



Language Support for Migrants *A Council of Europe Toolkit*

Tool 31 - Supporting migrants in taking advantage of opportunities to read in public spaces

Aim: To suggest ways of using examples of the written language displayed in public spaces to encourage learners to read the new language.

Plentiful exposure to the language being learned is crucial for successful language learning (see also Tool 32 – *Using cartoons to help migrants to learn a new language* and Tool 33 - *Accustoming migrants to watching the news*).

Unless they are at school or college, migrant learners who are beginning to learn the language of their host country probably have few opportunities to read texts in that language. However, every day they see written texts around them in the streets and on the walls of the area where they live and on their journeys in town. These offer opportunities for them to develop their reading comprehension in the new language.

Suggestions for getting learners to read texts available in public spaces

- To help learners take advantage of these opportunities, ask them to take photos of words or short texts that they see around them, including signs, advertisements etc. in more than one language.
- Choose a few suitable ones and ask one or two learners who took photos to try to explain the meaning. Then, in pairs or small groups, learners can show each other the photos they took and explain where they took them and what they think the meaning of the words or texts are. You can go from group to group and answer any questions they may have.
- Select some of the more important images and get individuals to explain them or, where necessary, explain them yourself.
- Exploring the differences between such notices, signs and posters in one country as compared to those in other countries can provide good opportunities for learners to reflect on cultural differences and similarities. These comparisons are likely to be at an elementary level so some translation may be required.

The words and texts that learners collect on their phones may include the following:

- types of places: roads, streets, avenues, squares, paths, one-way street etc.
- the names of these: they may refer to famous people at local, national or international level, historical dates, or refer to a station, town hall, church, park, school etc.
- common names of shops: bakeries, grocers, butchers, shoe shops, department stores
- names of service providers including those indicated at the entrance to buildings: optician, doctor, dentist, chiropodist, lawyer, etc.
- public notices and signs: 'mind the step', 'exit', 'no entry', 'one-way', 'no parking' etc.
- signs and advertisements on buses, trams and trains about the next stop, buying tickets, local events etc.

Printed or hand-written texts may also be available. In this case, you just need to ask learners to collect them, identify the source, the author(s) and their purpose. These might include:

- notices and posters
- publicity for electoral candidates
- commemorative plaques (X was born/lived in this house/building)
- flyers or notices about items wanted or for sale, services offered such as painting, gardening, lost pets etc.
- hand-written graffiti and street art.

This kind of 'reading in the street' is also a good way of 'reading' or getting to know the environment and becoming part of the new community.