)4) and a draft recommendation on access of migrants to employment (currently examined by the Committee of Ministers). Both recommendations offer practical policy advice on how language acquisition by migrants can be encouraged, facilitated and promoted at local and national level and their interaction with non-migrants improved.
5. The growing recognition of the importance to provide opportunities for migrants to learn the languages of the receiving countries and to offer them incentives to do so resulted in the introduction by many member states into their policy and practices measures aimed at promoting active language acquisition by migrants. The Council of Europe welcomed such

development. The Council of Europe welcomes such development but believes it will be very useful to initiate a Europe-wide discussion on the language learning provisions and language testing for migrants with a view to ensuring that the new policies effectively improve migrants' language competencies, promote plurilingualism and diversity, contribute to strengthening social cohesion and, most importance, are fully in line with the core values of the Council of Europe.

6. The present seminar pursues the aim to launch a debate on language acquisition and testing by offering policy-makers from different member states of the Council of Europe an opportunity to discuss the existing and perspective policies of linguistic integration of migrants with colleagues from other countries as well as with the experts on language learning and testing. However, we believe that this debate will continue after the seminar and will bring about the visible improvement of linguistic integration policies that will strengthen social cohesion in European countries and contribute to empowering migrants living in and coming to our societies to become fully-fledged, active and contributing members of these societies.