

Home languages

[Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec 2022\)1 on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture](#)

Measures

b. ix. Explore ways of including home languages – signed as well as spoken – that are not part of the official curriculum in the educational process and, where appropriate, provide formal recognition and certification of those languages

What is it about?

Home languages are understood as the languages used for communication in the home and those acquired in early childhood, including sign languages. The term refers to any language or languages used in a domestic context. The Council of Europe advises that these languages, especially those spoken by linguistic minorities or migrants, should be acknowledged in schools as an integral part of learners' linguistic repertoires. Plurilingual and intercultural education benefits from recognising and valuing home languages within the school community. These languages can be incorporated into the school environment by encouraging their use throughout the school, by offering them as subjects of study (e.g. in CLIL) or as media of instruction in other subjects, and by drawing on them as resources for learning additional languages. They can also be included within initiatives that link formal and non-formal learning, in which learners and their families are invited to participate actively.

Why is this important and what can be done?

Learners who receive schooling in a language that is not part of their repertoire should not be discriminated against by the education system. Efforts must be made to make room for home languages in the curriculum as well as within a framework of a plurilingual school policy. The curriculum can include at least optional teaching of these languages, organized in cooperation with the families and relevant cultural associations. When teaching additional languages and the language of schooling as a subject, learners' home languages constitute a resource for

learning, particularly in the form of comparisons between languages (Rec. 2022, p. 34). School leaders, therefore, should ensure that teachers allow learners to use their home languages in the classroom, even though the teachers themselves do not understand those languages.

See also Toolbox Entry on [Whole-school approach](#).

Council of Europe resources for policy/ decision makers

Resource 1: [From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education: Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe](#)

The Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe supports Member States in creating inclusive language policies that promote linguistic diversity, plurilingualism, social cohesion, and equal access to language learning. It offers practical guidance for well-designed language education, based on clear principles and democratic values, with a focus on effective implementation through broad social acceptance.

See especially Chapter 1: Language Policies and Language Education Policies in Europe - particularly 1.1.2 *National cohesion and linguistic minorities*, and 1.1.3 *Migrants: new linguistic minorities, new linguistic rights?* The principles of democratic management of language diversity outlined in the chapters, can be applied to design curricula.

Resource 2: [A Handbook for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training. The Language Dimension in All Subjects](#)

The Handbook develops responses to the current challenges of education systems highlighting the importance of language not just as a separate subject in school, but in all subjects across the curriculum.

See especially chapter 10 on curriculum development and section 5.3 that provides provisions for disadvantaged learners with no or very limited proficiency in the language(s) of schooling.

Resource 3: [Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education](#)

The Guide serves as a resource for shaping plurilingual and intercultural language education policies and for embedding such approaches across curricula. It presents key issues and principles of curriculum design from a plurilingual and intercultural perspective and explains how to identify, integrate, and sequence relevant content and goals throughout the different stages of education.

See especially **Section 3.7.2:** Diversity of children from migrant backgrounds.

Council of Europe resources for teacher educators/ pedagogical advisors

Resource 1: [Developing teacher competences for pluralistic approaches. Tools for teacher education](#)

Building on the ECML projects [Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to languages and cultures \(FREPA/CARAP\)](#) and [A guide to teacher competences for languages in education](#), this ECML resource website offers two types of tools to aid the development of teacher education programmes and courses – including the integration of home languages: a [Reference framework of teacher competences for pluralistic approaches \(FTC-PA\)](#) and [sequences of tasks for the development of these competences](#). The tools proposed on the resource website aim to complement the FREPA by focusing on helping teacher educators to develop teacher competences that facilitate integration of pluralistic approaches in language education, as well as in addressing the linguistic aspects of other subjects in the curriculum. The following teacher education materials may be especially relevant to the topic of language repertoires: [Awareness of and reflection on the plurilingual and multicultural profiles of learners](#) and [Confidence in one's ability to work with unfamiliar languages](#) in 'Commitment to values and principles', and [Reflecting on the links between learners' language repertoires and their productions in the target language](#) in "Didactic and pedagogical competence".

Resource 2: [Resources for assessing the home language competences of migrant pupils \(RECOLANG\)](#)

The ECML resource RECOLANG provides a set of values, principles and criteria for the assessment of home languages. These are based on a series of examples of existing assessment practices that have been used with migrant learners in secondary education. The overall aim is to support the social and institutional recognition of home languages and to enhance learners' plurilingual repertoires.

Resource 3: [European Language Portfolio](#)

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) enables learners to document their language skills, learning experiences, and cultural knowledge. It supports learner autonomy, plurilingualism, and intercultural competence. The ELP includes a Language Passport (a summary of language proficiency), a Language Biography (tools for reflection, goal-setting, and self-assessment), and a Dossier that encourages learners to document achievements gained both in and outside formal education.

Student teachers should be introduced to the ELP and the use of the ELP (see [European Language Portfolio. Using the ELP](#)): The individual's plurilingual repertoire can be described, planned, reflecting upon and assessed in the [Language Passport](#) and the [Language Biography](#). It can be documented and illustrated in the [Dossier](#).

Further resources

For teacher educators two other resources could be used: The virtual open course for primary school – [EducoMigrant](#) – and the [MARILLE](#) resource, aimed at secondary school, support (future) teachers to reflect on professional practices, to discover innovative and inclusive strategies and to deepen their understanding of working with learners from diverse backgrounds.