



Resolution 1973 (2014)¹

Final version

Integration tests: helping or hindering integration?

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Knowledge of a receiving society's language(s) without doubt facilitates the successful integration of migrants. This is the foundation on which integration tests were introduced by a small number of member States, initially for citizenship purposes. They have now, however, been embraced by a growing number of States and applied not only for citizenship, but also for residence, and even as a pre-entry requirement, primarily in cases of family reunion.
2. Not only has the use of tests increased significantly, but the standards required have also gone up. Furthermore, alongside language, a range of "citizenship" issues, such as facts about history and knowledge of political institutions, society and democratic values, have been introduced in a number of countries.
3. There are two primary concerns over the use of these tests. The first is whether they promote integration or have the opposite effect. The second is whether they are being used not so much as an integration measure, but rather as a migration management mechanism to limit the number of migrants entering and/or remaining in the country concerned. A drop of at least 20% of people seeking family reunion in one member State and a drop of 40% of those seeking or granted permanent residence permits in another gives a clear indication of the effect, intended or otherwise, that the introduction of these measures can have. These decreases are a reason for concern, as family reunification and greater security in terms of residence rights are beneficial for the integration of migrants. Especially vulnerable migrants need to be supported in the integration process by granting them access to these rights, instead of excluding them.
4. Encouraging integration through language and other testing is not in itself problematic, and it is a measure that many member States are likely to continue with in one form or another. It is, however, important to be aware of the limitations of such tests and ensure that they contribute to integration and do not become a barrier to it. Rather than promoting testing, offering language courses and possibly obliging migrants to participate in these courses may offer greater advantages and develop their language skills without running the risk of excluding migrants. They may also promote integration as a two-way process, requiring an investment by both the host society and the migrants. Furthermore, testing of knowledge does not, as such, improve language skills and can only be effective if it is offered at the final stage of a language course provided by the host State.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly is concerned that current integration tests in Europe are not as effective as they should be. In the first place, the level of knowledge required sometimes exceeds what is reasonably attainable by many immigrants or candidates for immigration, leading to the exclusion of many people who would otherwise have no problems integrating. This raises human rights issues, notably with regard to the right to family life and protection from discrimination. It is particularly problematic in the case of family reunification and when dealing with people who are illiterate or with low levels of education, old people, refugees and others. Furthermore, where integration tests are a barely veiled migration management measure, they inhibit and are detrimental to integration and they should be discontinued.

1. *Assembly debate* on 29 January 2014 (6th Sitting) (see [Doc. 13361](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Tineke Strik). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 29 January 2014 (6th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 2034 \(2014\)](#).



6. Member States of the Council of Europe are therefore invited to reappraise their approach to integration tests by evaluating their long-term effectiveness as a tool for efficient, sustainable and user-friendly integration, in order to ensure that:

6.1. the language proficiency levels set in these tests are attainable. This will require that:

6.1.1. the language levels be not set too high and that they be differentiated with regard to what is expected in terms of speaking and listening ability (not going beyond the A2 level of the Council of Europe “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” (CEFR)), and writing and reading ability (remaining at the basic A1 level of the CEFR);

6.1.2. the discriminatory effect of testing be avoided by giving preference to graduated scales of attainment, reflecting recognition of effort rather than simply achievement. Furthermore, testing has to take into account the needs and abilities of those who do not have the same levels of literacy and education, or those who may be in a position of vulnerability or have other difficulties, such as the elderly and refugees;

6.1.3. tests should not be the only method. Rather than, or in addition to tests, one should consider other ways of showing commitment to integration, such as civic commitment or progress, or by using mechanisms adopted in other countries, such as interviews with trained personnel to ensure fairness;

6.2. adequate financial support is provided by the State for preparatory courses. Wherever possible these should be free of charge for migrants, as it has been shown that making migrants pay for courses, which can run to 400 hours of learning or more, acts as a major barrier and disincentive;

6.3. appropriate measures are in place to ensure that failure rates in the tests, which can be high, do not have a discriminatory effect and do not lead to exclusion or a state of limbo for those who do not succeed. Failure could have the consequence of requiring further efforts, but it should not lead to the denial of the right to family reunification, permanent residence rights or citizenship;

6.4. particular attention is paid to pre-entry requirements and the impact they can have on the right to family life as enshrined in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and also family reunion as established in the European Union Directive (2003/86/EC) on the Right to Family Reunification. In this respect, failure in the test should never be the sole reason for excluding migrants from family reunification when they fulfil all the other criteria;

6.5. alternatives to these tests are explored and monitored, and used where appropriate.