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I. **The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the development of policies for the integration of adult migrants**

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Abstract

This discussion paper

- summarizes the Council of Europe's key aims and its policy regarding the language needs of migrants;
- explains how the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is intended to serve the Council of Europe's aims;
- outlines the CEFR's action-oriented approach to the description of language use;
- summarizes the CEFR's six proficiency levels, describing in some detail the communicative range that each level entails;
- briefly addresses the issue of tests for adult migrants; and
- explains how the CEFR can be used to support the development and delivery of language programmes for adult migrants.

1 Introduction

The Council of Europe was established to defend human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. In pursuit of these goals it develops continent-wide agreements to standardize the social and legal practices of member states and promotes awareness of a European identity that is based on shared values and cuts across different cultures. These concerns explain why the Council of Europe attaches great importance to the maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity and encourages language learning as a means of preserving linguistic and cultural identity, improving communication and mutual understanding, and combating intolerance and xenophobia.

Language is central to many of the challenges posed by migration, especially integration and the maintenance of social cohesion. Migrants' access to education and training in the host country is particularly important, as is recognized by Article 14.2 of the *European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers* (1977)¹:

To promote access to general and vocational schools and to vocational training centres, the receiving State shall facilitate the teaching of its language or, if there are several, one of its languages to migrant workers and members of their families.

In a similar vein, a *Report*² of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly noted in February 2005 that "mastery of the host country's language and obtaining training, if possible in keeping with labour market demand, are prerequisites if the problems posed by an under-qualified labour force are to be avoided". The report also detailed the growing tendency of member states to make the granting of citizenship conditional on the achievement of a stated level of proficiency in their national or official language. Clearly, language teaching and language testing have a central role to play in any adequate response to the challenges of migration and the integration of migrants into the host society.

The Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR)³ aims to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of language proficiency. It is founded on the conviction that language learning outcomes are likely to benefit internationally if syllabuses and curricula, textbooks and examinations are shaped by a common understanding. The CEFR does not claim to be that understanding, but rather a means of promoting various forms of international collaboration out of which such understanding can arise and gradually be refined. It is thus an apt basis on which to develop a European response to the linguistic challenges of migration.

There is a further reason why the CEFR is centrally relevant to policy development in this area. In harmony with the Council of Europe's key aims, it assigns central importance to the plurilingualism of the individual, which it distinguishes from the multilingualism of geographical regions. A plurilingual repertoire comprises the language variety referred to as 'mother tongue' or 'first language' and any number of other languages or varieties learned to any level of proficiency. In multilingual areas some individuals may be monolingual and others plurilingual. This perspective places not languages but those who speak them at the

¹ Council of Europe: <http://conventions.coe.int>

² *Migration and integration: a challenge and an opportunity for Europe* (Document 10453), 2005, p.10. [<http://assembly.coe.int>]

³ Council of Europe / Cambridge University Press, 2001. Available on line: www.coe.int/lang

centre of language policies. The emphasis is upon valuing and developing the ability of all individuals to learn and use several languages. The goal is to promote linguistic sensitivity and cultural understanding as a basis for democratic citizenship.

2 The CEFR's action-oriented approach

Since the 1970s the Council of Europe has promoted an action-oriented approach to the description of language use. As elaborated in the CEFR this approach is complex, technical and extensive, but its key features may be summarized as follows:

- Language is one of the foundations of human behaviour: we use it continuously to perform **communicative acts**. Those acts may be external and social. For example, we have conversations with family, friends and colleagues; hold formal meetings; make speeches and give lectures; write personal and official letters; promote our political views in written manifestos; extend knowledge in our domain of expertise by publishing articles and books. Communicative acts may also be internal and private. All forms of reading and some forms of listening are examples of this; so too are the many different ways in which we use language for purposes of thinking things through – for example, to plan the spoken or written apology we have to make for absence from an important business meeting, or to prepare ourselves for a difficult interview by trying to anticipate the questions we shall be asked and working out what our answers should be.
- Communicative acts comprise **language activity**, which is divided into four kinds: reception, production, interaction and mediation. **Reception** entails understanding language produced by others, whether in speech or in writing, while **production** entails producing speech or writing. **Interaction** refers to spoken or written exchanges between two or more individuals, while **mediation** (often involving translation or interpretation) makes communication possible between individuals or groups who are unable to communicate directly. Clearly, interaction and mediation involve both reception and production.
- In order to engage in language activity, we draw on our **communicative language competence**, which includes knowledge (not necessarily conscious) of the words, sounds, and syntactic rules of the language we are using, together with the ability to use such knowledge in order to understand and produce language.
- The language activity required to perform communicative acts always occurs in a **context** that imposes **conditions** and **constraints** of many different kinds. The CEFR proposes four main **domains** of language use: **personal, public, educational** and **occupational**.
- Because communicative acts are always contextualized, our communicative language competence also includes sociolinguistic and pragmatic components. Our **sociolinguistic competences** – again to be thought of as a combination of (not necessarily conscious) knowledge and ability – enable us to cope with the social and cultural dimensions of communicative behaviour, for example, by adhering to social conventions and cultural norms. Working in harness with our sociolinguistic competences, our **pragmatic competences** underpin our ability to use language appropriately to fulfil particular functions, for example, greeting, leave-taking, requesting, thanking.
- Finally, communicative acts entail the performance of **tasks**, and to the extent that they are not routine or automatic, those tasks require us to use **strategies** in order to understand and/or produce spoken or written **texts**.

The CEFR does not say how languages should be taught, but it is fundamental to the action-oriented approach that language learning is a variety of language use,⁴ which means that according to the CEFR, language learning too requires us to use strategies to draw on linguistic resources in order to perform communicative acts.

3 The CEFR's proficiency levels

The CEFR's action-oriented approach to the description of language use supports what might be described as the **horizontal** dimension of language learning and teaching. At any level of proficiency it enables us to consider how the capacities of the language learner, the different aspects of language activity, and the conditions and constraints imposed by context combine to shape communication. But the CEFR also has a **vertical** dimension: it uses some parts of its descriptive apparatus to define language proficiency at six levels arranged in three bands – A1 and A2 (basic user); B1 and B2 (independent user); C1 and C2 (proficient user). We can use these common reference levels as a starting point for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of learning materials, and the assessment of learning outcomes. We can also use them to plot the progress of individual language learners over time and as a basis for comparing language courses, textbooks, examinations, and qualifications. It is important to emphasize that the levels are not normative. The CEFR should rather be thought of as “a concertina-like reference tool that [...] educational professionals can expand or contract, elaborate or summarise, according to the needs of their context”.⁵

As we have seen, the action-oriented approach proposes that when we perform communicative acts we use strategies to make appropriate and effective use of our linguistic resources. Accordingly, the common reference levels are defined by three different kinds of scale. The first is concerned with **language activities**, what the learner/user **can do** in the target language at each level: the CEFR presents 34 scales of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing, which are summarized in the self-assessment grid (Table 2 in the CEFR; see Appendix 1 of this document). The second kind of scale refers to the **strategies** we use when we perform communicative acts, for example, planning our utterances or compensating for gaps in our proficiency. And the third kind of scale focuses on our **communicative language competence**: the words we know, the degree of grammatical accuracy we can achieve, our control of the sounds of the language, and so on. In order to understand the common reference levels fully it is essential to read these three kinds of scale in interaction with one another, because each helps to define the other two.

The common reference levels were defined partly by applying appropriate statistical procedures to the judgements of experienced teachers.⁶ Those teachers were drawn from Swiss lower and upper secondary schools, vocational schools and adult education. In other words, collectively they were concerned with language learners who ranged in age from early adolescent to adult. This may help to explain an important feature of the common reference levels when they are viewed as a continuum: they describe a trajectory of learning from beginner (A1) to advanced (C1 and C2) that in most educational systems is completed only by a minority of learners after many years of learning. What is more, from B2 upwards

⁴ CEFR, p.9.

⁵ B. North, “The CEFR Common Reference Levels: validated reference points and local strategies”, in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities*, report on an Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2007, p.19. Available online at www.coe.int/lang.

⁶ See CEFR, Appendix B, pp.217–225.

the language activities described by the CEFR increasingly interact with significant educational achievement and the practice of particular academic, professional or vocational skills. Consider the following three “can do” descriptors, taken more or less at random from the CEFR’s illustrative scales:

B2 – Reading for information and argument: Can obtain information, ideas and opinions from highly specialized sources within his/her field.⁷

C1 – Listening as a member of a live audience: Can follow most lectures, discussions and debates with relative ease.⁸

C2 – Writing reports and essays: Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, complex reports, articles or essays which present a case, or give critical appreciation of proposals or literary works.⁹

It is impossible to master any of these tasks simply by sitting in a language classroom; we learn to perform them only by engaging in extensive real-world communication, and this should serve to remind us that in the action-oriented approach language learning is a variety of language use.

At this point it may be appropriate to summarize the communicative range of the successive common reference levels, drawing on the discursive summary provided in Chapter 3 of the CEFR:

- At **Level A1** learners “can
 - *interact in a simple way,*
 - *ask and answer simple questions about themselves, where they live, people they know, and things they have,*
 - *initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics,*

rather than relying purely on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organized repertoire of situation-specific phrases”.¹⁰ In other words, A1 is the first identifiable level of proficiency at which learners can combine elements of the target language into a personal if still very limited communicative repertoire.

In **listening** learners at A1 level can recognize and understand familiar words and very basic phrases that mostly refer to their personal situation and their immediate concrete surroundings, always provided that their interlocutors speak clearly and slowly. In **reading** they can recognize and understand names, words and very simple sentences with the same limited range of reference. They can engage in very simple **spoken interaction**, asking and answering very simple questions, but their interlocutors must again speak slowly and be prepared to repeat and rephrase. In **spoken production** they can use simple phrases and sentences to say where they live and who they know; and they can **write** a short simple text (e.g., a message on a postcard) and fill in a form with personal details. In spontaneous language use, A1 learners have only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns that they use to exploit their basic repertoire of isolated words and phrases. They can link words or phrases with very basic connectors.

- At **Level A2** “the majority of descriptors stating social functions are to be found, like
 - *use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address;*

⁷ CEFR, p.70.

⁸ CEFR, p.67.

⁹ CEFR, p.62.

¹⁰ CEFR, p.33.

- *greet people, ask how they are and react to news;*
- *handle very short social exchanges;*
- *ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in free time;*
- *make and respond to invitations;*
- *discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet;*
- *make and accept offers.*

Here too are to be found descriptors on getting out and about: [...]

- *make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks;*
- *get simple information about travel;*
- *use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask for basic information, ask and give directions, and buy tickets;*
- *ask for and provide everyday goods and services”.*¹¹

Between A2 and B1 the learner becomes a more active participant in conversation provided that his/her interlocutors provide support and allow for limitations.

In **listening** learners at A2 level can understand a growing number of everyday phrases and an increasing quantity of highest-frequency vocabulary, especially when it has immediate personal relevance; they are also able to catch the main point in short, clear announcements. In **reading** they can understand very short, simple texts and find specific, predictable information in texts that they cannot understand in detail (e.g., written notices and instructions). In **spoken interaction** they can perform simple and routine tasks that involve the direct exchange of information and they can engage in very short social exchanges. In **spoken production** they can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms their family and other people, where they live, where they work, and their main leisure interests. They can **write** short, simple notes and messages and a very simple personal letter. In spontaneous language use A2 learners can use basic sentence patterns and memorized phrases to exchange a limited range of information in simple everyday situations. They have sufficient vocabulary to express basic communicative needs and can link phrases with simple connectors. They can use some simple structures correctly but they still make basic mistakes.

- **Level B1** “reflects the Threshold Level specification for a visitor to a foreign country and is perhaps most categorized by two features. The first feature is the ability to maintain interaction and get across what you want to in a range of contexts, for example:
 - *generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect;*
 - *give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends;*
 - *express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly;*
 - *exploit a wide range of simple language flexibly to express much of what he or she wants to;*
 - *maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to;*
 - *keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.*
 The second feature is the ability to cope flexibly with problems in everyday life, for example
 - *cope with less routine situations on public transport;*
 - *deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually traveling;*

¹¹ CEFR, pp.33–34.

- *enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics;*
- *make a complaint;*
- *take some initiatives in an interview/consultation (e.g. to bring up a new subject) but is very dependent on interviewer in the interaction; ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said.”¹²*

Between B1 and B2 learners are able to exchange increasingly large quantities of information.

In **listening** B1 learners can understand the main points of clear standard speech dealing with familiar topics that they encounter regularly; they can also follow many radio and TV programmes, provided that delivery is relatively slow and clear. In **reading** they can understand texts that describe situations and events in mainly high-frequency language; they can also understand the expression of feelings and wishes in personal letters. In **spoken interaction** they can engage with confidence in unprepared conversation provided that topics are familiar and of personal interest or pertinence; they can also cope with most situations likely to arise when interacting with native speakers. In **spoken production** they can connect phrases in a simple way to tell a story or give a description, and they can briefly explain their opinions and plans. They can **write** simple connected text dealing with topics that are familiar to them or of personal interest, and they can write personal letters describing their experiences and impressions. In spontaneous language use B1 learners have enough language to get by and sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine everyday transactions and communicate about familiar situations and topics. They are reasonably accurate in deploying a repertoire of frequently used routines and patterns, and they can link a series of discrete elements into a connected sequence.

- **Level B2** “represents a new level as far above B1 [...] as A2 [...] is below it. It is intended to reflect the Vantage Level specification.¹³ The metaphor is that, having been progressing slowly but steadily across the intermediate plateau, the learner finds he has arrived somewhere, things look different, he/she acquires a new perspective, can look around him/her in a new way. This concept does seem to be borne out to a considerable extent by the descriptors calibrated for this level. They represent quite a break with the content so far. For example at the lower end of the band there is a focus on effective argument:
 - *account for and sustain his opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments;*
 - *explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options;*
 - *construct a chain of reasoned argument;*
 - *develop an argument giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view;*
 - *explain a problem and make it clear that his/her counterpart in a negotiation must make a concession;*
 - *speculate about causes, consequences, hypothetical situations;*
 - *take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses.*

Secondly, running right through the level there are two new focuses. The first is being able to more than hold your own in social discourse: e.g.

¹² CEFR, p.34.

¹³ J. A. van Ek and J. L. M. Trim, *Vantage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 (first published Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1997).

- *converse naturally, fluently and effectively;*
- *understand in detail what is said to him/her in the standard spoken language even in a noise environment;*
- *initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly;*
- *use stock phrases (e.g. 'That's a difficult question to answer') to gain time and keep the turn while formulating what to say;*
- *interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party;*
- *adjust to the changes of direction, style and emphasis normally found in conversation;*
- *sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.*

The second new focus is a new degree of language awareness:

- *correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstanding;*
- *make a note of 'favourite mistakes' and consciously monitor speech for it/them;*
- *generally correct slips and errors if he/she becomes conscious of them;*
- *plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipient/s".¹⁴*

In **listening** B2 learners can understand extended speech that contains complex lines of argument provided that the topic is reasonably familiar; they can also understand most radio and TV programmes in the dialect they are familiar with. In **reading** they can understand articles and reports that express attitudes and viewpoints, and contemporary literary prose. They can engage with some fluency and spontaneity in **spoken interaction** and participate actively in discussion. Regular interaction with native speakers is quite possible. In **spoken production** they can give clear, detailed descriptions, explain their viewpoint, summarize the opinions of others, and weigh advantages and disadvantages. They can **write** clear, detailed text covering a wide range of subjects; they can develop an argument, giving reasons for and against; they can communicate detailed information and highlight the personal significance of events. In spontaneous language use B2 learners have a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions and express viewpoints. They have a good range of vocabulary to deal with most general topics and their own special interests. They have a relatively high degree of grammatical control and are able to use a limited number of cohesive devices to link utterances into clear, coherent discourse. The errors they make do not impair communication and they are often able to self-correct.

- **Level C1** is characterized by “good access to a broad range of language, which allows fluent, spontaneous communication, as illustrated by the following examples:
 - *Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly.*
 - *Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions.*
 - *There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language”.¹⁵*
- **Level C2** “is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence. What is intended is to characterize the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with

¹⁴ CEFR, p.35.

¹⁵ CEFR, p.36.

the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include:

- *convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices;*
- *has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning;*
- *backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it*.¹⁶

4 The issue of tests for adult migrants

According to the CEFR, then, proficiency in a second or foreign language is a highly complex phenomenon. Its development to advanced levels is a matter not simply of attending language classes; it also requires extensive engagement in real-world communication in the target language, which means that advanced proficiency is strongly oriented to the learner's academic and/or professional concerns. Progress from A1 all the way to C2 is a minority achievement, never a foregone conclusion, and usually far from rapid; it certainly cannot be guaranteed by a fixed quantity of language teaching expressed in terms of hours spent in the classroom. It is also important to emphasize here that the ability to perform (say) a B1 listening task does not automatically imply the ability to perform all other tasks specified for B1. These considerations should be borne in mind when deciding whether or not to require migrants to submit to language tests; and if tests are introduced, the same considerations should play a role in determining the level of proficiency to be aimed at.

Language tests for migrants are designed to serve one of two purposes: either to bar them from entering the country in the first place or, when they are already resident in the country, to determine whether or not they have achieved a stated level of proficiency in the language of the host community. Tests that serve the former purpose are usually administered in the migrants' country of origin, and their level depends on the immigration policy of the country in question. If there is a need for unskilled labour, the test may focus only on oral communication at a very basic level. If on the other hand there is a need for qualified professionals, the test will be at a more advanced level and may pay as much attention to reading and writing as to listening and speaking. In both cases the test is likely to be designed independently of any course of instruction, and it will reflect the perceived needs of the receiving country rather than the needs of the would-be immigrants.

When migrants already living in the host community are required to pass a language test in order to be granted citizenship or leave to remain in the country long-term, they usually take the test only after attending a course of instruction in the host community language. The test should thus focus on the skills that the course of instruction was designed to develop. If the course and the test are intended to support migrants' integration into the host community, both should take account of the perceived needs of migrants as well as of the host community. This is emphatically not a matter simply of selecting a CEFR level that intuitively seems about right and proceeding from there. On the contrary, it requires a detailed process of analysis that results in one or more profiles of the immigrant community and the development of appropriate programmes of instruction and methods of assessment. The CEFR provides us with tools to undertake such an analysis, as the next section explains. If the analysis is sufficiently thorough and differentiated, the assessment procedures should not be biased against migrants who decide to submit themselves to assessment without first attending a course.

¹⁶ Ibid.

5 Using the CEFR to support language course development and delivery

The CEFR is exactly what its title says it is: a framework of reference. As we noted in the introduction, it is intended to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of proficiency. In other words, it offers tools that can support the work of curriculum designers, materials developers and testing agencies, but it does not provide ready-made solutions. This is especially the case when its descriptive apparatus and proficiency levels are applied to the communicative (linguistic and sociolinguistic) needs of migrants.

In section 3 we noted that the CEFR's proficiency levels were defined on the basis of teachers' judgements, and that the teachers involved were drawn from four educational domains: lower secondary, upper secondary, vocational, and adult. This helps to explain four closely related characteristics of the proficiency levels. First, they plot a trajectory of learning that reflects the structure and organization of European educational systems; secondly, they describe the kind of behavioural repertoire that learners need as temporary visitors to a foreign country rather than as long-term residents; thirdly, at the lower levels (A1, A2, B1) their descriptors correspond closely to the typical content of foreign language textbooks; and fourthly, advanced language proficiency is inseparable from advanced levels of educational achievement and/or professional involvement. None of these characteristics is necessarily relevant to the needs of migrant language learners. What is more, the CEFR does not take account of the sociolinguistic, socio-structural and socio-historical dynamics of multilingualism, the often truncated plurilingual repertoires of migrants, or the individual's need for a variety of repertoires in polycentric contexts.

If we are concerned to support migrants' integration, we shall aim to design and deliver language programmes that help them to develop the communicative repertoire they need in the shortest possible time. We shall do our best to ensure that they do not waste time learning things they do not need, and that everything they do learn can be put to immediate use in their daily interactions with the host community. In every aspect of course design and implementation our efforts will take account of two fundamental facts. First, although adult migrants need to learn the language of their host community as part of the integration process, they will continue to use their mother tongue(s) at home, in communication with others from their country or region of origin, and in those domains of the host society where the language variety used can be a matter of negotiation. Our programmes should treat this positively, finding ways of affirming the value of all languages, all cultures and all ethnicities; they should never carry the implication that the language of the host community is in some way superior to and if possible should replace the migrants' mother tongue(s). Secondly, our goal is to enable adult migrants to use the language of the host community for purposes of essential communication. It is thus more important that they can get their message across than that their grammar is correct or that after many weeks or months of instruction their pronunciation still sounds foreign.

None of this is to claim that the process of integration should be complete by the end of our language course. On the contrary, the most the course can do is to enable participants to gain their first communicative access to the host community. Research confirms what common sense suggests: integration that includes a shift to use of the host community language takes a long time, typically several generations. Failure to understand this can mean that migrants' retention of their language of origin is misinterpreted as unwillingness to learn the language of the host community and thus to integrate.

There is no fixed way of applying the CEFR's descriptive apparatus to the analysis of language learners' needs, the design of programmes of instruction, and the development of tests. In the case of migrant learners, however, it seems appropriate to begin by considering the domains of language use in which they need to be able to communicate; then to consider the tasks they need to be able to perform in each domain; and finally to define the level of proficiency required for the successful performance of each task.

The CEFR's action-oriented approach identifies four domains, or external contexts, of language use: personal, public, occupational and educational. Each of these domains may be relevant to migrant learners, but with significant differences of emphasis compared with the needs of a foreign language learner at school. For example, language learning at school is often supported by student exchanges that give (say) an English learner of French the opportunity to live for a few weeks as a member of a French family; in other words, one of the aims of language learning at school is to extend the learner's behavioural repertoire in the personal domain. By contrast, while adult migrants need to be able to give an account of themselves and their personal and family circumstances, they may have little prospect of developing close personal relationships with native speakers of the host community language. The public domain, on the other hand, is likely to be very significant for migrants since their integration depends among other things on dealing successfully with officialdom and public services. Thus in the public domain they need to be able to perform with confidence and fluency tasks that will mostly lie beyond the experience of language learners who are not themselves migrants. This does not mean, however, that it is possible to deal successfully with officialdom and public services only at the more advanced levels of communicative proficiency. The requirements of the occupational domain will depend on the extent to which migrant learners need to use the language of the host community in the workplace. In many cases it will be sufficient for them to understand basic health and safety regulations, though this is likely to include a certain amount of written text. Whatever work they are engaged in, they will almost certainly be required to fill in forms of one kind or another. Finally, the educational domain can impinge on adult migrants in two ways: via their programme of language learning and, if they have children, in their need to interact with teachers and educational officials of various kinds.

Detailed analysis of the domains in which adult migrants require to use the language of the host community inevitably entails consideration of the tasks they need to perform and the language variety (standard or dialect) in which they need to perform them. Tasks can be analysed and described with reference to the five language activities the CEFR is centrally concerned with: LISTENING, READING, SPOKEN INTERACTION, SPOKEN PRODUCTION, WRITING. At this point it is useful to distinguish between the educational context in which migrants do their language learning and the domains in which they need to operate in their everyday lives. It may be that outside the language classroom they are mostly concerned with oral communication; but inside the classroom reading and writing should still play an important role in the development of their language proficiency, for three reasons. First, in all educational contexts the technology of literacy (writing things down) helps us to organize and memorize whatever it is we are trying to learn; secondly, the written form of a language helps to make its structures visible and thus easier to analyse and understand; and thirdly, in most forms of employment it is difficult to escape the need to exercise at least basic functional literacy (writing short notes, filling in forms).

Having determined the domains in which migrant language learners need to communicate and the communicative tasks they need to perform, we must determine the proficiency levels they need to attain. This is partly a function of the communicative tasks themselves: greetings and leave-takings, for example, are quickly mastered and belong to the lowest level

of communicative proficiency; on the other hand, it is not possible to engage in detailed negotiations or write a business report if one's proficiency level is A2. However, we should also consider whether the special needs of migrant learners require a different approach from the one typically adopted in programmes of general language learning. The vocabulary that migrant learners need is a case in point. The CEFR defines vocabulary range for A1, A2 and A2+ as follows:¹⁷

- **A1** – *Has a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases related to particular concrete situations.*
- **A2** – *Has a sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs. Has a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs.*
- **A2+** – *Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics.*

In developing a programme of instruction for these levels, it is necessary to define in some detail “particular concrete situations”, “basic communicative needs”, “simple survival needs”, “routine, everyday transactions” and “familiar situations and topics”. In the case of adult migrants such definition may entail acquiring a vocabulary that seems advanced and specialized when compared with the vocabulary contained in course books designed for general language learners at the same levels. For example, for a refugee in the early stages of an intensive English language course in Ireland, “particular concrete situations” included taking a sick child to the doctor's surgery. Accordingly, in the first weeks of his course his personal dictionary included the following entries: *ill, sick, health, therapy, blood pressure, operation, inflamed, tablets, temperature, dehydrated, dizzy, headache*. The same learner was simultaneously coming to terms with an approach to language learning that emphasizes learner involvement in the setting of learning targets, collaborative project work, and learner self-assessment. This explains why at the same early stage his personal dictionary also contained *assessment, self-assessment, project, topic, theme, prepare, organize*. Bearing in mind that the CEFR's higher levels (B2, C1, C2) increasingly imply educational achievement and professional involvement, those responsible for designing language programmes for adult migrants might usefully spend time trying to identify communicative tasks adult migrants need to be able to perform that do *not* lie within the first three levels (A1, A2, B1). The list is likely to be very short.

At this point it is necessary to confront an awkward fact. When we design a foreign language curriculum as part of general education, we can make a number of assumptions: the learners will all be in the same age range; they will have the same general educational experience; even if they do not all share the same mother tongue, they share the same language of education; most of them will have broadly similar social and cultural backgrounds; and they are likely to share the same general orientation to language learning and interaction with the societies and cultures associated with whatever language(s) they learn. When we design language programmes for adult migrants the situation is very different. The client group is likely to come from a wide variety of linguistic, ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds; it may range in age from young adult (late teens/early twenties) to elderly (sixties or seventies); educational experience and achievement are almost infinitely variable; some members of the group may already have a measure of communicative proficiency in the target language, whereas others are beginners; among the beginners there may be some who are not literate in their mother tongue; and so on. It is probably true but certainly unhelpful to say that each adult migrant has a unique communicative needs profile. The question is: how

¹⁷ CEFR, p.112.

can we design and implement language programmes that are cost-effective, clearly related to the proficiency levels of the CEFR, and meet the needs of individual migrant learners?

The Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio¹⁸ (ELP) provides us with a way of responding to this question at the levels of course design and course delivery. The ELP comprises

- a **language passport**, which summarizes the owner's linguistic identity and his/her experience of learning and using languages other than the mother tongue;
- a **language biography**, which supports the planning, monitoring and evaluation of language learning, and encourages reflection on the intercultural dimension of second/foreign language learning and use and on the language learning process;
- a **dossier**, in which the owner keeps work in progress, evidence of developed second/foreign language skills, and certificates and other documents that attest learning achievement.

Designed to foster the development of learner autonomy (a matter of learners doing things for themselves), the ELP provides the owner with checklists of tasks (e.g., *I can introduce myself and say where I come from*) arranged according to the levels and language activities of the CEFR. These can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate learning from day to day and week to week. Note that individual learners may work simultaneously on tasks at two or more levels; for example, listening tasks at B1, spoken interaction tasks at A2, reading and writing tasks at A1. At longer intervals learners can undertake a summary self-assessment in the language passport, using the self-assessment grid from the CEFR (Appendix 1 of this paper). In versions of the ELP designed for use by adult migrants the goal-setting and self-assessment checklists focus on domains of language use and communicative tasks that previous analysis has shown to be especially relevant. The checklists provide a general framework for the language programme and can be used to identify (i) needs that are common to all participants in the programme, (ii) needs that are shared by some but not all participants, and (iii) needs that are specific to individual participants. Programme delivery can then proceed via whole-class, group and individual learning activities that are planned, monitored and evaluated in the individual learner's ELP.¹⁹

There seems to be a growing tendency to attach two kinds of test to citizenship and permission to remain long-term in the host country: a test of communicative proficiency in the host community's language, and a test of cultural and/or civic knowledge. This may encourage the view that learning a language and learning about the society in which the language is used are two quite different things. Such a view is misleading. While it is true that one can gain many kinds of knowledge about a particular society or culture without learning its language, it is also true that language learning has an inescapable cultural dimension. This is clearly recognized by the CEFR's action-oriented approach, which assigns a key role to our sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, both of which presuppose a degree of (not necessarily explicit) cultural knowledge: for instance, knowing how to greet and take leave of someone. Furthermore, when language programmes for adult migrants are designed on the basis of the kind of needs analysis described above, it should follow that they focus directly on communicative activity within the host community. Learning to communicate in the world of work, for example, includes learning how to read

¹⁸ www.coe.int/portfolio

¹⁹ For a detailed account of how the ELP has been used as the basis for English language courses for adult migrants with refugee status in Ireland, see the paper "*Responding to the language needs of adult refugees in Ireland: an alternative approach to pedagogy and assessment*".

and understand a payslip; and payslips are cultural artefacts that differ from country to country. Cultural or civic knowledge that can be acquired independently of the host community language should nevertheless be included in the language programme, for two reasons. First, in most cases migrants will probably have to use the host community language to acquire the knowledge; and secondly, this kind of learning can provide appropriate content for a language programme that is also an induction into the social practices of the host community. When the programme entails portfolio learning based on a version of the ELP, it may be possible to use portfolio assessment as an alternative not only to language tests but also to tests of cultural and/or civic knowledge.²⁰

6 Conclusion

Increasingly Council of Europe member states use the levels of the CEFR to define the communicative proficiency that migrants must achieve if they are to be granted citizenship or long-term residence rights. It has been the purpose of this paper to summarize the conceptual complexity that lies behind the levels, to describe in some detail the range of communicative behaviour that each of the levels entails, and to provide a preliminary illustration of the procedures that take us from the CEFR as a framework of reference to the design and delivery of needs-based,²¹ CEFR-related language programmes for adult migrants.

In order to fulfil its intended function the CEFR strives to be comprehensive, transparent and coherent. The same features should characterize efforts to apply its descriptive apparatus and proficiency levels to the design of language courses, textbooks and other learning materials, and assessment instruments. When we bring the CEFR to bear on the development and implementation of policies for the integration of adult migrants, we should begin by recognizing that it was not designed to address the particularities of their linguistic situation, which are often bewilderingly complex. We should also recognize that the CEFR cannot present us with ready-made solutions; that effective language courses for adult migrants and just methods of assessment depend on careful and detailed analysis of their general educational background, their social and sociolinguistic context, the domains in which they must be able to use the language of the host community, and the communicative tasks they must be able to perform. This requires much painstaking effort.

When the CEFR is used as a convenient short cut, a substitute for hard work, the resulting simplifications and distortions can easily lead to injustice. It may be a matter of policy to require adult migrants to attend a programme of instruction in the language of the host community and to assess their communicative proficiency at the end of the programme. But such a policy is defensible only if the programme and the assessment instruments take full account of the needs of the learners, their situation in the host community, the multilingual reality that surrounds them, the context of polycentricity in which they live, and the constraints to which their language learning is subject. To determine that adult migrants should attain (say) A2 in the language of the host community and then to imagine that **any** A2 course will meet their needs and **any** assessment at A2 level will be appropriate, is to misunderstand the nature of language learning, language use and language itself, and to work against the principles on which the CEFR is founded.

²⁰ Again, see the paper “*Responding to the language needs of adult refugees in Ireland: an alternative approach to pedagogy and assessment*” for a practical example.

²¹ For further discussion of needs see Piet Van Avermaet and Sara Gysen, “From needs to tasks: language learning needs in a task-based approach”, in Kris Van den Branden (ed.), *Task-based language education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp.17–46.

7 Appendix 1
CEFR Common Reference Levels: self-assessment grid (© Council of Europe)

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g., family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.