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2018/0128 (NLE)

Proposal for a

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages**

{SWD(2018) 174 final}

## **EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

### **1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL**

- Reasons for and objectives of the proposal

Following the discussions at the Gothenburg Summit for fair jobs and growth in November 2017, the Heads of State or Government expressed their willingness to do more in the areas of education and culture. The Commission gave input to the debate with a Communication on "Strengthening European identity through education and culture"<sup>1</sup> which sets out a vision for a European Education Area to be created by 2025. It describes a Europe in which high-quality, inclusive education, training and research are not hampered by borders; spending time in another Member State to study, learn, or work has become the standard; speaking two languages in addition to one's mother tongue is far more widespread; and people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, as well as awareness of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity.

Improving the learning of European languages contributes to mutual understanding and mobility within the Union and helps to increase productivity, competitiveness and economic resilience. Language forms the basis of the cognitive and social development of a child; the benefits of multilingual competences influence all aspects of life.

Language competences will play a key role in creating a European Education Area. Consequently, Heads of State or Government reiterated in the European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017<sup>2</sup> the ambition of "enhancing the learning of languages, so that more young people will speak at least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue".

The lack of language competences is a barrier to mobility within the Union and world-wide, both with regards to education and training and access to the European labour market. The 2017 Annual Report on intra-EU labour mobility gives indications that language obstacles may overshadow economic opportunities of different labour markets in cross-border areas<sup>3</sup>. The Reflection Paper on 'Harnessing Globalisation'<sup>4</sup> states rightfully that "(a) more connected world has brought with it new opportunities. Nowadays, people travel, work, learn and live in different countries. They interact with each other on the web, sharing their ideas, cultures and experiences. Students have online access to courses run by leading universities across the world". Language competences are key features in order to have access to these new opportunities. Improving language competences of young people across the Union requires reflection on how language teaching and learning can be improved in all areas of compulsory education.

This Recommendation focuses on language teaching and learning in compulsory education (covering both general and vocational schools); multilingual competences may subsequently be developed in a lifelong perspective.

Currently Member States are not making enough progress towards the goal agreed at the Barcelona European Council in 2002 calling for further action to teach "at least two foreign

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture; [COM\(2017\) 673 final](#)

<sup>2</sup> European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2017) 2017 Annual Report on intra-EU labour mobility: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8066&furtherPubs=yes>

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2017), Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-globalisation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-globalisation_en.pdf)

languages from a very early age"<sup>5</sup>. While most pupils in the Union start learning a first foreign language earlier than in previous decades, the ambition level is still low concerning the second foreign language. The percentage of pupils starting to learn their first foreign language in primary school is now 83.8 %, up 16.5 percentage points compared to 2005. However, there are 11 countries where a second foreign language is not compulsory in general secondary education and in 16 educational systems students in vocational education learn considerably less foreign languages than their counterparts in general education<sup>6</sup>.

When the perspective is changed from participation in learning to the actual acquisition of competences, studies<sup>7</sup> find a generally low proficiency level among students at the end of compulsory education as well as very large differences between Member States. In 2012, the Commission presented an analysis of language competences in Europe<sup>8</sup>. Based on the first European Survey on Language Competences<sup>9</sup>, the analysis showed that, despite investment in language learning and teaching, education systems are still struggling with improving language competences.

While there is overall agreement that the assessment of language competences could help to promote multilingualism and support a more effective teaching and learning of languages at school, there is no comparable data on language competences in the Union. A study on the comparability of language testing in the Member States showed that current methods for assessment and monitoring of improvement also do not give a complete picture of individual language competences. Getting a more precise and comparable view on the level of language competences in the Union would require the collection of additional data on a regular basis<sup>10</sup>.

This proposal addresses a) the need to invest in language learning by focussing on learning outcomes and b) options to improve language learning in compulsory education by increasing language-awareness in school education.

Language aware schools embed language learning, both foreign languages and the language of schooling, in a cross-curricula approach, based on the assessment of the language competences of their learners and helping them to improve language competence according to needs, circumstances, abilities and interest<sup>11</sup>.

Schools and training centres with a high degree of language awareness could be building blocks for the European Education Area; they are able to stimulate interest in other countries, cultures and languages and lay the foundations for learning mobility and collaboration across borders. This proposal for a recommendation proposes concrete options to improve language

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<sup>5</sup> Presidency conclusions of the European Council in Barcelona, March 2002, [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download\\_en/barcelona\\_european\\_council.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/barcelona_european_council.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice (2017) Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe, 2017 Edition, [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL\\_2017\\_internet.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL_2017_internet.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> For example: Language competences for employability, mobility and growth, SWD(2012)372: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012SC0372&from=EN> ; The European Survey on Language Competences was conducted in 2011. Its findings were published in June 2012. [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Language competences for employability, mobility and growth, SWD(2012)372: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012SC0372&from=EN>

<sup>9</sup> The European Survey on Language Competences was conducted in 2011. Its findings were published in June 2012. [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2015) Study on comparability of language testing in Europe, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/reports/language-test-summary\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/reports/language-test-summary_en.pdf). The Commission proposed in 2014 a European benchmark for language competences, which was subsequently rejected by the Council.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Carl James and Peter Garrett: [Language awareness in the classroom](#).

learning and to enable more young people to speak two languages at proficient user level and to acquire a second foreign language to independent user level<sup>12</sup>.

In addition, it raises the question of introducing a benchmark for language learning in the Union, which can stimulate the development of effective and efficient language strategies and the overall improvement of language competence across the Union.

- Consistency with existing policy provision in the policy area

Language learning is addressed in a variety of policy areas in education and training.

In 2006, the Recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning<sup>13</sup> defined two competences related to language learning: 'Communication in mother tongue' (with mother tongue often regarded as being equivalent with the language of schooling) and 'Communication in foreign languages'. A review of this Recommendation was announced in the New Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>14</sup>. The proposal for a new Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning as adopted by the Commission on 17 January 2018<sup>15</sup>, proposes to define the competences 'Literacy' and 'Language competence', offering a more flexible understanding of the relationship between mother tongue and the language of schooling. The new approach answers to both challenges of a low level of literacy skills in Europe<sup>16</sup> and that of lacking language skills.

The strong link between literacy and languages underlines the understanding that competences need to be further developed in the language of schooling independently from the language of schooling being the mother tongue of the learner or a foreign language.

Increasing language learning is also supportive to the ideas expressed in the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching<sup>17</sup> as it facilitates mobility, intercultural exchange and understanding, and supports the understanding of common values.

The Commission Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan<sup>18</sup> addressed the aspect of using digital technologies more effectively for learning, including language learning. It

underlined the role of digital technology in "(strengthening) connectedness by developing specific content in multiple languages and by utilising key EU platforms such as School Education Gateway and its Teacher Academy<sup>19</sup>".

- Consistency with other Union policies

The main aim of this Recommendation is complementary to the Commission's ongoing work on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in that the Recommendation further supports "*the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order*

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<sup>12</sup> For definitions of proficient and independent user levels, see the Common European Framework of Reference – global scale table: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

<sup>13</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for lifelong learning ([2006/962/EC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A2006L0962))

<sup>14</sup> Commission Communication on the New Skills Agenda for Europe [COM\(2016\)0381](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A0381) makes several references to the importance of acquiring language skills as part of the overall European skills policy.

<sup>15</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, [COM\(2018\)24](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A24) Staff Working Document on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, [SWD \(2018\)14](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=SWD%3A2018%3A14)

<sup>16</sup> OECD (2016) PISA 2015 results, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching, [COM\(2018\)23 final](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A23)

<sup>18</sup> Commission Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan, [COM\(2018\)22](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A22)

<sup>19</sup> Teacher Academy: [https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/teacher\\_academy.htm](https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/teacher_academy.htm)

*to maintain and acquire skills that enable [everyone] to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market"*<sup>20</sup>. Language competence is considered as one of the crucial skills needed in this area.

The Commission Communication on Boosting jobs and cohesion in the EU border regions<sup>21</sup> argues for promoting border multilingualism. It invites Member States, regions and municipalities "to use life-long learning opportunities to step up efforts to promote bilingualism in border regions".

Also the Employment Guidelines 2018<sup>22</sup> propose that the "mobility of learners and workers should be promoted with the aim of enhancing employability skills and exploiting the full potential of the European labour market. Barriers to mobility in education and training, in occupational and personal pensions and in the recognition of qualifications should be removed." Lack of language competences can be considered as a key barrier to mobility which can be addressed in education and training, including compulsory education.

The 2016 Commission's Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals<sup>23</sup> highlights that education and training are among the most powerful tools for integration. It states that "learning the language of the destination country is crucial for third country nationals to succeed in their integration process. (...) All children, regardless of their family or cultural background or gender, have the right to education to further their development. Refugee children may well have had a break in their education or in some cases not been able to go to school at all and will need tailored support including catch-up classes. Teachers need the necessary skills to assist them and should be supported in their work in increasingly diverse classrooms, also to prevent school failure and educational segregation".

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<sup>20</sup> The European Pillar of social rights in 20 principles:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>21</sup> Commission Communication on Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions, [COM\(2017\)534](#)  
<sup>22</sup> Annex to the Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, [COM\(2017\)677 final](#)

<sup>23</sup> Commission Communication on an Action Plan for the Integration of third country nationals, [COM\(2016\)377](#)

## 2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

- Legal basis

This Recommendation is in conformity with Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Article 165 states that the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of their education systems. It also states that the Union shall aim at developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States.

Article 166 states that the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training. It also states that the Union shall 'encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people'. Supporting the learning and teaching of languages contributes to this aim.

This Recommendation does not propose any extension of the Union's regulatory power and does not require any binding commitments on Member States. Member States will decide, according to their national circumstances, how they implement the Council Recommendation.

- Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)

The Commission takes this action to encourage, support and complement Member States' activities in the field of language learning, while respecting their overall responsibility for their educational systems.

Language learning in compulsory education has not progressed along with the intentions declared in the Presidency Conclusions from the Barcelona European Council in 2002. A lack of language skills is still considered an obstacle to free movement and to cross-border trade and services<sup>24</sup>.

The added value of action at Union level lies in the ability of the Union to:

- facilitate the exchange and sharing of good practices between organisations in different countries to improve language awareness and language teaching and learning; and
- develop initiatives that further support initiatives for language learning in the European Education Area, support teachers and school leaders in their tasks, and further develop language strategies and multilingual approaches, promoting the quality and inclusiveness of education and training.

- Proportionality

The proposal provides good practice examples and offers support to Member States in sharing good practice and information, and in developing policies at both national and Union levels. As the commitments Member States will make are of a voluntary nature and each Member State decides the approach to take in improving languages teaching and learning, the measure is considered proportionate.

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<sup>24</sup> Commission Communication on boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions, [COM\(2017\)534](#)

- Choice of the instrument

A Council Recommendation is an appropriate instrument within the field of education and training, where the Union has a supporting competence and is an instrument that has been frequently used for Union's action in the area of education and training. As a legal instrument, it signals the commitment of Member States to the measures within the text and provides a stronger political basis for cooperation in this area, while fully respecting Member State competence in the field of education and training.

### **3. RESULTS OF EX-POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

- Ex-post evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation

Not applicable.

- Stakeholder consultations

This Recommendation draws on relevant elements from the stakeholder consultation on the language related aspects of the Key Competencies Recommendation<sup>25</sup>. As regards language competences, the online consultation, position papers and consultation meetings/conferences underlined the need to respond to competence demands in literacy, languages and communication in today's multilingual and culturally diverse societies, in a more integrated manner.

In addition, stronger focus should be put on literacy and on language development overall. This may include taking a broader perspective of what, nowadays, constitutes competence in languages, considering specialised or academic language or developments in digital communication.

In order to collect input broadly and discuss some initial ideas subsequently developed in the present proposal, the Commission organised a stakeholder meeting early February 2018 with representatives from some 60 civil society and academic organisations and key stakeholders, and around 20 representatives from Ministries of Education of the Member States.

The consultation meeting confirmed overall the relevance of the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to language learning in schools in the Union. Several speakers raised the point that there was limited progress since 2002 and a recommendation would need to propose initiatives that have the potential to actually improve language learning. Language strategies at school level were considered useful, as schools have to tackle a variety of challenges and have different needs in addressing languages (border regions, number of students with migrant or minority background).

Several participants expressed concern about departments for modern foreign languages being closed down in universities, thereby aggravating the shortage of qualified language teachers. The lack of teachers risks jeopardising the teaching of modern foreign languages at compulsory school level.

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<sup>25</sup> European Commission (2017), Report on the results of the stakeholder consultation - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/96e12ad1-8b9b-11e7-b5c6-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



Other issues that were raised included:

- The case for creating learning environments in which languages flourish and demand and motivation for language learning are supported, making sure that pedagogies are learner centred and learner autonomy fostered;
- Teachers and school leaders need support and resources; teacher preparation and education were seen as the key issues in order to change perceptions and improve language learning in Europe;
- Attention to the specific situation of children with migration or minority background; which includes reconsidering assessment of language competences as it can contribute to better learning, especially when taking the multilingualism of children into account;
- Recognition of prior learning and knowledge of languages that are not in the curricula should be supported; support the diversity of the language offer in schools, going beyond English.
  - Collection and use of expertise

The Recommendation builds on the work of the previous Working Group on Languages in Education and Training within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020)<sup>26</sup>.

More recently, in 2016 and 2017, the Commission organised a series of thematic expert panels and two peer learning activities pursuing two interlinked aims: to provide input on the literacy and language competences for the review of the Key Competence Framework and to examine how Member States help migrant children to quickly acquire proficiency in the language of schooling (current priority of ET2020)<sup>27</sup>.

The latest Key Data Report on teaching languages at school in Europe has also provided valuable insights in the trends in provision of language teaching across Europe, including (for the first time) data on structured language support for migrant children<sup>28</sup>.

- Impact assessment

Given the complementary approach of the activities to Member State initiatives, the voluntary nature of the proposed activities and the scope of the impacts expected, an impact assessment was not carried out. The development of the proposal was informed by previous studies, consultation of Member States and the public consultation.

- Regulatory fitness and simplification

Not applicable.

- Fundamental rights

This Recommendation respects the fundamental rights and observes the principles recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including the right of

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<sup>26</sup> All reports are available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/library\\_en?field\\_eac\\_eat\\_event\\_categories\\_value=language\\_teaching\\_learning&field\\_eac\\_eat\\_type\\_of\\_document\\_value=All&field\\_eac\\_eat\\_year\\_value=2014&=Apply](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library_en?field_eac_eat_event_categories_value=language_teaching_learning&field_eac_eat_type_of_document_value=All&field_eac_eat_year_value=2014&=Apply)

<sup>27</sup> All reports are available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/multilingualism/multilingual-classrooms\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/multilingualism/multilingual-classrooms_en).

<sup>28</sup> European Commission/Eurydice (2017), Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe, [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL\\_2017\\_internet.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL_2017_internet.pdf).



education, the respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity and non-discrimination. In particular, the recommendation promotes the rights of the child as established in Article 24 and takes into account the UN convention on the Rights of the Child in particular Article 29.1.c which specifies that the education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own<sup>29</sup>. This Recommendation must be implemented in accordance with these rights and principles.

#### **4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS**

Actions proposed in this Recommendation having budgetary implications will be supported within the existing resources of Erasmus+ Programme, as well as possibly, Horizon 2020 or European Structural and Investment Funds provided that provisions of the relevant basic acts foresee such support. This initiative does not prejudice the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework and future programmes. No additional resources will be required from the EU budget.

#### **5. OTHER ELEMENTS**

- Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements

To support the implementation, the Commission proposes to develop in cooperation with Member States supporting guidance material which could fill the identified gaps in implementation of competence-oriented teaching and learning.

The Commission intends to report on the use of the Recommendation in the context of European cooperation in the area of education, training and learning.

- Explanatory documents (for directives)

Not applicable.

- Detailed explanation of the specific provisions of the proposal

#### **Member State provisions**

In order to help all children and young people to acquire proficient user level in at least one other European language and encourage the acquisition of an additional (third) language to the level of independent user, the proposal recommends that Member States:

- Apply comprehensive approaches to improving language teaching and learning at all levels and in all educational and training sectors;
- Develop language aware schools along the lines described in the Annex to the Recommendation, thereby provide teachers with appropriate education and support;
- Promote learning mobility in the education of all language teachers and promote learning periods abroad;
- Identify and promote innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, thereby using European tools and platforms wherever appropriate;
- Aim at developing methods to monitor progress in language competences at different stages of education and training.

#### **Commission provisions**

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<sup>29</sup> UN (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 20.11.1989: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

The Recommendation proposes to welcome the Commission's intention to:

- Support the implementation of the Recommendation and its Annex by facilitating peer learning among Member States and developing appropriate reference material and tools;
- Make European Union funding available for the support of language teaching and learning and in particular strengthen the learner mobility strand of Erasmus+, the EU programme for education, training, youth and sports;
- Strengthen cooperation with the Council of Europe and its European Centre for Modern Languages in their areas of expertise.

Proposal for a

## **COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages**

### **THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) In the Communication "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture"<sup>30</sup> the European Commission sets out the vision of a European Education Area in which high-quality, inclusive education, training and research are not hampered by borders; spending time in another Member State to study, learn or work has become the standard; speaking two languages in addition to one's mother tongue is far more widespread; and people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, as well as an awareness of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity.
- (2) At the informal working session of the Gothenburg Summit for fair jobs and growth, Heads of State or Government discussed the role of education and culture for the future of Europe. The European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017<sup>31</sup> call on the Member States, the Council and the Commission, in line with their respective competences, to take work forward in this area.
- (3) Language competences are at the heart of the vision of a European Education Area. With increasing mobility for education, training and work inside the Union, increasing migration from third countries into the Union, and the overall global cooperation, education and training systems need to reconsider the challenges in teaching and learning of languages and the opportunities provided by Europe's linguistic diversity.
- (4) Increasing and improving language learning could strengthen the European dimension in teaching<sup>32</sup>. It could foster the development of a European identity in all its diversity, complementing local, regional and national identities and traditions and a better understanding of the Union and its Member States.
- (5) Almost half of Europeans report that they are unable to hold a conversation in any language other than their mother tongue<sup>33</sup>. The lack of language competences are a

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<sup>30</sup> Commission Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture; [COM\(2017\)673 final](#)

<sup>31</sup> European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching, [COM\(2018\)23 final](#)

<sup>33</sup> Europeans and their languages – special Eurobarometer report summary 2012: [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_sum\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_sum_en.pdf).

source of difficulty, hampering meaningful exchanges between public administrations and individuals across borders in the Union<sup>34</sup>.

- (6) Only four in ten learners in secondary education reach the ‘independent user’ level in the first foreign language, indicating an ability to have a simple conversation. Only one quarter attains this level in the second foreign language<sup>35</sup>. A comparative analysis of languages in education and training<sup>36</sup> showed that most Member States face challenges in ensuring appropriate learning outcomes in the field of languages. While challenges exist in all education sectors, they are particularly acute in vocational education and training where less emphasis is put on language learning.
- (7) Limited language competences remain one of the main obstacles to benefit from the opportunities offered by the European education, training and youth programmes<sup>37</sup>. Conversely, enhanced language competences will enable persons to benefit more from the opportunities the internal market offers, such as free movement of workers, as well as take a more informed and fair decision about opportunities in other EU countries.
- (8) Foreign language skills provide competitive advantages for both businesses and job seekers – if they form part of a broader set of useful skills<sup>38</sup>. There is positive correlation between foreign language skills and the likelihood of being in employment<sup>39</sup>. However, the results from the latest Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS 2016) show that only 7.9% of companies (that provide training for their employees) send their employees for language courses (ranging from 22.1% in Slovakia to 0.5% in Ireland).
- (9) To sustain current standards of living, support high rates of employment and foster social cohesion in the light of tomorrow's society and world of work, people need the right set of skills and competences<sup>40</sup>. This is also key in view of ensuring full integration of immigrant children, students and adults<sup>41</sup>. New ways of learning need to be explored for a society that is becoming increasingly mobile and digital<sup>42</sup>. The acquisition of better language competences could support increasing mobility and cooperation within the Union. In particular digital developments, allow for more and more languages to be learned and practiced outside the classroom and curricula. Current assessment procedures do not fully reflect these developments.
- (10) The European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>43</sup> states as its first principle that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to

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<sup>34</sup> Commission Communication on boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions [COM\(2017\)534](#)  
<sup>35</sup> European Commission (2012) – First European Survey on language competences, executive summary: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> European Commission (2014) - Comparative analysis of languages in education and training: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/lang-eat\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/lang-eat_en.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> The Erasmus+ programme offers online linguistic support to compensate this. [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/online-linguistic-support\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/online-linguistic-support_en).

<sup>38</sup> European Commission (2015) [Study on Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability](#).

<sup>39</sup> European Commission (2015) [Languages and employability](#).

<sup>40</sup> See European Commission (2017) Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-social-dimension-europe\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-social-dimension-europe_en.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Commission Communication on an Action Plan for the Integration of third country nationals, [COM\(2016\) 377](#).

<sup>42</sup> See European Commission (2017) Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/reflection-paper-harnessing-globalisation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/reflection-paper-harnessing-globalisation_en).

<sup>43</sup> Commission Communication on Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, [COM \(2017\)250](#)

maintain and acquire skills that allow full participation in society and successful transitions in the labour market. Language competence is one of the key competences that could foster employability, personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion; it is defined as "the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication"<sup>44</sup>.

- (11) More than half of the Member States officially recognise regional or minority languages within their borders for legal or administrative purposes, including national sign languages. Several of these languages transcend national borders. The languages added by the immigrant populations complete the linguistic picture in Europe<sup>45</sup>.
- (12) Schools are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to make sure that all children, regardless of background and first language, acquire a very good level of the language of schooling, if appropriate through special support measures. This supports equity and equal opportunities, and reduces the risk of early school leaving<sup>46</sup>.
- (13) Language-awareness in schools could include awareness and understanding of the language competences of all pupils, including competences in languages that are not taught in the school. Schools may distinguish between different levels of language competences needed depending on context and purpose and corresponding to every learner's circumstances, needs, abilities and interests.
- (14) The shortage of teachers in some subjects, including modern foreign languages, is mentioned as a challenge in more than half of the European Union's education systems<sup>47</sup> and several Member States have introduced reforms or incentives to tackle shortages of language teachers. Those reforms and incentives could include scholarships to attract language graduates with other professional experience into teaching or reformed teacher education programmes<sup>48</sup>.
- (15) Initiatives to improve key competences in school education<sup>49</sup>, including by better linking real life experience with academic learning, using digital technologies and supporting innovation in schools, have strengthened the focus on the learning outcomes<sup>50</sup>. They also supported the acquisition of language competences.
- (16) Content and Language Integrated Learning, i.e. teaching subjects through a foreign language, and digital and online tools for language learning have proven efficient for different categories of learners<sup>51</sup>. Language teachers across Europe could benefit from continuous professional development in both updating their digital competences and learning how they can best support their teaching practice by using different

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<sup>44</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, [COM \(2018\)24](#)  
<sup>45</sup> European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice (2017) Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe, 2017 Edition, [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL\\_2017\\_internet.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL_2017_internet.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> European Commission (2017) Education and Training Monitor: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en)

<sup>47</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018) Teaching careers in Europe: Access, progression and support:

[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/b/b9/220EN\\_teaching\\_careers\\_N\\_cert.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/b/b9/220EN_teaching_careers_N_cert.pdf)  
<sup>48</sup> European Commission (2014) Languages in education and training: Final comparative analysis, see footnote 36.

<sup>49</sup> Staff Working Document on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, [SWD \(2018\)14](#)

<sup>50</sup> Commission Communication on School development and excellent teaching, [COM\(2017\)248](#).

<sup>51</sup> European Commission (2014) Report on improving the effectiveness of language learning: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/clil-call\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/clil-call_en.pdf)

methodologies and new technologies. An inventory of open educational resources<sup>52</sup> could support them in this.

- (17) Various initiatives in Europe have supported the definition and development of language competences. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is a transparent, coherent and comprehensive reference instrument to assess and compare competence levels<sup>53</sup>. It distinguishes between basic user level, independent user level and proficient user level with the latter enabling a user to work or study in the language assessed. In 2018, the instrument was complemented by new descriptors for mediation, for young learners and for sign languages, with a view to making the Framework more accessible to a wider public<sup>54</sup>.
- (18) The European Language Label<sup>55</sup> rewards excellence and innovation in language teaching in all participating countries. It provides an incentive for schools to use new methodologies and strategies addressing local, regional, national or European priorities. It has contributed to raising the awareness about European cooperation in the field of language teaching and learning and enhancing the multilingual dynamics across educational sectors<sup>56</sup>.
- (19) All Member States have acknowledged the need to enhance multilingualism and develop language competences in the Union<sup>57</sup>. In order to provide a more accurate picture of language competences in the Union, the European Commission will work on a proposal for a new European benchmark on language competences including options for data collection.
- (20) While acknowledging that language competences are acquired throughout life and opportunities should be made available at all stages in life, this Recommendation addresses in particular compulsory education and training and fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in this field.

#### **RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:**

In accordance with national and European legislation, available resources and national circumstances, and in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders:

- (1) Explore ways to help all young people to acquire – in addition to the language of schooling – proficient user level in at least one other European language before the end of upper secondary education and training and encourage the acquisition of an additional (third) language to the level of independent user.
- (2) Apply comprehensive approaches to improve teaching and learning of languages at national, regional, local or school level as appropriate, making use of the policy examples set out in the Annex.

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<sup>52</sup> European Centre for Modern Languages: ICT-Rev <https://ict-rev.ecml.at/>.

<sup>53</sup> Council of Europe (2001) – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: [https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Global+levels+https%3A%2F%2Fwww.coe.int%2Fen%2Fweb%2Fcommon-european-framework-reference-languages%2Ftable-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale&gws\\_rd=ssl](https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Global+levels+https%3A%2F%2Fwww.coe.int%2Fen%2Fweb%2Fcommon-european-framework-reference-languages%2Ftable-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale&gws_rd=ssl)

<sup>54</sup> Council of Europe (2018) – CEFR: Companion Volume with new descriptors: <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>

<sup>55</sup> The European Language Label is awarded under the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission.

<sup>56</sup> The European Language Label: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/language-label\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/language-label_en)

<sup>57</sup> Council Conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences, May 2014, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf)

- (3) Ensure that all sectors of compulsory education and training are addressed, starting as early as possible and including initial vocational education and training.
- (4) As part of such comprehensive strategies, support the development of language awareness in schools and training centres by:
  - (a) actively supporting the mobility of learners, including by making use of opportunities provided by the relevant EU funding programmes;
  - (b) enabling teachers to address the use of specific language in his or her respective subject area;
  - (c) strengthening the competence in the language of schooling as the basis for further learning and educational achievement in school for all learners, and especially those from migrant or disadvantaged backgrounds;
  - (d) valuing linguistic diversity of learners and using it as a learning resource including involving parents and the wider local community in language education;
  - (e) offering opportunities to assess and validate languages competences that are not part of the curriculum, but have been acquired by learners elsewhere, including through expanding the range of languages that can be added to learners' school leaving qualifications.
- (5) Support teachers, trainers and school leaders in the development of language awareness by:
  - (a) investing in the initial and continuing education of language teachers to maintain a broad language offer in compulsory education and training;
  - (b) including preparation for linguistic diversity in the classroom in initial education and continuous professional development of teachers and school leaders;
  - (c) promoting study periods abroad for all students studying towards a teaching qualification, while encouraging mobility for all teachers and trainers;
  - (d) integrating learning mobility into the education of all language teachers, so that newly graduated language teachers benefit from at least six months of learning or teaching experience abroad;
  - (e) recommending the use of eTwinning<sup>58</sup> to enrich the learning experiences in schools and develop language competences of teachers and pupils.
- (6) Encourage research in and use of innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, including the use of digital tools and Content and Language Integrated Learning.
- (7) Develop methods to monitor the language competences acquired at different stages of education and training, complementing existing information on the provision of language learning.
- (8) Report through existing frameworks and tools on experiences and progress in promoting language learning.

**HEREBY WELCOMES THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:**

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<sup>58</sup> eTwinning is a community of teachers from pre-primary to upper secondary schools, hosted on a secure internet platform: <https://www.etwinning.net>



1. Support the follow-up of this Recommendation by facilitating mutual learning among Member States and developing in cooperation with Member States:
  - (a) guidelines on how to link language teaching and assessment to the Common European Framework of Reference for language competences<sup>59</sup>;
  - (b) evidence-based guidance material on new forms of learning and supportive approaches;
  - (c) digital tools for language learning and professional development of educational staff, in the field of language learning, such as massive open on-line courses, self-assessment tools<sup>60</sup>, networks, including eTwinning and the School Education Gateway's Teacher Academy.
  - (d) methodologies and tools supporting the monitoring of language competences in the European Union.
2. Strengthen the mobility of school pupils and learners in vocational education and training within the Erasmus+ Programme and support overall the use of European Union funding, such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) or European Structural and Investment Funds, where appropriate for the implementation of the present Recommendation and its Annex, without any prejudice to negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.
3. Strengthen cooperation with the Council of Europe, and the European Centre for Modern Languages, in the field of language learning to enhance innovative methods in teaching and learning of languages and increase awareness of the crucial role of language learning in modern societies.
4. Report on the follow-up of the implementation of the Recommendation primarily through existing frameworks and tools.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council*

*The President*

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<sup>59</sup> Based on the experiences and expertise developed by the Council of Europe in creating and updating the Framework and by the European Centre for Modern languages and the European Commission in applying this work to teacher education through jointly financed projects: <https://relang.ecml.at/Home/tabid/4079/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

<sup>60</sup> Currently Europass offers a self-assessment tool for language competence and the functioning and effectiveness of this will be reviewed as part of implementation of the new Europass Decision. <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/documents/european-skills-passport/language-passport>