

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CHAIR

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- The discussion in this session revealed that there is a wealth of experiences and practices related to language training, the integration of the children of immigrants in school in skills policies. Countries are very different in terms of the issues they have to deal with, their past experience with language training, the profile of their immigrant population and their available resources. But one thing was clear from our discussion today: It is absolutely important that we take action now. Investment in language training can be costly but it pays off in the long-term. In contrast, the cost of inaction can be very high. Language is “the cornerstone,” as highlighted by Latvia. Italy: Language is a “fundamental pillar.” It is key for economic success but also for social cohesion (Austria).
- In some of the countries here (Korea, Latvia, Netherlands) as well as IMO, it is important that such training also includes elements of tradition and culture. In one country (Israel), 3rd language learning is emphasized – this promotes knowledge of ancestral roots and strengthens the family/society.
- Latvia and Poland: language training is also needed for children of returning *_natives_* who went abroad for work and have now returned after many years.
- Of course there are practical questions and different approaches on the way such training is offered. E.g. By whom? Government? NGOs (Poland)? Private sector (Netherlands – integration agreements between government and specific employers/companies) When? (Prior to and/or after migration? In the country of origin or destination or both?) How many hours? On the job? Should migrants be trained for specific, shortage occupation? (clear answer from Austria: YES) Should countries have specific programmes for migrants or general ones are sufficient? Who is paying for this training? (In the Netherlands the immigrant pays) And who is offering the training?
- Many countries emphasize that both parents and children must be engaged in the language learning process and that parents must be engaged in children’s pre-school care in order to ensure integration.
- Some countries provide language training to children for free in school, while others require the children to take classes before attending school (Korea). Some countries require the migrant to pay for this training (Netherlands).
- Language training is most effective when tailored to specific needs and characteristics of immigrants: their prior qualifications, their background and intended/current occupations in host-country. The challenge is to make investments in developing immigrants’ skills that accelerate rather than delay labour market integration. It can also be beneficial if is offered on the job, as is the case in the Netherland.
- Cooperation is important. Internally, among different ministries (mentioned by Israel) but also with countries of origin, as highlighted in the case of Italy.
- We all agreed that education is a powerful driver in the labour market integration of the children of immigrants, more so than for the children of the native-born. Early intervention is necessary to ensure that migrants’ children are integrated into the education system and they learn the language of their host country. This was stressed by many countries today and it often also includes pre-school training (Korea, Austria, etc). This realisation has also implications for family reunification which should happen early enough for the children of migrants to benefit fully. Providing integration measures and training to parents is important, as it also benefits their children (Greece).