

The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants: towards the evaluation of policy and practice

Opening remarks

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Your welcome presence in such numbers at this conference is further evidence of the increasing importance that member states are according to language policies for integration purposes. The Council of Europe wishes to support you with the development and implementation of your policies and practices, drawing on its wide experience and its European reference instruments in the field of both languages and migration.

This conference builds on the first event held in 2008 when we carried out our first survey of language policies related to migration in member states. We examined language policy guidelines and a toolkit to support implementation which we drafted to promote high quality, needs-based language support programmes and appropriate forms of assessment of language learning outcomes.

In this follow-up conference our aim is to increase awareness of the benefits of evaluating of policies and practices, looking critically at their quality and relevance, their effectiveness and efficiency, while ensuring that they reflect our shared values and principles - respect for human rights, non-discrimination, respect for the dignity of each individual. This conference is an opportunity to share our experiences and expertise in approaches to evaluation while looking at our policies and practices from an ethical and human rights viewpoint.

Policies can impact on human rights because of the high stakes situations which effect the lives of individual migrants directly concerned by family reunification, access to residence, citizenship and the labour market. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in its recent Recommendation and Report - *Migrants and refugees: a continuing challenge for the Council of Europe* (Rec 1917, 2010) - has reminded us quite forcefully of the centrality of this human dimension in recalling that 'migration is about People as much as processes'.

Here in the AGORA building (its name means a Forum) we are offering a pan-European forum for dialogue and mutual support, a platform for sharing experiences, expertise and best practices among our member states and indeed beyond - migration is a global issue and we are pleased that Canada is also a participant in our deliberations.

In the interests of coherence and effectiveness, the Council of Europe is combining its *acquis* in language policy and practice with its *acquis* in migration policy and practice- the Language Policy Division in DG IV and the Migration Division in DG III are co-organisers.

Speaking from a languages perspective, 2010 marks fifty years of languages work at the Council, supporting states in developing and implementing language policies in field of education. Undoubtedly one of our best known recent reference instruments is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is particularly relevant to our discussions here today. It has become a world-wide reference instrument for making decisions on language learning, teaching and assessment, and, as our surveys show, it is now widely used as the basis

for language training for migrants and for defining language levels required for entry, residence and citizenship. This conference offers us an opportunity to critically evaluate our use of this reference framework in adult migration contexts.

Our work in migration also includes support for member states with language policies and practices for the successful integration in education systems of children of migrant origin and we are developing reference tools for that purpose. This also requires an evaluation dimension - one which can have the added benefit of providing valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the education system overall.

The Language Policy Division also provides expert assistance to countries (and cities or regions) in evaluating their language education policy and practice. This is not an external evaluation but Council of Europe assistance with self-evaluation.

Looking at the subject of evaluation in the context of this conference, the pre-conference questionnaires that you completed reveal that the evaluation of language policy and practice in some form or other has been accorded high priority by some countries, but that some others have not yet managed to devote so much time or resources to this crucial area. A glance at some monitoring reports by our European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) confirms the need to pay close attention to evaluation. In certain countries, for example, it is considered necessary

- to ensure a more coherent and coordinated structure for language provision
- to focus more strongly on assessing migrants language needs
- to intensify efforts to ensure that language training is of good quality
- to offer more incentives for language learning and to review certain measures that may be disproportionate and have a discriminatory or counter-productive impact....

This last point serves as a salient reminder that, in the context of the broader goal of integration, we need to ensure that language requirements / obligations do not reach the point where they can cause undue anxiety, even resentment and consequently seriously discourage migrants from learning the language. We know that motivation is a vital factor in successful language learning.

If evaluation of the language dimension is to feed into the broader and much more complex and challenging task of evaluating integration *per se*, we need to bear in mind that data gathered on language learning by migrants – reaching a specified CEFR level of proficiency - is exactly that: valuable data on the success of language support initiatives which are an important enabling factor in the ongoing process of integration. However, this in itself does not necessarily provide clear evidence of actual integration as there is no simple one to one relationship between a specific level of the CEFR and integration which is a process with different stages.

As this is a two-way process it is important to focus evaluation on the reactions of both the migrants and the native population. This implies an examination of the extent to which the native population accepts in a positive way the efforts of migrants to learn and use the language, however imperfectly, and whether they show goodwill towards the languages spoken by migrants. The native population needs to see the plurilingual repertoire of the migrants – which

they are developing further in learning the new language - as an asset, an enrichment and a potentially valuable addition (in economic as well as cultural terms) to the linguistic capital of the country. Education and the media can do much to promote such intercultural attitudes.

This conference provides us with ample opportunity to reflect together on principled approaches to good practice in evaluation. We took note of some criticisms that there was not sufficient time for discussion at the last conference and have tried to remedy that with two sessions of group work at this event. We also hope that by tomorrow afternoon you will have had time to reflect on how best the Council of Europe can respond to your needs in the future, bearing in mind our specific added value with regard to policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

In conclusion, Philia Thalgott, with Sergey Khrychikov and the Co-ordinating Group have worked hard to ensure that you will have a fruitful and enjoyable conference. I am sure that your active participation will be a just reward for their dedicated efforts.