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Supporting Integration:
Access to Citizenship in
Ireland and the EU

REPORT AUTHORS

Sarah Groarke
Michal Polakowski
Emma Quinn
Fran McGinnity

Supporting integration?

International practices on civics and
language requirements linked to
naturalisation



Presentation Structure

1. Background and methodology: how we gathered evidence
2. Overview of language requirements in EU Member States and the UK
3. Overview of civic requirements in EU Member States and the UK
4. Learnings from case studies
5. Conclusions

Background and methodology

- Ireland's Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 states the introduction of civics and language tests will be examined
- Extensive literature review on naturalisation, citizenship and migration and integration requirements
- Mapping exercise of requirements in 27 EU Member States + UK
- Deep dive into selected case studies: Finland, Belgium, Portugal and UK, complemented by three English-speaking non-EU states
- Interviews with officials/experts in citizenship policy in each EU country
- European Migration Network (2020) Pathways to citizenship study
- Limitations: EU-wide only; in-depth analysis of all EUMS beyond scope

Mapping language requirements

Language requirements in EU + UK

- 24 Member States (MS) + UK require evidence of language proficiency in order to naturalise
- Ireland, Cyprus, and Sweden do not
- Variety in means of assessment
 - Exam in 20 + UK; targeted test in 6 MS
 - Variety in types of test, administration...
 - National education certificates accepted in 19 MS
 - Interview in 3 MS; declaration in Malta
 - Some MS link to language component of integration course

Language requirements: levels

- Variety in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level:
 - 7 MS require A2 level (Basic)
 - 10 MS (incl. Finland) require B1 level (Independent lower)
 - 2 MS require B2 level (Independent higher)
 - Not specified in 4 MS, ‘basic/elementary’ in Bulgaria
- General increase in the level of language proficiency required by EU MS (Rocca et al 2020)

Language requirements: costs, exemptions and evaluations

- Exam costs apply in at least 12 MS
- Language support often provided as part of integration course – 11 MS (FRA, 2017)
- Exemptions in 13 MS on basis of illness and disability; age in 10 MS
- Few adapted to people in situations of vulnerability, including low-literate learners and refugees
- Only Finland offers sign language as option to satisfy language requirement
- No evaluations of impact of language requirements on language proficiency found; some MS hold quality audits of tests
- Council of Europe (2014) cautions against use of CEFR as measure of integration

Mapping civics requirements

Civics requirement in EU + UK

- 18 Member States + UK require civic knowledge/‘integration’
- Increase in requirements introduced in last 20 years
- No requirements in 9 EU Member States : Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden
- Variety in means of assessment:
 - Exam in 11 MS + UK
 - Most exams multiple-choice, paper/computer-based; number of questions ranges 15 - 40
 - Interview in 5 MS
 - Integration/orientation course in 2 MS

Civics requirements: content and costs

- Typically tests address knowledge of the Constitution, democratic and political system, history, geography, culture and customs. Less common: access to services, living in country and rights
- Little information was found on how content is devised
- Conducted in national language → form of language test?
- Exams mostly at cost to applicant, integration courses free
- Learning materials provided in all MS, mostly free of charge (handbook; preparation courses; practice exams)

Civics requirement: exemptions and evaluations

- Exemptions (age, prior education, disability) applied in most MS
- Few exemptions for people with low literacy
- Evaluation of civic requirements for naturalisation not found
- Research shows mixed views among applicants (Strik et al., 2010; Gidley et al., 2010; Byrne, 2017; Bassel et al., 2017)
- Research suggests focus on learning opportunities such as courses, rather than exams (Rocca et al., 2020)

Learning from case studies

Learnings from case studies: Portugal

- Language knowledge at A2 level of the CEFR. No civics requirement
- Language requirement in place since 1950s; formalising of procedures since; testing option introduced in 2006
- Possible to prove knowledge of Portuguese in many ways: tests; educational diplomas; accredited language courses
- Exemptions possible for citizens of countries where Portuguese is an official language; serious health problems; disability; aged over 60 plus illiterate
- Free language PPT Programme – Portuguese for All – targets applicants for permanent residence or naturalisation. Graduation satisfies the requirement

Learnings from case studies: Belgium:

- Naturalisation requirements include language and civics components
- “Social integration” requirement can be met in many ways: diploma/certificates to at least upper secondary; completion of a professional course; uninterrupted economic activity (5 years) or by completion of an integration programme
- Integration programmes differ among communities both in terms of scope and requirements
- Language requirement at CEFR A2 in Flemish, French or German; meeting integration requirement is sufficient, 7 other forms of proof available
- Challenges identified: one-size-fits-all solution which might miss specific needs of migrants and their background (such as illiteracy)

Learnings from case studies: UK

- Civics requirement and language requirement at B1 level in place
- Language knowledge requirement since 1914
- Since 2005, specified language and civics requirements have been part of naturalisation procedure. Initially a 'double path' was available
- Since 2015, two separate tests :
 - Life in the UK test based on a textbook
 - CEFR B1 SELT language test
- Evaluations: research indicates mixed assessment. Challenges include:
 - Reliance on for-profit preparatory courses; childcare
 - Effectiveness of testing languages other than English

Policy implications 1

- There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to requirements related to naturalisation (scope, difficulty, ways of proving knowledge), such variety is a result of different migration outcomes, integration policy priorities but also historical legacies
- The overall cost of running systems of requirements are unknown as they are often dispersed between different government branches and partially covered by fees
- The experience of several countries indicates the need for a system of public support for individuals with disabilities, lower educational attainment and language competence

Policy Implications 2

- Consideration will need to be given to how to prepare and test candidates in English, Irish and (potentially) Irish Sign Language
- Research indicates that a civics requirement might support integration if it is linked with a course rather than a test of knowledge
- Ex-ante analysis and ongoing evaluation are essential and need to take into account diverse voices (employers, educators, wider public and a migrant community)

Thanks for listening!

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Further questions? Contact us:

Michal Polakowski michal.polakowski@esri.ie

Emma Quinn emma.quinn@esri.ie

Fran McGinnity fran.mcginnity@esri.ie