Key-Co System

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# Key-Co System – IO1

## *Is Multilingualism the key competence?*

Cecilia Defilippi – Federico Faloppa

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Concise version

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*Key-Co System – Innovative practices for an intercultural adult education* is a project funded by Erasmus+ programme (KA2 – Strategic Partnership – Adult Education).

*Key-Co System* aims to strengthen educational and empowerment paths for adult migrant learners and enhance innovative practices among teachers, educators and organizations operating in adult education.

*Key-Co System* is promoted and coordinated by **Per Esempio Onlus**, a non-profit organization established in Palermo in 2011 fostering active participation, citizenship, youth and adult education, in partnership with:

- **Asociación Guaraní** (Madrid, Spain), a non-governmental organization implementing actions and projects aimed at promoting the integration and social inclusion of migrants and other groups at risk of exclusion.
- **«Second Chance» Scholeio Defteris Efkairias Assou** (Lechaiou, Greece), an adult public school founded in 2005 whose goal is to fight social exclusion by offering teaching and psychological and professional counselling to its students.
- **Centro Provinciale per l'istruzione degli Adulti «Nelson Mandela» Palermo 1 – CPIA1**, and **Centro Provinciale per l'istruzione degli Adulti Palermo 2 – CPIA 2** (Palermo, Italy), State-owned public institutions providing Italian and foreign citizens aged sixteen and above with learning opportunities and education.
- **Solidaridad Sin Fronteras** (Madrid, Spain), a non-governmental organization contributing to the development, integration, and wellness of vulnerable groups.
- **Università degli Studi di Palermo, Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza** (Palermo, Italy), which through the CLEDU (Law Clinic for Human Rights) is highly committed to protect and empower migrants', refugees', minorities', and vulnerable subjects' rights.
- **University of Reading, Department of Languages and Cultures** (Reading, UK), a teaching and research hub with leading expertise on language and migration, multilingual education, language policy and minorities.
- **Volkshochschule im Landkreis Cham** (Cham, Germany), a registered, non-profit association whose main activity is to provide courses in the field of vocational training, languages, health, culture, and special courses (second chance schools).

# Introduction

In May 2018, the Council of the Europe (CoE) released the *Recommendations on key competences* for lifelong learning. In this document, *competences* are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, where «knowledge is composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject […] skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results […] attitudes describe the disposition and mind-sets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations».[1]

Within this framework, *key competences* – to be developed in a lifelong perspective, from early childhood throughout adult life, and through formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts – are «those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, successful life in peaceful societies, health-conscious life management and active citizenship».[2]

More specifically, CoE's document identifies **eight *key competences***: Citizenship; Cultural awareness and expression; Digital competence; Entrepreneurship; Literacy; Multilingual competence; Mathematical competence; Personal, social, and learning to learn competence.

In the *Recommendations*, all these *key competences* are considered equally important: each of them can contribute to a «successful» individual and social life, has the potential to be applied in many different contexts and through a variety of approaches, and can enhance and complement the other key competences. However, some competences – such as the multilingual competence – have attracted more attention (and resources) than others.

The **multilingual competence defines the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication**. It is based on the ability to understand, express, and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts, and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in more than one language in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts

1 *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning,* «Official Journal of the European Union», 4 June 2018, p. 7; document available here.

2 Cf. ibid.

according to the speaker's wants and needs. It also integrates a historical dimension and cultural understanding, as it relies on the ability to mediate between different languages and media as well as cultural systems andidentities.

It requires knowledge of vocabulary and functional grammar of different languages and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of these languages, but it also necessitates knowledge of societal conventions, dynamics, and cultural aspects which can determine and affect linguistic choices and interactions. Essential skills for this competence consist of the ability to understand spoken messages, to initiate, sustain and conclude conversations, and to read, understand and draft texts, with different levels of proficiency in different languages, according to the individual's needs.

The multilingual competence can also include the ability to navigate in a complex repertoire through different registers, contexts, communicative situations by means of metalinguistic awareness and the appreciation of cultural diversity. Pre-conception and misconception of multilingualism, by both the individual speaker and the community, can obstacle the acquisition of this competence, whereas positive attitudes towards interculturality, commitment to a common framework for interaction, and recognition of each person's individual linguistic profile and repertoire – including recognition and respect for the mother tongue(s) of people belonging to minority groups and/or with a migrant background – can facilitate it.

**By facilitating and enhancing the multilingual competence, other key competences can be fostered and fully developed**. Therefore «significant efforts should still be made to promote language learning and to value the cultural aspects of linguistic diversity. Supporting multilingualism is of particular significance in promoting cultural diversity and linguistic skills as well as strongly contributing to economic and cultural relations between the EU and the rest of the world».[3]

For these reasons, EU Member states are constantly invited to increase awareness of the benefits of linguistic diversity, provide training in local languages, and further promote their mother tongues. The European Commission also recommends member states «to broaden the choice of languages taught in schools, in order to reflect personal interests of the learners and to value and

3 Cf. *Fact Sheets on the European Union – Language Policy,* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/142/language-policy.

make use of the linguistic competences of migrants».[4]

In an increasingly globalized world, individuals need a wide range of skills to adapt to a rapidly changing context, and EU member states have also been urged to include all competences in their lifelong learning strategies in the field of education. This entails adapting teaching and learning environments through new policies, curricula, staff training, which still present a great deal of inconsistency– and require a great deal of harmonization – across the EU and the Council of Europe.

**By involving five different educational institutions from four European countries, the "Key-Co System" Project has been expressly designed to enhance the new educational framework** emerged from the CoE's Recommendation and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practice among European partner organizations operating in the field of education. Through the design and testing of didactic tools based on learning units, it aims to trial common learning pathways, from a critical intercultural perspective, and with a focus on classes and modules tailored to **Adult Migrant Learners** (AMLs).

As a very complex and vulnerable target group for its distinctive characteristics (cultural and personal background, different levels of literacy in their native tongues, journey's trajectories and traumas, fluctuant motivations and expectations, different level of interaction with local populations, limited access to educational resources, under representation at institutional level and in media narratives, etc.), **AMLs require extra awareness and care by educators and educational systems**. The very label 'adult migrants' needs to be challenged, as it wrongly implies some homogeneity among people that may come from a huge range of socio-cultural and linguistic contexts, life experiences, and personal backgrounds. If this complexity and variety is not properly acknowledged by educators and their institutions prior any educational intervention, and a right amount of socio-linguistic information is not gathered and used to assess the learners' competence and needs, formal education can trigger frustration, vulnerability, exclusion instead of fostering inclusion.

On these assumptions, **this research paper aims to** identify gaps and inconsistencies in the current European context, to provide Key-Co partners and

4 Cf. European Commission – Training and Education, *Language teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms*, 2015, p. 16, https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/languages/library/studies/multilingual-classroom_en.pdf.

participants with some common terminological and theoretical background, facilitate the discussion around the learning units, and provide national and transnational governing bodies with a set of questions and issues that may need to be tackled for them to meet the goal stated in the CoE's2018 *Recommendation.*

In particular, the paper (from now on Intellectual Output 1, or **IO1**) will focus on **multilingualism** – deemed as a pivotal competence, especially regarding AMLs – by addressing the following research questions:

1. To what extent are multilingualism and multilingual competence considered by the five partner institutions?
2. To what extent and how is the multilingual competence valued and valorized by/within the partner institutions?
3. To what extent should the perceptions of students and teachers on multilingualism be considered?
4. What kind of teaching strategies are performed in each partner institution to develop such a multilingual competence?

## Structure and methodology of the research

To answer these research questions, IO1 was designed and accomplished through 5 stages:

1. **Desk research**, to gain a clearer picture of Key-Co partner institutions and their learners' groups (December 2018 – March 2019).
2. **Literary review on the target learners' group (AMLs)**, to gather the latest research findings on competence implementation for this group in formal and informal education settings (March-July 2019).
3. **Observations**, that took place at the Key-Co short term joint staff training event held in September 2019 at the Volkshochschule in Cham (Germany), including 15 semi-structures interviews with teachers taking part in the event, and two focus groups (45 minutes each) on the perception and use of terminology around multilingualism.
4. **Literature review about multilingualism**, with a focus on adult education and migration (October-December 2019), to outline some possible research gaps at European level.
5. **Questionnaires on terminology**, distributed to teachers from the five partner institutions (Autumn 2019).
6. **Questionnaires on multilingualism**, distributed to teachers, admin support staff, and students from all five partner institutions (to be possibly used as a base for follow-up interviews; Winter 2020).
7. **Follow-up interviews in situ with three target groups** (teachers, admin support staff, and students) to collect further data (Winter 2020); the use of this tool, which originally implied visits to each institution by the two investigators, has been strongly limited by Covid-19 restrictions across 2020-21.
8. **Data analysis and writing up** of the IO1 paper (Summer and Autumn 2020).

## Key-Co system partner organizations

Key-Co System involves **five partner organisations from four different European countries:**

1. Asociación Guaraní (AG) – Madrid, Spain;
2. Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti «Nelson Mandela» Palermo 1 (CPIA1) - Palermo, Italy;
3. Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti Palermo 2 (CPIA2) - Palermo, Italy;
4. «Second Chance» ScholeioDefterisEfkairiasAssou in Lechaiou (SCL) - Lechaiou, Greece;
5. Volkshochschule im Landkreis Cham (VHS Cham) - Cham, Germany.

These partner organisations vary considerably in terms of managerial and administrative structure, funding bodies and legal status (state-funded and owned institutions vs non-governmental organizations), size, pedagogic approach (goal-oriented vs student-oriented), syllabi and mission (educational vs vocational), teaching personnel, teaching material (from textbooks provided by Ministries of Education to materials freely selected by teachers), provenance, nationality and age of their students. However, all of them deliver formal education to adult learners, count – among their students – migrants (used as an umbrella term)[5], asylum seekers, and refugees, have mixed classes (which include nationals and foreigners); offer a variety of content and language classes (at different levels), provide their students with some certification/qualification nationally recognised, have the final goal to foster integration and social inclusion. **More importantly for the sake of Key-Co System, all of them target a specific type/group of learner: the Adult Migrant Learner (AML).**

5 Cf. the International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on migration*, IML Series No. 34, 2019, sub voce *migrant*: «An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes several well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students… At the international level, no universally accepted definition for "migrant" exists. The present definition was developed by IOM for its own purposes, and it is not meant to imply or create any new legal category».

## The target group's learning specificities

**Key-Co System's ambition is to challenge and harmonize education paths for AMLs throughout Europe, in line with the eight key competence framework** described in the 2018's *Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*, compare policies and practices of the five aforementioned teaching partners to better understand how education is currently offered to AMLs (and to what extent it could be improved), and to foster and disseminate best practice through learning units specifically tailored for AMLs.

**The integration of adult migrants into host communities has been a subject of political debate and policy initiatives at the Council of Europe**, and in a growing number of the Council of Europe member states, since the late 1960s.[6] However, only in the last two decades large-scale initiatives have focused on the linguistic integration of adult migrants, to name the title of a project launched in 2006.

Drawing on the tools, instruments and other resources developed by the Council of Europe over several decades in the field of learning/teaching languages, the *Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants* (LIAM) project has sought to facilitate the integration of migrants in civil society and to promote social cohesion, in keeping with the Council of Europe's core values. Accordingly, supports have been developed for policy makers, providers of language courses, and those in charge of testing migrants' language competences.[7]

One of the reasons for the CoE to undertake the LIAM project was to assess the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a Council of Europe framework adopted in most European education systems since 1990s.[8] According to surveys carried out in the past fifteen years, the CEFR has been used with increasing frequency to define the levels of proficiency that adult migrants are required to achieve in order to secure their permanence, residence and citizenship in European countries[9], although it was not intended

6 Cf. The Council of Europe, *Documents formulating the position of the Council of Europe on language education policy*, https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/official-texts.

7 Cf. The Council of Europe, Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM), https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/adult-migrants.

8 Cf. The Council of Europe, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment - Companion Volume*, https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages.

9 Cf. The Council of Europe – Education Department News, *20 Member States* participate in a Council of Europe Survey regarding the Use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*, 7 March

for such a purpose and its abuse could infringe the AML's human rights.[10]

For these reasons, the resources developed by the LIAM project focused on language policies and their implementation (at different levels), language learning programmes for adult migrants, learners' profiles, and the assessment of learning outcomes. Rather than setting standard or goals (as the CEFR did), they have been intended to help member states to meet the specific needs of adult migrants or, as Hans-Jürgen Krumm and Verena Plutzar claim, to «tailor[ing] language provision and requirements to the needs and capacities of adult migrants».[11]

These resources have also challenged the idea of assimilation and re-contextualized the concept of integration, echoing *Resolution 1437* (2005), I.4 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe («The concept of integration aims at ensuring social cohesion through accommodation of diversity understood as a two-way process. Immigrants have to accept the laws and basic values of European societies and, on the other hand, host societies have to respect immigrants' dignity and distinct identity and to take them into account when elaborating domestic policies»).[12]

Furthermore, by assuming that integration is a two-way and layered process, they were also designed to ensure sustainable and durable results, such as

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2017, https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/20-member-states-participate-in-a-council-of-europe-survey-regarding-the-use-of-the-common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-cefr-.

10 Cfr. https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/chapter-3-linguistic-integration-adult-migrants-liam-project-council-europe. Hans-Jürgen Krumm, *Profiles Instead of Levels: The CEFR and Its (Ab)Uses in the Context of Migration*, «Modern Language Journal», 91 (2007), pp. 667-69.

11 Cf. Hans-Jürgen Krumm & Verena Plutzar, *Tailoring language provision and requirements to the needs and capacities of adult migrants*, pp. 1-2, https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1c8.

12 Cf. ibid, pp. 1-2: «Integration is different from assimilation because it concerns both parties: the immigrants and the receiving society. The effect of assimilation would be complete adaptation to the language, behaviour, and values of the receiving society, with the consequential loss of the language(s) of origin, whereas in the process of integration both sides, migrants, and the receiving country, are open to creating new common ground for living together, respecting the already formed identity. This gives migrants a chance to make use of resources they bring with them and to expand their identity, acquiring new concepts and a new language; at the same time, the receiving country will see migrants as people enriching its linguistic and cultural dimensions. This is a process, which takes a long time, and which usually cannot be completed within the first years after arrival. To support this process, it is not enough for the receiving country to provide special integration programmes which have to be attended within a very short period following immigration. It is necessary to change and adapt all kinds of public services, housing, admission to the labour market and education programmes to the needs of immigrants […]. Integration aims at giving the immigrants an opportunity to take part in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of their new country – so that at the end of such a process they can live under the same legal, social, and financial conditions as natives of that country. It is a generally accepted view that the ability to speak the language(s) of the receiving society usually plays an important part in the process of integration, because it is a precondition for participation. However, mastery of the language is not enough; it is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition».

fostering social cohesion and full participation of all European citizens in the democratic process.

Member states have contributed LIAM by sharing their concerns and expressing their needs through three surveys of policy and practice (2007, 2009 and 2013), by taking part in three intergovernmental conferences in Strasbourg (2008, 2010 and 2014), and by making use of the results of a Symposium (2016) that provided them with a collection of papers and case studies discussing a wide variety of issues designed to stimulate reflection.[13]

A dedicated LIAM website was then designed to respond to the potential needs of diverse categories of users, to offer various kinds of resources – including a set of Principles addressing the various issues to be considered when designing policies to facilitate the linguistic integration of adult migrant – and a list of Key terms aiming at harmonizing background materials and vocabulary across Europe.[14]

Since LIAM, **scholars and policy makers across Europe have more and more acknowledged the importance to accustom both adult migrants and their host societies to the inclusion process, with a bidirectional approach aiming at facilitating and harmonizing social inclusion and preserving and supporting migrants' agency and emancipation.**[15] They also have redefined adult migrants' linguistic status not only from the perspective of the receiving society – where migrants are often seen as «speechless» as they are not able to use the language(s) of the country – but also by considering migrants' linguistic and metalinguistic competence. Migrants are not just as able to effectively communicate but they can also, normally, fluently speak more than one language a) because they come from countries which are multilingual and b) because in their migration trajectory, while travelling, they have been exposed to a variety of codes and have been required to learn other languages or varieties for surviving and accomplishing their journey.

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13 Cf. The Council of Europe, Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM), https://www.coe.int/it/web/lang-migrants.

14 Cf. Ivi.

15 MEDBALT, Strategic Partnership in Adult Migrant Education: Perspectives from Mediterranean and Baltic Sea Regions (MEDBALT), Vilnius, 2014 ff., https://repositorio.grial.eu/bitstream/grial/702/1/O1_MEDBALT_Adult_migrant_education_methodology_and_the_integration_programs_analysis.pdf; James Simpson and Anne Whiteside, Adult Language Education and Migration. Challenging agendas in policy and practice, London: Routledge, 2015.

Consequently, **close attention has been more and more towards teaching approaches and methods that can take into consideration AMLs' linguistic repertoire, sociolinguistic background, and motivational profile, in order not only to make adult migrants «good citizens»,[16] but also to involve them more actively in their learning process and fully work on their linguistic and metalinguistic awareness and potential.**[17]

As UNESCO has recently claimed in its *4th Global report on adult learning and education* (2019),[18] participatory decision-making and active involvement of local communities in learning experiences is deemed to have a positive effect on AMLs' achievements. In the classroom, learner-centered teaching methods, with the employment of active and experiential learning techniques, are seen as crucial to enhance the learner's critical reflection and practical application of acquired skills in everyday lives.[19] According to UNESCO's surveys, adults mostly benefit when the lessons' content is aligned with learners' practical needs, and the language they perform in their daily lives. Therefore, assessing expectations and conducting needs' analysis of the societal domains with which AMLs must and want to engage has proved to be useful in both directions: for the benefit of the individual learner, and for the benefit of his/her community.

Investigation on instructional strategies has identified a number of in-class activities which are more effective if employed with the target group, such as observations/observing demonstrations; role play; simulations, dramatizations; interview; picture study; games/puzzles; analysis of materials/process; project making; small group discussions; problem-solving situations; drawing; field trips; videos; use of technology.[20]

Moreover, the recognition and disclosure of the individuals' ethnic, cultural and learning background has been addressed as a tool to foster personal expression, diversity and non-discrimination through the diverse-classroom approach (as

16 Cf. Alisha M. B. Heinemann, *The making of 'good citizens': German courses for migrants and refugees*, «Studies in the Education of Adults», 49 (2017), 2, pp. 177-95.
17 Cf. Shibao Guo, *The Changing Nature of Adult Education in The Age of Transnational Migration: Toward a Model of Recognitive Adult Education*, «New Direction for adult and continuing education», 146 (2015), pp. 7-17.
18 Cf. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 4th Global report on adult learning and education, Hamburg, 2019,https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2019-12/4th_global_report_on_adult_learning_and_education_2019.pdf.
19 Cf. Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice*, «New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education», 74 (1997), pp. 5-12.
20 AdelaidaGines, E*ducational psychology: a textbook for college students in psychology and teacher education,* Manila: Rex Book Store, 1998.

the pioneering work done at ItaStra in Palermo has also shown).[21] According to UNESCO's *Investing in cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue* (2009), since «programmes need to go beyond the mere coexistence of people of different cultures in a community or a society, they call for learning strategies that include opportunities for cultural exchange, cross-fertilization and enhancing awareness of mutual dependence and inter-relationship».[22]

As far as literacy, numeracy, cultural awareness, and multilingualism are concerned, «the use of a learner's mother tongue as the language of instruction has been found to have a positive impact on learning. Literacy provision that initially uses the learners' first language has cognitive, psychological and pedagogical advance». Moreover, even though the understanding of language education for migrants rarely embraces multilingualism, multilingualism and multilingual practice better interplay with the migrants' need for multi-layered cultural and communicative competences.[23]

Research has also raised awareness about the specific social and personal factors that could obstacle learning achievements within the target group (such as personal traumas, lack of motivation, lack of money, hostile attitude towards education, etc.), and emphasizes the importance of community-based and informal learning approaches which create spaces for emancipatory learning and social action.[24]

**Despite the extent of contributions on this topic, however, there is still a disconnection between research-based guidelines and actual practices.[25] As a recent body of comparative research about the actual practice of Adult Education (AE) in real settings claims, a great deal of inconsistency still characterizes the profiles of AE to migrants in Europe in terms of policies, strategies, institutions involved, programmes, approaches, and results.[26]**

According to AE scholars and experts, in many European countries there is

21 Cf. MEDBALT, *Strategic Partnership in Adult Migrant Education*, cit, and Guo, The Changing Nature, cit.
22 UNESCO, Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, Paris: UNESCO, 2009, https://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf.
23 Cf. James Simpson, Anne Whiteside (eds.), *Language Learning and Migration: Challenging Agendas in Policy and Practice*, London: Routledge, 2015.
24 Cf. Richard Edwards, Sandy Sieminski, David Zeldin, *Adult Learners, Educational Training*, London: Routledge, 2014 (first published 1993).
25 Cf. Simpson, Whiteside (eds.), *Language Learning and Migration*, cit.
26 Maria N. Gravani, *Learner-Centred Education (LCE) as a tool for enhancing adult learning in distance learning universities*, "Journal of Adult and Continuing Education", 25 (2), pp. 198–216.

a lack of specific guidelines for AE to migrants, and «education measures are fragmented and applied only in the framework of project-based activities».[27] Moreover, the MEDBALT report (which compares AE policies and practices in Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Spain, Cyprus and Malta) reveals that the topic of AE tailored to migrants is still absent from the political agenda of many governments or is not sustained by a clear commitment.

Consequently, in several countries NGOs and charities are often the main actors in providing adult education to migrants, but they face numerous difficulties, from funding limitations to the employment of volunteer teachers who are not qualified to teach national languages as L2/LS, from misconception about multilingualism to the obstacles in the recognition of the learners' previous qualifications and skills. Since migrants' learning needs are not adequately met, AMLs are often offered – and deemed to take – mainly unskilled jobs, despite the Recommendations of the Council of Europe on key-competences and social inclusion. Finally, the MEDBALT report highlights a lack of overall coordination between NGOs and governments both on international and national level.

The MEDBALT report is also very adamant on what the «task» of adult migrant education policies should be. They should «provide learning opportunities and equal access to education for all, and especially, the most vulnerable and socially/economically disadvantaged groups: refugees, asylum seekers, (low-skilled) migrant workers, the unemployed migrants, adult migrants with special needs, the elderly migrants, migrant women, migrants with disabilities, etc. At the same time, to maintain and strengthen social (human) resources, adult migrant education policies have to ensure access to quality education of qualified migrant workers and entrepreneurs». They should therefore «guarantee equal rights for all migrants» and – from the perspective of provision of education and training - equal access «regardless of adult migrant financial and legal status and other personal social-demographical characteristics (gender, religion, race, etc.)»; they should then include as their core element «human rights and implementation of equal opportunities», the promotion of social inclusion, the creation of a more inclusive society, and «the prevention of social exclusion and segregation». They finally should challenge receiving societies' education systems, programmes, objectives: receiving societies should be better prepared to accept migrants as full members of the society.

27 Cf. MEDBALT, *Strategic Partnership in Adult Migrant Education*, cit.

These objectives – MEDBALT report suggests – would require EU's member states to take some common actions across the board, such as:

- identifying and recruiting educators-service providers for training (diversity management at workplace, language and professional capacity, intercultural competences, awareness about international migration issues, etc.);
- implementing family support measures for adult migrant learners;
- adapting and organising infrastructure of adult migrant education measures for socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; ensuring equal access to quality education and language training for all adult learners, regardless legal status and social-demographic characteristics;
- promoting intercultural competences and multilingualism among adult migrants at individual and family levels on one hand, and service providers on individual and institutional levels on the other hand; including adult migrants (or people with migration background) in implementation of adult migrant education measures (especially, at non governmental level);
- initiating and developing mentoring programmes for adult migrants; creating effective educational support for adult migrant and their families at schools and in local communities.

Within this context, adult migrant education policies should be implemented in the framework of the adult education and embedded in long-term integration strategies (or action plans), vocational education, and training schemes. These schemes should be sustained not only to seek for more effective integration outcomes, but also to include migrants' participation in the implementation of integration and education measures, which are often designed *for* them but *despite* them. Such approach would give voice to migrant communities, foster civic engagement and political participation.

The development and implementation of strategies and policies of the integration of migrants – the report concludes – should be one of the most important challenges to be addressed in the future. In such perspective, adult migrant education should be considered as a key priority at several levels, and not only by ministries of education. Also, equal and comprehensive adult migrant

education should entail a new approach to infrastructure and synergies at local level between formal and informal education providers, as well as institutions and civil society.

The effective achievement of education and training programs for adult migrants is related to systematic co-operation among relevant actors, clear training goals in terms of employment opportunities and recruitment, combination of technical and language learning/teaching, flexible organisation of education in relation to participants' opportunities (such as use of e-learning, personal support in the form of mentoring, clear identification of the target group and of the group's needs and conditions).[28]

The main aim of infrastructure of implementation of adult migrant integration measures has to be related to increased capacities of providers of educational measures to deal with diversity of abilities – and language superdiversity – to reflect migrants' competence and needs according to their socio-demographic profiles and ethno-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, it has to be sensitive regarding all grounds of discrimination – not only discrimination based on race or ethnicity, but also on religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality/citizenship, language (and language competence), social origin, and residence status.

Effective instrument to foster diversity and non-discrimination entails 'diverse' classroom approach, to allow learners from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds to learn together, thus raising the educational motivation and aspiration of disadvantaged learners as well as fostering inclusion and social cohesion without undermining the educational outcomes of other learners. Diverse classroom as an instrument fostering equality and non-discrimination also implies new attitudes towards multilingualism, which should be seen as an asset for all languages and for all learners, to boost self-confidence, intercultural awareness, and citizenship prospects.

As everyone should have the right to enjoy equal access to language course and vocational training (since language competence is considered to be an essential integration requirement), adult migrant education infrastructure should facilitate

28 Cf. Maurice de Greef, Dominique Verté, Mien Segers, *Differential outcomes of adult education on adult learners' increase in social inclusion*, "Journal Studies in Continuing Education", Volume 37, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 62-78; Bjarne Wahlgren B., Tinne Geiger, *Integration through adult and continuing education*, National Centre of Competence Development, the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, 2015.

this right and remove any obstacles by providing free general and targeted support for newly arriving immigrants, especially in areas of language learning and vocational training. This should be done by targeting those in need (including vulnerable groups of adult migrants: refugees, migrant workers, elderly migrants, migrant women, etc.). Main elements of adult migrant education infrastructure should then encompass:

- geographically convenient and time-wise flexible premises for provision of educational measures;
- flexible and needed based approach towards implementation of education measures (teaching/learning methods, diverse learning environments and multicultural teaching approaches);
- preparation of individual and/or collective educational plans, monitoring tools for assessing experiences and identifying learning pathways;
- holistic adult migrant education curriculum, considering not only integration outcomes (such as communication skills, social resources, etc.), but also obstacles, related to the most vulnerable migrant groups (such as post-traumatic syndromes, disabilities, etc.);
- specific description of the roles and division of work of those involved in provision of educational support;
- effective and flexible (formal and informal) system of recognition of qualifications;
- self-evaluation and institutional and/or legislative development.

**This list, however, is still a list of *desiderata* rather than a picture of the reality**, not only for the great deal of inconsistency which still characterizes adult education to migrants across Europe in terms of policies, strategies, approaches, but also for the lack of comparative approaches and opportunities to trial and apply this set of recommendations and see if a common integrated teaching and learning format can be realistically designed and pursued across institutions and countries.

To what extent Key-Co System partners are aware of these sets of recommendations? To what extent Key-Co System can facilitate a transnational

discussion among its partners on this open questions? To what extent can the reflection around multilingualism – among the eight key-competences – provide educational institutions across Europe with a suitable critical approach to AMLs' integration?

## Multilingualism and Adult Migrant Learners: a brief review

**Multilingualism is a complex phenomenon** that can be studied from different perspectives in disciplines such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and education. There are many definitions of multilingualism. Wei Li defines a multilingual individual as «anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)».[29] A well-known – and slightly different – definition of multilingualism was given by the European Commission in 2007: «the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives».[30] This definition presents multilingualism not only as an individual phenomenon, but also as a social one, where these two dimensions are not completely separated but, instead, intertwined.

To distinguish it from multilingualism as a social or collective phenomenon, individual multilingualism is sometimes referred to as plurilingualism. The Council of Europe defines plurilingualism as the «repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use» so that «some individuals are monolingual and some are plurilingual». In contrast, multilingualism is seen as «the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one variety of language…».[31]

Within individual multilingualism, there can be important differences in the experience of acquiring and using languages. An individual can acquire different languages simultaneously by being exposed to them from birth or successively by being exposed to second/additional/foreign languages later in his or her life. At societal level, a distinction has been made between subtractive and additive multilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism is the perception that the acquisition of L2 would be detrimental to an individual's L1. This could be caused by the increased cognitive load due to L2 acquisition which consequently decreases competence in users' L1. This phenomenon is found to be experienced by minority groups, especially when they are not schooled in their L1: with the frequent usage

29 Wei Li, *Research perspectives on bilingualism and multilingualism*. In Wei Li, Melissa Moyer (eds.), *The Blackwell handbook of research methods on bilingualism and multilingualism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 3-17.
30 Cf. European Commission, *Final report: High level group on multilingualism*, Luxembourg: European Communities, 2007, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/multireport_en.pdf.
31 The Council of Europe, *Policies for Plurilingualism*, s.d., http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Division_en.asp. For an overview, cf. Jasone Cenoz, *Defining multilingualism*, "Annual Review of Applied Linguistics", 33 (2013), pp. 3-18.

of their L2, their L1 competence and culture is gradually replaced by the L2. This also happens when immigrant children are required to shift to the language of the host country without being given the opportunity to develop their heritage language first.

Additive bilingualism would instead imply that the acquisition of L2 is not detrimental to the user's L1 but is in fact beneficial, the word additive suggesting an addition to someone's language repertoire. While learning a second language, one's first language skills and culture remains valued and are even reinforced. Additive bilingualism is thus usually seen as the main goal of bilingual education. Scholars refer to total additive bilingualism when a speaker is not only highly proficient in both his/her L1 and L2, but also when he/she is able to hold onto, and be positive to, his/her L1 culture whilst possessing the same attitude L2 culture.

In terms of individual performance, when considered in its every-day (or day-to-day) life practice, multilingualism can be defined in two different ways. One definition considers maximal proficiency to be necessary (i.e. native control of two or more languages), the other accepts minimal proficiency (minimal competence in languages rather than the mother tongue). This also introduces the distinction between balanced and unbalanced multilingualism, which is the distinction between being equally fluent in two or more languages or showing different and very different levels of proficiency depending on the language, and – in correlation – the use dimension of multilingualism, i.e. the ability of the speaker to switch, when necessary, from one language to the other(s) without major difficulty.

However, when looking at the multilingual speaker's abilities, uses, repertoire, rather than at his/her proficiency language by language, the concept of multicompetence may become more suitable. **Multicompetence implies not only the knowledge of the language, but also metalinguistic knowledge and communicative resources in spontaneous conversations. It also infers the gap between the traditional focus – in research and education – on one language at a time and multilingualism in real life, involving all known languages and multilingual discursive practices**. As scholars have established, multilingual speakers can navigate among languages, can adjust their language repertoire and competence to a wide set of variables, and do not necessarily use different languages for the same purposes, in all communicative situations, in the same

domains, or with the same people.

**Such a multicompetence cannot be measured from a monolingual perspective** «against the yardstick of the ideal native speaker of each of the languages involved». This «monolingual bias» in fact does not take into consideration the characteristics and potential of multilingual speakers at the cognitive level, neither it accepts that multilinguals can use their languages as a resource so that the known languages reinforce one another and let the speakers dynamically move between languages in real communication.

In the last two decades, holistic views of multilingualism have paid more and more attention to multilingual speech as a creative process which includes instances of language interaction in different directions and fruitfully have introduced the term and the concept of **translanguaging** (from Welsh *trawsieithu*). Originally referring to the educational practice of using Welsh and English in the classroom so that students read a passage or listened to some information in one language and had to develop their work in another language, with regards to multilingualism it refers to the process that involves multiple discursive practices and that appears normal in multilingual communities.

In recent years, **translanguaging, i.e. the process whereby multilingual speakers use all their languages as an integrated communication system**[32], has gained currency also in formal education, when several languages are studied as school subjects or languages of instruction, and where new approaches aim at integrating the curricula of the different languages to cross-linguistically activate resources of multilingual speakers, and in informal and non-formal education, for instance in migrant or refugee settings, where it has proved to be a useful methodology to enhance speakers motivations and self-confidence.

Since the 1990s, the European Union policy about language teaching draws fully from the concept of multilingualism[33], and the benefits of a multilingual

32 On the definition and the concept of translanguaging, cf. Ofelia Garcia, Li Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Gwyn Lewis, Bryn Jones, Colin Baker, *Translanguaging: Origins and Development from School to Street and Beyond*, "Educational Research and Evaluation", 18 (7), 2012, pp. 641-54; Gerardo Mazzaferro, *Translanguaging as Everyday Practice*, New York: Cham Springer, 2018.

33 «While the Council of Europe uses the term *'plurilingualism'* for referring to multiple language competences of individuals, European Union's official documents use *'multilingualism'* to describe both individual competences and societal situations. This is partly due to difficulties making a distinction between *plurilingual* and *multilingual* in other languages than English and French» *(Council recommendations on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages*, 22 May 2019, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(02)&rid=1)

education to both the learners and the wider society, the advantages spanning from increased cognitive abilities to employability and educational achievements.[34]

**Multilingualism is also believed to increase intercultural awareness and competences**, which are fundamental skills for European citizens to contribute to social cohesion within the Union. Drawing from this assumption, the European Union language policy fosters plurilingual and intercultural education with two main aims, as stated in the *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* (2016): facilitating the acquisition of linguistic and intercultural abilities and promoting personal development, so that individuals can realize their full potential.[35]

**Supporting multilingualism is therefore seen as a crucial task for promoting cultural diversity and linguistic skills** as well as strongly contributing to economic and cultural relations between the EU and the rest of the world.[36] For this reason, the EU does not address only the linguistic development of European citizens and local populations, but also the linguistic repertoires of prospect and new citizens, identifying several reasons to consider linguistic diversity as a form of cultural enrichment and a tool to foster social inclusion.

However, as far as migrant learners are concerned, most efforts are placed in the teaching of European national languages, whose knowledge is a compulsory requisite to obtain citizenship in many EU member states,[37] and a key factor which influences the inclusion process within the host country, in particular participation in the «wider society», access to public services, and 'integration' in the job market.[38]

**Within this context, the language(s) of instruction play a key-role, in particular for migrants who start a learning path after arrival. This however should not imply that instruction should be accessed only through the national language of**

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34 Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Language teaching and learning in the multilingual classroom*, European Commission, 2016, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c5673e19-c292-11e6-a6db-01aa75ed71a1,

35 Cfr. Jean-Claude Beacco, Michael Byram, Marisa Cavalli, Daniel Coste, MirjamEgliCuenat, Francis Goullier, Johanna Panthie, *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*, Council of Europe, 2016, https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/guide-for-the-development-and-implementation-of-curricula-for-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education.

36 Cfr. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Language teaching and learning*, cit..

37 Cfr. Lorenzo Rocca, Cecile Carlsen, Bart Deygers, *The 2018 Council of Europe and ALTE survey on language and knowledge of society policies for migrants*, 2018, https://rm.coe.int/the-2018-council-of-europe-and-alte-survey-on-language-and-knowledge-o/16809c88f9.

38 Cfr. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Language teaching and learning*, cit.

**the host country.**[39] Developing skills through the mother tongue(s) is considered to have important effects for the students to attain achievements in other subjects, to enhance their motivation and to develop their personal identity and socio-economic potential.[40] Research in psycholinguistics have furthermore shown that mother tongues should also be considered as a starting point for successfully teaching and learning any other language, as «there is an impact of the first language on second language acquisition for adult learners too. It is empirically verified that in their learning strategies adult language learners make more or less conscious use of comparing language structures and therefore the first and other languages spoken by learners need to be taken into consideration in the learning process of the second language».[41]

**This has had an impact on how language teaching should be administered and endorsed**, shifting from the behaviorist approach, based on the principle of monolingualism in teaching,[42] to the concept of «memory», and the development of language competence and abilities as a network.[43]

The concept of plurilingualism expressed in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*: Learning, teaching, assessment i.e. relies on this very assumption: a plurilingual approach should emphasize the fact that the multilingual learner does not keep languages and cultures «in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather build up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages

39 Cfr. ibid. These assumptions are partly confirmed by the results reported in the already mentioned Handbook of multilingualism, cit.

40 «Businesses have realised that the plurilingual resources of their employees are advantageous to them. Migrant languages also have their own specific commercial value. All this is related to the fact that in vocational education the principle of "at least two languages for all!" now generally applies. And knowledge of a migrant language is included here. Attractive exchange programmes with other language areas as a part of training contribute to the achievement of the goals that have been set». Cfr. Britta Hufeisen, Gerhard Neuner, *The plurilingualism project. Tertiary language learning: German after English*, Council of Europe – European Centre for Modern Languages, 2004, p. 174.

41 Hans-Jürgen Krumm, Verena Plutzar, *Tailoring language provision and requirements to the needs and capacities of adult migrants*, Council of Europe, 2008, https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802fc1c8,

42 «The development of "structured co-existence" – no compounding of linguistic systems, but their co-ordination (Lado 1964, Brooks 1963) – was the principle for language input, storage and processing during the learning of a foreign language. Mixing the languages during foreign language learning was considered to be a source of error (interference). This led, among other things, to the principle of monolingualism in teaching, i.e. the strict exclusion of the mother tongue from foreign language learning» (Hufeisen, Neuner, *The plurilingualism project*, cit.).

43 Cf. Frank G. Königs, *Mehrsprachigkeit statt Sprachenlosigkeit! Überlegungen zur Bedeutung von Mehrsprachigkeitskonzepten für Deutsch als Fremdsprache, in R. Koroschetz (Hrsg.), Brückenschlag. Actas del X. Congreso Latinoamericano de Germanistica. Akten des X. Lateinamerikanischen Germanistenkongresses in Caracas vom 2.-6. Oktober* 2000, Caracas 2000, pp. 1-17.

interrelate and interact.[44]

Therefore, the EU guidelines for multilingual classrooms emphasize teaching methods which highlight the development of meta-linguistic awareness through activities that encourage discussion about the language, comparisons between various aspects of different languages (phonetics, lexicon, and grammar, but also communicative conventions and styles[45]), intercultural awareness,[46] and the activation of all the language knowledge and meta-competence the learner possesses.[47]

**EU guidelines for teaching to migrants also address the importance of using personal background information and the learner's mother tongue as a starting point to co-design language courses and lessons.[48]** EU documents recommend therefore a learner's need-oriented approach to language teaching, which prioritizes an inclusion process for migrants also through an effort made by the society.[49]

A final point highlighted by research is that adult migrant learners (AML) often learn the target language mainly outside the classroom, through relevant linguistic contacts with native speakers. Therefore, educational institution should be able to value this informal or non-formal knowledge, and foster connections with the wider society.

**However, despite increasing the attention to the preservation of heritage languages has been the European directive for what concern language policies, more recent European reports highlight the mismatch between official resolutions and recommendations and actual teaching policies which, in the**

44 Cf. Hufeisen, Neuner, *The plurilingualism project*, cit., p. 4.

45 According to Hufeisen, Neuner, *The plurilingualism project*, cit., p. 4, on an intercultural level the comparison between languages could highlight differences in toning-down strategies when making a request or a demand, degrees of directness, expression of thanks and greetings, leave-takings, conversation endings, style discussion, use of listener signals, approach to dialogue roles, organisation and individual dialogue phases. Nevertheless, employing this perspective when teaching a language could be problematic since «particular countries play a dominant role in the studies done to date, with the result that findings are available for certain cultural contrasts, but not for others. Overall, there is a need for broader knowledge about cultural contrasts in specific communicative and linguistic areas in which there are cultural differences that affect communicative pragmatic competence. Appropriate analyses are namely a prerequisite for the further development of teaching materials and exercises».

46 «People with higher competences in several languages gain greater intercultural competences from the greater knowledge and awareness of other cultures they have gained through language learning» (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Language teaching and learning*, cit.).

47 Cf. Hufeisen, Neuner, *The plurilingualism project*, cit., p. 4.

48 Cf. Ibid.

49 Cf. Krumm, Plutzar, *Tailoring language provision*, cit.

**process of developing benchmarks for integration, may even violate human rights by explicitly forbidding the use of the mother tongue in both formal and informal settings.** From a sociolinguistic perspective, this development actually shows «a certain tendency towards assimilation – in that it is mainly the claims of the receiving countries that seem to be important whereas the question of how far to respect the immigrants' personality, languages and interests is no longer seen to be of equal importance». Despite language is regarded as a key issue for social integration, several important aspects (maintenance of L1s and migrants' plurilingualism, the role of multilingualism in intercultural awareness) are neglected. The focus still stays on the «time on task» hypothesis: the more time people spend in learning and using the L2, the better their competence will be. Although this strategy has not been only partially supported by research in psycholinguistic, and in some cases– when the use of the learner's mother tongue is explicitly discouraged if not forbidden – it even violates the human rights of the migrants, it remains the guiding principle in many countries.

Other aspects which seem to impede the implementation of the EU linguistic policies are the lack of proper training for teachers[50] and the inadequacy of task tests to assess language skills and pursue the aims expressed in official documents.[51] Also, communication strategies employed by the institutions involved in adult migrant education can act as a barrier to participation: the lack of multilingual facilitators, lack of interpreters, absence of internal differentiation methodology to work with diverse learning groups have posed challenges in the context of education programmes for migrants.[52]

**Last but not least, a strong bias against multilingual repertoires and multilingual competence in the classroom is still very present both among teachers**, who believe the shift from L1 to L2 being a pre-condition of any formal education programme, and among learners, who may develop defective multilingualism in diglossia contexts or may neglect their L1 for the sake of social promotion and integration in the host society.

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50 «So far, most teachers (often monolingual themselves) have received no training in making use of this plurilingualism and in teaching one language and at the same time making use of others» (Krumm, Plutar, *Tailoring language provision*, cit., p. 8).

51 «Passing a test indicates how well a person can manage the specific testing culture and demonstrate the specific linguistic skills tested – it says nothing about the person's integration process» (Krumm, Plutar, *Tailoring language provision*, cit., p. 8).

52 Cfr. Ulrike Hanemann, *Language and literacy programmes for migrants and refugees: challenges and ways forward*, Unesco, 2018, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266077

While a consistent body of data, research and guidelines exists about teaching to multilingual classrooms in compulsory/formal education (see the EU report Language teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms), fewer and scattered data analysis are available about adults, and especially about migrant adults. AMLs' needs and attitudes towards education are variegated and different, and assumptions based on teaching methods for children or young adults cannot be easily applied to this target group. In his paper *Language and literacy programmes for migrants and refugees: challenges and ways forward* Hanemann lists some multilingual best practices which could enhance participation and achievements of adult migrants, for example providing literacy education through mother-tongue and tapping resources among refugees and migrants themselves, who can be employed as cultural facilitators.

Further research on the role of multilingualism in migrant adults' education would also be crucial to complete the picture and help educational institutions to develop the right tools to fully conform to the EU directives about the role of multilingual competence within lifelong education.

# Investigating and evaluating multilingualism across Key-Co System: data collection and analysis

## A challenging lexicon

As a preliminary survey, a questionnaire was produced and circulated among the members of staff and teachers of the five different institutions, with the purpose of assessing:

1. if and to what extent the same terminology is shared across the project;
2. if and to what extent further lexical clarification is needed, for the sake of the project;
3. therefore, the possibility of providing the project with a wiki section to design and share a critical lexicon.

**Fifty questionnaires (ten per institution) were distributed, of which thirty-five were filled in**: the number is therefore not fully and evenly representative of all partners in the same way and cannot have a statistical implication. However, responses provided some very interesting information. **The same technical word/expression (in English) can be perceived in different ways depending not only on the different national contexts** (and the different possible translations from English into German, Greek, Italian and Spanish), **but also on individual awareness and on the lack of a common transnational frame.**

**This may suggest that we cannot assume that professionals working in the same field (AMLs' education) share the same background knowledge and terminology.** On the contrary, they may attach even opposite connotations to the same entry, and this may need to be tackled by providing partners in European transnational projects with preliminary terminological and conceptual discussions, and a starting toolkit (keywords, and their definitions) to avoid possible ambiguities and misunderstanding on lexicon and approaches.

**The results of the questionnaire have clearly shown that partners may not be aligned to a shared interpretation and goal, and that may even disagree on the semantics of key-terms** like *migrant/migrant learner* (the most controversial entries, according to the questionnaire, as half of the respondents does not feel

comfortable in using them in their workplaces), *adult learner, multilingualism, student needs, language policy, inclusion/integration, cultural awareness*, etc.

## An open discussion on multilingualism

Among the entries, *multilingualism* was further discussed as an umbrella topic during the first focus group organized in Cham in September 2019, to foster a terminological discussion – with a specific focus on AMLs – and, more generally, challenge ethnocentric frameworks in education.

As Giorgia from CPIA1argued, the meaning of *multilingualism* may depend on the national and local contexts in which one works, since multilingualism is already, in some cases, a feature shared by the classroom («multilingualism is a natural condition in almost every Italian family: we speak different languages in different context… dialects, neo-standard Italian, etc.»). However – as Massimiliano from the University of Palermo pointed out – you do not normally account dialects in the multilingual repertoire of a speaker, and you would not consider multilingual a L2 native speaker for its dialectal competence.

**This semantic ambivalence of *multilingualism*** was confirmed by the questionnaires that were distributed during the Key-Co short term joint staff training event in Cham in September 2019: in their answers, many respondents mainly focused on the regional linguistic diversity or social backgrounds of the host country, without taking into much consideration AMLs' linguistic repertoires, personal experiences, trajectories, motivations. **To many respondents, *multilingualism* sounded more like an abstract sociolinguistic category, related to language policy and planning, rather than an operational concept that could refer to, and could affect, the speakers' everyday life, motivation, language competence.**

Moreover, participants did not agree on the degree of fluency and competence which a speaker is expected to have to be considered «multilingual». Some interviewees believed that all the languages spoken by a multilingual subject should be performed with the same degree of fluency for him/her to be considered multilingual, without specifying what an acceptable degree of fluency should be. Some other participants, however, highlighted the fact that multilingualism should not primarily refer to grammar competence, but to communicative

competence and intercultural awareness («sapersi destreggiare in un contesto comunicativo», 'knowing how to juggle in a communicative context'), since grammar knowledge alone is not sufficient to guarantee a good level of (effective) communication and mutual comprehension between native and not native speakers in a given context.

The second focus group, about **multilingual strategies in teaching**, showed that another disputed topic related to multilingualism is the ability to use different languages in real contexts, which, according to some participants, can even undermine the purpose of a multilingual education. As Anna from CPIA1 claimed «after all [multilingualism] is not so useful in a practical way… [Students] do not normally need to speak different languages in a given context. **Multilingualism is theoretically a great skill, but not a lot of people share this competence.** What could students use Bambara for, in their real everyday life in a place like Palermo? They might use Bambara in courts but not in other aspects of life. I agree with the idea that the more languages you have in your portfolio, the better is for your life, but I don't think all languages are equally useful neither for the labour market at local level nor for your everyday life».

**The discussion around this aspect encouraged participants to reflect about the role and purposes of education, and the autonomy of choices in a globalized world:** «are we learning [or teaching] a language because it's useful or because we like it? – wondered Erin from VHS Cham – If we do it just because it is functional, it has to do with power relations which, in our case, dates back to colonialism».

**Power relations among cultures and languages are at stake, when dealing with multilingualism from the country of arrival's perspective.** Nevertheless, some participants agreed that multilingual competence can bring fundamental advantages when it involves learning the language of education: «This is a fundamental competence to develop – suggests Giuseppina from CPIA2 – We must use any available strategy to let students acquire this competence. We should focus on the students' specific needs and backgrounds, trying to help them to become acquainted with their host country, enter the labour market, live better. They should not be considered simple guests, but as people that could be fully 'integrated' in the new hosting community. Multilingualism is the fundamental base on which we have to produce our educational and citizenship tools». Moreover, Erin added, «different languages provide you with different ways of thinking, and it is not just a matter of integration: it's also about understanding

cultures and the different ways of thinking within different cultural systems».

The discussion than moved to another specific point: the students' background. As Giorgia stated:

> *Our students are used to speak, and listen to, many languages: they are plurilingual students by background and practice. But when they arrive in a new country, they normally differentiate between the language they speak and the language they learn. The role of the teacher is to help them transfer their competence from one language to another and develop their awareness about transcoding according to the different aims, places, and contexts where you can speak and use different languages. We do not need to accept the idea that official languages are more important than heritage languages. Acquiring awareness in languages allows the speaker to acquire further competences. If you facilitate a discussion about the different languages and provide the chance to transcode, it is easier then to foster a reflection on the structure of thinking. Multiculturalism is not one topic of the syllabus among many others. It is an approach, a perspective, based on the ability to transcode (not only by means of translation: translation is not equivalent to cultural mediation. By just translating the language you cannot translate the culture). I think that the main role of the teacher is to raise this kind of awareness, and help students see themselves as multilingual subjects.*

In agreement with Giorgia, Ana from Asociación Guaraní insisted on **the motivational aspect that could be enhanced using multilingual strategies:**

> *It is not easy to introduce multilingual competence and awareness in the classroom. Some of our students do not speak Spanish but speak other languages, and that is useful to learn other languages, as it may help your brain be more plastic, as research has demonstrated. You are more open minded. On the other hand, if in a classroom there is more than one person who speaks a foreign language, I think it is*

> *useful to use it to create a more collaborative environment and share knowledge among the students. Sometimes I hear that Susana [one of Ana's colleagues] uses different languages to explain and connect concepts across cultures: the teacher herself not only wants to be aware of what can culturally motivate students, but also make them value more their own languages.*

However, Erin claims, **multilingual strategies should not prevent students to «do the effort to learn».** Students may not be sufficiently motivated, and it could be useful to balance the use of their mother tongues with the language of instruction to increase their self-confidence. But the goal is also to help them acquire a good (and assessable) level of the language spoken in the host countries, which can be jeopardised by multilingual and translanguaging practices in class.

**Multilingual vs monolingual acquisition is a key issue for some of Key-Co System partners**. Since partners do not follow the same linguistic policies, and they do not all aim to enhance a multilingual competence in the students, some diverging opinions were discussed, to check to what extent the possibility to employ multilingual activities during the lessons is realistic in the different settings and matching with the school syllabus. As Aleksandra from VHS Cham explains, «in our courses the focus is German, so teachers use German all the time. The classrooms are too diverse [to switch to multilingual activities] and it is difficult to find a bridge language. Learners should focus only on the German language, and they are expected to do this».

Aleksandra's comment was seconded by Dimitris from SCS, who said that **since their school requires fluency in Greek as a compulsory requirement in order to attend the SCS, multilingual activities are not contemplated** (except for English classes), and when students face difficulties, they are asked to only speak Greek, no matter how challenging this is, to force them practice the language.

This topic was also fairly discussed from the learners' perspective. For instance, **what are AMLs' attitudes towards monolingual vs. multilingual approaches?** «In Germany, it is compulsory for migrants registered with the Federal Employment Agency to learn German in order to continue to receive financial support from the State – says Aleksandra – but there are people who think that learning German is not that useful to them because their community, their friends, their colleagues

speak mainly Arabic; also, men might think that their wives do not need German because they always stays at home with their children. This is a very strong motivational aspect». «In Palermo, students from Nigeria who already speak English – claims Giorgia– often ask their teachers why is it important to learn Italian, if they can already communicate in English?».

By the end of the focus group, an interesting discussion arose about **the role of 'dialects'.** Aleksandra said that despite in the Bavarian region people usually speak a dialect very different from standard German, migrants are asked to learn standard German to acquire citizenship. Nevertheless, the school tries to organise Bavarian dialect lessons on a voluntary base to allow migrants to better understand the language spoken in the region. Teachers from Palermo CPIAs also reported that after an Italian grammar lesson, migrant students often ask why people in Palermo, who normally speak the regional Italian or the Sicilian dialect, do not «respect rules» in Italian (e.g. intransitive verbs which become transitive in Sicilian dialect).

### *The practice of multilingualism*

The EU's motto *United in diversity* summarizes the fundamental contribution that linguistic diversity and language learning may bring to the European project. As we have seen, European transnational institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe strongly believe that language policies addressing multilingualism cannot only facilitate mutual cultural understanding and social cohesion in member states and across the continent, but can also play a pivotal role in enhancing employability, mobility, citizenship, and integration. The question is: employability, mobility, citizenship, and integration for whom, from what perspective? If language teaching and learning and multilingualism have become a priority for EU nationals, and for the sake of European integration, it is not clear to what extent they are also a seen as priority when dealing with Adult Migrant Learners.

**Key-Co-partner institutions do not share a common agenda and do not apply the same framework for enhancing their learners' multilingual awareness and competence.** Sometimes, they do not even share the same perception about the possibility (and the importance) of enhancing such competence. Broadly

speaking, the focus of each partner institution's language programme is the target language (L2), i.e. the standard variety spoken in the host country. But there is not much agreement neither on multilingualism as a challenge/opportunity for the AML and the receiving society, nor on the concept and meaning of *multilingualism*, which – as we have mentioned – may bear different connotations and imply different approaches and objectives. Of course, the possibility for the AML to reinforce his/her competence in his/her L1, or to learn one or more languages alongside the national language (L2) of the host country is neither forbidden nor discouraged in any partner institution, but there is a great deal of diversity when translating this possibility into practice, i.e. when assessing the role and the use of the learner's mother tongue in class, or when considering if/to what extent other languages can be employed in class through *translanguaging* to foster linguistic and metalinguistic awareness.

**In all partner institutions, the use of languages other than the target one is barely or little facilitated as a teaching tool that could fruitfully be employed in formal education or as a key-element to foster citizenship and social inclusion;** the decision to adopt other languages than the target one for explanations or activities in class is normally left to the individual choice of the teacher/instructor, lacking clear guidelines or policies. Except for CPIA1 and CPIA2, where some teachers occasionally make use of multilingual/*translanguaging* strategies for ice-breaking activities or to stimulate comparisons between languages and enhance learners' grammar and metalinguistic awareness, all partner institutions normally adopt a monolingual policy, centrally designed to teach the language of the host country as a pre-requisite for residence permits, job interviews, citizenship applications. Seldomly, and depending on resources (i.e. the use of an interpreter, the individual competence of teachers), heritage languages (L1s) may be used to clarify topics or tasks, to help students who are struggling to grasp some meaning in the target language, to foster participation and motivate students. But this mainly happens in one-to-one interactions rather than in class. Official teaching materials, when provided by the school (e.g. Cham), are only written in the target language, and are not translated into AMLs' heritage languages as teachers are not trained or expected to deal with these languages. Students can be sometimes exposed to their heritage languages in designated activities (for instance, when they are asked to share their cultural background and experience with their colleagues), but even in these occasions heritage languages are mainly used to trigger explanations which are required to be in the

target language. In some contexts (e.g. Asociación Guaraní) teachers may use other languages than the target language to encourage students to tell about their background cultures and to overcome self-isolation, but this is not embedded in the curriculum or done systematically. On the contrary, multilingualism is often seen as problematic, and several arguments against institutional multilingual policies have emerged from interviews and questionnaires:

a) the use of other languages than the target language would be unfair to students who do not speak them;

b) the exclusive use of the target language would let students achieve better results in a shorter time;

c) students themselves ask to speak only the target language in order to learn it as quickly as possible;

d) many teachers do not speak other languages: embedding multilingualism in the syllabus would require language qualifications or further language training for teachers.

**In all partner schools, language teaching follows a target-language-first model, and the maintenance and practice of heritage languages do not follow regular and consistent patterns.** Activities which involve some degree of multilingual and multicultural competences – such as labs on cultural background, visit to local cultural centers, food sharing experiences – generally are not part of the official curricula. They are set up occasionally, on a voluntary base, and they are not mandatory to students.

For instance, each month VHS Cham hosts an «Erzählcafe» ('narrative café') which welcomes women with migrant backgrounds to come together and share stories about their lives and backgrounds, and annually it also hosts a 'Multiculture' day, i.e. a small festival with presenters, foods from different countries, and activities for visitors, where participants can interact with each other in several languages and where intercultural exchange with local authorities, volunteer services, and programmes like AMIF is encouraged through the use of interpreters.

Similar events and activities («Food from our countries», «Music and dances from our countries») are organised also at SCS and Asociación Guaraní, whereas

CPIA1 and CPIA2 are involved in international projects on cultural exchange with partners from the EU, which may include sessions on multilingualism. However, these are either extra-curricular or exchange activities which may or may not involve learners and are not embedded in the curriculum.

Approaches to multilingualism have also been explored through topics like advertising and internal communication; the initial assessment of the students' language competence; hiring and training; multilingualism from an institutional perspective; continuous assessment; language use in the classroom. More importantly, they have been tackled through questionnaires and interviews not only to teachers and admin members of staff, but also to AMLs.

### *The students' perspective*

**AMLs from the five different schools cannot be easily compared.** Some of them have lived in the hosting country for more than ten years (SCS), and therefore have been largely exposed, and got acquainted, to the local language(s): they attend language classes mainly to improve their written skills; some others have just arrived in the host country; some others have just arrived but coming from countries where the target language is spoken (AG). Some of them have travelled alone for longtime before reaching their destination country and show a stark multilingual competence and metalinguistic awareness (CPIA1 and CPIA2). Others have joined their families as refugees (VHS Cham).

**It is very common for students with a migratory background to have multilingual competences and repertoires.** They may already speak two or more languages before starting their language classes in the host country: their language repertoire is often richer and more varied that the language repertoire of their teachers. However, this does not mean they are proficient in one or more languages, as their active competence may significantly vary, as well as their level of literacy, their previous education, their metalinguistic awareness, their confidence in their language abilities, their health condition (Post traumatic stress syndrome).

**Variability** may also depend on when and where they learnt new languages, for what purpose, within which migration trajectory and project (do they want to stay in the country permanently? Do they want to move to another country

soon? What do they need the language for? To be ready for a job interview, or to get access to the citizenship process, or to obtain a school certificate in their adulthood?), with what kind of personal and social motivation? Etc.

It is the not surprising that **several AMLs showed very little if no interest in being actively multilingual in class**, and being able to use their heritage languages, as this would prevent them to fully immerse in the target language. Also, while speaking their heritage languages at home is normal practice, speaking them in class or in public contexts outside the class is seen as a social constraint, which may marginalize them and limit their chances of interacting with the locals and being 'integrated'.

However, **most of them admit that they normally scaffold their L2 competence by recurring to translanguaging**, i.e. by a limited – but very functional – use of their mother tongue(s)or *linguae francae* (like English) to get help or to help other people better understand the content of the lecture or the grammar; in fact, **they would welcome more translanguaging activities and more multilingual flexibility by the teachers and their schools. In class, little space is dedicated** neither to the knowledge of AMLs mother tongues or heritage languages nor – more strikingly – **to the acknowledgement of their metalinguistic competence as a potential tool for boosting self-confidence, interaction, or active participation.**

**Vocabulary** might be another issue: AMLs often do not have the vocabulary to fully master a good-size vocabulary to enhance their oral and written expression, and more importantly to express their feelings and their ideas as adult learners. This may also limit their active participation to the class and in general their interaction with other students, especially with native speakers of the target language, whose more solid language competence may look sometimes intimidating to them. Last but not least, a limited vocabulary may have a knockdown effect on their communication skills and social integration chances outside the comfort zone of the school.

**The organisation of classes often reflects the top-down organisation of the schools**, and although space for discussing a variety of topics is always provided by teachers, and the use of various learning materials (books, texts, videos, games and role-plays, pantomime, etc.) is common practice, once classes have started activities and syllabi can barely be changed or adapted to the learners' needs. **Co-designing modules, as ambitiously suggested by EU papers, is not**

**really a possibility in Key-Co partner institutions yet.**

**Placement tests and interviews are positively evaluated**, as they constitute the first contact point with the schools, and they make AMLs feel heard and welcomed. **More extra-curricular activities, or extra-school activities** (such as walks-and-talks in town, guided explorations of sociolinguistic landscapes, meetings with the local population, tours of landmarks and key places) would be much appreciated, though, as they would be beneficial to AMLs not only for practicing the target language in real settings, but also for gaining a contextualised knowledge of the urban and social environment, and a more realistic flavour of the language – with all its varieties and registers – and the speakers' community.

## Conclusive remarks and some recommendations

The main aim of educational systems and institutions working with Adult Migrant Learners (AMLs) is to try to provide them with key-competences as soon as possible, for both enhancing the learners' chances to actively participate in the new society, and meeting institutional targets, which may vary according to national policies, organizational structures, and funding bodies, but which across the board are generally goal-oriented (i.e. providing a certain amount of measurable skills and competences in a given education cycle).

However, since AMLs across Europe – and namely across the five different institutions from the four different countries participating in Key-Co System – cannot be considered as a homogeneous target group, educational institutions may need to seek a balance between their own goals and their learners' needs. This looks particularly true when, among the eight key-competences, multilingualism is concerned. Although the teaching of the language of the receiving country is mostly seen as the priority, especially where a level of proficiency in the language is a compulsory requirement for AMLs to apply for refugee status, **learners' different sociolinguistic background, language repertoires, motivations and expectations cannot be entirely disregarded**. Particularly in the case of adults, these variables may indeed play an important role not only in the students' learning experience (as much as in the teachers' attitudes and methodologies and the class's dynamics), but also in the very process of social inclusion and 'integration', which – as the Council of Europe and UNESCO claim – should embed multilingual awareness, from the institution's side, and metalinguistic competence, from the learners' side.

The way in which Key-Co partners reflect upon this challenge, and try to address it, considerably varies for several types of constraints (resources, teacher's training, didactic materials, size of the classes, time, L2-oriented assessment, etc.). **Multilingualism in class can even be seen as an obstacle rather than as a challenge or an opportunity for designing innovative intercultural tools, for dynamically reflect upon teaching and learning practices, and for challenging culturally determined misconceptions or preconceptions about the learners' competences and abilities.** On the other hand, although being reluctant to be actively multilingual in class, students seem very familiar with translanguaging practices, and they would welcome the possibility to co-design modules for

maximizing their meta-competences, particularly as far as language is concerned.

Despite being recognised not only as a key-competence, but also as a key-competence that can enhance other key-competences and as a crucial tool for social integration by European institutions – and despite some solid research on linguistics needs, abilities, and constraints by Adult Migrant Learners – **multilingualism is still often seen as an impractical resource by educational institutions dealing with AMLs in national and local contexts.**

**To foster multilingual awareness in education, considerable resources should be allocated to teachers' training, didactic material's design, and implementation of European language policies and recommendations from the same international institutions that are vividly promoting multilingualism on paper** without a comprehensive analysis of the students' and the teachers' needs across the continent, and without considering the heterogenous backgrounds and existing competences of AMLs in different contexts. Of course, given the variability of migration phenomena in time and space, and the unpredictability of interactional dynamics in the class environment, such interventions would require constant monitoring, testing, and assessment of didactic tools and methodologies.

However, as the learning units co-designed by Key-Co partners prove, materials which already embed intercultural approaches – by overcoming national and cultural stereotypes and preconceptions –and potential multilingual activities, can be to some extent adopted for different typologies of individual learners, and possibly reviewed by the same learners which test them.

For the (too) many sociolinguistic variables involved, and for the different goals of each institution, **harmonisation among partners may not be always possible when dealing with language multilingual practice in class, but a common reflection on multilingualism involving funding bodies, school boards, teachers and students should be facilitated** at both European and national levels and should be welcomed by schools and institutions as a challenge, if not as a (timely) opportunity.

## The authors

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