

Thematic toolkit: Language learning support

Introduction

The IncluCities thematic toolkits offer practical, tested guidance and inspiration to help cities to reach **European standards in key areas of migrant integration**.

The toolkits are designed primarily for **local governments**, and are particularly **useful for smaller local administrations in Europe** and beyond, as well as for **partners** such as NGOs.

The content of these toolkits results from the crucial part of the IncluCities project, the benchmarking done by seven associations of local and regional governments and eight cities, with the support of the consultancy MigrationWork. These benchmarks helped to define a work programme for the mentoring schemes.

In each toolkit you will find an IncluCities thematic benchmark **drawn from a Europe-wide review of cities' experience in working on each of the four themes:**

- 1 Gender-sensitive integration
- 2 Building a 'city for all'
- 3 Labour market integration
- 4 Language learning support

The IncluCities benchmarks are qualitative standards for integration policies based on good practice and accepted standards from across Europe. They are good tools for self-assessment and goal-setting.

They consist of a set of **key factors** that define the critical conditions for success. Each key factor is illustrated with a section **why and how, and guiding questions**. Where relevant, the key factors were illustrated with good practice examples from the city or association acting as a "mentor" in the project.

Additional factors help to specify the context in which the city operates.

Benchmark: Supporting language learning in formal and non-formal settings

- 1.** Leadership and public commitment **5**
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Rationale

Being able to express oneself in the host society's official language(s) is one of the most important, if not the single most important step in the integration process.

Language skills are a pre-condition for full participation and influence in many other domains, such as work, education and social interaction.

Many national and regional governments have set up programmes which support language learning, often in a package with civic education. While these programmes are an important resource for language learning, some of them do not seem to be flexible and specific enough to meet the needs of different target groups and life situations.

From this background, cities as places of arrival and city councils as the sphere of administration closest to their citizens have a role to play in coordinating the existing offers for language learning and ensuring that support is available and accessible to all.

The focus of this benchmark is language-learning opportunities for adult migrants in both formal, classroom type settings and in non-formal contexts, e.g. through volunteering. It includes face-to-face and ICT-based support.

Context factors for this benchmark:

- The distribution of competences and relations across levels of government
- The existence of a national or regional policy framework for integration that is supportive of the city's integration goals
- Migrant Population structure (educational background, qualifications, demographics, forced migrants)
- The city council's budget and human resources
- The existence of civil society language learning support initiatives
- Human Resources available in the city council
- The degree of coordination with other relevant stakeholders, including multi-level coordination



1

Key Factor Leadership and public commitment



Why and how? Political leaders are in a key position to stress the importance of all residents being able to communicate in the city's official language(s) for equal opportunities.

By making the support of language acquisition a priority, and stressing why it is an investment that will generate many positive returns (e.g. in terms of labour market integration or social interaction) leaders can ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to this goal and can mobilise other actors to participate in a collective effort to improve language-learning.

Leadership and commitment do not need to be limited to migrants' or the city's official language(s) but can also include supporting multilingualism.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Do political leaders publicly stress the importance of supporting learning of the city's official languages(s)?
- ✓ Do political leaders provide arguments (internally and to the wider public) about why this is important and why the city should have a role in this?



2

Key Factor

Mapping language learning needs and opportunities



Why and how? The city's role in ensuring access to language support for migrants should be based on evidence on language learning needs across different migrant profiles.

A needs assessment that draws on the perspective of migrants can identify aspirations, learning profiles, and available time with regard to language acquisition and perceptions of the existing course offer.

Through mapping these learning needs against an inventory of language learning opportunities, support gaps and coordination/information needs can be identified, which can help in defining the city's role and measures that should be prioritised.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Have you consulted with migrants on their language learning needs and aspirations, as well as their perception of the existing language support offer?
- ✓ Do you have an inventory of stakeholders and existing language learning opportunities offered in your city by different actors?



Good practice examples

- **CAMIM project** (House of Immersion): for mapping language-learning needs with migrants and stakeholders.



3

Key Factor

Defining actions to support language acquisition



Why and how? The needs analysis should lead to a set of actions to foster language acquisition that is properly resourced to ensure their implementation.

This can be done within the context of a wider integration strategy or in whatever form is most appropriate to the city's governance system.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Have you defined a series of actions to foster language learning including resources and responsible actors?
- ✓ Are these actions part of a policy document that has been adopted by the city council?



4

Key Factor

Coordination between providers of language learning opportunities



Why and how? The city should take up the role as a coordinator of the language learning offer on its territory.

Where other levels of government and non-governmental actors offer language learning opportunities, it is crucial to play a coordinating role with them and the language learning offers they provide.

Coordination can also lead to the design of a local service which centralises information and advice about language learning opportunities based on individual needs, thereby facilitating access to the best language support measures from all providers.



Guiding questions



Are you in contact with the actors implementing language learning opportunities in your city to understand their offer and coordinate with them?



Good practice examples

The municipality of Schaerbeek has a publicly available [list of courses](#) for alphabetisation and French language learning from different providers.



5**Key Factor****Flexible delivery in time and space of language learning support to adapt to different life circumstances**

Why and how? Flexible modes of delivery are crucial for adapting language learning support to the very diverse and often precarious life circumstances of newcomers - especially of the most disadvantaged and hard to reach groups.

Language learning opportunities should be flexible in adapting to language learners' different time budgets and cover different times of the day to make them combinable with work and care-duties.

The places where language learning takes place should be easy to reach and include neighbourhoods where migrants settle. Conducting language courses in facilities with low entry thresholds (e.g. libraries) can reduce barriers.

**Guiding questions**

- ✓ Is language learning support in your city provided in different neighbourhoods, at a wide variety of places, including in combination with other services?
- ✓ Are courses held at different times of the day (e.g. during school hours and in the evening?)
- ✓ Are there courses for different time budgets?
- ✓ Can people with care duties realistically attend courses?

**Good practice examples**

VIA Asbl works with different language operators (school partners) in different parts of the city to ensure that newcomers have access to a school facility that is close to their home (ex. less than 45 min).



6

Key Factor

Providing for different learning types and goals



Why and how? Migrants have a variety of educational and professional backgrounds, prior experience with language learning and linguistic backgrounds.

This means that the course offer should cover different learning speeds and levels, including entry-courses for people who cannot read or write or are unfamiliar with the Latin alphabet.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Does language learning support in your city cover all levels, from basic to advanced?
- ✓ Does the course organisation take into account different types of learners and learning speeds?
- ✓ Are there specific entry courses for people without reading or writing skills, or who are unfamiliar with the Latin alphabet?



Good practice examples

Schaerbeek: VIA provides classes at different entry levels, as many newcomers need alphabetisation to start, requiring 1 or 2 years to acquire this competence.



7

Key Factor

Combining language training with volunteer jobs, job placements and employment



Why and how? In the context of active labour market policies and in cooperation with employers, cities can provide language training for workers with a specific profile or aspiration.

This is a particularly useful option in labour market sectors with shortages in your city.

In addition to that, there is evidence that language learners are more motivated when the course content is linked to their professional profile.

Combining language with vocational training can help to overcome doubts of employers about whether migrants have sufficient language skills to fill vacancies.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Have you liaised with local employers to assess their interest in supporting on-the-job language training for migrants?
- ✓ Have you explored a vocational language-training offer combined with professional training in sectors with shortages in your city?



Good practice examples

Brussels region: The regional office for employment [Actiris](#) provides language classes linked to professional training (language learning according to the professional skills). VIA links up newcomers to these classes when they correspond to their needs.



8

Key Factor

Supporting volunteering and non-formal language learning



Why and how? Volunteer work offers a great potential for language learning. It can reach migrants who are not reached by or available for classroom-based learning and can provide highly personalised support.

There are a variety of settings in which volunteering can support language learning, including within existing services (e.g. drop-in cafés, community centres, cooking clubs, social support in working with migrants in the education and health sectors).

Volunteers can take up roles such as language buddies and mentors, tutors for small groups or assistants/coaches in formal language courses and carry language learning into the real world.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Are migrants in your city aware of opportunities?
- ✓ Are volunteer initiatives making efforts to engage migrants?
- ✓ Have you explored, together with volunteering initiatives how to support language learning in these initiatives?



Practical tips

Cities can run campaigns to recruit language volunteers and provide an information service for non-formal language learning opportunities.



Good practice examples

Through the [CAMIM](#) Project, Schaerbeek has set up a «Maison d'immersion» - a café where language learners can drop by and improve their French language skills in an informal context.



9

Key Factor

Drawing on digital learning tools and blended learning



Why and how? Digital learning tools such as online learning platforms, mobile applications and massive open online courses (MOOC) can be a useful and flexible addition to face-to-face formal and non-formal learning.

There is a variety of free or low-cost platforms, including ones specifically for refugees and migrants, which municipalities can build upon.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Have you identified high-quality online-learning tools which could be suitable to complement your city's offer for supporting language learning?
- ✓ Do existing language learning support offers in your city already use such online learning platforms?
- ✓ Which interfaces does your city need to provide to blend face-to-face learning with relevant online resources? (e.g. facilitators, technical support,...)



Practical tips

In order to have the best possible impact, online learning tools should not be too demanding on ICT skills and hardware and offer tutors



Good practice examples

[Brulingua online language learning app](#) for 3 official languages and English (free for Brussels Residents), initiated by Actiris employment service).



10

Key Factor

Governance / LRG associations improving the multi-level coordination of language learning support



Why and how? Local and regional government (LRG) associations are well placed to improve coordination between national and regional integration frameworks on the one side, and local policies on the other.

They can communicate unmet needs in language learning support for migrants to other levels of government and lobby for adequate resources to implement local-level policies.

Cities should use this channel to convey information about obstacles they encounter in developing an adequate local support for language learning.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Is your city in contact (directly or via the national LRG association) with the relevant level of government to coordinate language learning support?
- ✓ Have you made recommendations or reports to the regional or national level?



Good practice examples

VIA and [BAPA BXL](#), the French language community organisation [COCOF](#)



11

Key Factor Monitoring & Evaluation



Why and how? Courses should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure they are fit for purpose, benefit participants, and demonstrate improvement over time.

Beyond the question whether course objectives have been met, the benefits of language courses with regard to non-language integration objectives (e.g. labour market integration) are another important dimension of evaluation.

Evaluation should include feedback from all stakeholders, including course participants themselves.



Guiding questions

- ✓ Is the city aware of unmet language learning needs of its migrant population?
- ✓ Is your city aware of how the present language learning support measures work?
- ✓ Which quantitative and qualitative indicators do you use for evaluating this?
- ✓ Can the city demonstrate how it has used this information on improving language-learning support?



Practical tips

- The best moment to start defining an evaluation framework is when you start thinking about a new policy, i.e. with the needs analysis
- Use the capacity of external partners, from migrant organisations to evaluation experts to design your evaluation



The city of Jelgava, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, and the Schaerbeek municipality together with the Association of Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region (BRULOCALIS), contributed to the development of this thematic benchmark.



The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the oldest and broadest European association of local and regional governments. Its members consist of more than 60 national associations of municipalities and regions from 40 European countries. Together, these associations represent some 100,000 local and regional governments. www.cemr.eu

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The **IncluCities** project (2020-2023) aims to improve integration of third-country nationals in middle-sized cities through city-to-city cooperation. Eight municipalities, with varying degrees of integration-related experience, and their national associations of local and regional government participate in the project, led by CEMR and funded by the EU (AMIF). www.Includities.eu



MigrationWork is a non-profit consultancy helping communities, practitioners and policy-makers to respond to migration in ways that move towards integration. MW has long-standing experience in organising mutual learning between local practitioners across Europe. Their Europe-wide work is independent, evidence-based and draws on a combined track record of working with migration processes, its policy context and its practical challenges. www.migrationwork.org



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