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Policy Paper on **Migration**

Bridging the Language Gap: Improving Multilingual Access in EU Public Services

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The ParticipACTION Project

The ParticipACTION " Building Inclusive Civic Engagement and Solidarity Among Diverse Young People in Europe " project is co-funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Program (CERV-2023- CITIZENS-CIV).

The project's core aims to enhance youth engagement in European decision-making processes and create opportunities for young people to connect with policymakers at local, national, and European levels through research initiatives, roundtables, workshops, and training sessions on policy and advocacy. The project targets young people aged 16 to 23. It seeks to involve not only European citizens but also young individuals with migratory backgrounds or coming from non-EU countries, with a special focus on women and girls. By bringing together these diverse groups of young people, the project aims to foster mutual understanding of shared experiences and barriers to democratic participation, ultimately promoting solidarity. The goal of the project is to equip young people with the tools to influence EU democratic processes, while promoting a bottom-up approach that ensures their lived realities are at the heart of policy decisions.

The ParticipACTION project is implemented in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania by a consortium of five experienced partners. The project runs from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2026.

Project Partners

IRC Italia – Fondazione International Rescue Committee Italia ETS – Coordinator (Italy)

G.F.C. - Generation For Change CY - (Cyprus)

PLACE - PLACE Network - (France)

GLOCAL FACTORY - GLOCAL FACTORY Società Cooperativa Sociale - (Italy)

MANO EUROPA – Asociacija Mano Europa - (Lithuania)



From Youth Participation to Policy Papers

As part of the project, young participants were given the opportunity to explore issues that matter to them, exchange perspectives and develop policy-oriented proposals. Through a series of participatory activities and workshops, they worked collectively to identify challenges, formulate recommendations and translate their experiences and ideas into concrete policy proposals.

The policy papers presented in this publication are the result of this process. They reflect the perspectives and recommendations developed by the participating young people and aim to contribute to ongoing discussions on inclusive democratic participation and youth engagement in Europe.



Bridging the Language Gap: Improving Multilingual Access in EU Public Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The language gap between public services and members of society who do not speak the native language, represent a series of issues related to human rights and economic markets, within the EU. The lack of state-mandated translations in public institutions leaves reliance on informal translations, and creates a disruption in the single European labour market. The lack of priority for this issue within European institutions leaves gaps between rules and laws at the EU level and reality, putting pressure on key European values of non-discrimination of human dignity. Through the strengthening of public awareness and development of simple platforms to improve access to public institutions, this policy paper aims to address an issue affecting almost 65 million people.

INTRODUCTION

1. Background and Context

The European Union is built on unity in diversity. This idea is written in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights also supports this idea. The EU has 24 languages and many regional, minority and non-territorial languages. This language diversity is a part of how the EU works.

In today's EU over 14 million EU citizens live in a country different from their own. Migration from countries both within and outside the EU is also increasing. As a result people interact with administrations in new ways. Public services like healthcare, justice and social security are where individuals use their rights. However EU institutions work with languages, but national, regional and local public services mostly speak only one language or have limited language options.

2. The Problem: Barriers as Democratic Deficits

The current situation is a problem. When public services do not speak languages there is a gap between the rights guaranteed by EU law and the reality for residents.

Language barriers in administrations cause critical issues:

- * **Democratic and Civic Exclusion:** Not speaking the local language prevents residents from understanding administrative procedures voting in local elections or participating in public consultations.
- * **Socio-Economic Disadvantages:** Language barriers delay processing work permits recognizing qualifications or accessing benefits. This leads to inefficiencies. Increases the risk of marginalization for foreign-born populations.
- * **Health and Safety Risks:** Poor communication in healthcare or emergency services puts life and well-being at risk as seen during -border health crises.

Traditional translation and interpretation models are under strain. They are often underfunded rely on solutions and are fragmented across governance levels. While Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Translation (MT) offer promise, their integration into the sector

is uneven. They also lack quality standards, ethical safeguards and data privacy compliance under the GDPR.

3. Scope and Objectives of the Policy Paper

This policy paper addresses the need for a coordinated framework to improve access in EU public services. Its focus is on third-country nationals and EU mobile citizens with insufficient proficiency in the host state's administrative language, with particular attention to healthcare, social protection and migration procedures. It shifts the focus from seeing multilingualism as a burden to recognizing it as a requirement for cohesion, integration and digital inclusivity.

Specifically this paper aims to:

- * Analyze the gaps and operational challenges faced by Member States in providing multilingual public services.
- * Evaluate the role of emerging tools Large Language Models (LLMs) and public-sector AI applications in mitigating language barriers while maintaining high standards of data security and inclusivity.
- * Propose policy recommendations aimed at EU institutions and national governments to harmonize standards, foster cross-border administrative interoperability and secure funding for linguistic infrastructure.

By bridging the gap, between diversity and administrative accessibility the framework outlined in this paper seeks to ensure that no citizen or resident is left behind in a digital and mobile European Union.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Throughout EU member states, third-country nationals experience multilingual gaps in information, procedures and support, leading to staggered access to public services. Public health, housing, tax and digital administrative services primarily operate in national languages, with their websites having little to no translated materials. Interpretation services are sporadic, and not mandated by member states, placing large burdens on civil institutions. This can leave citizens unable to understand their eligibility, complete forms or navigate a website.

Several causes can be attributed to this complex issue: the fragmentation of national-language service delivery across Member States, the low political priority afforded to translation and inclusion, staff training, or lack thereof, on intercultural communication to enable appropriate translation, and dependence on informal, sometimes fraudulent, translators provided by NGOs or otherwise, which undermines the support of rights.

Consequences are measurable, in terms of denial or delay of accessing health and social protection, violation of fundamental rights, exclusion from education and labour markets, increased social isolation and both social and economic inefficiencies across the single market, as a result of reduced labour mobility and integration. An inconsistency between EU-level norms and enforcement on language access and the lived experiences of migrants illustrates the need for coordinated EU-level policy action, common language-access tools, and target capacity-building within Member State services.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Language barriers remain a structural obstacle to inclusion across the EU. Despite 24 official languages and over 5 million intra-EU movers annually (Eurostat, 2024), no binding EU legislation mandates multilingual public service delivery at member state level. Directive 2010/64/EU guarantees interpretation rights exclusively in criminal proceedings, leaving health, housing, and administrative interactions legally unprotected. The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 acknowledges language access as fundamental, yet remains non-binding. The AMIF (€10.94 billion, 2021–2027) funds integration measures, but the FRA's 2023 Migrant Rights Report documents that 49% of third-country nationals in frontline receiving states – including Cyprus and Greece – report language as their primary barrier to accessing public services. This implementation gap between existing EU frameworks and lived reality constitutes the central problem this paper addresses.

CALL TO ACTION 2026

Access to public services does not merely represent a significant tool for increasing integration of immigrants in a society but it is the concrete exercise of human fundamental rights.

To consider public services as a tool of social protection is not sufficient for them to exist, but their quality and access needs to be guaranteed to anyone. For this reason we, as students living in Europe, have identified the immediate action that political institutions are required to undertake.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Strengthening Public Awareness and Intercultural Competence in Public Services

We call on the European Commission, in cooperation with European Education Area (EEA), the Ministry of Education of each Member States and civil society organisation such as the European Council for Refugees and exiles (ECRE), and European Commission to develop structured public awareness programmes and mandatory training for frontline public-service staff.

The programmes should include:

- Annual national and European level conferences in which third-country nationals' necessities are placed at the core of the discourse. The barriers experienced in accessing healthcare, education, housing shall be central to make European citizens aware of the consistent efforts that migrant face to engage with the public services system. Progress in this action will be verified by a mandatory participation rates of migrants organisation for consultations.
- Mandatory intercultural communication training for frontline public service employees. If the level of consciousness of people is increased, this would automatically constitute an advantage for improving the access to social services since the employee will be better equipped to properly communicate and empathise with situations lived by migrants. By 2032, 40% of public servants should be trained in anti-discrimination policy per each public service office at

local, municipal, regional, national and European level. Satisfaction with the services will be examined through an online survey that people using the service will be invited to fill after each contact with front line public service offices, taking into consideration the availability of the employees in explaining the bureaucratic procedures and the possible adoption of translators or other tools to make the communication clearer.

The European Commission should coordinate and provide financial support through existing funding instruments such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Member States will be responsible for monitoring the implementation at national level.

RECOMMENDATION 2: introduction of the digital platform “MLAPS”: MultiLingual Access for Public Services

We recommend the European Commission to develop, by 2028, “MLAPS” (Multilingual Access for Public Services) a centralised European level digital platform available also as a mobile application, in cooperation with Member States and local public administrations.

In the platform each Member States should cooperate with the Commission to integrate national public service detailed information available in the users’ nearby territory including healthcare, education, housing, legal assistance and administrative procedures.

To improve accessibility, MLAPS will include:

- instant online translation tools in order to guarantee an information space understandable to everyone
- Geolocation services for nearby public-service offices
- Simplified administrative language

On 31st of March 2026, the European Commission launched a call for proposals to support “multilingual access to trusted news and public-interest information across Europe”. Since public services are the concrete representation of “public-interest information” this recommendation strongly contributes to the achievement of this goal, enhancing social inclusion in the EU digital strategy. The success of MLAPS should be monitored through the following indicators:

- Number of public services integrated in the platforms
- Number of languages available
- Number of participating Member States
- Number of users

RECOMMENDATION 3: Addressing structural barriers: Providing the adequate socio-economic preconditions to learn the local language

The European Commission, in conjunction with the action of single Member States and civil society organisation such as the European Council for Refugees and exiles (ECRE), by 2030 should launch a programme to guarantee the basic necessary living conditions in order to create an adequate environment for any member of society to learn the language and further promoting a long term integration in the social substrata.

Within 2030, by enlarging the capacities of existing integration funds, the programme should be able to support Member States in:

- Increasing access to housing assistance and free public transportation for students from 18-25 years old
- Expanding free language courses for newly arrived members of society with a particular attention to the participation of younger generations in education to develop their potential

These objectives will be valued through an annual monitoration in which each Member State is required to provide the following information:

- Percentage of access to stable housing after the first year of residence
- Number of students enrolled in language course and completion rates of language programme
- School participation rates among foreign-born youth

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this paper proves that the problem is both urgent and solvable. By implementing the listed calls to action, we address a problem that puts under question values outlined in the EU Charter, pressures national public systems, and hinders the self-identification as a European, amongst others. With recent rises in migration into the EU, the time is right more than ever, for a centralised plan to adapt a system in which each citizen is able to interact with the state they live in.

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