



Council of Europe  
Language Policy Unit  
DGII – Education Department

[www.coe.int/lang-migrants](http://www.coe.int/lang-migrants)

*Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants*



## Knowledge of society

### *Citizenship training*

The training offered to migrants (or which they must follow to acquire nationality) usually includes a “non-linguistic” component. This generally involves a presentation of the host society and takes various forms: viewing of a film, talk with trainers or training proper. The areas covered usually involve the history of the country and its overall, economic and political features. The training often highlights knowledge of citizens’ rights and duties, in particular as regards life in society (health, education, legal status of spouses, taxes, military service obligations, etc.) and routine administrative procedures. The training may be followed by assessment or actual tests, the results of which may determine access to a desired status (permanent residence, citizenship).

### *Information*

It is important not to misunderstand the expected outcomes of such training and to look closely at its content. It should actually serve no other purpose than to inform the persons being trained, with the information either being initial or supplementing or modifying the experience which the adult migrants have already acquired of life in the society where they sometimes have lived for a long time. Above all, the relevant information must be understood (and hence given in the migrants’ language). And the courses should probably be seen more as an opportunity for identifying the support and resources available to assist migrants in their daily lives than as involving actual assimilation of the technical information provided.

The presentations may also tend to praise the host society and show it in the best possible light. It is by no means certain that the relative lack of reference to (or playing down of) the social problems affecting it adds to the presentations’ credibility. The tendency to present the nation as a united entity so as the better to differentiate it from those newly arrived quite often results in the differences which make it up (generational, income, regional, religious, political and anthropological differences, etc.) being ignored and precedence being given to discourse based on national identity, although it is well known that identity is built up over time and that several conflicting notions of identity exist side by side within a single political environment.

### *Training*

It would therefore be relatively futile to assess commitment to the host societies’ fundamental democratic values on the sole basis of the acquisition of factual or functional knowledge. And it would be just as naive to

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believe that a “national” narrative can lead people to sign up to sometimes new societal values. It must be underlined that the relevant training can in no way seek to replace heightened intercultural awareness as the product of education or experience. The latter is, of course, relevant to migrants, but it is equally vital for the whole of society, which must (re)learn to accept, openly and critically, differences other than the inherited ones which form its multiple and future identity. Intercultural education pursues educational objectives of this kind and therefore extends far beyond the limited framework of the training courses for migrants, in which it nevertheless has a fundamental and irreplaceable part to play.

**JCB**

## Related Resources

- *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue - Living Together As Equals in Dignity*, Council of Europe, 2008
- Concept paper : *The role of languages in policies for the integration of adult migrants*, 2008 - Jean-Claude Beacco
- *Report on a survey: Language requirements for adult migrants in Council of Europe member states*, 2011. Claire Extramiana, Piet van Avermaet – Language Policy Division