



Language Support for Migrants *A Council of Europe Toolkit*

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

Aim: To suggest ways of supporting recently arrived migrants when they are making sense of their new circumstances and surroundings and to adjust to their new situation.

When they arrive in a new country it is common for migrants to feel various sorts of anxiety and apprehension about their unfamiliar surroundings. From an educational point of view, this 'culture shock' needs to be managed by the institutions or people concerned with their welfare.

Managing the unexpected reactions and curiosity that newly arriving migrants may experience when encountering new and unfamiliar circumstances is an integral part of intercultural education. The 'shock' that migrant learners experience may be a reaction to new discoveries about the host community and their living conditions. These may include:

- an unfamiliar educational culture
- food, the organisation of meals, mealtimes etc.
- the clothes people wear
- the most popular kinds of sports, games, or pastimes
- the media, such as local or national TV
- the organisation of leisure time, including national holidays; and so on.

Some general guidelines

Migrants' reactions to these kinds of discoveries are normally immediate and spontaneous. They often take the form of a judgement such as 'that's good' or a comparison with what they know, such as 'it's better than where I live'. To prevent these discoveries being either rejected as 'foreign' or being accepted uncritically, they need to be dealt with as part of your language support. This is best done in a language the learners know well. Below are some suggestions about how to do this.

- Find out about learners' reactions to their new circumstances and/or organise some time to enable them to talk about their feelings.
- Try to get them to express their views verbally in their own language (although there are likely to be problems understanding them) or in the language of the host community (although their knowledge of the language may be too limited).
- Gather some reliable information about the subject in question or, if feasible, ask the learners to do some basic research on it.
- Avoid talking about 'national characteristics' or under-estimating the diversity that exists within the host community.
- Avoid direct comparisons between the characteristics of the host community and those of the countries of origin as these could be misleading. Bring in at least one other point of comparison.
- Organise group discussion so as to bring the learners' different points of view to the fore.

- When leading the discussion, do not try to change learners' reactions; try instead to make them aware of the complexity of the topics being discussed and the reasons why more thoughtful reactions are needed.
- Give examples of the ways in which such reactions can affect relationships and democratic life, including in educational and/or work environments.