



## The Council of Europe

Founded in 1949, the Council of Europe has its headquarters in Strasbourg, France; it currently has 46 member states. The organization's foundational values are human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and its key instruments are the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the European Cultural Convention (1954), and the European Social Charter (1961, revised 1996).

## The Council of Europe and Language Education

From the beginning, the Council of Europe has promoted language learning and teaching in order to support communication among its member states and to preserve Europe's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. The organization's most recent articulation of its language education policy is contained in [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)1](#) of the Committee of Ministers, on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture, adopted in February 2022.

The Council of Europe's work in language education has been shaped by three principles:

1. *The individual language learner is an autonomous social agent with rights and responsibilities.* This principle arises directly from the European Convention on Human Rights and explains why the Council of Europe's successive language education projects have stressed the importance of (i) designing courses that are closely geared to the needs, motivations and characteristics of learners and (ii) enabling learners as far as possible to steer and control their own progress.
2. *Communicative purpose is prior to linguistic content.* This principle arises directly from the first and is responsible for turning language education on its head. Traditionally, curricula and language teaching programmes have specified items of language to be taught, whereas the Council of Europe's approach begins by analysing learners' communicative needs and specifying the tasks those needs require them to perform.
3. *Language education should be plurilingual and intercultural.* Learning a new language is a matter of learning new ways of doing things we can already do in the language(s) through which we live. Language learning thus entails learning a new code but also learning new ways of behaving in language, and that necessarily introduces an intercultural dimension. These considerations come together in the concept of plurilingualism as "a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact" (CEFR 1.3).

These three principles underpin the instruments that the Council of Europe has developed to support the reform of language education in its member states. By far the most important of these instruments are the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#) (CEFR, 2001) and its [Companion Volume](#) (2020).

The Council of Europe developed the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as a means of communicating the CEFR's ethos, descriptive scheme and proficiency levels to language learners. Between 2000 and 2010 the ELP Validation Committee validated and accredited 118 ELPs, including the CercleS ELP (29.2002, in English, French, Czech, Slovak, Italian, Spanish and German versions). Full details of the Council of Europe's ELP project are available [here](#).

A history of the Council of Europe's work in language education from 1954 to 1997 is available [here](#).

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