



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION  
FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

# Adult Learning and Education and the Integration of Migrants The Need for a European Strategy

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The EAEA is an NGO with 128 members in 43 countries, representing non-formal adult education and learning on European level. EAEA itself its members represent the whole spectrum of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education activities, including formal, non formal and informal learning, education and skill training.

## a. Introduction

“In light of the demographic challenges faced by most EU Member States (i.e. demographic ageing and an increasing old age dependency ratio), immigration can help counterbalance an ageing population, whilst meeting the skills and labour shortages in certain sectors. However, relying in immigration also entails that appropriate policies are developed at national level in order to fully support the social and economic integration of newly arrived migrants into European societies. Demographic ageing and an increase in immigration may lead to **social fragmentation** in the absence of appropriate policies and support measures.”<sup>1</sup>

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) therefore sees a need for a strong European strategy in the area of adult learning that addresses a range of important topics. We understand that migration is a complex issue, and we will not try to tackle all aspects of migration policies, but rather concentrate on the role that adult education can play. We have seen from other regions of the world that migration can be seen as an opportunity where adult education plays an important role in bringing people together and increasing the skills and competences of adults (see the 2011 Grundtvig Award winner from Canada). We would like to see increased efforts in European societies, too, in order to make this happen.

EAEA's expertise is in adult education. Many of our members have considerable experience in working with migrants and with intercultural projects and approaches. We feel strongly about the contribution migrants can make to European societies, and the positive impact of strong intercultural developments. We will concentrate on our strategy on adult education and learning as this is our field of expertise and refer to other civil society organizations (e.g. human rights, anti-racism etc.) for further recommendations and strategies. European institutions have been active in the field of migration, and while the emphasis is on justice, there has been the production of a 'Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners'<sup>2</sup>. The Council of Europe has dedicated a lot of work to the issue of migration and has, in fact, put a focus on migrants and adult learning. A recent recommendation, for example, deals with validating migrants' skills. In the education area, there has been a Green Paper "Migration & Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems", which focuses on the school sector.

We propose a coherent and coordinated strategy that tackles both migrants' skills and competences and intercultural activities across Europe.

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1 Policy briefing for Workshop 6 at the Action Plan conference in Budapest 2011

2 [http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/docl\\_12892\\_168517401.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/docl_12892_168517401.pdf)

## b. Mobility – migration

In the terminology of European institutions, the difference is clear – migration happens from third countries into the European Union, while mobility means the free movement from one EU country to another. The reality of moving from one country to another is, of course, more complex. The social and psychological experience of arriving in a foreign country does not differentiate according to status. The need to learn the language, to find a social network, to understand local customs, the labour market (etc.) remains the same whether you are a migrant or a mobile European. In the same vein, the prejudice of native cultures does not differentiate along these lines, either. People may be prejudiced against foreigners, whether they come from Romania, the Ukraine or Africa. (Obviously, migrants from outside the EU do have additional challenges to deal with because of their legal status – applying for visa and work / residence permits etc., so there is an additional need for support).

We would like to underline that therefore initiatives for education, learning and intercultural initiatives will benefit all those coming from abroad, which also means supporting and promoting free movement of people.

## c. Different groups

Migrants come from different countries, social backgrounds, educational levels etc. Their approach to integration is different according to these backgrounds, and the native cultures reaction to them might be also different. Religion has become an increasingly important category in the discourse of migration. While there are many issues that go beyond the scope of learning and education, the heterogeneous nature of migrant communities does have a strong impact on individual migrants' needs and opportunities. A highly qualified professional has different learning demands from an illiterate unskilled worker (even if it is just about learning the host language).

## d. Civil society, Local Authorities and non-formal learning

The complexity of the situation and the need for local, regional, national and European action underlines the need for civil society organizations, especially those run by migrants themselves. They know the needs and challenges and can reach out to newly arrived migrants. Close cooperation with them in order to establish a learning culture will be absolutely necessary.

The role of Local Authorities is also crucial. Information, integration, and outreach can only happen on the local level, and Local Authorities, should work in cooperation with adult education providers, other educational institutions, social institutions and civil society organizations.

Non-formal adult education initiatives can reach people who have not previously gained from educational achievements. All too often, education and training are presented as

necessities and obligations (e.g. not to lose one's job), which will deter those with few or negative learning experiences. In combination with effective outreach methods, local non-formal learning opportunities can be very successful in reaching a high number of migrants.

Providing learning opportunities for migrant parents is an important approach to encourage an improvement in the educational achievements of the next generation. In particular, enabling mothers to access learning close to home, perhaps at the local school as part of family learning initiatives, has very positive outcomes for children's learning.

## e. Recommendations

### a. A European task force bringing together various DGs and institutions

Currently, migration is dealt with in different DGs and within DGs also in different units. There is the clear danger of doubling efforts in one area and missing out on other points due to a lack of coordination. In order to launch a European effort to promote integration, we propose a European task force that brings together the different units and DGs and to develop and produce a European strategy for integration. Obviously, this strategy should have a strong focus on lifelong learning. Other institutions (such as the Council of Europe) and civil society organizations should be part of the task force.

### b. Coherent and cooperative approaches at all levels

An **integrated national and local approach** is needed to address the needs of migrant communities. Issues such as welfare, health, transport, and childcare need to be addressed, together with learning support needs. This requires local agencies of different types to collaborate closely in the interests of their service users.

**EAEA underlines the importance of simultaneously acting at various levels in a coherent way.** For example, guidance and counselling are important, but governments (national and local), stakeholders and providers need to make sure that there will be appropriate courses for those interested. In combination with campaigns and promotion, we need **investment in learning infrastructure and adult education staff**, as well as training and courses.

### c. Understanding the needs of migrants

We have pointed out earlier that migrants are in fact a very diverse group from different backgrounds. Therefore a necessary first step is understanding the needs of the target groups and the individual migrant. Based on that, effective learning strategies can be implemented and learner-centred methodologies applied.

**Good practice example: The Grundtvig Award winner 2008:**

The project is entitled Benim Adim Einar - which translates as 'Professionals Experience Integration in Turkey.' This project targeted 23 professionals from 8 countries around Europe who are directly involved in integration work in their countries. The idea behind the project was to provide the participants with an insight into the challenges and frustrations of integration as experienced by newcomers into a country. This group of professionals was asked to travel to a small town in Turkey in order to take part in the same integration programme as immigrants in their own country. The programme covered language and social skills, as well as an intake interview. Participant's experiences of the programme were documented in DVD form. This film has since been shown in over 17 European countries. The main aim of the project was to show that integration is not just a one-sided process. The project has demonstrated that integration comes from both sides.

d. An investigation into the barriers for learning for migrants

Each member state should be invited to investigate its legal provisions and / or possible legal and financial barriers to migrants' learning. Whether there are waiting periods until migrants have access to courses (which stands in the way of early and structured language learning) or similar barriers, member states should become aware of them and undertake to change them.

e. Empowering migrants

In order to make real progress, we need to listen to and cooperate with representatives of the relevant groups rather than assuming to know their needs, i.e. work WITH them rather than work FOR them; grassroots organisations have to be supported. There are many good examples of empowering working methods and learning methodologies, which have to be applied widely.

**Muslim peace agents (Sweden)**

Sweden now has a Muslim study association, which has launched this project: Young Muslims across the country have been trained to be Peace Agents. They have been given the knowledge and tools needed to work with peace issues, anti-violence and human rights. The long term aim is to combat Islamophobia (fear and animosity towards Islam, mainly by people in the West) and Westphobia (fear and animosity towards the West, mainly by Muslims).

f. Language Learning

Learning the language of the new country is essential for successful integration, social cohesion and active citizenship. We therefore suggest that we need comprehensive language learning provision that is easily accessible for migrants.

The methodology needs to be adapted to the needs and experiences of adults (too often, school teachers work with adults without changing their methodological approach) and, if possible, combined with other learning needs (e.g. with basic skills training or vocational training,). Non-formal adult education in many countries has elaborated excellent methodology and great examples of embedded learning, and a transfer of these innovations would be desirable.

**A good practice example from Germany and Austria:  
Mama lernt Deutsch**

German course for migrant mothers of school children: In order to lower the barriers, the courses are offered directly at school and additional child care is offered during the courses. The first focus is to help the women communicate at school and about their children and then continues the teaching based on the needs of the learners.

g. Welcoming and mentoring programmes

Various countries, regions, cities or other organizations have introduced welcoming and / or mentoring programmes in order to facilitate the language learning, social contacts and cohesion of migrants with the host culture.

**An excellent example comes from Canada and won the Grundtvig Award  
2011 in the Outside of Europe category:**

The project aimed at providing ESL (English as a second language) services to adult immigrant and refugee newcomers in rural and remote communities across British Columbia, using a delivery approach that differs from the traditional classroom delivery which requires a higher minimum number of learners. The project is currently based on the involvement of over 700 volunteer tutors. Trained volunteers provide free English language and immigration settlement support to adult immigrant and refugee newcomers living in rural or remote communities throughout British Columbia. This program fosters community collaboration through program partnerships between not-for-profit community groups, the British Columbia Community Adult Literacy Programs, public colleges and universities, school districts, public libraries, employment agencies, and volunteer societies. ESLSAP Service providers receive government grants to recruit, train, and support community members who volunteer to tutor immigrants and refugees settling in small and remote BC communities.

## h. Recognition of qualifications gained outside the host country

In many European countries, but also in individual organizations, there is often a tension between the supposed need for qualified immigrants and the willingness to use them according to their competences. Too many people think that they should take the jobs that are unattractive to the host culture and are hesitant to accept better qualified migrants. A number of migrants works in low-skilled jobs accordingly although their qualifications are much higher.

We therefore need more awareness for the competences of migrants, as well as the recognition that European societies need them.

European countries therefore need to introduce better and faster system of recognizing migrants' qualifications as well as enabling them to study for and take necessary exams more quickly and with a minimum of administrative burdens.

## i. Recognition and validation of prior learning

Many migrants come from countries where some sectors of education and training, including professional and vocational skills, are acquired through non- and informal learning. There are also other competences that come from settling in another country and dealing with a foreign culture (which Europe promotes and supports in its students through its mobility programmes, for example Erasmus).

Member states therefore need to establish recognition and validation systems – and not only for migrants – that fulfill the following demands:

- ★ The learner has to be at the centre of the validation process. His or her experiences and life situation have to be taken into account – a validation process can never be a technical exercise only learners' decision on validation
- ★ Guidance is essential – in order to make the right decisions and to lead to and through the validation process, good guidance must be provided.
- ★ The equality of access to validation and access to guidance must be assured.
- ★ The competences and skills of people involved in validation need to be assured and appropriate training measures for them need to be foreseen.
- ★ The validation process has to be coherent and the learner should receive feedback on the results
- ★ When setting up validation structures, a bottom-up process is to be given preference. In the governance structures, a strong participation and consultation of civil society is recommended.
- ★ There is a lack of tools and methods for recognizing competences required outside of the formal system. Hence there is a need for development work and resources to gather good practice and create new tools for recognition on national and European level.

j. Learning for staff, counselors, social partners etc.

Learning about different groups of migrants but also intercultural competences will help education and training staff, but also everyone else who deals with migrants, for example staff in job centres, employment agencies, local authorities, colleges and schools, health providers etc to improve their working practices.

There is also a specific learning need about and with migrants for the social partners (on all levels) so that the representation and contribution of migrants is appropriately recognized. The work place is one of the strongest opportunities for integration, and the social partners can have a crucial role in making this possible.

k. Public investment

The need for **public investment** in adult learning for migrants is crucial. Public investments must make it possible for poor people to participate in lifelong learning, with particular emphasis on participation fees, income or support while participating, access to study loans – people should be able to participate in adult learning without having to pay for it and without losing their benefits.

As the recommendations so far demonstrate, the organisation of appropriate provision is also complex – in order to organise effective outreach activities with learner-centred, empowering methodologies, a solid basis of structural investment is necessary. We believe that this should really be seen as an investment rather than a cost.

l. Role of companies

As already mentioned in the point before, the work place is one of the best opportunities for integration. Companies can reinforce that further by providing adequate work place learning, for example in combination with language learning. The promotion of diversity within the work force (which would have a strong learning and training component) can be part of a Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.

m. European campaign of intercultural activities based in adult education/ learning

One of the most difficult issues is the learning and involvement of the host cultures since they may not have any motivation to engage in intercultural learning. Inward migration in Europe is mostly unplanned and therefore people simply notice a gradual or faster change in their area and too often react with hostility to these changes and to the newly arrived migrants.

How do you reach both migrants and the native public in order to bring them together? On the one hand, we need a strong boost from the grassroots level, local adult education centres, NGOs, etc working together.

Different approaches and ideas are possible, but generally people will come when they are personally concerned by the respective topics.

**Intercultural workshops (Ireland)**

Various community centres in Ireland organize workshops that either address intercultural dialogue directly (e.g. addressing myths and prejudice about migrants) or organize knitting or quilting groups that bring native and migrant participants together.

f. Conclusion

Non-formal adult learning for both migrants and host societies can provide real progress for the further development of European countries. Adult education can serve as a meeting space for dialogue that discusses the challenges of the future. We should discuss together in which future societies we want to live and then base our action on that. A prosperous and socially inclusive Europe needs the mutual learning of all its citizens. We call on all European decision-makers to make this possible.

Signed by  
Sue Waddington, President and  
Gina Ebner, Secretary General  
on behalf of the EAEA Executive Board