

The logo for COMBI features the word 'COMBI' in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The letter 'O' is replaced by a stylized speech bubble containing two overlapping circles, one red and one orange. The background is white with several faint, light blue speech bubble outlines scattered around the text.

COMBI

Communication competences for migrants
and disadvantaged background learners in bilingual work environments

ROADMAP TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCES OF MIGRANTS WORKING IN BILINGUAL AREAS

Product of the COMBI project Communication competences for migrants and
disadvantaged background learners in bilingual workplaces

01/11/2016 - 31/08/2019

combiproject.eu



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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**Roadmap towards the improvement of
the communication competences of
migrants working in bilingual areas**

About the COMBI-project

Communication competences for migrants and disadvantaged background learners in bilingual workplaces

The COMBI project, funded by Erasmus+, was set up to develop innovative and inclusive learning materials and practices that aim to improve the communication competences and minority language skills of migrants working in Europe's many bilingual regions, specifically in sectors that require bilingual skills such as the elderly, social and healthcare sector. COMBI's methods do not aim for full language competences, but instead for functional skills relevant to the requirements in the workplace.

The COMBI team is made up of six partners from five European countries, each having their own area of expertise in the fields of academic research, vocational training and digital communication.

The following document is a roadmap intended to give insight into the current situation in respect to migrants working in bilingual areas and minority language learning, and how this situation may be improved.

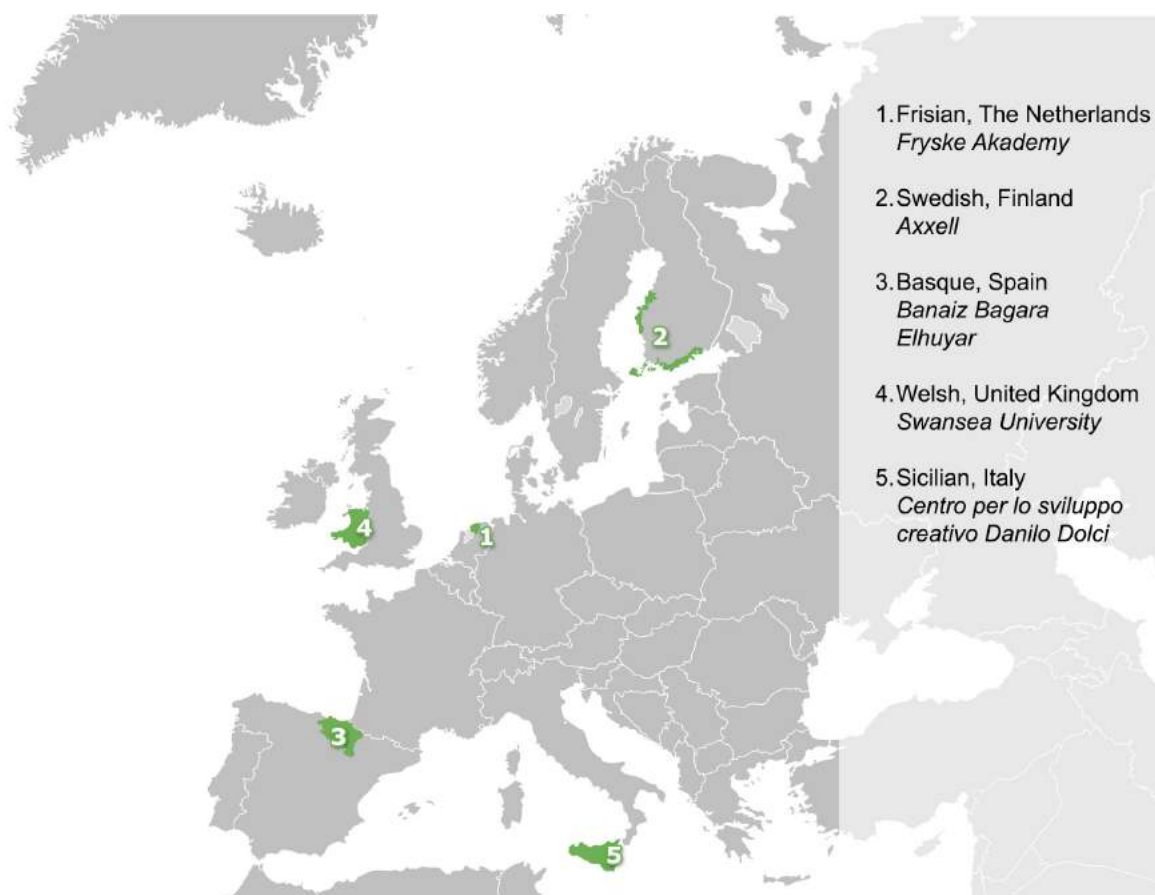


Figure 1: locations of the COMBI project's six partners

Structure of the roadmap:



1 European challenges

that gave rise to COMBI's goals

Language: a major barrier for migrants seeking employment...

In 2015, A total of 4.7 million people immigrated to one of the 28 EU Member States (Eurostat 2017). These migrants often need to obtain a living in their new surroundings. That this is a difficult undertaking wrought with challenges becomes apparent from the high unemployment rate among highly skilled migrants (*A New Skills Agenda for Europe*, 2016).

The most frequently named challenge that migrants face in their search for work is language (e.g. Yao and Ours 2015) and successful linguistic integration is a major step towards economic inclusion.

It naturally follows that in bilingual areas migrants face additional problems: here many jobs require skills in both the national and the minority language.

In the care sector and other working fields, communication skills, including skills in a patient's mother tongue are of vital importance

One area of work, in which minority language skills are of great importance, is the care sector: patients often prefer to use their native language when talking to staff, and research shows that personnel using the patient's native language, or even being aware of it, has a positive effect on well-being and sense of comfort (e.g. Irvine et al. 2008).

"There are these subtleties in language which makes the context completely different, just by a single word.

Misunderstandings can't happen in medicine - you have to be extremely precise with it."
(Hospital Doctor, quote from Irvine et al. 2008)

Finally, experiences from the partners' regions show that migrant workers can feel excluded when unable to join conversations in the language that staff and patients use amongst each other.

"Sometimes through speaking their own language – recognising, you know, their own language, it means as well that you recognise them as a whole person." (Welsh Nurse, quote from Irvine et al. 2008)

Furthermore, dementia seems to affect the native language last and least, eventually making this language the sole means of verbal communication as the disease progresses (Mendez, Saghafi and Clark 2004).

"People started to talk about experiences they had years ago. Mostly how they felt discriminated and excluded for not speaking Euskara"

(Experiences from migrants working in the care sector that joined COMBI's pilot)

One might consider the use of interpreters, instead of training staff's bilingual skills. However, experts argue that interpreters cannot equate to bilingual health care workers, since the latter can give a higher level of care and have a higher level of authority, skill, and/or trust with the patient (Cioffi 2003).

Europe's linguistic heritage needs continuous protection

Europe has a rich linguistic landscape: most member states of the European Union officially acknowledge the existence of languages within their territory in addition to the state language. The actions of the European Parliament in general reflect a persistent effort to protect these minority languages and Europe's linguistic diversity. In addition, many European Union member states have ratified the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. One of the Charter's paragraphs specifically states the need to stimulate the use of the minority language in social care facilities (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, paragraph 13.2.c).

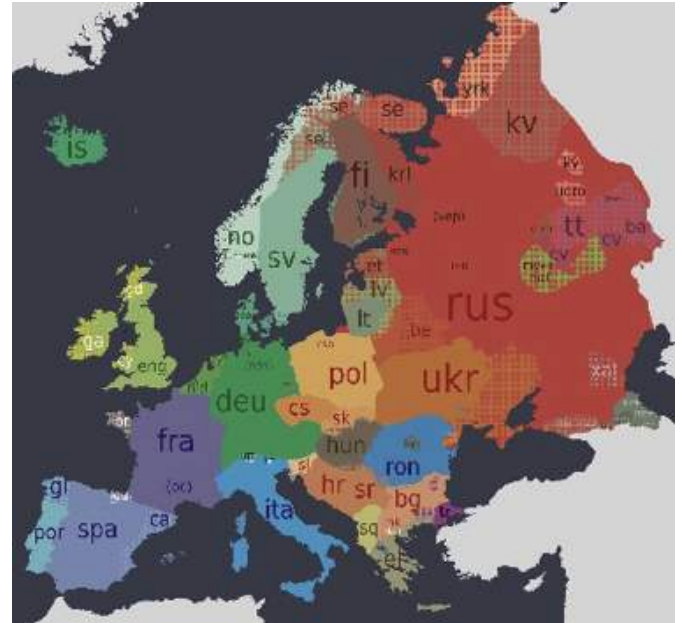


Figure 2: map of Europe's languages (by Urión Argador, licensed under CC Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic).

It seems of vital importance therefore:

to determine what pathways exist for migrant workers to learn the minority language, and how these pathways should be improved.

2 Needs analysis

to pinpoint hurdles and suggest which resources / steps are required for improvement (COMBI's first output)

COMBI's needs analysis:

To find out more about existing pathways for migrants to learn the minority language COMBI carried out a needs analysis: it consists of a literature review and a survey held among migrants, management of care facilities, vocational trainers and language teachers in the five countries of the COMBI partners. The analysis shows what policies and practices exist regarding minority language learning of migrants working in the care sector, and what are the attitudes of survey respondents towards migrants learning the minority language in addition to the national language.

It turns out:

That countries strongly vary in policies and practices, but all offer pathways to learn the national language. However, pathways for the minority language are much less available. Only the Basque Country and Sweden have policies aimed at familiarising migrants with the minority language and only in the Basque Country is this policy regularly put into practice. The survey shows that migrants working in the care sector do perceive the importance of learning the regional language, but courses tailored to the needs of migrants, and/or to the specific language requirements of the workplace are often not there.

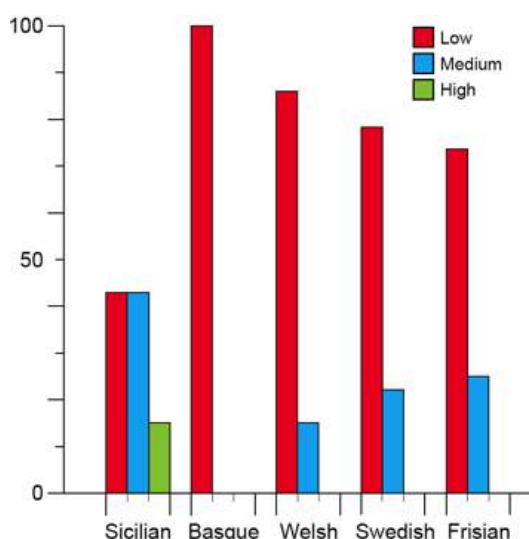


Figure 3: self-reported skills in the minority language of interviewed migrants working in the care sector in one of the five partner countries.

Recommendations of the needs analysis:

Language learning methods need to be created aimed specifically at migrants and focused at improving communication competences required at the workplace. These methods need to take the minority language into account.

In addition, policy makers and care facilities need to be made far more aware of how important it is that staff possess minority language skills.

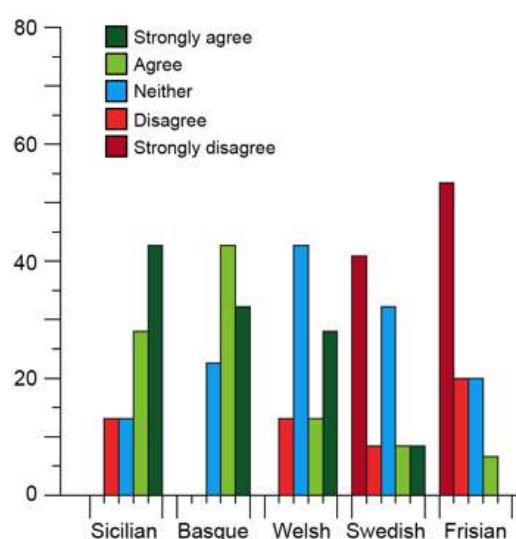


Figure 4: opinion of migrants working in the care sector in one of the five partner countries about the statement "Speaking the minority language is essential for my job".

COMBI's Needs Analysis is available:

in English, under an open license at:

<http://combiproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/COMBI-output-01.pdf>

An abbreviated version in English, Spanish, Italian and Dutch, will be available soon on the COMBI website.



3 Development

of products required for improvement and piloting

Following the recommendations of the *Needs Analysis*, COMBI has developed methods that contribute to opening up pathways for migrants working in bilingual areas to improve their communication and minority language skills.

COMBI's Teacher Trainer Toolkit:

Is a highly **flexible** document, that can be used by vocational trainers, language teachers, care facilities and their staff, to develop courses aimed at improving communication and minority language skills of migrant students and staff. It offers tools to adapt a course to a country's and institution's specific policies, to the specific language needs of patients and to the cultural/linguistic backgrounds and existing skills of the students.

Using the Toolkit's needs analysis an institution's policy and its staff's attitudes and practices regarding minority language use can be mapped out.

The toolkit takes an **innovative** and **multidisciplinary** approach: it offers tools for vocational trainers to incorporate language training in their teaching, and tools for language teachers to adapt their courses to the workplace.

It offers **inclusive** methods and builds on the premise that no full skills are necessary but that language awareness and functional language skills matched to the requirements of the workplace already positively affect the quality of care and the well-being of the patients.

In addition to a printable document, the toolkit is also available as an **interactive** course.

The Teacher Trainer Toolkit will soon be available:

in English, Spanish, Italian and Dutch, under an open license at the COMBI website. The interactive course can already be followed freely at [openlearning.com](https://www.openlearning.com):

<https://www.openlearning.com/courses/combi-teachin-minority-languages/>

COMBI's *Modules*: tailor-made courses, based on the *Teacher Trainer Toolkit*, for teachers, managers of care facilities and policy makers

Seven modules, based on COMBI's Toolkit, were developed and are available in a digital course on openlearning.com. Each course is aimed at a specific target group and gives insight into following topics:

1. How one may gather information at the workplace about the situations in which national and/or minority languages are used (*Collecting and analysing communication needs*).
2. How one may introduce innovative and interdisciplinary methods in one's course (*Multidisciplinary approaches to learning*)
3. Examples of exercises using innovative and interdisciplinary approaches (Exercises Using Multidisciplinary Approaches). This module also offers videos of a care scene and of a lesson for students based on this care scene, as an example of how the Toolkit's methods can be brought into practice.
4. What aspects to consider when planning a course on improving the minority language skills of students (*Planning of courses*)
5. How to use *inclusive* evaluation methods that test language skills, useful for the work floor, as opposed to full language skills (*Tools of evaluation*).
6. Examples of good policy making and management in Europe that open up pathways for migrants to learn all languages of the host community, including the minority language (*Best practices transferable at a pan-European level*).
7. Finally a list of online interactive learning tools for learning the minority languages of the five partner regions (*Tools for migrant workers in health care*).

All COMBI modules are available:

in English, Spanish, Italian, Finnish and Dutch, under an open license at openlearning.com:

<http://www.openlearning.com/courses/combiproject/homepage>

4 Implementation

Disseminating COMBI's products and stimulating their use

COMBI's products aim to help opening up pathways to learn the minority language for migrants working or wishing to work in the care sector. To make COMBI's products effective migrants themselves, language teachers, vocational trainers, and policy makers need to be aware of COMBI's research results and products.

Dissemination up till now:

During the project's runtime the partners kept local care facilities and minority language centres informed about the progress and published products. Local migrants, teachers and care workers were engaged in COMBI's surveys, and helped to test and improve the *Teacher Trainer Toolkit*. Policy makers were informed of the project's goals by presentations, for instance the presentation for the Members of European Parliament at the *Minorities Intergroup* in Strasbourg. Via presentations at academic conferences COMBI's research results were made public in the academic world. And of course, members of all target groups participated in COMBI's four Multiplier Events, during which the four COMBI products - the Needs Analysis, the *Teacher Trainer Toolkit*, the *Modules*, and the *Roadmap* - were presented.



5 Recommendations

for policy makers, teachers, and management of care facilities: in addition to implementing COMBI's products, what further needs to be done?

With its products and dissemination activities, COMBI hopes to make a strong contribution *to the improvement of the communication and minority language skills of migrants working in bilingual areas*. However, to achieve COMBI's goal still more needs to be done. Therefore the COMBI partners would like to make the following recommendations:

List of recommendations:

Policy makers need to:

- acknowledge that, to support economic inclusion of migrants, their linguistic integration should also focus on language skills required for the workplace.
- acknowledge that in many workplaces, such as the elderly, social and healthcare sector, skills in both majority and minority language are important.
- recognise therefore that linguistic integration of migrants can and often needs to take place in both the dominant and the minority language of the host community.
- develop a framework for assessing the language skills of migrants which takes the minority language into account.
- recognise the linguistic background of migrants and value this background in courses focused on linguistic and cultural integration.
- recognise that the needs of migrant pupils training for the workplace often differ from those of other pupils.
- realise that, currently in Europe, hardly any pathways exist for migrants to integrate into the linguistic and cultural practice of bilingual workplaces, and that these pathways need to be created
 - + by funding and / or facilitating the creation of courses and learning materials adapted to the multilingual reality of the workplace.
 - + by preferably funding language and vocational training courses that take the minority language into account.

Care facilities need to:

- be aware of the linguistic landscape of the patients, so that staff can be suitably trained.
- consider adopting an “active offer”-principle, such as present in Wales, in which patients are asked for a language preference.
- consider implementing methods to visibly communicate the patient’s language preferences to the staff. For instance by making a notation in the patient’s chart, so that after shift changes, language preferences aren’t overlooked.
- consider appointing a language trainer or organise courses for personnel to improve communication competences that take the minority language into account. These courses need to be adapted to both the demands of the workplace and the linguistic backgrounds of the students.
- recognise that even limited or functional language skills can offer comfort to patients and allow staff with limited skills to use these.

Language and vocational trainers need to:

- adapt interdisciplinary practices: language courses can be adapted to the workplace and vocational training can focus on improving language skills; vocational trainers and language teachers need to work together.
- include minority language awareness in vocational training, and highlight the importance of patients’ language needs.
- offer minority language courses aimed at migrants and focused on the workplace.
- use current care workers as volunteers to teach, since they are familiar with the circumstances in which the state and minority languages are used.
- share courses, based on COMBI’s methods or otherwise, via an open licence, online or with other stakeholders.

Policy makers, care facilities, language and vocational trainers need to be aware that:

- flexible and open-source learning materials, developed by COMBI, which take into account both the needs of migrant students and the linguistic and cultural background of the host community, are available online for free.

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Funding institution

EACEA, Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnerships for adult education

Project duration

01/09/2016 - 31/08/2019



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Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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