

Language policies and their impact
Into reception countries:
insights from Greece and Italy



Lorenzo Rocca and Anna Mouti
Bergen, 10 June 2025



Lorenzo
Societa Dante Alighieri,
Rome, Italy

Anna
Aristotle University of
Thessaloniki, Greece





We brought Greece and **Italy** with us today...
Not their sunsets or evening breeze but something just
as meaningful: research data from both countries...

Zooming Out... Zooming In: Cross-National Overview

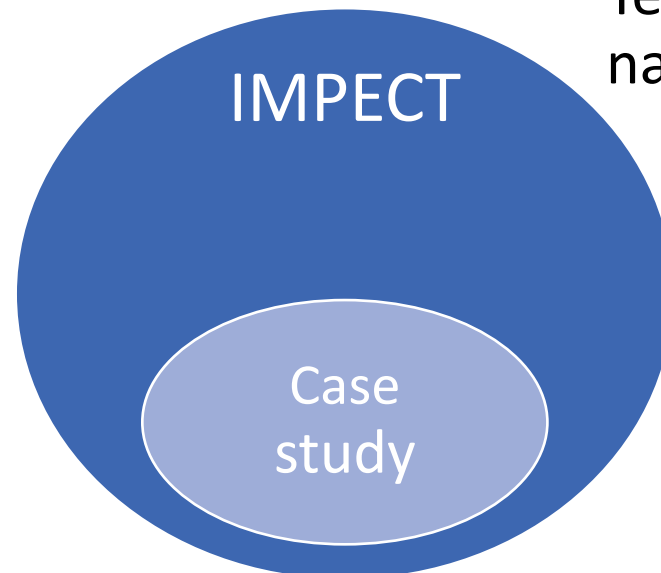


Broad Insights (European level)

- System-wide language/KoS requirements
- Broad cross-country trends
- Survey among teachers in 20 countries, and interviews with both teachers and learners in 9 countries

Local Voices (Italy and Greece)

- Focus on everyday educational practice and experience
- Context-specific approach within individual 2 countries
- Teachers' interviews and localized national survey results



Aim and related dimensions



- To **investigate the impact** of language requirements for residence and citizenship on learning and teaching environments **in Greece and in Italy**, in relation to adult migrants and with particular regard to **LESLLA learners**
- **Three dimensions** of impact are considered:
 1. in terms of different emotions in the learning environment
 2. on teaching
 3. on the roles of teachers

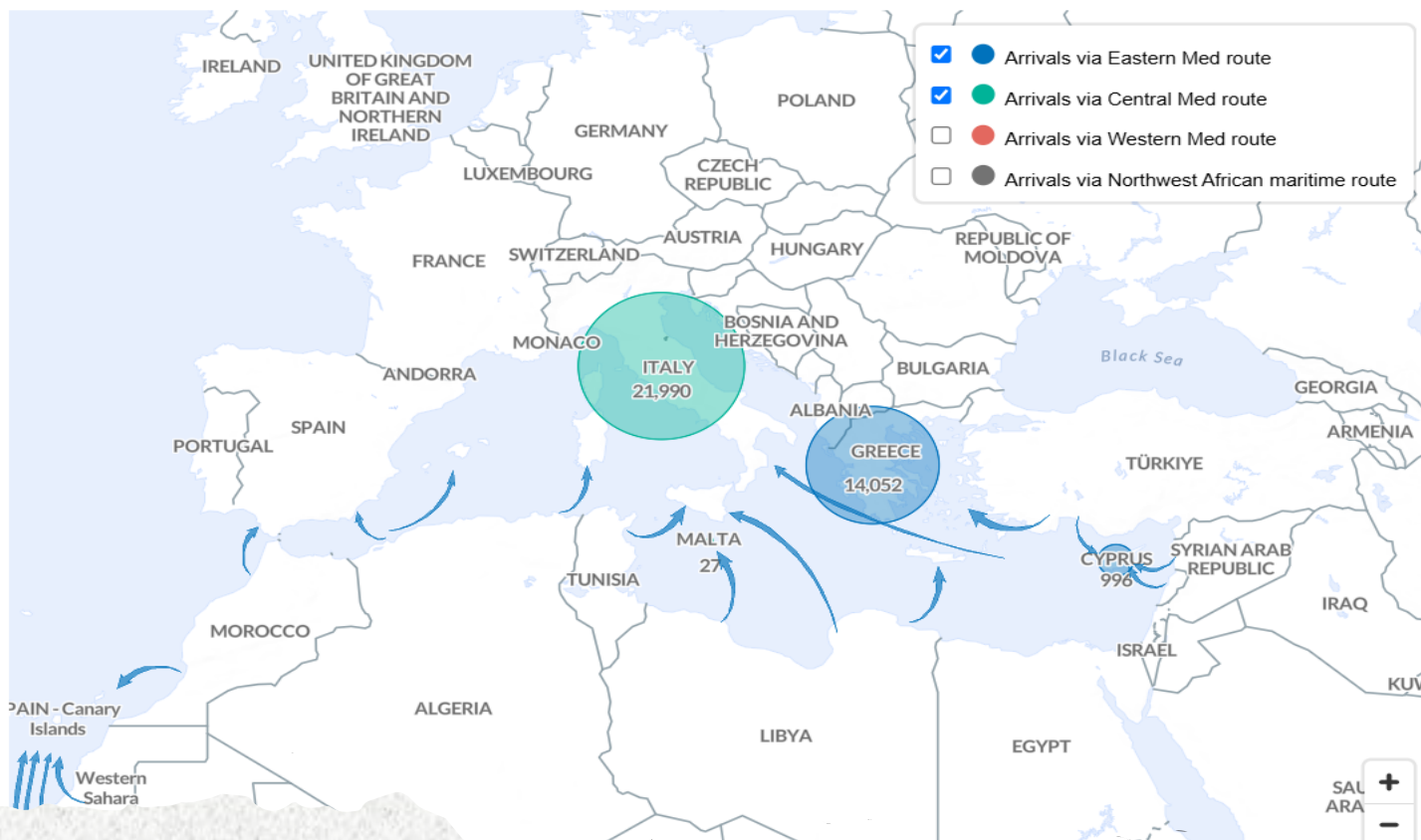
These dimensions are addressed from the teachers' perspective, analyzing a survey and interviews: a mixed method was used with a quantitative data collection integrated by qualitative research

Why a focus on Greece and Italy



Our 2 countries are significant due to:

- their geographical position as **bridges over the Mediterranean**:
- their being frontier states with a **double role as host and transition countries** (Bantekas & Michail, 2023; Roman et al., 2021)



Total arrivals in 2025

JSON

52,712

Last updated 25 May 2025

Sea arrivals in 2025

JSON

50,375

Last updated 25 May 2025

Land arrivals in 2025

JSON

Includes individuals who arrived in the northern part of Cyprus by air and crossed the Green Line into the government-controlled areas of Cyprus.

2,337

Last updated 25 May 2025

Dead and Missing

includes dead and missings c
Northwest Africa maritime routes

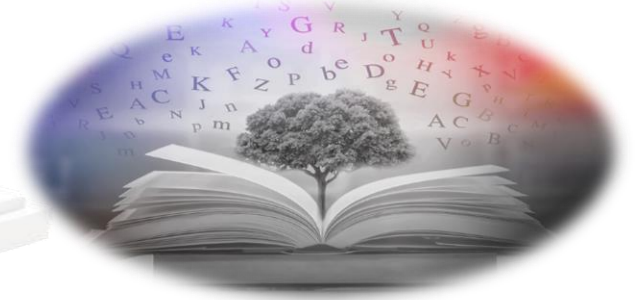
454

Last updated 20 May 2025

Why a focus on Greece and Italy



- Their learning environments often constitute the first formative segment for LESLLA learners: in this sense, the two countries appear also as “**bridges of literacy**” in favor of other member states
- It can happen:
 - ✓ when these countries represent transition lands
 - ✓ to the extent that some skills are learned just once, so that they can be transferred from one language (in this case, from Greek or from Italian) to another



Greece and Italy have an added value, representing the first provider, place and phase within the ongoing learning process of migrants in general and LESLLA in particular

Background: LESLLA learners



- The presence of LESLLA in the two countries is, of course, a fact, even if it is hard to estimate the exact number and even harder to estimate to what extent LESLLA are involved in any language learning processes
- This is because of the **lack of monitoring**, both at macro, meso and micro level



Background: LESLLA learners



The last official data (ISTAT, 2021) says that considering the overall migrant population, LESLLA are estimated around 9%. It is worth mentioning that these data refer to those who:

- has never attended any kind of school in any country
- are resident, thus excluding those asylum seekers who are legally present in the country, without taking up residence for other reasons

In addition, with regard to asylum seekers, by cross-referencing the data of the Ministry of Interior related to the 157,651 migrants who reached Italy in 2023 with the literacy rate of their countries of origin, it emerges that under a third come from countries with a literacy rate of less than 50%

Background: LESLLA learners



A similar situation in Greece where a large number of asylum seekers comes from countries with a literacy rate of less than 50%

Another indicator is the regularly published factsheets by the Project HELIOS, with information related to the educational background of beneficiaries: out of 8,091 profiles, 847 (10,5%) had only received early childhood education and 1,447 (17,9%) only primary education

Language policies in Greece and Italy



- Language policies have been subject of quantitative rankings provided by two indexes in a wider context: MIPEX and LAPIM
- More in detail, the Language Policy Index for Migrants - **LAPIM** (Carlsen & Rocca, 2025, forthcoming), developed as outcome of the IMPECT project, offers a detailed picture totally focused on the linguistic dimension (language requirements and learning opportunities)
- Initial findings presented (2023) give Italy a 67/100 ranking while Greece is placed on 50/100 and, thus, in the middle of the relative strictness continuum in language policy (the average of the 20 surveyed country is 65)

Background: language requirements



Both countries share similar language requirements as far as the CEFR levels required are concerned (Mouti & Rocca, 2023):

- No entry requirement is set either in Greece or Italy
- For both contexts there is CEFR A2 required for permanent residency and CEFR B1 for citizenship

Two main differences:

1. The KoS tests – it does exist as a requirement for permanent residency and citizenship in Greece but, substantially, it does not exist in Italy
2. The presence only in Italy of test for temporary residency

Background: language requirements



- Temporary residency provides CEFR A2 only for speaking - Migrants have to meet the requirement within 2 years from their first arrival
- Permanent residency can be applied for after 5 years of residency. It provides CEFR A2 for the four skills, with a partial exemption in the case of LESLLA learners from the reading and writing components
- Citizenship can be applied for after 10 years of residency. It provides CEFR B1, again for all the four skills

There are different ways to comply with these legal obligations, e.g.:

1. Attendance at language courses provided by state schools called CPIA can lead to fulfil the first two requirements; it means it is not sufficient for citizenship
2. The acquirement of a degree (from the lower secondary), awarded by a state school
3. The passing of an official certification awarded by one of 4 recognized institutions

Background: language requirements



Greece does not have any test for migrants prior to their entry, nor for temporary residency

- Permanent residency can be asked after 5 years of residency and there is a requirement by applicants above 16 years old: CEFR A2 for the four skills with a KoS component; partial exemptions are provided e.g. based on the acquirement of a degree, starting from the lower secondary, awarded by a state school
- Citizenship can be asked after 3-7-12 years of residency (depending on the existing residence permits). In 2020–2021, the Certificate of Knowledge Adequacy for Naturalization (PEGP) was introduced, focusing on both language skills at CEFR B1 and KoS contents related to Greece's geography, history, culture, and political institutions

Background: learning opportunities



- The basis of learning opportunities for migrants is represented by the network of CPIAs. They provide courses offered free of charge to adults (15+), including all foreign people legally present in Italian territory (Deiana, 2022)
- Courses of Italian are mainly focused on A1 and A2 levels

Learning opportunities are sustained by **a double synergy**:

- (1) the synergy between CPIAs and the so called third sector (no profit associations), with a mutual recognition of the different roles
- (2) the synergy between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior that is the responsible authority for the EU AMIF (Asylum Migration Integration Fund) projects, targeted to third country nationals. These projects provide a tuition ranging from LASLLIAM to CEFR levels till B2

Background: learning opportunities



- Language education for adult migrants is fragmented, and classes are highly diverse in terms of students' language competence, literacy levels, and background (Kantzou et al., 2017)
- This applies across various educational settings, including those organized by NGOs and solidarity schools, but also the state Schools of Second Chance, which are for adults who have not completed mandatory education. The L2 Greek language education is also offered in the Migrant Integration Centers (M.I.C.), which operates as branches of Community Centers in municipalities and there are also the Integration Training Centers of Project HELIOS
- Migrants have access to services aiming promoting social integration. Local and national authorities, as well as NGOs and associations, provide language courses, soft-skills workshops, and job preparation courses to newcomers. However, despite these initiatives, it remains a significant gap in fully addressing the needs of LESLLA learners, particularly in terms of availability and accessibility of dedicated programs

The study: our three Research Questions



RQ1 - How do LESLLA teachers in Italy and Greece perceive the impact of language requirements in terms of different emotions within the learning environment?

RQ2 - How do LESLLA teachers in Italy and Greece perceive the impact of language requirements on their teaching?

RQ3 - How do LESLLA teachers in Italy and Greece perceive the impact of language requirements related to their roles?

The study: two phases to answer to our RQs



QUANTITATIVE PHASE

- 352 LESLLA teachers were involved. They are experienced second language teachers, in general to adult migrants, and in particular to LESLLA learners
- They took part to the online multilingual survey questionnaire, with 20 Council of Europe member states involved (Carlsen et al., 2023)
- Among the entire set of statements contained by the questionnaire, 5 were considered relevant for this study, according to the mentioned 3 dimensions of the investigated impact

QUALITATIVE PHASE

- 10 LESLLA teachers were involved, 5 in both the countries. They are as experienced LESLLA teachers, familiar or very familiar with the language requirements

Participants: interviews



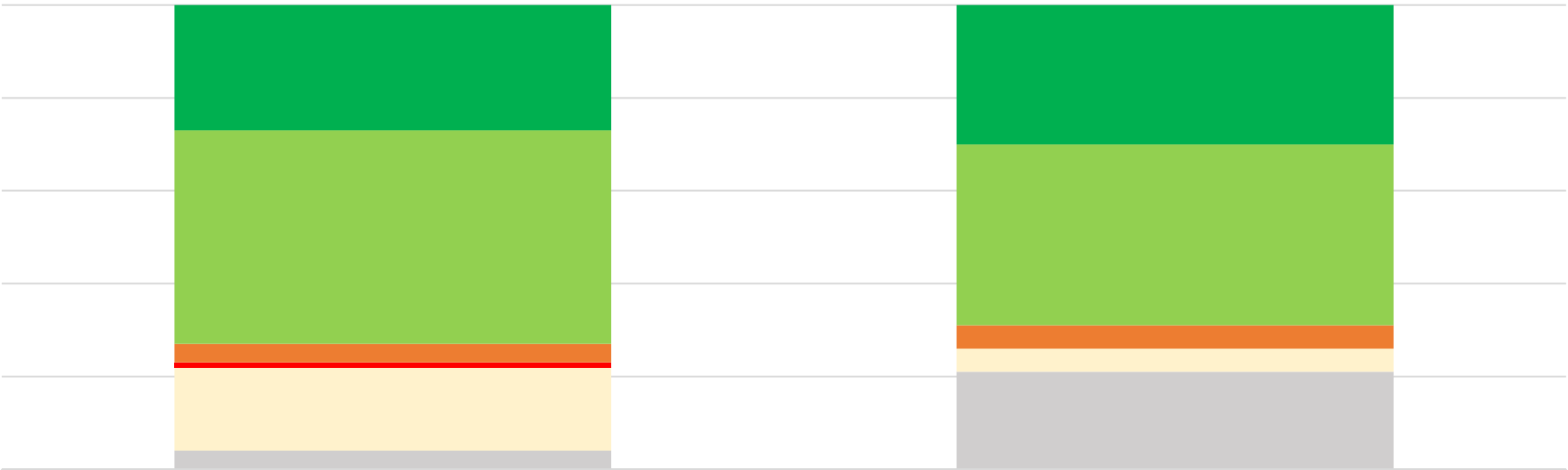
Country	Greece	Greece	Greece	Greece	Greece	Italy	Italy	Italy	Italy	Italy
Pseudonym	Maria	Giannis	Eleni	George	Anna	Teresa	Giada	Giacomo	Francesca	Arianna
Age:	56	38	47	36	49	43	48	46	61	35
I work for:	State	State	NGO	NGO	State/ NGO	State	State	State	State	State
Teaching to adult migrants (years)	20	13	9	8	15	16	20	18	15	9
Teaching to LESLLA (years)	13	10	9	5	3	10	6	12	6	8
Examiner/ Rater	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Familiarity with requirements	very familiar	very familiar	familiar	very familiar	familiar	very familiar	very familiar	very familiar	very familiar	familiar

Main findings



- Quantitative outcomes (data from the **5 statements** of the survey selected in coherence with each of the **3 RQ**), as integrated by the qualitative outcomes (quotes from the interviews)
- Data are shown through graphs followed by quotes reported in *italics*

Language requirements cause anxiety for LESLLA learners (RQ1)



	Italian LESLLA teachers (%)	Greek LESLLA teachers (%)
Strongly agree	27	30
Agree	46	39
Disagree	4	5
Strongly disagree	1	0
Neutral	18	5
Not relevant/I don't know	4	21

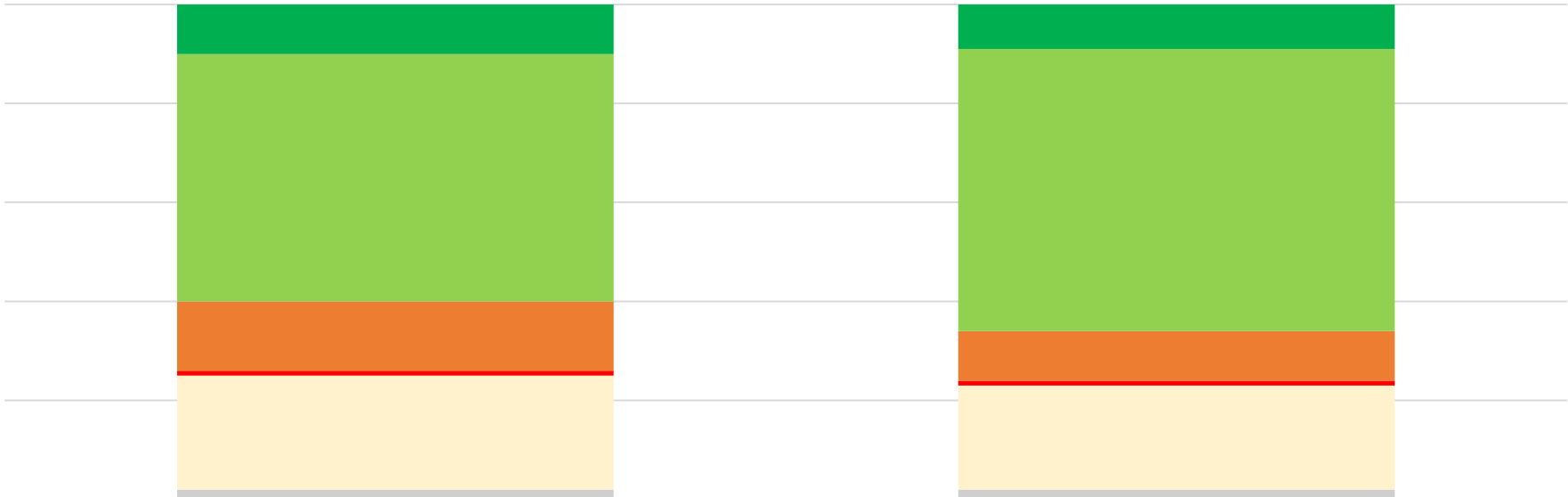
Language requirements: anxiety



Arianna from Italy said that: *It happened more than once to have people in class crying, especially women of a certain age, who were facing something much bigger than themselves. They are pushed to do it [...] The point is how? With what stress? With what sword of Damocles on the head?*

George from Greece: *Especially the low-literate ones don't have...The philosophy... they are not familiar with the philosophy of exams in general. [...] The philosophy of exams for them may cause an additional burden because they are not familiar that "I have to take an exam to get a certificate"*

Language requirements motivate LESLLA learners to learn the language(s) of the host country (RQ1)



	Italian LESLLA teachers (%)	Greek LESLLA teachers (%)
Strongly agree	10	9
Agree	50	57
Disagree	14	10
Strongly disagree	1	1
Neutral	23	21
Not relevant/I don't know	2	2

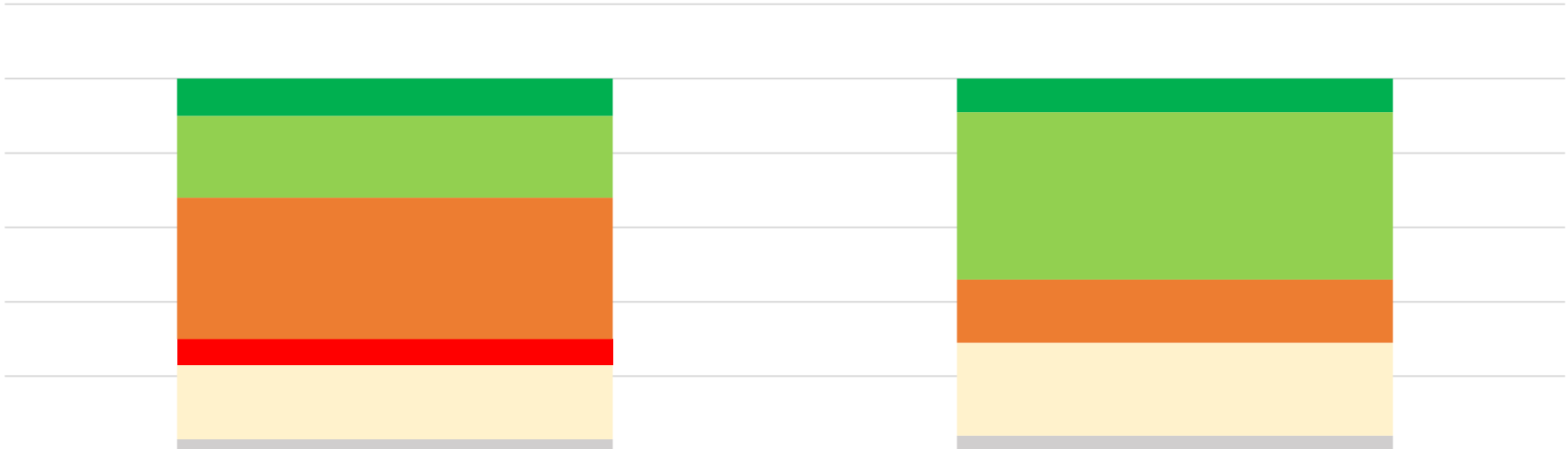
Language requirements: motivation ?



It is not unlikely that respondents consider some sort of indirect impact of language requirements: when the direct impact is the construction of unethical barriers, the mid-term effect, or indirect impact, may be that of having brought out an otherwise unspoken demand (Minuz et al., 2014), leading to the involvement of a previously hidden audience in learning and teaching environments, especially LESLLA women

On the other hand, Maria from Greece seeks to clarify that motivation is often lacking when it comes to learning a language of a country considered just a transition and not a destination: *The point is that most of them have not chosen to stay in Greece. [...] I think it is a station... [...] when you are on a train bound for Munich and there is also an intermediate station, which is in Thessaloniki-Greece, that is, how much do you have in mind to invest in the intermediate station when the train leaves elsewhere...*

Language requirements are an obstacle to the integration of LESLLA learners (RQ1)



	Italian LESLLA teachers (%)	Greek LESLLA teachers (%)
Strongly agree	10	9
Agree	22	45
Disagree	38	17
Strongly disagree	7	0
Neutral	20	25
Not relevant/I don't know	3	4

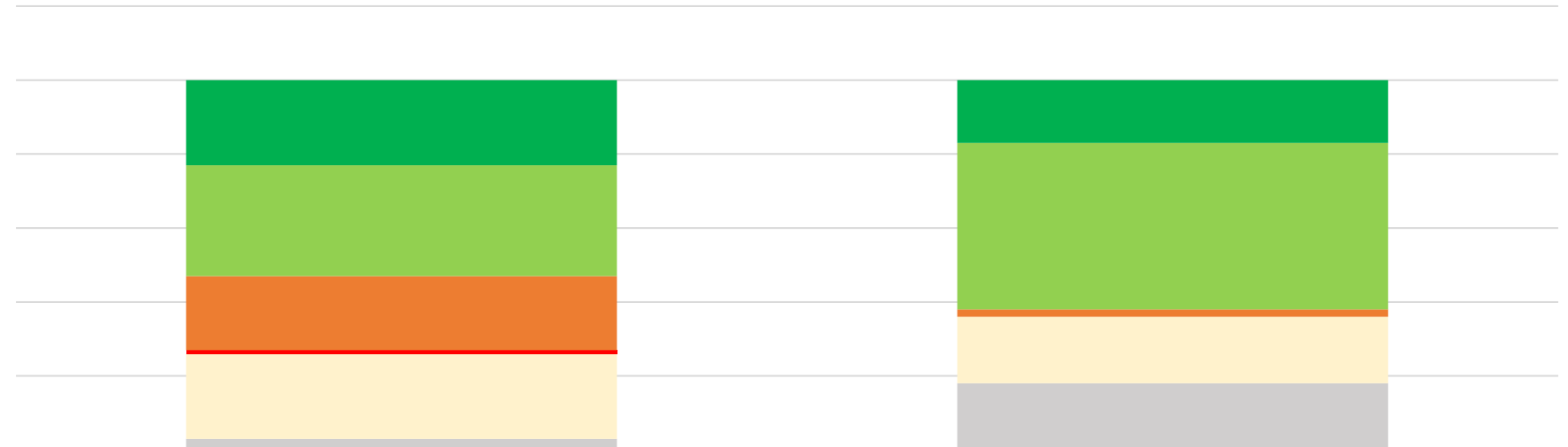
Language requirements: **obstacle?**



Eleni from Greece: He was in Greece for 20 years and he must have gone to school for 3-4 years in his country. [...] but I can also understand from the way they hold the pencil and from their letters... it is clear to me how many years they have been in education... There was no way of him passing the exam

- (1) The partial exemption for LESLLA in the case of permanent residency A2 test
- (2) The fact that attending a course implies avoiding the mandatory test for both temporary and permanent residency
- (3) The huge presence of learning opportunities without any cost and opened to all migrants, with courses profiled on LESLLA learners
- (4) The absence of the KoS component in the Italian requirements

Because of the language requirements, many adult migrants attend language courses that are not appropriate for their learning needs (RQ2)



	Italian LESLLA teachers (%)	Greek LESLLA teachers (%)
Strongly agree	23	17
Agree	30	45
Disagree	20	2
Strongly disagree	1	0
Neutral	23	18
Not relevant/I don't know	3	18

Attending not-appropriate language courses



The issue is the discrepancy between the **learning curve** and the “**legal curve**”:

- the clock of an appropriate syllabus for LESLLA learners is not synchronized with the clock of the legislator who imposes tests
- there is no correspondence between the time really required by learning needs and the time allowed to fulfil to language requirements

Teaching is not enough...



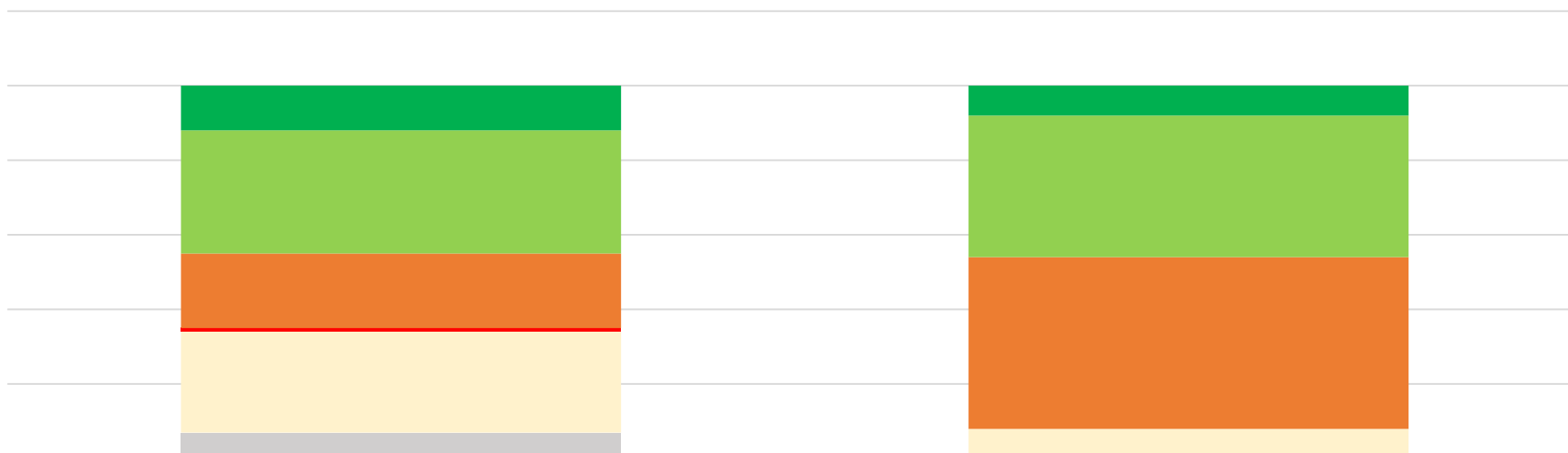
Hence, the sad awareness of teachers of the impossibility that their teaching is able to help learners achieve the necessary skills to face the imposed exam

Confirmations of this come from both from Greece (Anna, just below) and Italy (Giacomo)

Language requirements were so high for this population [...], the progress was so slow, together with the fact that the attendance was not regular

Don't promise what is impossible to do, in the sense that sometimes, and I can relate as a teacher, you would like to do so. That's why you say, "Yes, you need this. I know it's a lot [...] we can't do it". At first, I used to say: "Yes, let's try to force it", then, instead, I wouldn't force it anymore

My job as a teacher should not involve making decisions that have consequences for my students' chances of obtaining permanent residence or citizenship (RQ3)



Italian LESLLA teachers (%)

Greek LESLLA teachers (%)

Strongly agree	12	8
Agree	33	38
Disagree	20	46
Strongly disagree	1	0
Neutral	27	8
Not relevant/I don't know	7	0

Ethical implications



Arianna from Italy: As an examiner I can say that I experienced this role very badly, because the feeling is that the outcomes of the test and therefore also almost the person's life depends on, on me

Eleni and Anna from Greece:

I don't want to take the responsibility to cut or to give someone a chance for something. It's too heavy for me. [...] I find it very soul destroying and costly for them [...].

*I don't think it's a fair process. It's not even a fair way for people. [...]
Yes, I didn't want to participate in such a process ...*

Inevitability of the rater/examiner role



Teresa from Italy is an example of this opinion: *Well, how do I feel about this role? I mean, someone needs to do it, don't they? It's part of our job, so we must do it. Definitely we have to do it and since someone has to do it, it should be done by people who have a certain experience*

Makis from Greece is on the same wavelength: *At least when I go, I take care and wish that my presence, how can I tell you, always make things easier...I mean, I think that's okay? What if someone else goes in my place? Things will be worst*

Conclusions: a **case study** for a **proper overview**



- **Background information** about the context (migrants' population, language policies) is needed to allow a better interpretation of the results
- **Survey** and **interviews** led to a complementary value, referred to the opportunity to go into more detail with experienced respondents, to corroborate the quantitative outcomes




Conclusions: it is a matter of **emotions**



- The impact of language requirements is not always as direct as it seems, as there are many implications and different aspects on the educational settings and, more in general, on the stakeholders involved: **teachers** in many cases have to deal with their multiple roles: as **raters** and/or **examiners**, but also as **supporters**, **social workers**, and **consultants**
- Teachers' emotional state working with vulnerable groups can be highly impacted by complexities inherent in their roles and they often experience a wide range of emotions, like stress, burnout, anxiety (Mayor, 2021, Ayapong et al, 2022, Oberg et al., 2023, Nordanger & Egeland, 2024, Carlsen et al., 2025)

Conclusions: it is a matter of **oscillations**



- 
- A thin, dark grey wavy line representing an oscillation, with four small red rectangular markers placed at the peaks and troughs.
- This is the space where teachers seem to oscillate **between politics and language policies, evaluation decisions and the care for the individuals** they welcome to the school. These individuals are human beings, with all the emotions they carry, sometimes conflicting, sometimes hard to interpret, and often leading to the awareness of the inevitability of events due to legal obligations

From Athens to Rome and from Lampedusa to Lesvos, migration is an issue of major concern, embodying the challenges and humanitarian issues faced by frontline European countries and **making particular cases emblematic of the broader migration crisis**

Thank you
Grazie Mille
Ευχαριστούμε πολύ
Tusen takk

mouti@itl.auth.gr

l.rocca@dante.global