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Language Policy Division
Division des Politiques linguistiques

Adult migrant integration policies:
principles and implementation

Contents

- Languages in adult migrant integration policies 5**
 - Towards effective implementation of the Council of Europe’s principles and values5
 - A European value: plurilingual education6
 - Linguistic diversity of adult migrants, diversity of the needs to be met.....6
 - Principles for developing language training for adult migrants6
 - Intercultural dialogue: the languages of migration.....8
 - Intercultural education8
 - Linguistic/”cultural” competences and access to legal citizenship.....9
 - Conclusion.....10

- Support tools for decision makers and practioners..... 11**
 - Thematic Studies.....11
 - Case studies.....13

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The work of the Council of Europe on linguistic integration of adult migrants is guided by the Organisation's adherence to human rights and intercultural understanding and the principles of transparency, consistency and quality.

This document is geared to outlining the debates and results of the *Linguistic integration of adult migrants* Programme run by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division.

Languages in adult migrant integration policies

In the light of the priorities set out in the Declaration and Action Plan of the [Third Council of Europe Summit](#) (Warsaw), the Parliamentary Assembly is endeavouring to orient its work in the field of migration towards “promoting intercultural dialogue, fostering tolerance and ensuring the integration of immigrant communities in their host societies” (para. 4.2 of [Resolution 1511](#) [2006]¹).

Towards effective implementation of the Council of Europe's principles and values

In this context, the Council of Europe offers to help member States in their search for solutions to language issues facing adult migrants, because they cut across all aspects of the policies for receiving and integrating such persons (status, employment, health, housing etc)².

These language questions relate to:

- teaching the national language of the host state for use in personal, social and working life;
- integrating these individuals in the host society, enabling them to function as active, involved democratic citizens;
- transmitting the languages of origin to their children, as these languages are part of their cultural capital and a command of languages is an asset for the whole of society.

It is important for member States to take charge of these language policies in an explicit and co-ordinated manner by basing them on the mutual rights and duties of the host societies, the migrants and their States of origin.

The Council of Europe has developed principles governing action for migrants as vulnerable groups, but a great deal of technical work is still needed in order to implement them. It is proposed to assist the member states in identifying practical measures to improve their efficiency and prevent the action having any undesirable side-effects (marginalisation, rejection, reinforcement of sectarian identities, etc). To that end, the instruments for guiding language training as developed by the Council of Europe are available, viz the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#), the [European Language Portfolio](#), the [Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies](#), etc.

¹ *Migration, refugees and population in the context of the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe*

² The question of migrant children mainly relates to their schooling and is therefore not addressed here.

A European value: plurilingual education

Like all other types of language course, language training for adult migrants takes place in a plurilingual educational context. Plurilingual education posits that everyone is potentially plurilingual, ie all individuals can, at any time in their lives, acquire new languages. This genetic capacity must be developed by education, not in order to turn out lots of polyglots but to make everyone aware of their language abilities, the capacity independently to learn the languages they need or would like to learn, up to whatever standard. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) specifies different levels or profiles, underlining the fact that any form of linguistic competence, however minimal, is respectable and can be certified, because, “speaking like a native” is not necessarily the goal pursued by all for all the languages which they know or want to know (= *individual linguistic repertoire*). Developing each individual’s repertoire is a requirement which is intensified by globalised exchanges. It is above all the basis for mutual respect and recognition of Otherness: if everyone acknowledges the diversity of the languages in his/her repertoire, (s)he is in a position to recognise the diversity of Others. Plurilingual education is therefore profoundly intercultural, providing one of the mainstays of social cohesion.

Linguistic diversity of adult migrants, diversity of the needs to be met

The diversity of migrants’ languages is one aspect of the multilingual and multicultural nature of contemporary European societies. This diversity is reflected in the range of languages in their repertoires, the use of (one of) the language(s) of the host society (in the personal, social, working or other environments) and the use of the language(s) of origin or the languages in their repertoire. This diversity is also reflected in the requisite periods of learning for the language(s) of the host country (depending on whether the migrants have been schooled, or have already had experience of learning an unknown language, etc), and depending on the stages in the migratory process (arrival, brief, lasting or definitive settlement, etc).

For adult migrants, therefore, this diversity relates back to a comparable diversity in terms of linguistic needs in the host society. This means that the training course must be open and diversified, depending on the forms and phases of migration, and therefore that there can be no one standard response: no single course (according to level), single test, single level of competence to achieve, single cultural contents or single standard teaching procedure, etc. Standard responses come cheaper, but they are likely to fall short of migrants’ training expectations and therefore prove inefficient.

Principles for developing language training for adult migrants

Drawing on these principles (plurilingual education and linguistic diversity) and depending on the resources available for these activities, the following are required:

- tailor-made training courses corresponding as closely as possible to the broad range of situations of these individuals and their short- and/or long-term needs. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies* (3rd Part) can serve as technical aids in analysing these language needs;
- defining contents in terms of specific realistic communication situations (addressing one’s children’s teachers, speaking to neighbours, writing a CV for a job, etc);
- defining training goals in terms of competence profiles (eg A2 level for conversation, but A1 for reading of written production), rather than homogenous levels (A2 for all competences), in order to meet the learners’ diversified needs;

- subsequently addressing the forms of the target language to be taught (vocabulary, spelling, morphology, sentence structure, textual organisation, etc). These language goals can be identified by means of the programme reference tools known as *CEFR Reference Level Descriptions by language*³. These instruments were developed to identify the forms of a given language corresponding to the CEFR descriptors. The reference descriptions are available for several languages and can be used to determine the linguistic contents of training courses intended for adult migrants. Some were even specifically designed for this purpose⁴;
- if a single standard test is nevertheless used (for residence), bearing in mind the actual nature of the expected levels (eg B2 is defined by virtually perfect command of morphology [eg conjugations]); this should be defined functionally rather than in terms of the citizens' idea of what is "proper knowledge" of their language(s), which amounts to an assimilationist approach;
- taking account of these adults' educational habits in the choice of teaching methods;
- organising accurate and systematic monitoring of the quality of the training courses, conducted either by the national/regional education system or by specifically mandated voluntary/private bodies;
- entrusting the courses to properly trained professionals rather than volunteers;
- considering assessment as an integral part of the training process rather than solely as a means of verification (with a possible sanctioning function);
- if considered necessary, organising official examinations or tests depending on these target groups and the various purposes of the verifications (verification of the ultimate competence, to obtain a residence permit, to acquire the host country's nationality, etc), entrusting the design and running of such examinations or tests to independent specialist bodies which meet the current professional standards (vis-à-vis transparency, fairness, etc);
- incorporating a language dimension into vocational training courses, alerting enterprises to the issues involved and providing them with technical assistance (eg training references for the building/civil engineering sector taking account of verbal communication), or help vis-à-vis regulations on adult further training;
- linking up school courses with lessons learnt directly "at the chalkface" by the adult migrants themselves. The aim here is to show policy-makers, educational officials and trainees that adult migrants can learn languages directly by getting involved in all the activities of the host society, meaning that such learning is not a pre-requisite for their integration.

These arrangements should result in suitable and effective training courses capable of motivating the migrant adult trainees and eliminating the need for coercion. Experience has shown that "forced" language learning is seldom successful in the medium term, especially in terms of the trainees' attitudes to the host society, which is hardly conducive to social cohesion.

³ Council of Europe – Language Policy Division: www.coe.int/lang - Section on "Reference Level Descriptions (RLDs) for national and regional languages".

⁴ *Niveau A1.1. pour le français [Level A1.1 for French]*, 2005, Didier, Paris, the utilisation of which is illustrated in *Créer des parcours d'apprentissage pour le niveau A1.1* (S. Etienne, 2008, Didier).

Intercultural dialogue: the languages of migration

Migrants should be provided with appropriate language training courses as quickly as possible so that they can secure a decent living and thus make a proper contribution to the host society. A further aim, however, is to ensure their social integration, which raises cultural questions.

The acquisition by adult migrants of the/a language of the host society is deemed to be offset by some form of acceptance of the new residents' languages. This "adaptation" mainly concerns the development or encouragement of attitudes of curiosity about and "benevolence" towards these "new" languages, so as to prevent the linguistic intolerance that stems from systematic disparagement of migrant languages. Such a benevolent attitude is expressed in everyday communication between native language speakers and migrant language speakers. It can be taught as such to all primary schoolchildren as a mode of verbal politeness or civility.

The priority for new immigrants is undoubtedly to learn the/a language of the host society. However, in providing such language courses, there should also be a place for the languages of origin, though not in the form of systematic teaching. Room can be made for such languages in the educational framework to the extent that they help promote the acquisition of the/a language of the host State/region. This can take such practical forms as having learners describe the linguistic habits of their communities (usually by means of a shared third language).

Lastly, it is up to the immigrants themselves, together with the host society, to consider how their languages of origin can be transmitted from one generation to another for as long as possible. The context in which these languages are handed down is extremely fragile because generally speaking, the languages immigrants bring with them cannot acquire any sort of "official status" in the host society. Language policies geared to supporting the transmission of migrant languages can vary in form, ranging from organising training courses (based on forms of bilingualism according to the specific context) to involving adult migrants in the effort to transmit their languages. In order to support the transmission of languages of origin, it would be useful to devise mechanisms for informing parents and the general public about the advantages of bilingualism and the potential benefit of inter-generational activities, setting up networks involving all the players in the language field, and establishing synergies among immigrants in their various living environments.

Intercultural education

Language teaching is an integral part of any intercultural education. The Council of Europe *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*⁵ supports political approaches to promoting intercultural dialogue and identifies democratic citizenship, history and language learning as key competences.

Intercultural dialogue can be built up by means of a converging set of measures with short- to long-term effects. Where the host society is concerned, it would be useful to provide reliable and systematic information for all pupils in the national/regional education system (from the earliest possible age) on the realities of migrants, their languages and cultures of origin, drawing on the multilingual and multicultural environment existing in many classrooms, or by helping immigrants become involved in the available modes of social participation, such as neighbourhood committees, residents' associations, parents' committees, consumers' associations, etc.

⁵ www.coe.int/dialogue

Adult migrants could usefully be provided with information on the host society on their arrival, giving a multifaceted overview of its cultures and its past and present identities. The central position of the rule of law and the principles of democratic coexistence with respect for law should also be stressed, and an awareness created of the concept of a plural and dynamic cultural identity, as migrants often have an “ethnic” perception of identity.

A new tool produced by the Council of Europe’s Language Policy Division known as the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, which provides food for thought on experience of other cultures, is now available for use in training. This facility is based on a typology of competences required by every citizen or learner in this field: recognising the identity of others, respect for otherness, acceptance of ambiguity, empathy, etc.

Linguistic/“cultural” competences and access to legal citizenship

Legal citizenship is granted to adult migrants on the basis of legal criteria which vary widely from one State to another. The criteria often include assessment of the integration of the person applying for citizenship in the host society, based on participation in collective social activities, linguistic knowledge and “basic knowledge” of the host society. This linguistic and cultural assessment should be conducted with care if it is to promote the effective integration of immigrants and therefore to boost social cohesion, given that the acquisition of nationality is not an end in itself but a stage in a process.

A person’s social integration is often gauged by his/her command of the/a language of the host society, but there is no direct, proportional relationship between command of a language and positive attitudes vis-à-vis the society concerned: people can be very well integrated and yet have limited language skills. This assessment of language command, which is deemed vital for exercising citizenship, is liable to be warped by other criteria such as correct usage, fluency or lack of accent, compliance with the dominant socio-linguistic norm, etc. These features in no way prevent native speakers, who do not necessarily comply with these norms either, from acting as citizens. Such verification must above all provide objective evidence that the persons applying for citizenship are able to communicate with some degree of efficiency.

Successful integration on the part of applicants for citizenship is also gauged by whether or not they can boast “knowledge” of the host society. Such knowledge may well be useful, but it in no way guarantees that those possessing it adhere to the values enshrined in the Constitution and in law. Integration into the host society can only be “verified” by facts: it can only be deemed successful if the “new” citizens do not commit acts legally requiring them to be debarred from the nationality acquired, and especially if they become involved in community life as active democratic citizens.

It is important to analyse the procedure for designing and taking such examinations or tests in such a way as to ensure their transparency and fairness or equity, particularly in terms of the “knowledge” expected of candidates, so that they do not become pretexts for excluding immigrants. This comes down to avoiding any kind of mechanical testing (multiple-choice questions) and integrating the examinations/tests into the overall training process.

Conclusion

The Council of Europe has clearly set out the principles governing policies for the integration of adult migrants, and they attract broad consensus. However, it is vital for member states to reflect and exchange experience on the technical methods adopted for implementing these principles, because the latter are not self-evident and do not necessarily correspond to “common sense”, given the power and energy of cultural stereotyping; nor do they represent the most economical solutions. If they fail to produce the forms of integration desired by the host societies and by the migrants themselves, resulting in plurilingual and pluricultural new citizens (possibly holding dual nationality), social cohesion will be potentially jeopardised in the long term. This is foreshadowed in Europe by many examples of social fractures within migrant populations.

All these training facilities for adult migrants must be made effective, rather than remaining a kind of low-cost concession to the new arrivals. Their quality should make it more difficult for anyone to hijack the integration mechanisms. Languages form an environment for human communication which is vital for democratic coexistence, and it would be worse than perverting them to use their diversity as a pretext for making them *de facto* mechanisms for exclusion.

Support tools for decision makers and practitioners

The Language Policy Division has produced a *Concept Paper*⁶ intended to provide states with assistance in finding solutions to language problems faced by adult migrants – problems that cut across all aspects of reception and integration policies (status, employment, health, housing etc).

A series of five Thematic Studies and five Case Studies were also produced to stimulate discussion, encourage the sharing of experience, lead to consensus on guiding principles, and foster cooperation between member states in their efforts to

- identify adult migrants' needs vis-à-vis the language of the host country while taking account of their sociolinguistic situation and respecting their plurilingual and pluricultural identity;
- define the goals of language training programmes for adult migrants, using the CEFR and respecting the principles of quality, transparency and fairness;
- develop and implement programmes of language and intercultural training according to internationally accepted principles of quality assurance;
- develop and administer tests and other assessment instruments, including alternative forms of assessment, again according to internationally accepted principles;
- design and implement initial and in-service training schemes for teachers of language and culture courses for adult migrants.

The *Concept Paper* and the *Studies* listed below were presented to a intergovernmental seminar held in Strasbourg (June 2008) and are currently available on the Language Policy Division's website (www.coe.int/lang: Section *Minorities and Migrants*).

Thematic Studies

i) *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the development of policies for the integration of adult migrants*, David Little

This text

- explains how the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) is intended to provide common reference standards;
- outlines the CEFR's communicative approach to the description of language use;
- summarizes the CEFR's six language proficiency levels, describing in some detail what each level entails;
- briefly addresses the issue of tests for adult migrants;
- explains how the CEFR can be used to support the development and delivery of language programmes for adult migrants.

ii) *Quality assurance in the provision of language education and training for adult migrants – Guidelines and options*, Richard Rossner

This text

- provides an overview of some key issues affecting the quality of language learning services for adult migrants;

⁶ *The role of languages in policies for the integration of adult migrants*

- establishes the main criteria that need to be fulfilled in an effective programme of language training;
- proposes a specialised international quality scheme that involves formal accreditation with systematic checks of the design, content, resourcing and delivery of language courses for adult migrants,
- offers a set of charters establishing the relevant principles and reference standards.

iii) *Language tests for social cohesion and citizenship – an outline for policy makers*, ALTE Authoring Group (Association of Language Testers in Europe)

This text

- offers professional guidance based on good testing practice so as to ensure that the needs of migrants are met;
- emphasises the importance of test fairness when tests are related to migration, residency or citizenship;
- refers to a number of easily-available quality standards to be adhered to in developing and administering language tests;
- illustrates how different elements of the testing process may be related to an ethical standards framework.

iv) *Language learning, teaching and assessment and the integration of adult immigrants. The importance of needs analysis*, Piet van Avermaet and Sara Gysen

This text

- stresses the importance of taking account of migrants' language learning needs from a societal perspective;
- explains how communication needs can be identified and described, and can serve as a basis for the development and delivery of language programmes;
- explains how to take into account the perceived needs of migrants as well as of the host community.

v) *Tailoring language provision and requirements to the needs and capacities of adult migrants*, Hans-Jürgen Krumm and Verena Plutzar

This text

- gives an insight into the complexity of the linguistic identities of migrants, which result from the psychological and social conditions under which migration takes place;
- shows trends in integration policies and their effects on language support programmes for adult migrants over the last decade;
- identifies aspects of language programmes which do not meet the linguistic needs of adult migrants, for example the negative effects of testing for integration purposes, and outlines alternatives;
- describes which language programmes are needed to support social cohesion and ensure democratic citizenship for migrants.

Case studies

- vi) *Responding to the language needs of adult refugees in Ireland: an alternative approach to teaching and assessment* (David Little)
- vii) *The role of literacy in the acculturation process of migrants* (Hervé Adami)
- viii) *Language Learning in the Context of Migration and Integration – Challenges and Options for Adult Learners* (Verena Plutzer and Monika Ritter)
- ix) *Education: Tailor-made or one-size-fits-all? A project commissioned by the Nederlandse Taalunie* (ITTA/Elwine Halewijn and CTO/Annelies Houben, Heidi De Niel)
- x) *Living together in diversity - Linguistic integration in Flanders* (Reinhilde Pulinx)