

Martin Hope

Language Rich Europe

According to Eurobarometer, 83% of Europeans value knowing other languages yet 44% cannot speak another language. With globalisation and increasing migration, multilingualism is critical to intercultural understanding and cohesion in society, job prospects for individuals, and competitiveness in Europe.

Language Rich Europe (LRE) aims to encourage multilingualism across Europe and works at two levels:

- at policy level it aims to establish a benchmarking tool for national governments and decision makers to evaluate and improve language policies and practices in their education systems, public services, businesses and media;
- at teacher and learner level, it aims to raise awareness of the importance of language learning, and to increase the number of people learning languages at all stages of their lives.



Figure 1: Countries and additional regions included in *Language Rich Europe*

By collecting and analysing new research data on language policies and practices in 20 countries and disseminating it through a network of partners, this project seeks to capture the attention of leaders in government, business and society across Europe and will:

- **illustrate** the current situation, highlighting good policy and practice to enable informed policy choices;
- **inspire** new language focus among decision makers by demonstrating the importance of languages to stable and prosperous societies;
- **motivate** more people to learn languages.

In advance of the research publication, Language Rich Europe has already connected with over 1,000 prospective members of the LRE Network through the organisation of debates and conferences about multilingualism, and through the popular LRE blog (<http://languagerichblog.eu/>) and twitter account (@languagerich), which have been informing stakeholders about the project and recounting multilingual stories from around Europe.

A book of essays published in 2011, entitled *Towards a Language Rich Europe, Multilingual Essays on Language Policies and Practices*, has already provided an overview of the language environment in a selection of European countries, setting out some of the national language policy contexts and highlighting the key challenges. These essays were written by colleagues from our network of partner organisations, and the insights they share with us are relevant not only for their own context, but for stakeholders across the continent.

The development phase of the project is now complete. A detailed questionnaire rooted in EU and Council of Europe (CoE) recommendations was constructed by the Babylon Centre for Studies of the Multicultural Society, University of Tilburg in consultation with the project steering group and external advisers. Our research partners used this instrument to gather national data on language policies and practices in the domains of pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. They have also conducted direct research in selected universities and vocational training colleges, reported on language policies in the media, researched multilingual services in cities, and investigated language strategies in a sample of businesses.

A significant database has been generated through this research, and the data has enabled country profiles to be generated in which alignment against EU and CoE recommendations is shown in charts and interpreted in an analytical text explaining the results and context, as well as highlighting examples of good practice.

The results of the Language Rich Europe research are now being finalised and translated and by May/June 2012 will be available in 23 languages both in print form and on an interactive website.

Launches to disseminate the findings of the research will take place between May and June 2012 and will be followed by workshops to exploit the results. The Language Rich Europe network of over 1,200 decision makers across Europe will meet through these workshops and will include decision makers from government, education, business, city administrations, the media, and immigrant associations. This sustainable and interdisciplinary network will continue to share knowledge and good practice in multilingualism through the special login platform incorporated into the new LRE website, which will also be launched in May 2012, and through two international events in London and Brussels, where final country action plans will be presented and recommendations on EU policy made to the European Commission. The multilingual website will enable the research findings to reach much wider audiences of people interested in language education.

Language Rich Europe partners



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