



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Culture

Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies

Multilingualism policy

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Follow-up of the Action Plan on language learning and linguistic diversity National Report Template

Country**ITALY**.....

INTRODUCTION

The Action Plan for language learning and linguistic diversity invited Member States to take actions on various issues. This document lists these points for action. It follows the same order as the chapters of the Action Plan: *1.Lifelong language learning; 2.Better language teaching; 3.Building a language-friendly environment.* Chapter four invites you to outline the global national strategy on languages and, if Member States so wish, to provide information on other language initiatives which do not fit into the framework of the Action Plan and/or plans for multilingualism.

Some actions recommended by the more recent Communication on Multilingualism are also included in the relevant chapters. They are shadowed in grey and are optional. Although the time allowed for these actions is shorter, Member States have the possibility to report on their initial work on them.

The national report should be written by filling in this template. Each point is followed by some key questions which guide Member States in presenting their work in progress. It is not compulsory to answer each point. If some of them were not a priority at national level it should be mentioned and the point(s) skipped.

Once completed, the national report should be posted on CIRCA: http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/eac/languages/library?l=/actionsplans20042006/follow-up_national&vm=detailed&sb=Title

For more information, please post a message on the CIRCA language newsgroup (http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/eac/languages/newsgroups?n=europa.eac.languages.bulletin_board) or contact Patrizia Baralli or Luca Tomasi (see contact details at the end of the document).

1. LIFE-LONG LANGUAGE LEARNING

1.1. 'Mother tongue plus two other languages': making an early start

It is a priority for Member States to ensure that language learning in kindergarten and primary school is effective, for it is here that key attitudes towards other languages and cultures are formed, and the foundations for later language learning are laid. The European Council in Barcelona called for "further action ... to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age.

In implementing this commitment, most Member States will be called upon to make significant additional investments. In implementing their commitment to teach at least two foreign languages from a very early

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age, Member States should consider whether adjustments are necessary to primary school curricula, and whether provision for the training and deployment of additional specialist teaching staff and other teaching and learning resources in primary and pre-primary schools is adequate.

Member States are invited to review their current arrangements for early language learning in the light of best practice from across Europe; and implement the Conclusions of the Luxembourg Presidency concerning Content and Language Integrated Learning, including raising awareness of the benefits of this approach, exchanging information and scientific evidence on good CLIL practice and specific CLIL training for teachers.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

A foreign language has been introduced since the first year of the primary school. Moreover, in the framework of the autonomy of the schools, a second foreign language may be taught as an option.

An obstacle to the general introduction of a foreign language has been the lack of generalist teachers able to teach also a foreign language.

A general plan of language training for primary teachers has been set to overcome this problem.

A special project has been put forward in order to offer specific language tools and training for primary education ("Divertinglese"), involving TV and WEB. (see 2.2)

1.2. Language learning in secondary education and training

In secondary education or training young people complete the acquisition of the essential core of skills that will serve them throughout a lifetime of language learning. Member States agree that pupils should master at least two foreign languages, with the emphasis on effective communicative ability: active skills rather than passive knowledge. 'Native speaker' fluency is not the objective, but appropriate levels of skill in reading, listening, writing and speaking in two foreign languages are required, together with intercultural competencies and the ability to learn languages whether with a teacher or alone.

Member States should provide adequate information to parents about the choice of their child's first foreign language, and the flexibility of school curricula to permit the teaching of a wider range of languages.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

In middle schools two community languages are taught, while in upper secondary education one foreign language is usually offered.

Some types of secondary paths offer two or more languages.

1.3. Language learning in Higher Education

"Higher Education institutions play a key role in promoting societal and individual multilingualism. Proposals that each university implement a coherent language policy clarifying its role in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity, both amongst its learning community and in the wider locality, are to be welcomed. All students should study abroad, preferably in a foreign language, for at least one term, and should gain an accepted language qualification as part of their degree course"

Member States are invited to review training programmes at universities to ensure that they equip students in the language professions with the right skills for rapidly changing working conditions.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

In all university curricula at least one foreign language is compulsory.

In more than 60% of the registered Universities courses in a foreign language are provided. Most of these courses belong to the scientific and economic areas.

1.4. Adult language learning

Every adult should be encouraged to carry on learning foreign languages, and facilities should be made readily available to make this possible. Workers should have the opportunity to improve the language skills relevant to their working life. Cultural activities involving foreign music, literature or films, holidays abroad, town-twinning activities, voluntary service abroad can be promoted as opportunities for learning about other cultures and languages”

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

Education for adults is provided in CTP (Centres for permanent education). At the national level we have more than 3000 CTPs, run in schools in evening hours. English and Spanish are included in the curricula.

1.5. Language learners with special needs

Language learning is for everybody. Only a very small minority of people has physical, mental or other characteristics that make language learning impossible. Provision for learners with special needs of one kind or another is increasingly being made within mainstream schools and training institutions; however, such learners are still excluded from language lessons in some cases. Good practice in teaching languages to learners with special needs can be further developed and new methods and approaches need to be developed for the teaching of foreign languages to such learners

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

In Italy students with special needs are integrated in normal classes.

1.6. Range of languages

Promoting linguistic diversity means actively encouraging the teaching and learning of the widest possible range of languages in our schools, universities, adult education centres and enterprises. Taken as a whole, the range on offer should include the smaller European languages as well as all the larger ones, regional, minority and migrant languages as well as those with ‘national’ status, and the languages of our major trading partners throughout the world. The imminent enlargement of the European Union will bring with it a wealth of languages from several language families; it requires a special effort to ensure that the languages of the new Member States become more widely learned in other countries. Member States have considerable scope to take a lead in promoting the teaching and learning of a wider range of languages than at present.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?

- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

The languages more widely spread are English, French, German and Spanish, with different percentage in the various regions.

Some upper secondary schools, in their autonomy, also offer courses of Russia, Chinese and Arabic.

The increase of the qualitative and quantitative offer of foreign languages is affected by the organization of the school and academic curricula.

2. BETTER LANGUAGE TEACHING

2.1. The language-friendly school

It is important that schools and training institutions adopt a holistic approach to the teaching of language, which makes appropriate connections between the teaching of 'mother tongue', 'foreign' languages, the language of instruction, and the languages of migrant communities; such policies will help children to develop the full range of their communicative abilities. In this context, multilingual comprehension approaches can be of particular value because they encourage learners to become aware of similarities between languages, which is the basis for developing receptive multilingualism.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?

New curricula have been introduced in the primary and low secondary after the Reform Bill 2003. The new curricula, better known as “Indicazioni Nazionali per i Piani di studio Personalizzati “, for Primary Education and “Indicazioni Nazionali per i Piani di studio Personalizzati “ for Low Secondary.

The Reform has not been extended to upper secondary yet.

The “Indicazioni Nazionali” make no provisions for any kind of holistic approach to the teaching of languages: mother tongue, foreign or languages of migrant children (not even mentioned) in the perspective of receptive multilingualism.

The lack of national measures does not mean that the holistic approach is not practised anywhere in Italy. Schools are autonomous and can control 20% of the curriculum. Certainly there are schools, especially in border regions, which are aware of the opportunity of a multilingual and intercultural approach to the teaching of languages and develop specific activities and projects.

There are also national projects such as CROMO: it is an Austrian-Italian-Slovenian CROSSborder MOdule on intercultural and metacognitive competences to supplement the ELP.

It is a two-year project (2005-07) financed by the three national authorities, although initially proposed and promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education. The CROMO project “culture” enacts the “boundary breaking” and “border crossing” mission it has given itself to foster intercultural dialogue in a historically and culturally very “sensitive” part of Europe, while aiding to implement the ELP process in all three countries. It is intended to help build bridges among our border communities in the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (IT), Carinthia (AT) regions and Slovenia by developing a common tool in the form of an ELP supplement with the aim to help learners reflect upon and reconsider their intercultural and interregional experiences while developing their metacognitive language-learning strategies and competences.

The Crossborder Module for ELPs for the 15+ age range is ready in its first draft stage and is the result of the joint effort of the researchers, experts and teachers from these areas, under the technical guidance of the Österreichisches SprachenZentrum (ÖSZ) of Graz, the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia Educational Research Institute (IRRE) in Trieste and the Slovenian National Pedagogical Institute (ZRSS).

The Project consists of three main parts subdivided into six interrelated sections, all of which can be used separately and at different times.

Part1: “In my experience...” explores the learner’s experience with and reflections on intercultural encounters, featuring a grid and a checklist of intercultural areas, allowing the pupil to record reactions, opinions and reflections, also bringing cultural similarities and differences to the fore.

Part2: “How we react...” for awareness-raising related to the use of language in intercultural experiences, with a questionnaire, a checklist on language and communication awareness and a series of communication strategies.

Part3: “What we learn...” is designed to lead learners to greater awareness of the various stages of intercultural competence, with a checklist of descriptors for self-assessment.

A teacher's guide in using CROMO is also in the draft phase.

CROMO is being piloted in 12 schools in the autumn-winter of 2006 and will be a useful tool in the language classroom as a way to make learners and teachers more sensitive and inclined to reflect on how to improve communicative competence in intercultural situations, such as those in border regions.

The 2003 Ocse-PISA survey has revealed in 15- years-old Italian students a low receptive and productive written literacy in Italian. These results confirmed a national survey carried out by CEDE (now INVALSI) in 2000: in a sample of 650 18-years-old students, 50% had problems with reading comprehension.

The need to improve the quality of teaching Italian as a mother tongue, both in low secondary and in the first two years of upper secondary (age 11-16), became evident. A project, called POSEIDON, was launched by INDIRE on the initiative of some language teachers belonging to language teacher associations (ADI, AICC, GISCEL, LEND) keeping in mind Lisbon's objectives. The basic idea of the project is that teaching can be improved only through teachers' development, consequently the starting point has been teacher training using blended e-learning (see 2.2).

The project is characterised by a plurilingual, holistic approach to the teaching/learning of languages: first language, foreign and classical languages in line with the CEFR of the Council of Europe.

It is still in the phase of teacher training but some theoretical and practical materials, together with methodological approaches, have already been developed by the teachers involved.

- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?

The strongly-subject based curriculum at secondary level tends to militate against a holistic approach to the teaching of languages. Besides there is a strong public demand for English which is the only compulsory foreign language in the primary school.

- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

None, at present.

2.2. Language teacher training

Language teachers have a crucial role to play in building a multilingual Europe. They, more than teachers of other subjects, are called upon to exemplify the European values of openness to others, tolerance of differences, and willingness to communicate. It is important that they have all had adequate experience of using the target language and understanding its associated culture. All teachers of a foreign language should have spent an extended period in a country where that language is spoken and have regular opportunities to update their training.

The skills and personal resources required to teach languages well are considerable. Initial training should equip language teachers with a basic 'toolkit' of practical skills and techniques, through training in the classroom; language teachers need the advice of trained mentors as well as regular opportunities to keep their language and teaching skills up to date, inter alia via e- learning and distance learning.

Language teachers may often feel isolated, unaware of developments elsewhere with the potential to improve their work; they may not have access to adequate professional support networks; it is therefore important to facilitate contacts and effective networks between them at a regional, national and European level.

In this field, Member States have a crucial role to play in ensuring that all teachers of a foreign language have:

- appropriate initial training including practical training in the pedagogy of foreign languages, and experience of living in a country whose language they teach, and*
- regular paid access to in-service training.*

Member States will recall that the Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 invited them to encourage future language teachers to take advantage of relevant European programmes to carry out part of their

studies in a country or region of a country where the language which they will teach later is the official language.

Member States are invited to review their current arrangements for foreign language teacher training in the light of the findings of the study 'European Profile for Language Teacher Education';¹

d) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?

There are no special provisions made at national level for in-service training of language teachers, unless connected with the recent Reform and the early start in primary education.

Initial training is temporarily still provided by the so called SSIS (Scuole di Specializzazione all'Insegnamento Secondario). According to the Reform Bill they should be replaced by Lauree Magistrali per l'Insegnamento (LMI). The SSIS are run by university teachers together with senior school teachers who act as mentors to support trainees in their classroom-based practice. The course, which integrates academic study and practical teaching, lasts two years. Afterwards teachers go straight into teaching and become permanent teachers after one year on probation, during which they are supported by a senior teacher who acts as a tutor. If they fail they can try again for one more year. No provision is made for periods of stay in countries where the language is spoken. When university students, future language teachers can take advantage of Erasmus program. As teachers they can take advantage of all the other relevant European programmes.

The Reform Bill has introduced the teaching of English since the first year in the Primary school. Before that the teaching of a foreign language started in the third year and it was free of choice (English, French, Spanish, Dutch). The teaching was imparted either by a specialist teacher (with a degree in foreign languages) or by the specialised teacher, that is the teacher of the class specialized also in the teaching of a foreign language (generalist). With the Reform the tendency is to replace specialist teachers completely with generalists so that to integrate the teaching of the foreign language into the global pedagogic process. But few primary school teachers are also able to teach English, consequently it has been necessary to organise a large scale national training initiative to put the majority of teachers in the position of being able to teach English as well. The Project, which has been going on for the last three years, this year is known as PICO. It is aimed to develop oral communicative skills and methodological competences. Duration is flexible according to initial competences but some of the teachers start from the scratch. So there are modules of 30/80/100/200 up to 380 hours of exposition to the foreign language. The levels are those of the Common European Framework and it has been agreed that level B1 would suit a primary school teacher to teach English to children.

Language teacher professional associations are involved in the project and it is also supported by PuntoEdu: an online training platform realised by INDIRE (The Ministry National Documentation Institute for Innovation and Education Research based in Florence).

It is a blended e-learning environment which mixes on line learning (courses, laboratories, online teaching resources and forums) and onsite lessons and activities structured in virtual classrooms to help trainees communicate and interact in between onsite meetings.

It is an environment focused on learning-by-doing activities and personalised learning programmes:

- teachers can personalise their learning and training in time, space and choosing their activities;
- it makes use of action-research
- teachers can apply the ICT to educational activities and use didactic resources (provided on the platform in a section for children);
- teachers are actively involved through learning by doing activities and synchronous and asynchronous exchange;
- they can produce, share and use materials
- they learn by peers
- all the activities are coordinated by an e-tutor

The training initiative has reached, at present, thousands of teachers (16.000 last year and more or less the same number this year). The target population is 45/50.000.

At the end of the course teachers receive a Certificate for the competences acquired.

¹ *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference*
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/doc/profile_en.pdf

Teacher training as conceived in the POSEIDON project (see 2.1) has the same features: an online learning by doing community of teachers of Italian, foreign and classical languages.

The project fully responds to the needs of developing and value teachers' competences in autonomous schools.

The training initiative for teachers of English in the primary school is also supported by RAI Educational (edutainment) with an initiative called "Il Divertinglese Docenti": a TV programme schedule supported by a web site. The initiative is meant to support the development of communicative competences through the exposure of the trainees to authentic language in relevant situations. The TV programmes consist of two sections:

- fiction, meant also to develop cultural (literary and historical) competences
- documentary short films which, besides a cultural dimension, present also an interdisciplinary approach.

The web site is used to develop activities and exercises utilizing the TV linguistic input. Teachers can use both the TV programmes and the web site at their leisure and develop their personal self-training plans.

As regards the training of language teachers with a special focus on plurilingual, holistic approaches to the teaching of languages, besides the POSEIDON project, other local initiatives can be mentioned:

- 1) The INFO Project (Comenius 2.1): it is a project meant to develop a common European Training Model of Professional Development for teachers who work in multilingual areas with minority languages. Its objectives are:
 - to develop linguistic, plurilinguistic, cognitive, meta-cognitive, social, intercultural, and operational competences for teachers to work in multilingual areas with minority languages
 - to develop adequate training curricula based on the real needs of students and teachers in those areas
- 2) A transnational (Austria-Italy-Slovenia) European Portfolio for language teacher competences in a multilingual context, for continuous professional development and plurilingualism. It is a Regional Education Authorities initiative with the support of the General Directorate for Foreign Affairs of the Ministry of Education.

A working Group has been constituted by the General Director of the General Directorate for Foreign Affairs at the Ministry of Education, with the participation of Professional Associations (LEND and ANILS). Its task is to develop a "Profile of the European Language Teacher", a framework of reference for training language teachers in Italy in compliance with "The European Profile for Language Teacher Education". The main aim is to provide a conceptual base to be used in training initiatives to develop teachers' competences to adopt holistic approaches to the teaching of languages and to include plurilingual and intercultural education in their classes.

The Group has just started working.

- e) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?

Economic and practical reasons make it difficult to include a period of stay in the country where the language is spoken in pre-service teacher training and also to give teachers in-service opportunities to do so and to keep their language and teaching skills up to date. They are not allowed to leave their classes for long periods. Sometimes family engagements prevent teachers also from taking advantage of European programmes.

- f) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

None, for the present. But as a consequence of the Reform teachers' legal status will be changed.

2.3. Supply of language teachers

Some Member States face shortages of adequately-qualified language teachers; these may be general shortages or may relate to certain languages or certain types of education or training; these shortages need to be addressed and sustainable solutions found. More can be done to exchange teachers between Member States; such teachers may work as teachers of their mother tongue, teachers of another language

or as teachers of another subject through their mother tongue. In linguistic border areas there is particular scope for initiatives targeting neighbouring languages in this field.

Member States have been recommended² to remove legal and administrative obstacles to the mobility of teachers and their progress needs to be monitored

In this field, Member States have a particular responsibility to remove any remaining administrative or legal barriers to the employment of teachers of a foreign language from other Member States.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?

In Italy there is no shortage of language teachers at national level. There is in some areas, but mobility is possible only on demand by the teacher. No action has been accomplished to remove legal and administrative obstacles to the mobility of teachers among Member States. Exchange of teachers within the Union is possible only on the base of particular agreements, projects or programs.

- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?

Teachers' legal status and unions' agreements

Teachers from member countries are allowed to become permanent teachers in Italian schools as long as they follow all the procedures: they must be qualified as teachers and enter a teacher classification list.

They can also be hired temporarily by schools in their autonomy, especially as support to permanent teachers in language classes to develop oral skills.

Italian permanent teachers are not allowed to leave their classes temporarily to go and teach abroad. They can do that without salary, also their career is suspended.

- b) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

No proposed initiatives. But teachers' legal status will necessarily change alongside with the full implementation of the Reform.

2.4. Training teachers of other subjects

Most pupils and trainees could study at least some of their curriculum through the medium of a foreign language. Many more members of the teaching profession should in future be able to teach their subject(s) through at least one foreign language; to this end, trainee teachers should study language(s) alongside their area of specialisation and undertake a part of their teaching studies abroad.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?

CLIL is extensively used in some schools and in some Regions (e.g. Lombardy) in pilot projects which also involve teacher training for the vehicular use of a foreign language in their classes. No provision is made at the moment in mainstream school education.

In the law Decree/2005 for the Reform of upper secondary the teaching of a subject using a foreign language is present in the final school year. The Reform has not been implemented yet.

- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?

Current curricula at university level do not foresee the possibility of preparing future teachers of other subjects to teach their classes using a foreign language, neither does teachers' initial training (even if CLIL techniques are included).

- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

² by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Mobility ... for Students, Persons Undergoing Training, Volunteers, Teachers and Trainers (2001/613/EC)

There are no specific initiatives for the moment, but the study of at least a foreign language at the university has become part of the curricula in all faculties and many students take advantage of Erasmus programmes. So there is a hope for the future that also teachers of other subjects will be competent enough in a foreign language to use it as language of instruction after methodological training.

2.5. Testing language skills

The Common Reference Scales of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Language³ provide a good basis for schemes to describe individuals' language skills in an objective, practical, transparent and portable manner. Effective mechanisms are needed to regulate the use of these scales by examining bodies. Teachers and others involved in testing language skills need adequate training in the practical application of the Framework. European networks of relevant professionals could do much to help share good practice in this field.

The European Language Portfolio⁴ can help people to value, and make the most of, all their language skills, howsoever acquired, and to carry on learning languages by themselves

In this respect, Member States were invited by the Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 to set up systems of validation of competence in language knowledge based on the Common European Framework of reference for languages developed by the Council of Europe, and to stimulate European cooperation in order to promote transparency of qualifications and quality assurance of language learning.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?

No concrete action has been accomplished for the moment because the educational system in Italy is in a transition phase.

Testing is still very much a business of the school and of the teachers. Only at the end of some upper secondary schools there is a national test of language skills. The contents of the test differ according to the type of school. It consists of reading comprehension, written production and an oral test, which is mostly focused on the type of language and on the contents relevant to the type of school. Tests for the final exam at the end of low secondary are still developed by the class teachers, at least for the present school year.

Things will be changing with the full application of the Reform. Students will have State Exams at the end of low and upper secondary and national tests will be administered in between to monitor the outcomes of the teaching/learning process at several stages.

The law Decree/2005 for the Reform of upper secondary has three attachments which regard the levels of attainment in foreign languages. Reference is made to the CEFR levels. But, as already said, it has not been implemented yet.

Language Portfolios are more and more used in Italy.

There are ten validated PELs developed in various regions for different age groups. They are largely used in schools. The number of learners using an LP is 32.302 (year 2005-06)

The process of dissemination and implementation of the PEL is supported by the Directorate General for International Relations of the Ministry through a National Support Group (inspectors, administrators, heads of school, teachers). Information booklets have been produced and disseminated both in paper format and on line. They are downloadable from National ELP web pages on Ministry portal. Information is also available on Regional Education Authorities' web sites or portals.

Consultancy is offered on regional/local level by education authority advisors; local/regional help/information desks; local/regional monitoring activities and sharing of good practice.

The development of PELs always implies teacher training. Training courses for teachers have been organised by regional authorities in Campania, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche, Piemonte, Molise, Puglia, Val d'Aosta, Bolzano, Trento.

In Abruzzo, Bolzano, Campania, Marche, Molise, Piemonte, Puglia, Liguria, Sicily and Lombardy there are Groups whose focus is to train teachers in ELP use and to pilot validated models in the region.

As a consequence many teachers are now acquainted with the CEFR.

³ http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/Common_Framework_of_Reference/default.asp

⁴ [http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=\\$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/welcome.html](http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/welcome.html)

The “Progetto Lingua 2000” introduced external certification in Italian schools. It has become very common: it is on a voluntary base and students have to pay for it.

The advantage has been the supply of teacher training courses by tests providers to train teachers to use their tests and to prepare students for them. In this way teachers are becoming more and more acquainted with the CEFR levels.

- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?

There is a problem of “culture”. Italian teachers have always considered testing as their exclusive concern and they have always tested students intuitively and holistically in a very traditional way (written compositions and letters, individual oral tests etc..). Only in the last decade objective testing has entered the language classroom.

- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

The implementation of the Reform should definitely change the approach to testing and evaluation in the mainstream educational system.

3 BUILDING A LANGUAGE-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

3.1 An inclusive approach to linguistic diversity

National and regional authorities are encouraged to give special attention to measures to assist those language communities whose number of native speakers is in decline from generation to generation, in line with the principles of the European Charter on Regional and Minority languages.

Member States are encouraged to give special attention to measures to assist language communities whose number of native speakers is in decline from generation to generation, in line with the principles of the European Charter on Regional and Minority languages.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
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It is difficult to say what initiatives have taken place as a direct consequence of the Action Plan in this domain, as in others. Even before 2004, policy makers were aware of the need to defend the languages and cultures of minority communities in the country. In line with the principles of the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, Law 482 passed in late 1999 formally recognizes this need related to the “historic minority” populations of Italy (Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene and Croatian) and other historic minorities speaking varieties of French, Provençal, Friulano, Ladin and Sardinian. Well over 500 different projects have been funded to this effect in the Regions of Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Molise, Piedmont, Puglia, Sardinia, Sicily, Veneto and the Autonomous Region/Provinces of Val d’Aosta, Trento and Bolzano since then.

The recent Lombardy Language Education Policy Profile process (2005-06) has highlighted that greater attention should be given to preserving the linguistic capital of local dialects. Indeed, a leading Italian expert in minority and regional languages Prof. Fiorenzo Toso of the Universities of Udine and Saarbruecken, remarks that there is an evident regression throughout the country in the use of “traditional languages” (here meaning dialects). Even if measures similar to those adopted by Law 482 for minority and regional languages were to be promoted, according to Prof. Toso the tendency would probably not change, since their use depends on the speakers’ willingness to use them. However, a new interest in linguistic heritage is emerging, related to the need people feel to belong to specific communities in the wake of globalization and the crises other forms of collective representation are facing.

3.2 Building language-friendly communities

Every community in Europe can become more language-friendly by making better use of opportunities to hear and see other languages and cultures, thereby helping to improve language awareness and learning. It is in the interest of the Union to capitalise on the skills and experiences of its many bi- and tri-lingual citizens, and temporary residents such as Erasmus students; monolingual citizens have much to learn from them; public authorities can make better use of their skills in schools, adult education centres, cultural establishments and workplaces.

Tourism projects, cross-border projects and town twinning schemes can form the nuclei of local language learning schemes, enabling citizens to learn the language(s) of their neighbours or twin town(s), and offering an incentive to do so.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

The Action Plan was officially launched in March 2004 within the framework of a national project for language-friendly environments set up by the General Directorate for International Relations of the Ministry of Education of the Ministry of Education, called "Parlare il Mondo" (a container for a series of actions fostering engagement with multilingualism, some of which have been reported on elsewhere in this questionnaire: projects and activities related to fostering self-evaluation of language competence and to disseminating ELP use, crossborder language awareness and intercultural awareness projects and tools – in particular, the CROMO project, the promotion of Italian-language learning by the families of migrant children, the Language Education Policy Profiles, language-learning projects through the expressive arts, a thematic network of schools for language-friendly environments, the Language teacher profile...). Several simplified versions of the Action Plan, distributed both in paper format and on the Web, have also provided a stimulus in this sense.

The General Directorate for International Relations also set up a national network of schools for language-friendly environments, which is piloting a model of "stages/phases" of language-friendly environments (2006), developed from preparatory work undertaken in 2003-04 with 16 schools during the launching phases of the Action Plan. Since the building of a language friendly school is a crucial context for the Action Plan, a holistic approach is necessary if we wish to foster the engagement of different school and community stakeholder categories in language learning and language awareness activities. The aim of the original working group was thus to understand and look into the existing resources and needs in one's local environment, both internally and externally to the school itself, also by exploring how schools may extend the learning activities on offer into the non-formal and informal learning domains. Schools gained knowledge and made use of ideas and ways to work towards European language-friendly communities, centred around schools acting as vital catalysts in the process.

Guidelines to schools have been issued on a national level by the Ministry of Education to promote effort in schools to help prevent the loss of first language competence by migrant children besides their learning of the national language and of the foreign languages on offer.

A regional "Multicultural Bookshelf" project involving schools, libraries, adult education centres, local authorities and NGOs has made books and multimedia materials in a wide range of migrant languages and on a wide range of cultures available. Support in using these materials to stimulate the perception of the appeal of these languages is also available.

Besides the work undertaken in this field by the General Directorate for International Relations of the Ministry of Education, the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, in agreement with the Department for Internal and Territorial Affairs, of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is also active in promoting the learning of neighbouring languages in border communities. At a trilateral conference on the topic held in Trieste in 2005, the following observations were made:

Participants highlighted a number of obstacles to more widespread teaching of neighbouring languages: competition from English as a "universal language" which tended to dominate even in exchanges between neighbours; the de facto prevalence, in linguistic relationships, of a "dominant" language which tended to make the learning of the other language irrelevant; the attitude of parents and the general feeling within the

community that it was more gratifying to learn a “universal” language at the expense of the language of the neighbouring country, seen as a “regional” language.

In contrast, a language policy that promoted partial knowledge, often sufficient for a functional relationship, focusing not only on school but the world of employment, and which motivated – in terms of crossborder co-operation – the administrative and political players was seen as an effective antidote to the process of linguistic standardisation mentioned above. Importance should be attached to the role of the mass media in the way they portray the image, culture and language of a country’s neighbours, in order to encourage people to get to know them in greater depth.

3.3 Improving supply and take-up of language learning

It is essential to improve the take-up of language learning opportunities by continuous activities to raise awareness of the benefits of language learning, and by bringing language resources closer to the people who need them. The Council of Europe’s initiative the European Day of Languages⁵ can be valuable in motivating people to learn foreign languages.

European Union initiatives such as the European Languages Label⁶ also have a key role in this by highlighting local, regional, or national projects that have found creative ways to improve the quality of language teaching.

The provision of language learning facilities and courses is the responsibility of local, regional and national authorities. Both within and outside formal systems there is still considerable unmet demand not only for language lessons but also for information and advice on language learning.

Appropriate structures are required to motivate people of all ages to learn languages, to offer guidance about how to start, and to provide easy access to a variety of different language learning activities. This is likely to require some investment in new provision, though there is also much to gain by making better use of existing language learning resources and staff in schools and universities, libraries, local learning networks and adult education centres.

- a) What concrete actions (if any) have been accomplished in this field since 2004?
- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?
- c) What are the proposed initiatives to overcome these obstacles?

The “stages of a language-friendly environment” model mentioned above in 3.2 , developed following the impetus offered by the Action Plan, is geared to improving the supply and uptake of language learning, also by helping schools and other providers of language learning opportunities consider these opportunities, for different stakeholders in diverse socio-cultural and geographic settings, within 3 possible fields of mutual interaction: the lifelong learning continuum, the formal – non formal – informal learning continuum and the distance-closeness or “stickiness factor” of social cohesion.

As a result of the Action Plan, a series of initiatives (conferences, seminars, workshops, language fairs, exhibits, clubs...), at times correlated to EDL celebrations undertaken both on the national and on regional/local levels, have tried to disseminate innovative ideas and practices in stimulating language awareness in a variety of stakeholders, also through the illustration of a compendium of “language-friendly environment” activities, drafted within “Parlare il Mondo” from an overview of interesting EDL practice, Socrates projects and European Label winners.

In the 2004 – 06 period the number of European Label applications made to the Labour and Welfare Ministry has noticeably increased, meaning that language learning providers other than schools have become more aware of the opportunity to showcase innovative practice.

⁵ 26 September each year; see http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co_operation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/European_Day_of_Languages/default.asp

⁶ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/language/label/index.cfm>

4 OVERALL NATIONAL LANGUAGE STRATEGY

Member States are invited to describe how the Action Plan fitted into their national language policies

- a) How has the follow-up of the Action Plan been coordinated at national level?

Most of the actions described in the previous sections respond to the demands of the Action Plan but were already part of national language policies (e.g., Law 482/1999 on Regional and Minority Languages, the early start in primary school, the introduction of a second foreign language, the diffusion and implementation of PELs etc..)

- b) Has it been included in national policy initiatives?

No. National initiatives already included actions for promoting language learning.

- c) Was there a coordination group / committee?

No.

Member States may provide information on other relevant national initiatives for languages which do not fit into the framework of the Action Plan

- a) Were there any language initiatives and priorities which were either planned or carried out and which did not fit into the framework of the Action Plan?

No.

Member States are invited to establish national plans to give structure, coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism, including increasing the use and presence of a variety of languages in daily life⁷

- a) What initial steps have been taken on this issue?

None as yet

- b) What obstacles to the implementation of this recommendation have been identified?

The education system in Italy is undergoing a slow and thorough action of reform and, at the moment, it is the focus of attention at national level.

⁷ These plans should be based upon Integrated Guideline N° 23 and form part of the national plans that Member States are producing in the context of the Lisbon Action Plan for growth and jobs. (http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/pdf/integrated_guidelines_en.pdf)