



*Relating language curricula, tests and examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference*

# **Aligning to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Companion Volume: a continuous process**

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## IMPACT

**Total number of workshops given: ca 95 (since 2013)**

**Total number of countries: 33**

Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland (TBC)

**Regional cooperation:** Baltic States, Poland



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# BENEFICIARIES

## Primary target groups

- teacher educators (both pre-service and in-service)
- language teachers
- language testers and examiners, item writers
- curriculum developers
- educational researchers
- school inspectors
- policy makers



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# COOPERATION

## National and/or local authorities

- Appropriate institutions and individuals to coordinate the activities on a local/national level
- Information about relevant current measures and procedures in member states
- Co-organisation of local or regional training courses and workshops
- Possible multipliers & appropriate multiplying mechanisms in support of local or regional clusters of multipliers.



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- Linking existing examinations to the CEFR
- Constructing examinations based on the CEFR
- Developing formative tests linked to the CEFR
- Linking language curricula to the CEFR
- Developing tests of second language
- Exploring ways to assess **mediation** and pluricultural & plurilingual skills
- How to practise and test literature in line with the CEFR CV
- Alternative, continuous methods of assessment in line with the CEFR CV
- Assessment in pre-service teacher education: the impact of the CEFR CV on developing the assessment competences of future teachers

# CHALLENGES

- Shift from determining CEFR levels to understanding and application of the Companion Volume
- Awareness of CEFR/CEFR CV concept of language use
  - *Language in **action***
- Understanding the CEFR CV concept of mediation
  - *Group process*
- Incorporating pluricultural & plurilingual skills
  - *National language and immigration policies*
- Validation of links to the CEFR/CEFR CV
  - *Content validation*
- Data collection and interpretation for reliability and validity purposes



## CONCLUSIONS

In a majority of European countries RELANG has contributed to:

- Improvement of language tests and examinations
- Linking tests and examinations to the CEFR/CEFR CV
- Dissemination of CEFR/CEFR CV principles and values
- Modernization of curricula and syllabi

**Thanks to the Council of Europe and its ECML**

**Thanks to the European Commission**



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## **Why is RELANG relevant in the context of curricular reforms?**

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# CEFR IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

- Foreign language curricula in most European languages are linked to CEFR proficiency levels.
- Academic and professional mobility draws on the common understanding of CEFR levels:
  - level descriptions may vary greatly across national educational systems and teaching contexts within one country.



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## CEFR AND ITS COMPANION VOLUME

- CEFR published in 2001
- CEFR-CV published in 2020
- New content in the Companion Volume
  - updated and/or expanded level descriptors (e.g. phonological competence);
  - A newly developed set of descriptor scales for mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural competences.



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## NEW CHALLENGES IN FL TEACHING

- Online and hybrid teaching and assessment prompted a new revision of language curricula:
  - Testing and other forms of assessment (alternative, online);
  - Enhancing teachers' competence to develop classroom and other tests.



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## NEW CHALLENGES IN FL TEACHING

- New reality encourages new revisions of language curricula, for example:
  - What are the features of some new writing genres, such as blogs, online posts, or *online chats*? Can we assess them?
  - How can we test audiovisual comprehension?
  - What should be included in a standard test of mediation?



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# NATIONAL DOCUMENTS AND PRACTITIONERS

- RELANG brings together theory and practice:
  - National FL curricula may reflect advanced theoretical linguistic constructs and political aspirations.
  - Teachers and test developers are usually required to follow the official documents with limited discussions on how to implement them.
  - 2-3 days of discussions in RELANG workshops often lead to more transparency and mutual understanding of curricular targets.



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- RELANG offers a workshop to align a national curriculum to the CEFR/CV.
- RELANG may offer a timely intervention when curricular changes are being considered.
- RELANG may serve as a discussion forum to clarify the underlying constructs in the newly accepted national curriculum.
- RELANG invites the participants to consider national curricular targets and link them to testing and assessment practices.



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**Has Covid made you reassess your needs in terms of alternative forms of assessment?**

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## NEEDS IN TERMS OF ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

- The Covid pandemic – external, nation-wide examinations cancelled or administered online, subject matter reduced, and assessment criteria adapted (validity and reliability?).
- A must to complement external exams with alternative, classroom-based methods of continuous assessment.
- The shift from a formative to a summative function.



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- an important means of gaining a dynamic picture of learners' language development
- an ongoing process of making judgements about learners' language progress (by teachers and learners)
- non-conventional strategies in line with learner-centred approaches
- a collection of data on how language learners process and complete authentic tasks in the target language.

- continuous, longitudinal assessment
- direct tests
- authentic assessment
- feedback provided to learners
- untimed exams
- contextualised test tasks
- criterion-based score interpretation.

- focus on documenting language learners' growth over time, rather than on comparing learners with one another;
- emphasise language learners' strengths rather than weaknesses, focusing on what they know and can do with the language;
- are based on activities that represent actual progress towards teaching goal;
- reflect tasks typical of real-life settings.

- Scores are interpreted against the criteria.
- Language performance is measured by completing contextualised test tasks.
- Feedback is given to learners to make them aware of their learning progress.
- Alternative assessment tasks closely resemble real-life tasks (portfolios, individual projects, group projects, etc.)

In their workshop, the RELANG team presents different techniques that

- reflect real-life tasks;
- have a process and product orientation;
- enable learners to cooperate rather than compete;
- lead to authentic integration of skills and processing of information from a variety of resources;
- result in building students' self-esteem, and autonomy.



## ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

- **Alternative, continuous assessment is in line with the CEFR concepts:**
- the action-oriented approach
- the learner-centred approach
- learners seen as ‘social agents’
- positively stated ‘can do’ statements
- four modes of communication.



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**Plurilingual & pluricultural skills are an essential part of the CEFR and its Companion Volume - What does this mean for learning, teaching and assessment?**

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# The concept of *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*

- **not** a novelty introduced by the Companion Volume (CV)
- referred to in the original CEFR (in sections 1.3, 1.4, and 6.1.3)
- CV provides
  - more elaborate definitions
  - a set of descriptor scales



# The concept of *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*

- Multilingualism v. plurilingualism



the knowledge of a number of languages or the co-existence of different languages in a given society



the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner

# The concept of *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*

- Multilingualism v. plurilingualism
- distinction in line with the CEFR promoting the need for learners as ‘social agents’ to draw upon their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences in order to
  - fully participate in social and educational contexts
  - achieve mutual understanding
  - gain access to knowledge
  - further develop their linguistic and cultural repertoire

# The concept of *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*

- a composite of three interrelated notions
  - building on pluricultural repertoire
    - the practical functional ability to exploit pluriculturalism
  - plurilingual comprehension
    - the practical functional ability to exploit plurilingualism for comprehension
  - building on plurilingual repertoire
    - the practical functional ability to exploit plurilingualism
- CV offers descriptor scales for these three notions

# Further implications for learning, teaching, and assessment

- CV presents mediation as a mode of communication that surpasses traditional concepts of translation and interpretation
- plurilingual and pluricultural competence particularly useful in mediation
  - cultural mediation
    - facilitating understanding and cultural awareness (within a language and across languages and cultures)
  - one particular CV mediation scale called *Facilitating pluricultural space* centered on this very aspect of mediation

# Further implications for learning, teaching, and assessment

- The role of RELANG
  - familiarizing participants with the relevant concepts and descriptor scales related to plurilingual and pluricultural competence
  - opportunity to explore the potential role of plurilingual and pluricultural competence along with mediation in
    - standardized assessment
    - classroom-based assessment