

European Language Monitor – Exploring European Language Policies On-Line

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Abstract

The European Language Monitor is a project of EFNIL, the European Federation of National Institutions for Language. Since 2009, the project has collected and published data on language legislation and language planning in Europe. This article gives an overview of the information that is provided on European language legislation and language planning based on an extensive questionnaire with 9 sets of questions. Data for more than 25 European countries is accessible via a web interface. The paper argues that access to information on language policies across countries is an important asset for policy makers, journalists, scientists and teachers.

Keywords: language policy, language strategy, data collection.

Resumé

European Language Monitor er et projekt under EFNIL, den europæiske sammenslutning af nationale sproginstitutioner i Europa. Siden 2009 har projektet indsamlet og publiceret data vedr. sproglovgivning, sprogpolitik og sprogplanlægning i Europa. Artiklen giver et overblik over den information man kan finde om europæisk sprogpolitik og sprogplanlægning baseret på et omfattende spørgeskema med 9 sæt af spørgsmål. Data fra mere end 25 lande er tilgængelige via en webgrænseflade. Artiklen argumenterer for at adgangen til information om sprogpolitikker på tværs af landegrænserne er et vigtigt redskab for politikere, journalister, forskere og undervisere.

1. Introduction

The European Language Monitor (ELM) (Kirchmeier-Andersen et al. 2012) is a project of EFNIL, the European Federation of National Institutions for Language, that collects and publishes data on language legislation and language planning in Europe. ELM provides answers to questions like:

- How many countries have a language law?
- What languages are used as language of instruction in higher education?
- What languages are used on company web sites.
- Which countries have specific programs to support language technology for their languages?

The user can browse and compare language laws, find information about the status of minority languages, the use of languages in the educational systems, in the media and about the use of language technology in many European countries.

The data in ELM are collected and validated by the national institutions for language that are organized in EFNIL. The focus is on official regulations and their implementation. We have taken great care to provide comments, quotes, links and translations of legislation wherever possible. The data for ELM have been collected every 4 years since 2009. The current version, ELM 4, is based on data collected in 2017-2018.

2. What is a Language Monitor?

In some countries, such as Sweden and Norway, reports on the status of its language(s) are presented to policy makers on a regular basis, in others, language status reports are created ad hoc, depending on the political situation. Very few surveys are created on a regular basis allowing the

comparison of language data across countries and over time.

In our view, a language monitor should comply with the following criteria:

- It is a scientific review of the language situation in one or more countries repeated in certain intervals.
- The information should be comparable over time.
- The information should be comparable across countries.

None of the three criteria are clear cut and easy to apply. It is not at all clear which kinds of data reflect the actual language situation of a country and which factors influence the change of that situation. Neither is it clear whether the data collected for one country are at all comparable to similar data from another, as the political and social conditions vary from country to country.

An important part of the data collection process, therefore, is to provide exact reference to the actual legislation in each country. A statistical overview and a maps view is provided as tools for further exploration and understanding of the different language regimes, their differences and similarities. We hope that this enables researchers and other interested parties to review the sources of the data, look into the details and draw their own conclusions.

The development of a language monitor is a continuous bootstrapping process where questions are tested and the answers evaluated, after which the questions are adjusted accordingly. In some cases, new questions are added. Thus in the newest version, ELM 4, a suite of questions on language technology has been added in cooperation with the META-NET project (Rehm & Uszkoreit 2012).

3. ELM vs. other Language Surveys

To our knowledge there are no surveys that cover the linguistic situation in Europe as detailed as ELM. The Unesco Survey of World Languages, which was launched in 2018, mainly focusses on the status and use of languages and especially endangered languages, but it does not provide quotes from and links to actual legislation, which is necessary if one wishes a more detailed view of the language policies in each country. Some of the EU Eurobarometers do contain questions about languages and linguistic practices, but they are based on public opinion data, not on legal facts. Other surveys, for instance The European Survey on Language Competences commissioned by CRELL (Araújo & Costa, 2013), focus on specific aspects and effects of language teaching and the role of external factors.

4. Methodology

ELM 4 contains 9 suites of questions. Some elicit lists of languages (What are the official languages in your country?). Some are simple yes/no questions (Is there a language law in your country?). Others offer multiple choices.

As many questions as possible have been designed to elicit quantifiable answers in order to give an overview. However, the most interesting and detailed information is located in the comment fields where links and quotes from legislation are provided (in the original language and in English) alongside with comments from EFNIL's language experts.

The question suites cover the following topics:

1. Country situation. Official, regional, indigenous, immigrant languages spoken within and outside the country, legal status, accordance with conventions
2. Legal situation. Language law, constitutional status, other regulations, language demands for citizenship
3. Primary and secondary education. Languages of instruction, languages offered
4. Tertiary education. Languages of instruction, languages used in publications and dissertations
5. Media. Papers, TV, film, music. Languages used and translations provided
6. Business. Regulations. Company languages, annual reports, websites
7. Dissemination of languages. Official languages taught abroad
8. Language organisations. Official, non-governmental but publicly funded, private
9. Language technology

The questionnaire was designed by EFNIL's ELM working group: Sabine Kirchmeier (Danish Language Council), Cecilia Robustelli, Academia della Crusca, Italy), Jennie Spetz (Swedish Language Council), Nina Teigland (Norwegian Language Council), Karlijn Watermanns (Nederlandse Taalunie), and presented and discussed with the EFNIL members. EFNIL representatives in all countries were asked to fill in the survey during 2017.

5. Visualisation and Translation

ELM is conceived as a transparent, interactive web-based system. This means that all questions and answers for all countries can be selected and displayed in a flexible manner. On the ELM website (ELM 4. 2019) it is possible to view the answers to all questions for a specific country, to compare the answers to a given question across countries and to combine questions and comments in order to get a more detailed picture. ELM also offers a map view of some of the data (currently only ELM 3. 2014).

Comments are given in English and quotes are given in the original language and in English translation. Active links to current legislation etc. are provided in most cases as shown in figure 1. Translations of the original quotes may be an authorized translation or provided by the respondent. This is indicated accordingly.



Country	2.1. Does the Constitution of your country state what the official/national/main languages are?	2.1.2. Comments
Bulgaria	Yes	Член от Конституцията на Република България: чл. 3. (http://www.parliament.bg/en/const) Чл. 3. Официалният език в републиката е българският. Constitutional article: Articles 3. http://www.parliament.bg/en/const (authorised) Art. 3. Bulgarian shall be the official language of the Republic.
Iceland	No	Stjórnarskrá Ísveidins Íslands https://www.althingi.is/lagaa/muna/1944033.html "The Icelandic Constitution" (not authorised)

Fig. 1: ELM web interface showing responses to questions and comments in original language and in English.

6. Results

The following section presents some of the information that can be found using ELM. We will focus on two areas: Legal situation and language technology.

6.1 Legal situation

About half of the participation countries state that there are provisions about the official languages of the country stated in the constitution. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Slovenia report that the official languages are stated in the constitution. The other countries do not have provisions of this kind.

Another way of securing a special status for the official languages of a country is a general legal act specifying the language use in various contexts. Only 6 countries do not have a specific language law.

Only Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg and Portugal do not report to have other legal acts regulating the use of official languages. However, all four have stated that they have specific language laws and for Belgium, Greece and Portugal, the use of official languages is also stated in the constitution.

In the following table, countries have been ranked according to the level of regulation they provide for their language(s). The least regulated countries, e.g. those with regulations at the lowest level of legislation, are on top, whereas those with the highest level of regulation appear at the bottom.

Country	Provisions for official languages		
	2.1 Constitution	2.2. Language law	2.3. Other legislation
Denmark	No	No	Yes
Germany	No	No	Yes
The Netherlands	No	No	Yes
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	No	Yes	No
Greece	No	Yes	No
Czech Republic	No	Yes	Yes
Iceland	No	Yes	Yes
Norway	No	Yes	Yes
Sweden	No	Yes	Yes
UK	Not appl.	Not appl.	Yes
Portugal	Yes	No	No
Bulgaria	Yes	No	Yes
Hungary	Yes	No	Yes
Belgium	Yes	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Latvia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Provisions for official languages at different levels of legislation

6.2 National Strategies and Funding Programs for Language Technology

Almost half of the countries report that they do have an official strategy for the development for their language(s). These may be protective strategies for minority languages, strategies for the support of languages in different situations, for the choice of language of instruction at universities and schools, or strategies for how languages can be supported technologically.

The existence of targeted funding programs can be seen as an indication for the awareness in a country about the importance of language technology. More than half of the countries have funding programs for LT. These are mainly the Nordic and East European countries, Luxembourg and the UK, but also Greece, Germany and Hungary.

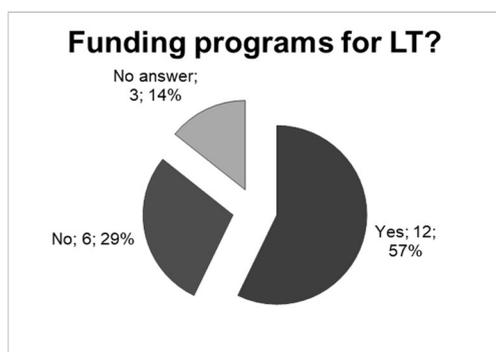


Fig. 2. More than half of the countries have dedicated funding programs for Language Technology.

7. More Details on Current Language Legislation with ELM and LLE

As described above, ELM provides detailed statistical information about the status of the official and non-official languages in Europe and the different rulings and practices in European countries. Supplementary to the statistical information, the comment fields for each question contain a wealth of details about each specific country and inspiration for further studies, such as links to information sources, quotes from legislation texts and their translations into English.

In addition to the ELM project, EFNIL also provides a detailed description of the language legislation in effect in each country in the form of an overview article for each country in both French and English. The project, called LLE (Language Legislation in Europe), is also based on the information provided by the European national institutions for language and frequently updated.

8. Conclusion

Statistical information about language legislation and practices is highly relevant for decision makers, journalists, researchers and teachers. Comparing the different approaches to language legislation and planning in Europe generates new perspectives on local practices. However, the statistical data alone cannot capture the diversity that is reflected in the different language regimes, and sometimes the statistics may raise more questions than they answer.

EFNIL's two projects ELM (European Language Monitor) and LLE (Language Legislation in Europe) provide a unique, reliable and easily accessible source of information on the language situation in the participating countries and allow the user to explore in detail the complexity of the language situation in Europe.

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