



Language Support for Migrants *A Council of Europe Toolkit*

Introduction to the second series – Tools 40-45

Discovering migrants' needs

The aim of this series of six tools is to offer guidelines and practical materials for managing the so-called 'welcome phase', i.e. the first meetings with migrants newly enrolled at the centre where teachers and volunteers work. The series aims to offer guidance to those providing language support for migrants about the following:

1. having a first short meeting with individual migrants in the form of an interview (tool 31)
2. finding out about their language profile and the languages they know (tool 40)
3. finding out about their level of literacy in the languages they know (tools 40 and 42)
4. finding out about their existing competences in the target language (tool 40 in relation to oral skills; tool 42 in relation to written skills; tool 41 in terms of self-assessment)
5. finding out what they consider to be their most urgent communicative needs in the target language (tool 41)
6. collecting information about how they learn (tool 43)

Using this series of tools should generate a record of what teachers and volunteers have discovered about each learner's language profile (tool 44) and their backgrounds (tool 45).

Where feasible, this process and the completed forms should enable decisions to be made about forming of groups of learners with shared needs and interests, a similar literacy profile, as well as similar competences in the target language.

These six tools may be used in a sequence or separately. If you plan to use them as a series it is recommended that you use them in the sequence in which they are presented below.

Some points to bear in mind

It is important to remember that many migrants:

- can speak several languages (i.e. they are plurilingual)
- may be able to speak a language but not write it
- may have had very formal education or none at all, and so may feel uncomfortable answering questions about their education
- may not have had schooling in their first or main language
- may have a highly developed level of literacy in their own language, but may be new to the script of the target language
- may be highly qualified professionals
- migrants, especially refugees, who have had difficult experiences, need to feel welcome and reassured. Learning the language of the host country may not be their first priority.

It is therefore important:

1. not to make any assumptions, e.g. related to literacy, school/educational experience, qualifications or work experience;
2. to try to obtain any information already gathered about learners (e.g., previous schooling, health and other special needs etc.) before meeting them to discuss their language needs.

Checking availability

It's a good idea to check migrants' availability and whether they need any particular support to attend language activities. For example, some parents/carers with children may only be able to attend if there is childcare available or if their children can stay with them during the session. Other migrants may be working part time and/or may have transportation difficulties due to distance and the cost of public transport.

Some general guidelines

Here are some points to bear in mind when using the tools in this series.

- Adapt the contents of the tools to the target language, the context (country, region, etc.) and the specific needs of the learners, taking into account the cultural content of learning materials, as well as intercultural aspects of interaction with and between learners.
- Be sensitive to the learners' feelings and choose topics and pictures carefully.
- Be aware of learners' possible special needs, in particular eventual eyesight and hearing problems.
- Reassure the learners before using each tool by pointing out e.g. *"This is a useful activity to help me get to know you and your language needs"*.