

# Language policies as key aspect of migration policies: an evolving scenario in Europe

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The article focuses on the role of language policies within the broader framework of migration policies in Council of Europe Member States. A description of the system currently in place in a representative sample of countries will lead to considerations related to language requirements, including the linguistic dimension of the knowledge of society requirements, as well as to language learning opportunities, where present.

**Keywords:** language requirements, migrants, learning opportunities, knowledge of society

## 1 Introduction

During the past two decades, language policies for migrants within the Council of Europe Member States have been characterized by an oscillation: on one hand, it is possible to notice openings represented by the confirmation and sometimes strengthening of learning opportunities; on the other hand, it is impossible not to detect growing closures constituted by the ongoing introduction or tightening of language and knowledge of society (later on, KoS) requirements.

This paper begins by presenting data from two sources that aim to explain this phenomenon. First, the results of the latest survey by the Council of Europe, conducted in collaboration with ALTE (Association of

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Language Testers in Europe) are considered. Then, the updated situation is described taking into account LAPIM, the language policy index for migrants (Carlsen and Rocca, 2025, in press). Finally, the discussion section analyses the presented evidence, addressing its implications and offering reflections on the current scenario.

## **2 The picture painted by the Council of Europe and ALTE survey**

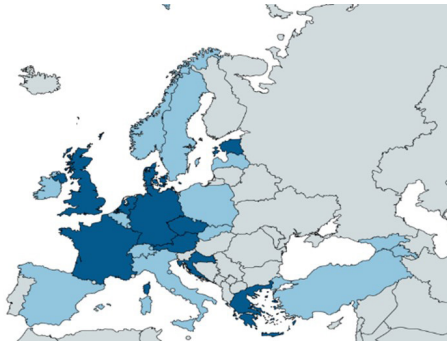
The survey provided a representative sample of the European framework, involving 40 Member States and 41 different contexts/regions. Flanders and Wallonia (the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking regions of Belgium, respectively) were considered as two distinct regions, since they have legislative autonomy regarding migration policies.

The study was conducted in 2018, with its report published two years later (Rocca et al., 2020). The purpose was to offer an up-to-date picture of language policies related to the migration context, five years after the previous survey and 11 years after the first one. In this sense the outcomes also constituted a basis for comparison, thus providing an overview of policy trends from 2007 to 2018. Such a comparison has been possible only with regard to the language and KoS requirements, as the 2018 survey was the first that addressed the topic of learning opportunities.

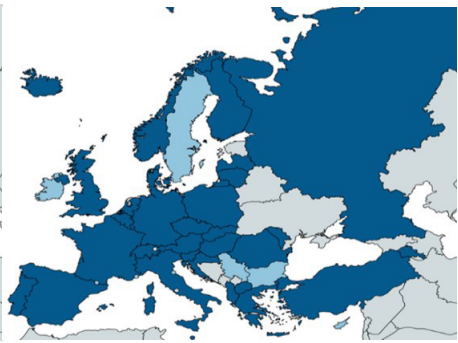
### **2.1 Language and KoS tests**

The two maps on page 15 illustrate the changes in Europe's situation regarding compulsory tests between 2007 (Figure 1) and 2018 (Figure 2). In both figures three different colours are used: grey indicates Member States that did not answer to the survey, dark blue are those that stated they had at least one language or KoS requirement, and in light blue are those that do not impose any such criteria on migrants at any point.

Comparing the presence of dark blue in the two maps, it is evident that an increasing number of countries introduced language and/or KoS requirements as an integral part of their migration policies. Therefore, passing language tests has become an increasingly necessary step along the so-called migrants' journey (Saville, 2009). For the



**Figure 1:** Requirements: the situation in 2007.



**Figure 2:** Requirements: the situation in 2018.

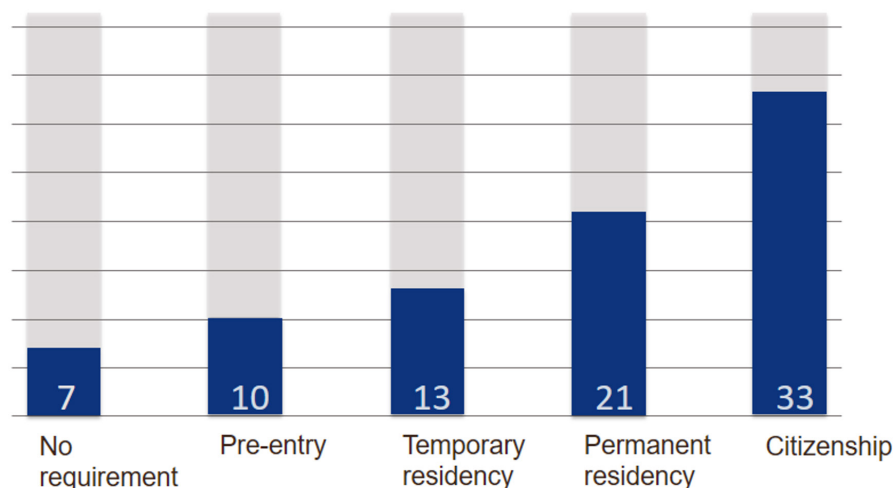
scope of this paper and in relation to such requirements, four stages of this journey are considered: the pre-entry stage, temporary residency, permanent residency and citizenship.

The columns in Figure 3 show that in 2018 only seven out of the 40 surveyed countries (17%) had no language or KoS requirements (Andorra, Bulgaria, Ireland, Monaco, San Marino, Serbia and Sweden). The other 33 countries (87%) set tests to assess from one to three abilities: language proficiency, KoS and often also digital skills, as in many cases the tests were computer based.

With regard to the aforementioned four stages, in 10 of the countries (24%) migrants had to meet certain criteria prior to their entry into the country of resettlement (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Romania, Turkey and the UK). A total of 13 (32%) of the countries set language and/or KoS requirements for temporary residency (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and the UK), while 21 (51%) countries have the same requirements in relation to permanent residency (Austria, Belgium (Fl.), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Switzerland and the UK).

The number of Member States imposing language and/or KoS requirements for citizenship doubled since the first Council of Europe survey, reaching 33 (78%) (Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium (Fl.),

Belgium (Fr.), Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK).



**Figure 3:** Number of countries with compulsory tests (2018).

Taking into account the migrants' journey, nine countries (22%) had requirements at one of the four stages, 11 (27%) at two stages, seven (17%) at three stages, and six (15%) at all four.

It is worth mentioning that apart from a few cases the Council of Europe Member States did not provide exemptions from these requirements for vulnerable test-takers, such as refugees and low-literate migrants.

Considering the sum of the numbers reported in the last four columns of Figure 3, the overall number of requirements is 75 and in only 10 cases did low-literate migrants receive some form of exemption, while refugees did so in just 12 cases.

Focusing on language proficiency, according to the CEFR the levels required have increased. For instance, while only one country had a B2 requirement for citizenship in 2007, the number had risen to four in 2018. Apart from the pre-entry tests that were all calibrated at CEFR

A1, the language level required varied considerably across countries: both for temporary and permanent residency there was a clear average for A2, but within a range covering three levels, thus from A1 to B1. In the case of language tests related to citizenship, some countries ask for A2, while others expect migrants to demonstrate language competence at the B2 level, as such there are four different levels involved in this context, with B1 as the average.

Standardized language tests were used in 47% of the countries: this means that in 53% of cases the tests used were non-standardized (just seven countries reported that the language tests used had been subject to an external audit, like the ALTE audit system)<sup>1</sup>.

In terms of KoS, 44% of the countries surveyed required migrants to pass a dedicated test. Most often this test focused on history and geography (14 countries), constitution and law (13), or the customs and traditions of the host country (11), with less attention to other contents, like the educational system (8), the public services (7) or aspects of the job market (8).

In two out of 16 cases, the KoS tests were in an official language of the host country, thus representing an additional language test linked to a CEFR level typically not specified. These KoS tests thus clearly function as implicit language tests, often with a required proficiency that exceeds the CEFR level of the language test required by the same country. This mainly happens because of the recurrent presence of highly culturally connoted abstract concepts in KoS tests.

## 2.2 Learning opportunities

Moving to learning opportunities, 94% of the Member States surveyed in 2018 provided language courses for migrants. In 32 cases the national or local government financed language courses free of charge or with a token fee.

In 36% of the countries the teachers involved did not receive any specific training, and in 42% the progress of the course was not monitored at all. Moreover, there was a considerable lack of consistency between Member States, and what mainly differed was the number of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alte.org/Setting-Standards>

hours provided and the degree to which the courses were tailored to specific learner groups.

Eleven Member States provided up to 250 hours of language tuition, in eight cases up to 500 hours and four up to 1,000 hours. Only one third of the countries provided courses targeted at vulnerable groups, and low-literate learners in particular were rarely provided with a sufficient number of hours of instruction, although research has shown (Kurvers et al., 2015) that such learners should receive more hours of tuition, at a slower pace and with tailored courses.

If it was true that in the large majority of contexts accommodations were provided for minors, it happened mainly within the compulsory education system, as in only 9% of the countries were courses offered outside the school system, or in any case outside the school calendar. This means that special second language support and reinforcement paths for migrant children and adolescents were almost never in place.

In 13 of the countries KoS courses were integrated into language courses, and thus were only offered in the second language. More generally, when KoS courses were unrelated to a language course the use of the second language remained predominant (19 cases), followed by the use of a lingua franca (17 cases). KoS courses in one of the migrants' first languages were more limited (11 cases).

### 3 The updated scenario described by LAPIM

Within the IMPECT project,<sup>2</sup> aimed at investigating the integration of migrants with poor education and the consequences of migration tests for them, a new index was designed, called LAPIM, *LAnguage Policy Index for Migrants*.

The reasons behind the decision to develop this new index were related to the need to build an index for the first time totally focused on language policies for migrants, as existing indices seemed too comprehensive. Among them, a reference for LAPIM was the *Migrant Integration Policy Index* (MIPEX) developed by the Barcelona Centre of International Affairs and the Migration Policy Group. MIPEX analyses migrant policies on a large scale, with 167 indicators based on

2 <https://www.hvl.no/en/research/project/impect/>

the following eight dimensions: labour market mobility, education of children, political participation, family reunion, access to nationality, health, permanent residence, and anti-discrimination. The last time MIPEx was updated it gathered information from 38 countries, including all EU Member States.<sup>3</sup> Each country obtained a score ranging from 0 (*critically unfavourable*) to 100 (*favourable*). The scoring was done in an Excel coding scheme where each indicator was reported in a corresponding row.

Based on the related objectives, LAPIM was designed as an index with five different purposes:

- A modality of ranking European countries' language policies for migrants, thus in terms of a tool which allows cross-country comparisons in a systematic way.
- A step forward to greater comparability with the Council of Europe and ALTE survey, transforming the data into values.
- An opportunity to cover more aspects and to provide much more details compared to the survey (for instance, related to exemptions or to learning opportunities).
- A means, after five years, to update and double-check the data from the same survey.
- A way to control the data, thus indirectly improving their reliability, thanks to the fact that LAPIM and the survey took into account different target respondents: mainly academics and language testers in LAPIM, and mainly policymakers in the survey.

In order to allow comparisons with the MIPEx ranking, LAPIM uses the same scale (0-100), with a four-point system, meaning that the scoring options are 0, 33, 66 and 100. Again, as in MIPEx, LAPIM provides an Excel coding scheme, in this case with 36 rows, one for each indicator. A last column is included with the heading "comment".

With regard to the related specifications, the requirements are addressed based on the four stages mentioned above: pre-entry stage, temporary residency, permanent residency and citizenship. For each stage, LAPIM offers details concerning:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mipex.eu/>

- The language skills required; for instance, if all four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) are required or only oral, with “oral” here including both listening and speaking within an exchange between the examiner and test-taker.
- The CEFR level imposed, in cases with a language requirement; and the languages involved in cases with a KoS requirement – if the official language only, or if one of the first languages of the test-taker, or even if the use of a lingua franca is considered.

It is worth mentioning that while for the first three stages (pre-entry, temporary residency, permanent residency) LAPIM takes into account policies addressing third-country nationals, in relation to citizenship it considers all migrants, thus including EU citizens.

LAPIM pays specific attention to the theme of exemptions, with two dedicated rows:

- The first row allows respondent to specify whether the exemption takes into account one or more of the following six groups/conditions: age (minors and/or the elderly); mental/physical disability/trauma; status (e.g. refugees, family reunion, etc.); low-literate migrants; a diploma or a degree taken in the country of resettlement.
- The second row concerns the kind of exemption, pointing out whether the exemption is total or partial, where “partial” refers to three variables: if the exemption concerns only one dimension (for instance, temporary residency, but not also permanent residency); if it regards one or more of the groups/conditions listed above; and if it is related to one of more skills (for instance, only speaking and not writing).

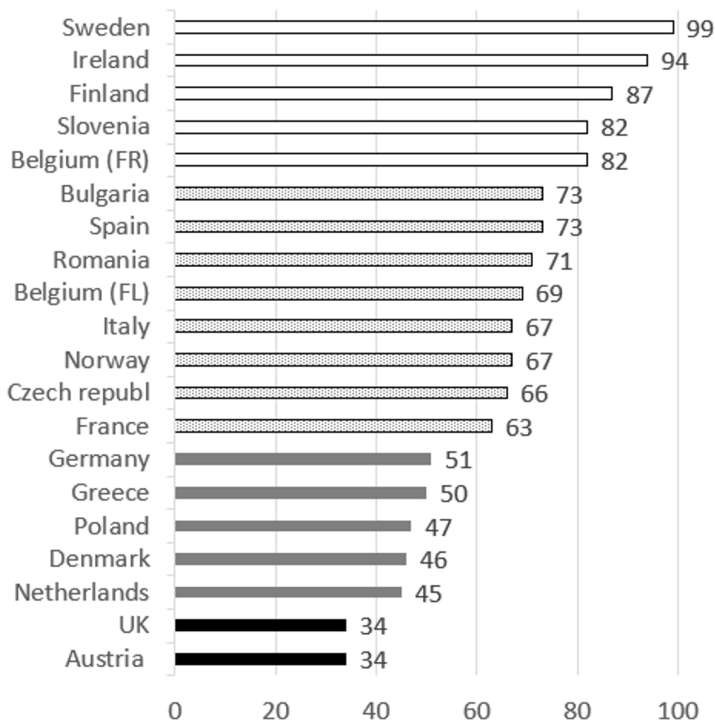
Addressing learning opportunities LAPIM considers only language courses provided free of charge or for a token fee. It is important to underline that the role of volunteers and NGOs in providing language support for migrants was not considered, as LAPIM refers only to state and national policies. The policy domain embodies questions regarding which groups of migrants should be given free language courses, the number of hours that may be provided, and what training opportunities are at the disposal of specific target learners, particularly for



low-literate migrants. This group requires more hours of tuition, as such individuals are challenged both by learning a new language and by learning to read and write. Ultimately, LAPIM covers the degree to which following a certain number of hours of tuition results in being exempted from the requirement to pass compulsory tests.

Before the data collection started, LAPIM was implemented under qualitative piloting in six countries; then, based on the feedback, it was revised from these more diverse contexts. Afterwards, data were collected from language experts recruited through the ALTE and EALTA (European Association for Language Testing and Assessment) networks.

Figure 4 reports the scores for the 20 countries surveyed to date. They fall into four categories, according to their position in a hypothetical ordinate axis with, at the top, the most lenient respondents and, on the bottom, the strictest ones. Therefore, the lower the score, the stricter the policy applied by the country.



**Figure 4:** LAPIM scores (2023).

The correlation between MIPEX and LAPIM (Carlsen and Rocca, 2025, in press) shows consistency among the two indices. This means, for instance, that the countries rated by LAPIM as having the least strict language policies are also identified as the most favourable by MIPEX; in contrast, the countries with the strictest language policies in LAPIM are ranked relatively low in MIPEX.

As stated above, LAPIM can serve several purposes, not least the double opportunity to update the data collected in 2018 by the survey and to provide additional information with regard to the language policies of the countries surveyed.

The following two sections aim at giving examples of this opportunity, first listing three changes discovered in the language policies for migrants, then detailing the situation related to one country, with the additional goal to explain the rationale behind the obtaining of the LAPIM scores.

### **3.1 Changes in language policies for migrants**

The data collected by LAPIM show the changing language and KoS requirements among the Council of Europe Member States. In particular, the presence of the column “comment” allowed the respondents to add useful information to obtain a better understanding of the current policies. Three examples of this information are given below, two concerning permanent residency and one related to citizenship.

From 2022, the language level required in the Netherlands for permanent residency rose from A2 to B1, except for cases where the applicant has proven that they are not able to reach B1, in which case they can take the exams at level A2. This “levelling down” to level A2 is only possible when the applicant has followed at least 600 hours of language classes at a designated language school.

Similarly, with regard to permanent residency Slovenia passed from no requirement to A2, on the basis of the Aliens Act that came into force in May 2023. The level A2 applies for all four skills, with the following exemptions: partial, in the case of low-literate individuals (with less than six years of schooling) and technically for illiterate persons, who must demonstrate A2 abilities in speaking only; total for those with

the refugee status or under subsidiary protection, as well as for people who are unable, on grounds of ill health, to sit the examination in the required form, and people older than 60 years. There are also some other exemptions (e.g. for those who have completed primary, secondary or tertiary education with Slovenian as the language of instruction).

In 2021 the situation changed in Greece in relation to citizenship: in confirming B1 as required level, the new law also requires a formal test with all four skills assessed, while before the test-takers only had to pass an oral interview.

### 3.2 Obtaining LAPIM scores: the case of Italy

The first section of the LAPIM Excel coding addresses pre-entry requirements. As Italy does not have any test for migrants prior to entry, in the initial six rows (the first three related to language and the second three to KoS), Italy obtains the maximum scoring, 100 for each row, with 600 as the subtotal.

For all the other sections, Italy has laws covering all the LAPIM rows in various ways. Therefore, in order to justify the other scores after the aforementioned subtotal, an explanation of the Italian language policy for migrants is needed. Three requirements are currently in place:

1. For temporary residency, the DPR 179/11<sup>4</sup> (so-called *Accordo di Integrazione*) requires CEFR A2 only for speaking (an oral interview, which also addresses KoS contents related to daily life). Migrants have to meet this requirement within two years from their first arrival in order to obtain the renewal of their residency permit. The following exemptions are in place: total exemption for EU citizens, minors under 16 years, unaccompanied minors, refugees, family reunions, disabled people, people with limitations in learning caused by special needs, pathologies or age.
2. The DI 7/12/21<sup>5</sup> (which replaced DM 4/6/10, so-called *Decreto Maroni*) regulates the permanent residency that can be applied for after five years of residency. It requires CEFR A2 for all four skills. The following exemptions are in place: total exemption for

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4 <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2011/11/11/011G0221/sg>

5 <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/02/12/22A01025/sg>

EU citizens, minors under 14 years, disabled people, people with limitations in learning caused by special needs, pathologies or age; partial exemption in case of low-literate test-takers who only have to pass an oral interview, and not the reading and writing components.

3. Citizenship can be applied for after 10 years of residency. The DDL 4/10/18<sup>6</sup> (so-called *Decreto Salvini*) introduced CEFR B1, again for all four skills. The following exemptions are in place: total exemption for disabled people, people with limitations in learning caused by special needs, pathologies or age.

The laws in force establish four ways to comply with these legal obligations:

1. Attendance of language courses provided by state schools called CPIA (see the next paragraph) allows individuals to fulfil the requirements for residency (both temporary and permanent), but is not sufficient for citizenship.
2. With regard to residency, migrants can apply for a CPIA test without being enrolled in CPIA courses; in other words they are considered “external test-takers”. For “internal students” the first method would apply.
3. The acquisition of a diploma or degree, starting from the lower secondary school level, awarded by an Italian state school.
4. The passing of an official language certification exam (A2 for residency, B1 for citizenship) awarded by one of the CLIQ institutions.<sup>7</sup>

The foundation of learning opportunities for migrants is represented by the state schools called CPIA – Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti. More than 4,000 teachers are employed within 129 CPIAs. This system provides different kinds of courses offered without any charge to adults aged over 15. This includes third-country nationals, as well as EU citizens, refugees and asylum seekers with pending status;

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/10/04/18G00140/sg>

<sup>7</sup> CLIQ is the association recognized by the Ministries of Interior, Education and Foreign Affairs composed by the four official certification bodies: Università per Stranieri di Perugia, Università per Stranieri di Siena, Università Roma Tre and Società Dante Alighieri - <https://www.associazionecliq.it/>

in other words, all migrants legally present in the Italian territory can access the CPIA schools.

Courses in Italian as a second language are mainly focused on A1 and A2 levels, with an institutional formative path of 200 hours of tuition for CEFR band A, including KoS elements and according to the Ministry of Education Guidelines.<sup>8</sup> CPIAs can offer courses for other learners' profiles, like Alfa and Pre-A1 courses for non- and low-literate migrants or B1, B2 and, rarely, C1 and C2 courses, as well. This can happen within the so-called "potenziamento dell'offerta formativa", a higher level of institutional training that depends on several factors, such as supply and demand or financing.

Learning opportunities are sustained by a sort of permanent synergy, in place since 2007, between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior. In this, the DLCI (the Department of Civil Liberties and Integration of the Ministry of Interior) finances additional language courses targeted to third-country nationals, described in the related guidelines.<sup>9</sup> In addition to a tuition fee that decreases down according to the LASLLIAM<sup>10</sup> and CEFR levels (from Low Alfa to B2), these courses, co-funded by AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, managed by DLCI), also provide two kinds of modularity:

- by skill, thus with training focused on specific language skills, such as writing; or
- by theme, thus with courses related, for example, to the language needed for specific professions.

Now the situation has been described, it is possible to give examples aimed at illuminating some of the LAPIM scores present in the Excel reporting for Italy. As Figure 5 shows, with regard to temporary residency, for instance, in the row concerning whether a compulsory test is required, the score is zero, because migrants are obliged to pass a test; in the row addressing language skills, the score is 66, as only a

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8 [https://www.idaveneto.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/linee\\_guida.pdf](https://www.idaveneto.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/linee_guida.pdf)

9 [https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2023-04/1.\\_linee\\_guida\\_piani\\_regionali\\_2023-2026.pdf](https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2023-04/1._linee_guida_piani_regionali_2023-2026.pdf)

10 LASLLIAM stands for Literacy and Second Language Learning for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants. It is the Council of Europe Reference Guide aimed at support the double process of learning literacy and/in the second language - <https://rm.coe.int/prems-008922-eng-2518-literacy-and-second-language-learning-couv-texte/1680a70e18>

speaking test is required (the four options in this case are: 100 for no test; 66 if the test is only oral; 33 if it is oral plus reading; zero if it is all four skills, including writing). Looking at the CEFR level, the score is 33, as the level is A2 (66 is the score for A1 or below; zero for B1 or above).

Language Policy Dimension	Indicator-short name	Sub-indicators- short name	Description	100	66	33	0	LAPIM score
TEMPO-RARY RESIDENCY								
	Language requirements							
	Language requirements for temporary residency	Temporary residency language course or test(s)	Language requirements for temporary residency	No requirement	Requirement to take a language course provided (accessible and free)	Requirement to take a language course paid by the migrants themselves	Requirement to pass language test(s)	0
		Temporary residency language skills required	What language skill is necessary to pass the test(s)	No requirement	Only oral skills required (listening & speaking in an interview)	Speaking/ listening/ reading	All four skills (speaking/ listening/ reading/ writing)	66
		Temporary residency CEFR – level required	What CEFR-level (or equivalent to CEFR –level) is required to pass the	No requirement	A1 or below	A2	B1 oral or above	33

**Figure 5:** LAPIM scores – Italy (2023).

### 3.3 Far from neutrality

The given example, with an explanation of the scoring system, clearly shows that a value-neutrality approach is not present within LAPIM. In fact, as far as the structure, content and mainly scoring are concerned, LAPIM follows the Council of Europe's values of human rights and equity, which focus on the ways to attain a socially fair and inclusive migration policy (Beacco et al., 2017). For instance, when learners' completion of a language and/or KoS course may exempt them from requirement to pass tests, there is an LAPIM indicator giving an additional score for

it. Moreover, the attention that LAPIM pays to the special needs of vulnerable learner groups is fully consistent with the guiding principles of preserving equal opportunities for all, starting from the most vulnerable persons, as the Council of Europe action plan in the context of migration and asylum highlights (Council of Europe, 2021).

Although the total number of hours cannot give a complete picture of the degree of adequacy of a language course, it represents an important variable, especially in the case of low-literate learners. As a consequence, the LAPIM scoring system means that in courses targeted to this group the maximum score (100) is assigned only in the case of more than 1,000 hours of tuition; the second highest score (66) is for attending 700 to 1,000 hours, with a score of 33 for 400 to 700 hours, and zero (with the implicit message, “not enough, not adequate in principle”) for up to 400 hours of tuition.

The rationale behind LAPIM, and its non-neutrality, appears influenced by a critical approach related to language tests being perceived as potential gatekeepers in the migration context. The final part of the paper addresses the discussion around such an approach, which is even more present in the language testing community in terms of a reaction against the growing prominence of language and KoS requirements, as highlighted by the data shown in this study.

## **4 Discussion**

As data show, the new trend in migration policies has been to build a codependent relationship between democratic and human rights, on the one side, and the individual’s ability to get a certain score on a language test on the other, which is extremely personal and can vary among people. Consequently, language tests, which were originally thought to assess language competence, are now seen and used as if they measured something else, like the willingness to integrate with success in the country of resettlement. However, the proposition that the achievement of a CEFR level can be interpreted as demonstration of the migrant’s loyalty and commitment to be part of the host society is largely unsupported by research. »The CEFR cannot establish whether a certain language level is indicative of a level of integration, because

it is only a measure of linguistic ability« (Parliamentary Assembly,<sup>11</sup> *Recommendation 2034*, 2014). In this regard, it is worth remembering that although language proficiency is unanimously considered a facilitator of the integration process, this process cannot be exclusively determined by the linguistic component (Beacco et al., 2014).

The CEFR was built upon the overarching values of the Council of Europe in order to promote and sustain plurilingualism, respect for diversity, intercultural dialogue, dignity among social agents and mobility across borders. Therefore, as Burzos et al. (2017, p. 423) point out:

*It seems paradoxical that an instrument developed to acknowledge and facilitate the idea of a multilingual Europe is employed as a means to legitimize monolingual policies based on the requirement of given national languages. For that reason, there is a growing concern that the CEFR is becoming an instrument to control and restrict immigration.*

In the professional environment of language testing, the use of language tests as instruments that aim to investigate migrants' behaviours and attitudes unrelated to declared language construct is often defined as an example of *test misuse*. This expression is not fully defined in the literature, but seems to refer to at least two different things. On the one hand, test misuse is using a test with a different intent than the one originally born in mind. On the other hand, test misuse can refer to the negative effects on test-takers, no matter whether such effects are intentional or not (Shohamy, 2001, 2007; Van Avermaet and Gysen, 2009; McNamara and Rover, 2006; Khan and McNamara, 2017; Carlsen and Rocca, 2021).

*The so-called critical language testers highlight the changes in the field of language requirements from a "language and power" perspective. They identify an intention behind language examinations of regulating access to society or the attempt to preserve social cohesion by freezing out certain groups* (Pochon-Berger and Lenz, 2014, p. 3).

The Council of Europe and ALTE survey revealed, and LAPIM confirmed, that there is a lack of agreement among Member States as to

11 The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is a deliberative body composed of representatives of the 46 national parliaments.



what proficiency level is appropriate for a given stage of the migrants' journey. For instance, in the case of citizenship the requirement ranges from no requirement, to A1 and up to B2. This reaffirms that language requirements often fulfil a symbolic function, instead of effective language needs, as highlighted by Böcker and Strik (2011, p. 182):

*as there is no proven relationship between integration and a specific level of language proficiency, it is difficult to understand why some Member States should have higher requirements than others for the same purpose. These differences throw doubt on the argument that immigrants need the proficiency level they are required to demonstrate in order to successfully integrate.*

The survey and LAPIM converge again in pointing out the presence of tests assessing a uniform level. The ALTE 2023 Report on uneven language profiles<sup>12</sup> confirms that in a few countries differentiated language requirements are in place (for instance, level A1 in writing, together with level A2 in reading and level B1 in listening and speaking), when the CEFR strongly encourages profiles: »levels are a necessary simplification. [...] The reason why the CEFR includes so many descriptor scales is to encourage users to develop differentiated profiles« (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 39). Language requirements are supposed to express real language needs, and when it comes to uneven profiles then more differentiated requirements would be expected, as opposed to a global level being used. Not all job profiles and not all roles in society require the same competence in reception, production, interaction and mediation. As a logical consequence, the expectations should also be diversified. It does not seem necessary to establish a uniform level, because learners do not meet the criteria of a homogeneous profile (Krumm, 2007); on the other hand, an individual's daily interactions in the personal, public, occupational and educational domains impose clearly differentiated linguistic needs.

Moreover, language tests often raise human rights issues: this is the case with pre-entry tests, clearly against the right to family reunification as highlighted by the European Committee of Social Rights. In

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/Carlsen\\_Rocca\\_Machetti\\_2023\\_ALTE%20LAMI%20Uneven%20profiles%20report.pdf](https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/Carlsen_Rocca_Machetti_2023_ALTE%20LAMI%20Uneven%20profiles%20report.pdf)

line with this there is the Council of Europe's aforementioned *Recommendation* 2034 (2014), which states that

*it is important to be aware of the limitations of tests and ensure that they contribute to integration and do not become a barrier to it. The required standards sometimes exceed what is reasonably attainable, leading to the exclusion of many people. This raises human rights issues. [...] It is particularly problematic when dealing with people who are illiterate or with low levels of education.*

Indeed, learners with poor educational backgrounds are particularly negatively affected by compulsory tests (Oers, 2020): they benefit less from language courses and perform less well on tests (Kim et al., 2014). Their failure is not only caused by a lack in the skills tested, but also by a lack of experience with the testing situation and a lack of familiarity with test formats, as for instance with the assessment techniques or the setting commonly used in language tests (Allemano, 2013). In order to protect this vulnerable group LASLLIAM »presents levels traceable only in relation to the learning process and scales describing progressions in a formative path, without any unrealistic aspiration to measure a supposed level of integration« (Minuz et al., 2022, p. 98). With the same aim, LAMI highlights that »literacy is a necessary prerequisite for any kind of written test. [...] Policy makers need to provide training courses that strongly support the acquisition of literacy skills« (ALTE, 2016, p. 28).<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the effects of learning opportunities on the language requirements, the findings of both the survey and LAPIM show that only in a few cases can migrants receive an exemption from the compulsory test by attending language courses. In addition, such courses are too often not tailored to the learners' specific needs. On the contrary, they seem "flattened" to be in line with the law, in the sense that are mainly focused on the CEFR levels provided by the requirements currently in place, with certain negative effects. From the school system perspective this leads to both "teaching to the test" and the provision of few courses for levels that are not part of the compulsory tests, while from the learners' perspective there is a motivation to simply attend a

13 <https://cdn.wildapricot.com/218795/resources/Documents/LAMI%20Booklet%20EN.pdf?version>

course to pass a test, rather than gain the abilities and skills needed for their daily lives in the second language. These and similar issues clearly and often emerged as the indirect impacts of the focal language requirements on learning environments (Rocca and Mouti, in press).

## **5 Conclusion**

Language tests can be seen as gatekeepers which strongly discriminate against vulnerable groups, generally do not reflect the learners' uneven language profiles, and often ignore human rights: in this context, the shared engagement of the language testers' community is required, as seen in a growing advocacy, daily commitment, and professional responsibility to try to prevent language tests from being misused. »Validators have an obligation to review whether a practice has appropriate consequences for individuals and institutions, and especially to argue against adverse consequences« (Cronbach, 1988, p. 6).

In recent years, ALTE has established a set of 17 common minimum standards (MSs) for its members' tests in order to establish quality profiles in examinations. Such MSs cover all stages of the language testing process: test construction; administration and logistics; marking and grading; test analysis; and communication with stakeholders. These MSs are used within audit processes aimed at checking the whether language tests delivered by ALTE members meet professional standards and accurately reflect test-takers' abilities.

In 2024, ALTE introduced a new Minimum Standard (MS 18) in its audit system: *You take action when test scores are interpreted and used for a purpose that violates the best interest of test-takers.*

It reflects two key principles: Principle 1 in the *ILTA Code of Ethics*, established by the International Language Testers Associations:<sup>14</sup> Language testers shall not discriminate against nor exploit their test-takers on grounds of age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language background, creed, political affiliations or religion, nor knowingly impose their own values (e.g., social, spiritual, political and ideological), to the extent that they are aware of them.

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14 [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iltaonline.com/resource/resmgr/docs/ILTA\\_2018\\_CodeOfEthics\\_Engli.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iltaonline.com/resource/resmgr/docs/ILTA_2018_CodeOfEthics_Engli.pdf)

And Principle 9 in the *ALTE Principles of Good Practice*:<sup>15</sup> Language testers shall regularly consider the potential effects, both short and long term on all stakeholders of their projects, reserving the right to withhold their professional services on the grounds of conscience.

According to these principles, MS 18 addresses the third ALTE mission: maximizing tests' positive impact by making the connections among policy, research and practice. Indeed, this new MS represents a concrete attempt to raise awareness in language testers about the double commitment that they should have, to make clear to stakeholders what would be an appropriate use of the test; and, contextually, to improve a system aimed at collecting information on how the test is used. Finally, if misuse is detected, professionals should have the duty to take adequate and proportionate action.

This is only one field of action, as the advocacy of language testers needs to go beyond the test itself, for instance creating the conditions for a growing connection between learning, teaching and assessment, and sustaining in particular the engagement of teachers, as the very final aim should be policies enforcing what has been declared in a key Council of Europe Resolution: »rather than promoting testing, offering language courses [...] may offer greater advantages without running the risk of excluding migrants« (Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution 1973*, 2014); a Resolution with an emblematic title proposing the following rhetorical question: *Integration test: helping or hindering integration?*

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15 <https://pt.alte.org/resources/Documents/ALTE%20Principles%20of%20Good%20Practice%20Online%20version%20Proof%204.pdf>

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## Jezikovne politike kot ključni vidik migracijskih politik: razvijajoči se scenarij v Evropi

Članek se osredotoča na vlogo jezikovnih politik v širšem okviru migracijskih politik v državah članicah Sveta Evrope. Opis trenutnega sistema v reprezentativnem vzorcu držav vodi do razmislekov o jezikovnih zahtevah, vključno z jezikovno dimenzijo zahtev za poznavanje družbe, ter o možnostih za učenje jezika, kjer so te prisotne.

**Ključne besede:** jezikovne zahteve, migranti, možnosti učenja, poznavanje družbe