

**Transparency and international comparability in languages:  
The role that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)  
and European Language Portfolio (ELP) can play**

Within a European learning space in the field of languages, cooperation among higher education institutions needs a common basis, and coherent, recognised standards for all those involved in the processes of learning, teaching and assessment, and management of languages.

At present, in many institutions of higher education, it is difficult to ascertain students' real language levels, since these are often ill-defined in vague terms with no accurate description of the level, objectives, and content of the courses followed or levels, content and evaluation criteria of examinations passed or of other language achievements gained in different learning contexts. All of this precludes comparison and hinders, if not prevents, academic and professional recognition from one country to another or even one institution to another.

The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages provides a global reference system applicable to all languages, which can introduce greater transparency and coherence between different institutions and sectors of education and has great potential for encouraging a new approach to teaching and learning. It

- promotes standards comparable all over Europe which give a common language to all the persons active in the field of languages in order to help them to reflect on their current practice;
- provides a language- and institution-independent description of six reference levels for describing learners' proficiency related to language in use in that they describe what a learner can do at a given level;
- fosters a pedagogical approach that bases language teaching and learning on the learner's needs, motivations, characteristics, and resources; on the analysis of the learning situation; and on the definition of realistic and explicit learning objectives from the perspectives of language in use and the development of plurilingualism, learner autonomy, and lifelong language learning.

When higher education institutions describe their programmes, teaching material, attestations, examinations, and other qualifications according to the Council of Europe's common reference levels and descriptions -thus clearly stating objectives, contents, procedures, and criteria - competences become not only transferable from one system to another, but also clear and understandable for all learners, teachers, institutions, and employers.

In this context, the European Language Portfolio, a practical application of the CEF, plays an important role by, ideally, acquainting every single language learner in Europe with the ideas and standards of the CEF.

The ELP is a personal document for the use of the learner. It is at the same time an information tool and a companion to language learning, because it allows all language proficiency – whether acquired within or outside of formal educational settings – and intercultural experience to be presented in a comprehensible, complete, and internationally comparable way. It also contains help for thinking about one's own language learning and for planning further learning.

The European Language Portfolio exists in numerous versions in various countries and languages. There are ELP versions for a variety of target groups and contexts. Nevertheless, all ELPs have the same structure and pursue the same objectives. A version for higher education has to take into account, in addition to general language, the specific fields of language learning and usage in higher education and beyond, which is to say language for academic and professional purposes and to enhance mobility.

When entries are made responsibly and transparently, the Portfolio can be the basis for mutual recognition of language achievements and its use may trigger and support changes in learning and teaching practice.