

PROVIDING LANGUAGE SUPPORT TO MIGRANTS

A guide to using the Council of Europe toolkit to train teachers and volunteers



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Abstract

Based on the Council of Europe's Toolkit for providing language support to migrants of all ages, this Guide offers a framework for teacher education and training initiatives which aim to help educators to develop the awareness and skills needed to support migrants as they learn the language of their new host community.

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All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Education Department
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France
E-mail: education@coe.int

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
INVENTORY OF KEY ISSUES TO BE EXPLORED BY PARTICIPANTS	7
1. The challenges of providing language support to migrant learners	7
2. Helping participants to familiarise themselves with the languages of the migrant learners they work with and to find out more about these languages	9
3. Supporting migrants' learning of the language or one of the languages of the host county	9
4. Intercultural management of otherness in the context of democratic culture	11

Introduction

Teaching the language of the new host country to migrant adults and younger learners, to speakers of other languages with a migrant background and migrant children in compulsory schooling requires a complex and specific set of educational skills. Teachers providing language support for these learners need special consideration, especially if they are primarily subject teachers and have less experience of second language teaching. The same is true of volunteers providing language support to migrants, especially if they have not received training as teachers or if they have little experience of working with such learners.

The resources offered in the Council of Europe [Toolkit](https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/toolkit-2024) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/toolkit-2024> are 'ready to use', and that is their primary function. But many of the tools, especially those in categories A and B ('raising awareness' and 'preparation and planning'), also provide a basis for professional learning, enabling volunteers and those teachers who have limited experience of working with migrants to reflect individually and collectively on the use of the tools and on the approaches to providing support which they need to adopt. With the help of teacher educators or trainers, they have an opportunity to go back to and deepen their understanding of the educational and pedagogical principles that using tools in the Toolkit implies and to develop not only practical skills but also a cultural framework for this kind of language education.

During the piloting of various tools in the Toolkit in schools (particularly in Liguria), the experience of using these tools in numerous classrooms to evaluate their relevance provoked a range of reactions among the teachers concerned. In many cases second language teachers and mother tongue teachers felt the need to reassess certain principles already known to them from their earlier training. They were able to appreciate the importance of these principles for their learners, or rather they understood more clearly their crucial role.

The tools in the Toolkit were developed according to fundamental principles of language teaching (notably plurilingual education), and they are therefore often underpinned by didactic theory. They also raise general didactic questions and thus provide teachers and volunteers who are providing linguistic support to migrants (LSM) with a basis for insightful reflection as part of their continuing professional development.

In summary, the Toolkit contains resources not only for providing language support to migrant learners but also for their educators' bottom-up professional learning. This Guide offers a practical outline of the Toolkit's potential uses for this purpose.

Using the Guide

The Guide assumes that teachers and volunteers giving language support to migrants can be offered professional learning opportunities to develop the awareness, understanding and skills essential for their LSM work. Depending on the context and the funding available, these professional learning opportunities may be offered in various forms:

- ▶ a structured training programme led by a teacher educator or a teacher who is experienced in the field of LSM
- ▶ a short series of training and discussion sessions that are provided face-to-face or online
- ▶ a module of a wider teacher education programme for novice teachers
- ▶ a self-study programme with periodic supervision
- ▶ and so on.

The aim of this Guide is to provide suggestions about using the tools in the Toolkit and other useful resources for training and professional learning purposes.

- ▶ It systematically lists general didactic issues relevant to the linguistic support of migrants, whether adults or young people.

- ▶ Each issue is briefly described.
- ▶ In each case, several resources in the Toolkit that are best suited to addressing these issues from a professional learning perspective are listed, and there are also sometimes recommendations about relevant resources resulting from projects run by the Council of Europe and by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML).

The following approach to using the Guide is recommended:

- ▶ Those responsible for organising the training or professional learning opportunities for educators should familiarise themselves with the issues raised in sections 1 to 4. These can be addressed in any order and should be selected according to the priorities in given contexts. It may well be useful to consult organisers of LSM and educators themselves ("**the participants**") in the selection process.
- ▶ Depending on the time available and the needs of the participants, one or two of the tools

suggested in each case can be selected and worked on. Participants can then be invited to look at other tools in the list in their own time, or members of the participant group could select different tools and be prepared to comment on the topics addressed.

- ▶ The teachers/volunteers participating in the training programme should, if possible, try out the tools selected, or they can be described and commented on by people who have actually used the tools.
- ▶ This can be followed by an open discussion, which need not necessarily be based on educational principles or didactic theory.
- ▶ If participants are familiar with them, the theoretical principles underlying the form and content of the selected tools can be elicited, or these principles can be briefly described to encourage critical reflection on which educational, pedagogical and didactic framework is most appropriate when working with the tools in question.

Inventory of key issues to be explored by participants

Below is an inventory of issues and questions relevant to the linguistic support of migrant adults and young people from migrant backgrounds. In each case a list of tools is suggested. Those most relevant to the context and to the interests of participants can be selected as a starting point for awareness-raising and training activities.

1. The challenges of providing language support to migrant learners

1.1. Reflection on some key differences between foreign language teaching and supporting migrants learning the language of their host country: the role and responsibilities of the educator working with migrants, helping learners to adjust to their new situation, the kind of language migrant learners need to learn, avoiding pressure on the learners, the approach to learners' errors etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

2. *Supporting recently arrived migrants who are adjusting to their new situation*
3. *Some considerations to be aware of when working with recently arrived migrants*
4. *What is involved in providing language support for recently arrived migrants*
5. *Some points to bear in mind when providing language support for migrants*
7. *Migrants as language users and learners*

1.2. Encouraging participants to reflect on the aims of language support for their learners and the approaches and resources to be used, depending on the ages of the migrants: reflection on the kinds of language learning activities (in the new language and/or where possible, in the first language) which can be used to develop learners' self-esteem and their confidence in their own ability to learn, to help them manage anxiety or even trauma relating to migration (e.g. through autobiographical anecdotes), and to overcome any feeling of being outsiders (e.g. due to their lack of knowledge of the rules of communication in the new culture etc.).

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

16. *Taking account of diversity when providing language support for migrants*
18. *Being aware and taking account of the uneven linguistic profiles of migrants*

20. *Setting objectives for language support for migrants who are beginners in the new language*

6. *Supporting migrants of different ages who are learning a new language*

1.3. Encouraging participants to reflect on ways of defining learning objectives: using descriptors from benchmarks such as the CEFR and LASLLIAM; the suitability of these descriptors for planning language support for migrant learners in different educational contexts; the challenges for non-language specialists in using them; defining objectives by content and focus (grammar, vocabulary).

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

10. *Supporting migrants with low literacy*
20. *Setting objectives for language support for migrants who are beginners in the new language*
22. *Planning language support at a very elementary level*
25. *Functions and expressions useful in subject teaching with young migrants*
26. *Dealing with grammar when providing language support*

See also the [CEFR Reference Level Descriptions \(language by language\)](#)

1.4. Encouraging participants to reflect on the teaching activities that are feasible within the overall number of hours available for LSM (especially in language support programmes offered by institutions), and to decide which activities are suitable given the educational background of the learners and the number of learners in the group: what objectives are realistically achievable? How do these compare to the official objectives of the programme? What aims should be prioritised? Encourage participants to give priority to oral interactive and written activities, whole group work, collaborative activities in small groups or pairs and individual tasks, etc. (see also 1.5 below).

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

12. *Taking account of diversity when providing language support for migrants*
17. *A checklist for reflecting on differences within groups of migrant learners*
19. *Reflecting on your language support work*
22. *Planning language support at a very elementary level*

54. *Introduction to using scenarios in language support for migrants*

1. 5. Encouraging participants to reflect on the selection and adaptation of teaching activities for language support sessions of different durations: planning, structuring and managing short sessions (30-40 minutes), medium-length sessions (50-60 minutes) or longer sessions (up to 90 minutes). Reflection on the possible options: individual regular sequences of activity (to aid learners' sense of security), sequences of activities involving several kinds of focus, (e.g. strategies for learning communicative skills); out-of-class breakout sessions not following a fixed pattern; coherent didactic sequences lasting one or more hour-long sessions (where there is a possible risk of diluting the methodology), etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

22. *Planning language support at a very elementary level*

23. *Finding out about situations in which migrants need to use the target language*

See also CEFR chapter 4: *Language use and the language user/learner*.

1.6. Encouraging participants to reflect on activities suitable for teaching the host country language as part of the programme for teaching the national/official language (i.e. the language of schooling) on courses intended for all learners (including those who are native speakers): the nature of these activities, their compatibility and complementarity with those used for learning the national language, etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

24. *Accustoming young migrants to the language needed when studying school subjects*

25. *Functions and expressions useful in subject teaching with young migrants.*

See also the ECML resource: *Language skills for successful subject learning* <https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2012-2015/LanguageDescriptors/tabid/1800/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

1.7. Encouraging participants to reflect on communication within the learner group: turn-taking and opportunities for learner intervention, giving instructions and guidance, managing behaviour, giving feedback on formative assessment, the role of language in assuring learner wellbeing etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

26. *Dealing with grammar when providing language support*

27. *Assessing language learning and offering feedback in a supportive way*

46. *Breaking the ice and building group confidence*

47. *Using an 'about me' wheel with migrants*

1.8. Critical analysis of published resources available for language support: evaluation criteria, adaptability to specific groups of learners, limits of flexibility; possible forms of adaptation: selection of elements, redesign of elements, adopting the suggested approach but not of the associated contents, adopting support materials but not the guidelines for use, etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

28. *Selecting and using texts for listening at elementary level*

29. *Selecting and using texts for reading at elementary level*

54. *Introduction to using scenarios in language support for migrants*

See also resources offered by FIDE, Switzerland https://fide-info.ch/fr/ressources-didactiques/video_et_textes

1.9. Encouraging participants to reflect on the systems and approaches to be used to encourage learners to reflect on their learning and assess their own progress.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

51. *Encouraging migrants to think about their learning*

52. *Encouraging migrants to think about learning activities*

53. *Encouraging migrant to assess their own progress in language learning*

1.10. Stimulating participants' reflection on how to encourage their learners to continue learning autonomously in parallel with organized language support activities: identifying relevant resources and assessing the potential reasons for using them, their reliability and adaptability, as well as any risks involved; autonomous learning activities that can be useful depending on the context (e.g. watching cartoons for youngsters, news bulletins for adults, etc.)

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

31. *Supporting migrants in taking advantage of opportunities to read in public spaces*

32. *Using cartoons to help migrants to learn a new language*

33. *Accustoming migrants to watching the news*

2. Helping participants to familiarise themselves with the languages of the migrant learners they work with and to find out more about these languages

2.1. Gathering information on learners' languages to get a general idea of how they work, where they are used, their history, etc. Reflection on the information gathered and its possible use with learners.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

12. *Arabic: some information*

13. *Kurdish: some information*

14. *Persian languages: some information*

15. *Somali: some information*

Selected public resources:

<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language>,

Search by language on Wikipedia: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_de_langues

Linguistic planning around the world: <https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/>

2.2. Gathering information about the languages spoken by learners and their families: several languages (mother's language, father's language), common languages, uses of the host country language in the family, etc. Participant reflection on the information gathered and reports on discussions with learners (if their level allows). Reflection on language diversity within groups of learners as regards the languages they bring with them, their competence in the host country language and in other languages. Implications of this diversity for language support activities.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

11. *Taking advantage of the first languages of migrants*

16. *Taking account of diversity when providing language support for migrants*

17. *A checklist for reflecting on differences within groups of migrant learners*

18. *Being aware and taking account of the uneven linguistic profiles of migrants*

See also the ECML's Virtual Open Course (VOC): [Collaborative Community Approach to Migrant Education Sections 6 and 7](#)

2.3. Practical activity: describe your own language repertoire and write your language autobiography; compare these with those of other participants: how you learned the languages (with the family, at school, self-taught, etc.), their importance for work, their emotional value, their importance for your identity, etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

8. *Creating a plurilingual self-portrait: a reflective task for you*

18. *Being aware and taking account of the uneven linguistic profiles of migrants*

2.4. Practical activities to find out more about your learners' skills in these languages and about learners' previous language learning experiences (in their countries of origin): their level of literacy, their education, etc.; their knowledge of and skills in the host country language; their knowledge of and profile in other foreign languages, etc.; gathering information about learners' reactions to the (language) teaching methods they have experienced (body language, gestures, communication in the classroom, classroom routines, etc.) and especially their views on learning tasks organised by their teachers (writing, grammar, memorization, homework etc.): what helped, what did not help, what was missing, what do they expect from their language support etc.? Reflection on the information gathered and follow-up discussions with learners (if their level allows). Consequences for the planning of teaching and learning activities.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

40. *The first interview*

41. *Finding out what migrants can already do in the target language and what they need to be able to do*

42. *Finding out about migrants' literacy and language profile in the target language*

43. *Finding out more about migrants' own language resources and skills*

44. *Migrants' language profile*

3. Supporting migrants' learning of the language or one of the languages of the host country

3.1. Encouraging participants to reflect on the language needs of the learners who they are (or will be) working with: 'emergency' language learning for newly arrived migrants, literacy and second language courses, preparation for compulsory language exams, professional orientation for those seeking work, mastery of the national/official language of schooling for school-age learners. Reflection on suitable approaches: functional/action-oriented activities: social scenarios, realistic simulations, authentic texts used for authentic purposes etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

10. *Supporting migrants with low literacy*

20. *Setting objectives for language support for migrants who are beginners in the new language*

37. *Supporting migrants who need to look for training opportunities*

38. *Supporting migrants who need to describe their general skills when applying for a job*

See also ECML *Language for Work* resources: <https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Home/tabid/3151/language/en-GB/Default.aspx> and <https://languageforwork.ecml.at/ResourceCentre/tabid/4074/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

3.2. Reflection on the teaching of communication skills: the importance of developing communication strategies and of planning activities that are realistic and plausible, (for example, writing texts with a social function vs. creative writing), working on social interaction in predictable situations, planning activities and selecting resources containing different types of written and spoken language etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

28. *Selecting and using texts for listening at elementary level*

29. *Selecting and using texts for reading at elementary level*

30. *Selecting pictures and 'realia' for language activities: some guidelines*

31. *Supporting migrants in taking advantage of opportunities to read in public spaces*

See also CEFR chapter 4: *Language use and the language user/learner*

3.3. Reflection on the teaching of formal language skills: selection criteria (e.g. vocabulary), forms of progression (in relation to the development of learners' individual interlanguages), reliability of reference descriptions (linguistics of languages vs traditional grammar), and their usefulness to learners, learners' ability to reflect on metalinguistics and to discuss grammar, use of sequences of reflective activities with learners, etc.; contrastive approaches to language learning etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

25. *Functions and expressions useful in subject teaching with young migrants*

26. *Dealing with grammar when providing language support*

3.4. Reflecting on the uses of family languages and languages of origin in language support including in the school environment: the languages used in the family have a place in language support, especially at school; how to take advantage of them, at least occasionally; helping participants to understand and explore the value of including these languages in language support sessions for those who speak them as well as for other learners; learning the

host country language via detours through other languages learners know, comparative/contrastive approaches focusing on vocabulary, syntax, common expressions, texts, etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

11. *Taking advantage of the first languages of migrants*

79. *Providing language support for migrant families*

3.5. Reflection activities focused on the language of school subjects: definition of 'academic discourse', its role in learning scientific content, its linguistic characteristics, overlap of language between subjects and terminology specific to each subject, helping learners to adjust to subject-specific language, etc.

Toolkit resource to use as a basis for these activities:

24. *Accustoming young migrants to the language needed when studying school subjects*

25. *Functions and expressions useful in subject teaching with young migrants*

See also the ECML resource: *Language skills for successful subject learning* <https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2012-2015/LanguageDescriptors/tabid/1800/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

3.6. Reflection on activities that help learners to improve and extend their vocabulary, and to remember and reuse vocabulary that they have begun to learn.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

34. *Ideas to support migrants' learning of basic vocabulary for everyday life*

35. *Techniques to aid vocabulary learning*

36. *Introducing basic vocabulary for expressing opinions and emotions*

3.7. Reflection on ways of developing a scenario based on learners' communicative needs and adapting it to their language level and interests.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

23. *Finding out about situations in which migrants need to use the target language*

41. *Finding out what migrants can already do in the target language and what they need to be able to do*

54. *Introduction to using scenarios in language support for migrants*

62. *Example of a scenario: Shopping in the host country*

4. Intercultural management of otherness in the context of democratic culture

4.1. Reflection on communicative cultures (1): conventions relating to oral interaction: modes of address, politeness, performance of speech acts, ellipsis and ‘unspoken’ language, turn taking, body language etc.; comparative analysis: ways of exploring and taking advantage of these cultural differences and similarities in language support.

Examples of Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

58. Scenario - Language needed to find one's way in town

61. Scenario - Talking about food

65. Scenario - Getting involved in lifelong learning

69. Scenario - Participating in meetings with school staff about one's children

See also the [CEFR Reference Level Descriptions \(language by language\)](#)

4.2. Reflection on communicative cultures (2): diversity of genres of written text and their names and forms: genres that do not have equivalents across languages; contrastive analysis of genres across languages, especially of academic discourse and textbook language (depending on the subject) (see also 3.5); ways of managing and taking advantage of these differences/similarities in language support.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

25. Functions and expressions useful in subject teaching with young migrants

29. Selecting and using texts for reading at elementary level

4.3. Reflection on ways of addressing the impact of societal similarities and differences on migrant learners in language support: exploration of the origins of specific societal customs in the receiving country: in the education system, the health system, political life, the world of work and economic life etc; also annually recurring events, geographical, social,

ideological and religious differences between generations, etc.; identifying reliable sources of information, ways of engaging learners' interest and encouraging reflection, etc.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

1. Supporting migrants in managing relations with people in a new context

2. Supporting recently arrived migrants who are adjusting to their new situation

4.4. Reflection on the issue of cultural differences and helping learners to deal with the surprise or shock that they experience when first encountering unfamiliar values, beliefs and customs: identification of key beliefs and values prevalent in the host country community, connections with participants' own beliefs and convictions; identification of most surprising elements for migrant learners. The importance of enabling learners to recognise and accept these cultural differences and to express their reactions (in their first language and/or in the language of the host country); the importance of identifying sources of possible misunderstandings of certain words and expressions; learners' unwillingness to accept how people communicate in the host country, or to explore beliefs and values that are different from or incompatible with their own. Managing these reactions to unfamiliarity through information exchange and dialogue based on democratic principles.

Toolkit resources to use as a basis for these activities:

1. Supporting migrants in managing relations with people in a new context

2. Supporting recently arrived migrants who are adjusting to their new situation

See also the Council of Europe's [Manual for the design of a training course on intercultural competence Part 2 – Concepts related to the Council of Europe intercultural integration model](#).

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.