

### Development of complementary online education in regional or minority languages

Online learning has the potential to provide diverse groups of people the opportunity to participate in education at various levels. Regional or minority language speakers may take a course online for a variety of reasons such as being in lockdown because of a health crisis, emergency or conflict situation, living in a remote area where face-to-face classes are not easily accessible or are not organised because of a lack of teachers or insufficient number of children, having an itinerant lifestyle, following a busy work schedule, or simply wishing to improve personal skills. Teaching in or of regional or minority languages is part of the educational obligations of Council of Europe member states party to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML).

Successful online teaching of regional or minority languages or various school subjects in those languages requires changes in teaching methods as compared to face-to-face classroom activities, with a view to keeping learners truly motivated and engaged. Both educators and learners are expected to be innovative and creative, and to become even more active participants in educational processes. In the opinion of the ECRML Committee of Experts, states parties to the Charter should develop comprehensive strategies for distance education, to complement physical courses in and of regional or minority languages, especially for children and young people at the age of compulsory education for whom school has strong social interaction and integration dimensions. Such a strategy should ensure basic and further teacher training in order to familiarise teachers with pedagogically sound methods for effective online teaching. State authorities should build the capacity of all stakeholders to create conditions for open access and use of online learning tools as well as quality contents in regional or minority languages. They should, in particular, take into account the specific needs in terms of IT equipment and the internet access of the most disadvantaged groups of learners.

### Open learning and open access

Open learning is an approach to education that represents a real added value for some aspects of the fulfilment of undertakings of every state party to the Charter relating to education at all stages, including adult and continuing education. It seeks to remove all barriers to learning, while continuing to provide learners with a reasonable chance of success in an education and training system responding to their specific needs and wishes in multiple areas of learning. The Committee of Experts therefore notes with interest the ongoing adaptations in education when and where face-to-face learning for regional or minority language speakers cannot be organised for administrative, organisational or health-related reasons.

The alternative schooling put in place during the COVID-19 crisis can be seen as a timely development potentially valid for the future as an option and as a complement to face-to-face education. In this context, and bearing in mind insufficient availability of teaching materials in regional or minority languages noticed during several monitoring cycles, the Committee of Experts would welcome public financing of the development of quality open access textbooks in all languages protected under the Charter. Such textbooks, registered under open licenses, should be made accessible online for the use of pupils, students,

teachers and the larger public. They can be distributed in print, open educational resources or audio formats to be downloaded or purchased at little or no cost for the users.

Free access to teaching materials in regional or minority languages can reinforce cross-border co-operation and mutual understanding that are at the core of the Charter. Open access to educational resources, their re-use and re-purpose can call for and enhance open pedagogy used by teachers from various countries. Closer ties can be set up, and better teacher training can be developed for each regional or minority language, for example via MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) or specific webinars.

### Monitoring online education

The protection and promotion of European linguistic cultural heritage as well as education in or of regional or minority languages as enshrined in the Charter are at the centre of the ECRML Committee of Experts objectives. At each monitoring cycle, the Committee assesses the implementation of Article 7 in every monitored state party as well as, if appropriate, of chosen provisions of Article 8 on education concerning languages protected under Part III of the Charter. The Charter is an evolving legal instrument that can guide further developments in teaching of and in regional or minority languages. Through its monitoring work, the Committee of Experts will promote genuine equality of opportunities in access to education by means of information technologies, and encourage the tolerance and participation of various stakeholders.

### Useful links:

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/official-texts>
- ECRML resources webpage, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/resources>, in particular under “Publications”
  - o [New technologies, new social media and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#)
  - o [Educational Toolkit](#)
  - o [The protection of children’s rights under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages \(ECRML\)](#)
- Council of Europe platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/platform>
- [Graz Centre](#)
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/learning-resources>
- [Council of Europe responses to Covid-19:](#)  
[Such as statements by](#)
  - o [the Secretary General,](#)
  - o [Chair of the ECRML Committee of Experts,](#)
  - o [Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities \(FCNM\),](#)
  - o [Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity & Inclusion \(CDADI\), etc.](#)

