



Education and Culture DG

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Outcomes of the European Commission's public consultation on multilingualism 14 September – 15 November 2007





COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

**Outcomes of the European Commission's public consultation on
multilingualism
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

Greater mobility within the Union's borders, migration flows from third countries and globalisation have all brought an increasing number of languages into the everyday lives of citizens and companies. The European Commission is committed to promoting language learning and linguistic diversity, in accordance with the European Union's founding principles. Between 14 September and 15 November 2007, it carried out a public consultation to solicit citizens' views and expectations in relation to language policy. The findings of this survey, which forms part of a broad consultation process, will serve as a basis for a new Commission Communication to be published late in 2008. The purpose of that document will be to tackle the issue of the place and role of languages in an increasingly multilingual Europe.

Methodology

The questionnaire covered six different areas, all closely linked to the ways and the extent to which languages are used and promoted within the EU, from learning provisions, through social, cultural and economic aspects, to the functioning of the EU institutions. The sixteen questions of the survey either called for free comments or proposed a set of pre-formulated answers. Some were a mixture of both.

This document presents the main findings of the consultation. While it was possible to compile statistics for all the closed questions, the responses to the open questions were analysed at length and clustered according to recurrent themes to establish trends and correlations. These free comments also offered an insight into the reasons behind the choice of the various options by the respondents.

Participation

The consultation was open to any interested parties both within and beyond the boundaries of the Union. The number of finalised responses received amounted to 2,419, in all official languages of the EU.

Awareness-raising about the survey took the form of notices on various web pages of the Europa site, references in the press and in public speeches, as well as direct notification to a large number of individuals, organisations and networks that had formerly expressed their interest in European policies. As no information was gathered on how the participants had learnt about the consultation, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of respondents who were either 'spontaneous' visitors to the Europa site or readers of the European press compared with the proportion of those who had been contacted directly. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that contributions came from individuals and organisations interested in European policies in general and in the place and roles attributed to languages in the EU in particular. Despite the relatively high number of participants, the outcomes of this consultation should therefore by no means be interpreted as those of a public opinion poll, but rather as the views of citizens who have opted to enter into a dialogue with the European Commission about the way they would like to see the European Union in the future.

An outstanding response rate

The 2,419 finalised contributions to the survey on multilingualism represent an outstanding participation rate for public consultations on European policies, which on average receive between 200 and 500 responses.

Another striking feature of the participation is the prevalence of individual respondents over people responding on behalf of their organisations. There is not one EU, EFTA or candidate country missing from the broad range of countries represented by the respondents; moreover, a significant amount of contributions were received from other continents.

The consultation was available in 22 official EU languages, but altogether the participants represented 57 mother tongues, including numerous regional and minority languages as well as those spoken in countries outside the EU.

This high rate of participation, across such a vast geographical area and mainly by private individuals, clearly shows that the way languages are taught, treated and spoken in Europe is an issue particularly close to people's hearts.

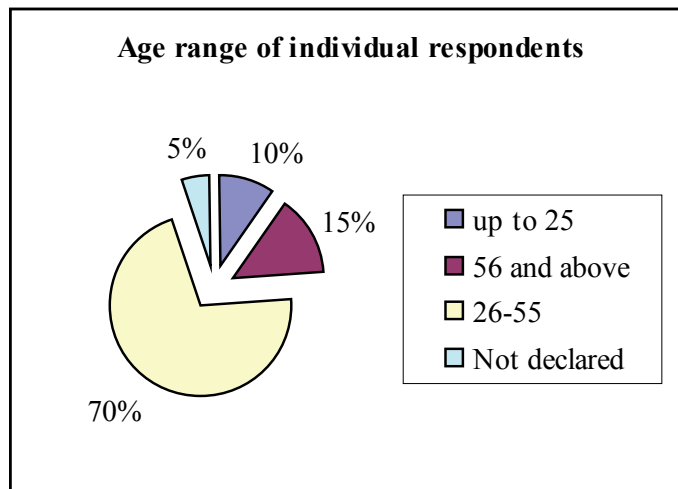
Moreover, the significant proportion of respondents whose mother tongue is not one of the EU official languages provides evidence that multilingualism in the Europe of today is a reality whose complexity goes far beyond the management of 23 operational languages. It sets out a context calling for answers at levels other than the merely functional one, covering a much wider spectrum of languages than those enjoying official status.

In a nutshell: what do respondents to the consultation think about languages?

- More than 96% of the respondents agree that the linguistic diversity of the EU calls for special attention from European politicians and that language skills are important both for their everyday and their professional life.
- According to respondents the most important factors for successful language learning are an early start and direct experience of the country of the target language.
- Most people think that the linguistic diversity of the EU is an asset to be safeguarded and wish to see it placed in a context going beyond economic and functional aspects, which recognises the identities and cultures represented in languages.
- Advocates of the cause of regional and minority languages think more could be done for the respect of these languages especially within education and public services and would like to see the EU adopting a more protective role in this respect.
- Most respondents would like to see the media promoting an intercultural society model, valuing linguistic and cultural identity, and focussing on tolerance, not confrontation.
- The vast majority of respondents share the view that it is easier to do business abroad with knowledge of the local language and that companies have therefore an interest in investing in the development of the language skills of their staff.
- The majority share the view that migrants should preserve their language of origin and treat their linguistic and cultural identity as a necessary basis for integrating into a linguistic and cultural community different from their own.
- Most people find that the costs related to working in 23 official languages are justified or should even be increased.

II. THE CONSULTATION IN FIGURES

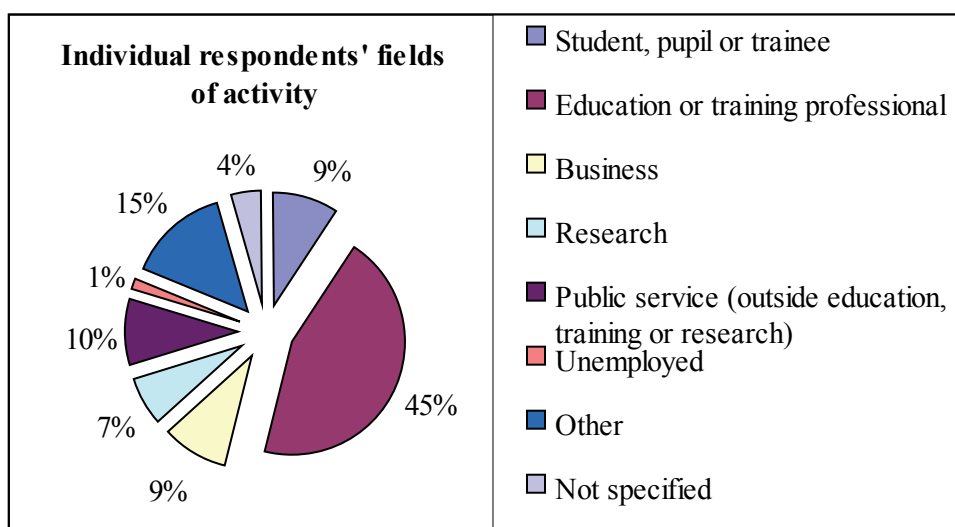
The total number of finalised contributions to the consultation amounted to 2,419. The ratio of men and women was 40% to 58%, with 2% of the respondents not declaring their gender. Individual respondents were asked to indicate their age range. The overriding majority – around 70% - of the 1,865 respondents asked this question fell into the middle age range (26-55 years). 10% of the respondents were under 26, and 15% above 56.



Respondent groups by activity field

Respondents replied more than three times more often as individuals than on behalf of their organisations (77% vs. 23%). In the latter case, the following three types of organisations were the most often represented: non-profit making organisations (27%), primary / secondary education institutions (19%) and higher education institutions (16%).

Nearly half of the respondents (45%) replying as private individuals described themselves as education or training professionals. The three groups of Public service (outside education, training or research), Students, pupils or trainees as well as Business accounted for the three second biggest subsets, each representing between 9 and 10% of the total number of participants.



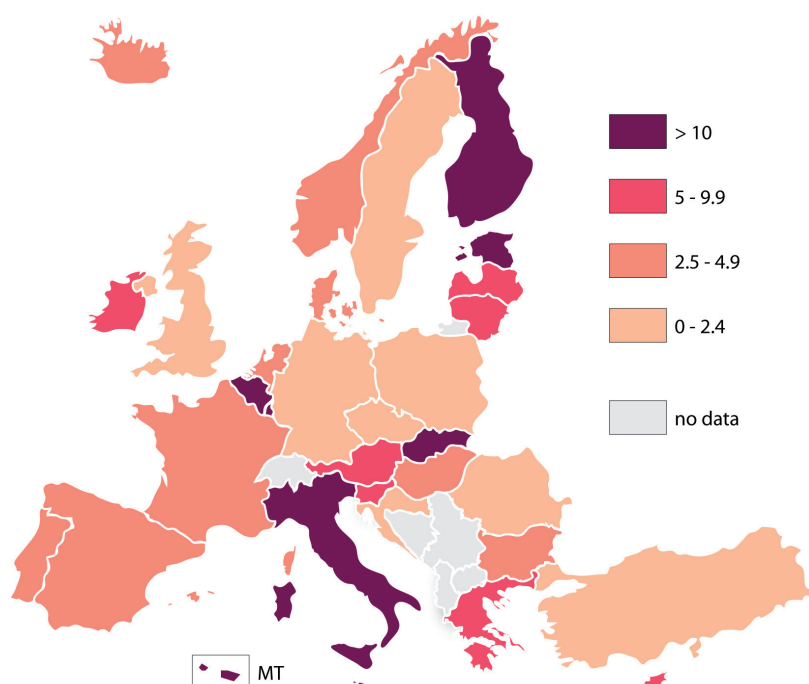
Geographical coverage

The consultation covered 58 different countries altogether, including all EU, EFTA and the two candidate countries Croatia and Turkey, four further European countries and twenty-two countries of Africa, Asia, South and North America, these latter four accounting for 2.6% of all the contributions.

Within the EU, participation from Italy and France was by far the highest in number, representing 26% and 12% of the total, respectively. Countries yielding the second biggest number (4-6% each) of responses were, in decreasing order: Germany, Spain, Finland, Belgium, Greece and the United Kingdom. The remaining 19 Member States together account for 26% of all the responses.

When read against the size of the respective populations, however, the countries that show the highest participation rate (10-57%) are, in decreasing order, the following: Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Finland, Malta, Estonia, Slovakia, Italy and Belgium (cf. chart below).

Number of contributions by millions of inhabitants within the EU, the EFTA and the two candidate countries



Languages

As to the mother tongue of the respondents¹, there was a vast coverage of altogether 57 different languages indicated. From these the three biggest ones were Italian (24%), French (13%) and German (9%).

A significant percentage (10%) of the respondents declared their mother tongue to be other than one of the 23 official languages of the EU, representing 34 different languages. Over 80% of the 177 participants falling into this category had one of altogether 19 different European regional languages as their mother tongue. The remaining participants' mother tongues correspond to 15 different languages of other European, Asian and African countries.

The response rate ranged around 98% throughout the questionnaire, with the sole exceptions of the two entirely open questions 6 and 11, calling for freely formulated comments. The contribution rate to these two questions was around 80%.

¹ Only respondents participating in the consultation as private individuals were asked about their mother tongue, and altogether 1,795 participants replied to this question.

III. OUTCOMES OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS BY QUESTION GROUP² (1-6)

Question Group 1: The purpose of language learning

1. There are nearly as many official languages in the European Union as Member States. The European Union should therefore devote special attention to their place and role.

Question 1	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Partially Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number of replies	1921	387	64	31
Percentage	79.94%	16.10%	2.66%	1.29%

Response rate to this question: 2403/2419 (99.34%)

The table shows that almost 80% of the respondents “strongly agree” that special attention should be devoted to the place and role of languages, indicating a wide consensus on the importance of promoting the languages of the Member States.

Although the question only refers to official languages – and not to regional or minority ones -, this fact obviously did not trigger an important number of negative responses.

As for people whose mother tongue is different from the official language of their country of residence, the percentages were almost the same, with some more negative responses than on average.

There was a significant increase in the percentage of negative responses from people residing outside the EU – “partially disagree” and “strongly disagree” answers accounting for 9.43% of their replies -, which suggests that the evolution of language policy matters most to EU citizens and less to the outside world.

2. In my everyday life I need to know more than one language / It is important to know foreign languages in the place where I work.

Question 2	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Partially Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number of replies	1942	376	63	27
Percentages	80.65%	15.61%	2.62%	1.12%

Response rate to this question: 2408/2419 (99.55%)

The vast majority of respondents considering languages important in their daily life or at work shows a general awareness irrespective to people’s professions and fields of activities or their country of residence within or outside the EU.

On the other hand, the situation changes for people whose mother tongue is different from that of their country of residence. Awareness about the importance of being able to master more languages is even more developed, with over 92% of respondents who “strongly agree” and only 6.38% who “partially agree”. This is probably due to the fact that, for this category of respondents, multilingualism is a basic and self-evident factor of their daily life, with an immediate impact on their ability to integrate socially and professionally in their country of residence.

² The tables in this section summarise the results to each of the questions, expressed both in numbers as well as the percentage of those respondents that effectively replied to each question.

3. What are the most important areas in which you need skills in one or more foreign languages?

Question 3	social life (e.g.: relations with family, friends, colleagues)	career development	culture (e.g.: understanding music, films or other works of arts written in a foreign language)	leisure (e.g.: sports or hobbies)	travel
Number and percentage of the people who selected the option	1508 (62.55%)	2026 (84.03%)	1817 (75.36%)	663 (27.50%)	1828 (75.82%)

Response rate to this question: 2411/2419 (99.67%)

As regards the domains where people consider language skills the most necessary, most respondents indicated career development – which is consistent with the statistics for Question 2. It shows an awareness of the fact that, in a dynamic labour market, language skills are essential assets for maintaining or developing employability.

The percentages are very similar for respondents whose mother tongue is different from that of their country of residence, with the only significant increase for the option social life, where 75.53% of this group considered language skills to be very relevant, 13 points more than the average rate. This reflects an increased preoccupation of this category of people with social integration, including all forms of interaction (leisure, cultural, etc.). This may be due to an increased concern for social insertion and linguistic identity of respondents whose country of residence is either different from their country of origin or who belong to a particular regional or minority language community.

Question Group 2: Language teaching and learning

“Jeder will dort abgeholt werden, wo er sich befindet. Der Lernende sollte mit seinen Bedürfnissen und Fähigkeiten im Mittelpunkt allen Bemühens stehen. Alles Andere geht ins Leere.”³

4. In your view, what are the best ways to encourage language learning?

Question 4	Starting language learning at a very early age	Studying two foreign languages at school	Using CLIL ¹	School exchanges	Study periods or placements abroad	Cultural and leisure activities in foreign languages
Number and percentage of the people who selected the option	1870 (77.59%)	1305 (54.15%)	1069 (44.36%)	1280 (53.11%)	1809 (75.06%)	1159 (48.09%)

Response rate to this question: 2410/2419 (99.63%)

Concerning the options given in the questionnaire, most respondents share the same views on what are the best ways to encourage language learning. Starting to learn a language at a very early age and study periods or placements abroad are ranked as the first and second most important factors. Early language learning is considered especially important (82.05%) by respondents whose mother tongue is different from the official one in their country of residence, showing a clear correlation with their enhanced need of language skills in everyday life from a child.

6.4% of the respondents added their own suggestions on the best ways of encouraging language learning. The most recurrent themes mentioned were receiving bilingual education, in which case the second language should be a regional one, as well as promoting and raising awareness of the value each language represent. Subtitling and the use of the media were also considered particularly good ways to encourage language learning.

³ “People should be reached where they are. Learners with their needs and capabilities should stand in the centre of all efforts. Everything else is in vain.” – All quotations in the analysis are taken from the contributions to the survey.

5. In your view, what are the most important factors leading to good quality language teaching and why?

Question 5	Emphasis on motivation	Emphasis on communicative skills	Adjusting teaching methods to learners' needs and styles	Emphasis on intercultural skills	Use of multimedia in the classroom (video, Internet, teaching software)
Number and percentage of the people who selected the option	1431 (59.62%)	1431 (59.62%)	1451 (60.46%)	1021 (42.54%)	1060 (44.17%)

Response rate to this question: 2400/2419 (99.21%)

Among the five available options the first three received the greatest attention and shared almost equal percentages. Respondents commenting on their choices mainly reflected on possible ways for encouraging language learning. Suggestions included full immersion into the language by putting the learner into contact with authentic materials and native speakers, the use of CLIL, as well as mobility/ exchange programmes. There was also a general preference expressed for teaching communicative skills, rather than learning grammar and vocabulary, deemed as theoretical knowledge of little practical use.

As regards further factors leading to quality language learning, most options specified by the respondents focussed on taking account of learners' needs and capabilities. Many of these suggestions actually overlapped with the pre-defined options. For instance, the need for trained, up-to-date, linguistically competent teachers, who also possess intercultural skills, is clearly connected with at least one of the options of the questionnaire. Finally, motivation was another highly recurrent theme among the free options, despite the fact that it figured also among the pre-defined answers.

Question Group 3: Languages in a multicultural society

"People must learn that there is not only one language, one culture, one truth and one point of view."

6. In today's multicultural society what do you think would be the best way to respect linguistic diversity at local, national and European levels?

Response rate to this question: 1981/2419 (81.89%) For this question no pre-defined options were provided but respondents were invited to give an open text comment.

These emphasised one or more of the following main aspects:

- inclusive attitudes (mentioned in 49% of all the answers): promoting linguistic and cultural diversity at all levels by presenting it as an asset and leaving people the right to choose which language to use; tolerance and recognition towards other cultures, etc;
- education (35%): when to start and with how many languages, the freedom of choice, raising children with an intercultural understanding, special linguistic provisions for children of migrant and minority communities, the role of international mobility, etc;
- regional, minority and migrant languages and cultures (20%): their recognition and promotion;
- services (17%): suggestions as to how authorities should communicate with citizens, e.g. bi- or multilingual road signs, product labels, official documents and websites, etc;
- language equality (14%) among the official languages of the EU;
- lingua franca (12%, of which 4% on Esperanto): as a practical solution for managing linguistic diversity;
- and media (8%): their role in promoting linguistic and cultural diversity.

As can be seen from the above, the question raised comments covering an extremely broad area, as the three different levels of action mentioned in the question call for different types of interventions. For example, the issue of linguistic equality vs. a lingua franca typically occurred in comments referring to the European level, whereas the question of regional, minority or migrant languages and cultures was more associated with the local and national levels.

The other four of the six aspects mentioned above relate to any of the three levels, hence their significant occurrence rates.

In more than a third of the comments referring to the issue of education, the theme of inclusive attitudes was also mentioned, which reveals the conviction that language learning leads to tolerance, and reciprocally, familiarisation with other cultures is an incentive to language learning.

As regards the topics lingua franca vs. language equality, the majority argued in favour of safeguarding the latter, despite the costs involved. Moreover, it was pointed out that languages were not merely tools of communication, and that there should be a recognition of the national, regional, minority or migrant identities and cultures they represent. There were even attempts to reconcile the two topics by proposing a lingua franca at European level for the sake of (cost-) efficiency combined with language equality at national and local levels to respect linguistic diversity. Most such comments suggested either some of the widest used languages – English, French, Spanish or German -, or some ‘neutral’ languages such as Latin or Esperanto, in order not to discriminate among speakers. Esperanto was proposed in 4% of all the comments to this question.

Approximately one-fourth of the replies raised the issue of regional and minority languages, mainly in relation to the local aspect of linguistic diversity. These comments combined with certain other topics with a significantly higher frequency than their overall occurrence rates (see above). Thus 45% mentioned the issue of education and 25% that of services. At the same time, the topic of lingua franca was raised at a significantly lower rate in this group of responses than on average: only 4,5% referred to it, out of which Esperanto rated only 1,5%. Another recurrent feature of the comments in this group was the expectation that the EU take some of the responsibility for this issue and sanction any Member States which breach the linguistic rights of minorities.

7. Which policies / sectors should in your opinion pay more attention to multilingualism? Have you any concrete measures to suggest and/or positive experiences to report?

Question 7	Culture	Youth and civil society	Social inclusion	Health	Justice
Number and percentage of the people who selected the option	1748 (73.72%)	1740 (73.39%)	1495 (63.05%)	651 (27.46%)	734 (30.96%)

Response rate to this question: 2371/2419 (98.02%)

Respondents were invited to choose among the proposed options or to add further fields to the list under this question. The two most frequently chosen areas are highlighted in the table. Interestingly, respondents outside the EU tended to deviate the most from the average rates in that they ranked justice and healthcare relatively higher (both approx. 36%), placing the fields of culture (69%) as well as youth and civil society (62%) relatively lower.

The most recurring themes within the freely specified comments were, in decreasing order, education, media, tourism and mobility, work and employment.

The additional comments and the distribution of the categories correlate strongly with the results of Question 6, with respect to the central place attributed to cultural and educational aspects.

8. In your opinion, should the media give a wider coverage to cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe?

Question 8	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Partially Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number of replies	1780	511	77	28
Percentages	74.29%	21.33%	3.21%	1.17%

Response rate to this question: 2396/2419 (99.05%)

As is apparent from the above table, the overriding majority (>95%) of respondents agreed with the argument expressed in the question. The free comments concerned mainly the ways in which this objective could be realised. The very few negative responses expressed doubts about the importance and marketing value of the issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, considering the commercial character of media. The same line of reasoning laid responsibility with the public media for financing programmes and “selling” multilingualism.

The media’s role was also often associated with the question of regional and minority languages. Many respondents

argued that country-wide channels could pay the most contribution in this respect, with special programmes about these languages in the – more widely understood - national language. Complementary to this idea at European level there appeared suggestions for a kind of “European media” (European TV channels, cross-border news, etc.), including some examples of good practice (ARTE, Australian ethnic TV and Euronews).

All in all, most respondents wished to see the media promoting an intercultural society model, valuing linguistic and cultural diversity, focussing on tolerance, and not on confrontation. Moreover, many people expect the media to counteract globalisation and homogenisation rather than promote only Anglo-Saxon culture.

Finally, the large majority of comments relating to both questions 6 and 8 stress the importance of subtitling by national TV channels, thus conveying authentic language experiences into our living rooms. Training of media staff was often mentioned as an important prerequisite to a corresponding promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Question Group 4: Languages and business

“Kielten ja kulttuurien osaaminen lisää luottamusta ja arvostusta kumppanien välillä.”⁴

9. Do you think that languages have an impact on business? If so, in which respect?

Question 9	It is better to contact a foreign company in the language of the country in which the business is established.	It is easier to do business with a foreign company if you know the language of the country in which the business is established.	It is easier to obtain information on market conditions in a given country (prices, customers, producers, etc.) if you know the language spoken there.
Number and percentage of the people who selected the option	1323 (55.82%)	1823 (76.92%)	1610 (67.93%)

Response rate to this question: 2370/2419 (97.97%)

The participation rate to this question can be considered relatively high especially in view of the fact that only 10.62% of the respondents came from the wider business sector.

The three options proposed in the questionnaire tackle either the appropriateness of using the local language for business purposes (it is better to ...) or the efficiency of doing so in terms of facilitating the process and accessing more information (it is easier to...). As can be seen from the figures above, the majority of respondents focussed upon the answers pointing to efficiency and facilitating business transactions.

6.2% of the respondents added further arguments to the ones proposed in the list, mainly also related to the concept of efficiency. One prevalent trend revealed in the long comments was the respondents’ deep concern about matters of cultural awareness, respect for diversity, willingness for communication and acceptance of different mentalities. Several respondents shared the view that language skills in themselves can become a key to successful intercultural relationships only if combined with intercultural awareness and acceptance of other (cultural) identities. The concern for respect for cultural diversity was sometimes even placed before business interests: «Parler la langue constitue un acte d’intérêt pour le pays, pas un support commercial réducteur»⁵.

Finally there were some comments on the prevalence of English in the business sector suggesting that either it or some common language (Esperanto) should be adopted in order for business relationships to run smoothly.

⁴ “Familiarity with languages and cultures increases trust and respect between partners.”

⁵ “Speaking a language is a sign of interest in the country and not just a mere commercial support.”

10. Which concrete measures would you recommend for companies to acquire and develop language skills?

Question 10	Provide language courses at the workplace	Encourage participation in international events and meetings	Promote staff with foreign language skills	Take on native speakers of the language you need to use most	Define a language strategy for your company
Number and percentage of the people who selected the option	1716 (71.89%)	1225 (51.32%)	1250 (52.37%)	719 (30.12%)	1495 (62.63%)

Response rate to this question: 2387/2419 (98.68%)

As can be seen from the above results, workplace training was viewed as the most important measure for developing language skills, closely followed by identifying appropriate ways to manage and foster language skills for the company.

Respondents adding other options mainly quoted the need for early language education as well as for e-learning programmes. Practical suggestions included creating job profiles specifying foreign language requirements, restructuring workflows in a way that staff members of various cultural backgrounds may co-operate as well as using CLIL or developing special terminology seminars, as part of language training.

The need to develop and adjust the language strategy to the characteristics of the market and clients in question was mentioned several times, as well as the usefulness of a common language for business, be it the currently prevalent English or a neutral language, like Esperanto.

Question Group 5: Languages and social integration

"Every measure that will favour inclusion will favour language skills."

11. In your opinion, what would be the most effective ways of helping migrants to master the language of the host country?

Response rate to this question: 2082/2419 (86.07%)

Similarly to question 6, respondents to this question were invited to provide open text comments without a set of pre-defined options. These concerned one or more of the following main aspects:

- civil society (mentioned in 57% of all the answers): citizens' attitudes and actions favouring integration; the need for intercultural skills and reaching out to migrants, etc;
- social measures (25%): provision of job opportunities as well as civil rights and duties, including access to host country language courses; validating linguistic skills, etc;
- courses (24%): in particular their cost, context, structure and methods, etc;
- migrants' role (9%): work and residence permits should be linked to the knowledge of the host country language; balance should be sought between preserving the language and culture of one's country of origin and getting to know those of the host country, etc.

Among the themes mentioned, the ways in which the civil society could contribute to the integration process was the most recurrent one. This in itself shows an open and pro-active attitude on the part of most respondents. Remarks in this category touched on the importance of intercultural skills and awareness for the local population; the readiness on the part of the local communities to include migrants in social and cultural activities, ensuring opportunities for migrants to make use of their newly acquired linguistic skills and cultural knowledge or introducing personalised mentoring programmes.

Another group of suggestions concerned various measures that would favour the integration process. These were often justified by their expected benefits to both sides, the local community as well as migrants. Proposals focussed on offering migrants jobs and making the educational system in the host country more open to their needs.

The third most frequent line in the comments concerned the provision of courses. Suggestions dealt with content matters like the teaching of basic or survival skills, the coverage of areas of language and culture in everyday life likely to challenge migrants, pressures being applied at work, etc. They also touched on the organisational side of courses and how it could be used to strengthen the linguistic and cultural training of migrants and widen their contacts with representatives of the host country.

Other points frequently put forward were that the courses should be modestly priced or free, otherwise migrants could not afford them. They were also expected to give enough self-confidence to their target groups in order to enable them to make use of their



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