MAKING INTEGRATION WORK

Language Training for Adult Migrants

Joint OECD-BMI-IRCC Discussion

28 April 2021
Independent of reason for migration, immigrants who speak the host-country language have significantly higher employment rates than those who do not.

Language plays an important role in the creation of community and a sense of belonging. Immigrants who speak the host-country language often report a greater feeling of social integration than those who do not.

What considerations surround language training for adult migrants?

- Multiple objectives for both host country and migrant
- Competing obligations, including childcare and work
- Different learning methods and starting points
Policymakers should address four main challenges

**Personalisation**
- How to adapt to migrants’ different circumstances, starting points, and pace of progress

**Ease of Access**
- How to remove obstacles to participation

**Quality**
- How to avoid overlap or gaps in services and ensure that high-quality courses are available

**Evaluation**
- How to understand the impact of language training on migrant integration and develop cost-effective programmes
Tailor courses to migrants’ needs and starting points

- Start by assessing learners’ level of education and capacity to learn.
- Integrate language and job training.
- Build on new technologies in language learning.

- Assessment and placement in learning tracks should take into account education level and other factors.

- Language learning can be combined with vocational training as part of active labour market policies.

- The use of digital tools can help language teachers personalise the learning experience and add flexibility.
Reach a greater number of migrants by removing obstacles to participation

- Ensure access to language training for all migrants
- Make language training flexible and compatible with daily life
- Consider affordability when developing financing models

- Early access is essential, but settled residents may also benefit from language opportunities.
- Meet migrants where they are by offering childcare, evening courses, and place-based services.
- Where courses are not free, a participation-based deposit scheme may be more motivating than a non-refundable fee.
Ensure well-coordinated and quality language tuition are broadly available

- Invest in teacher preparation and recruitment
- Engage with non-traditional partners to broaden opportunities
- Coordinate stakeholders to avoid overlap and under-coverage

- Language teachers need specific preparation to understand the intercultural and psychological dimensions of learning in a migration context.

- Partnerships with schools can improve outreach and bring context to language courses. Engaging the private sector can offer agility.

- Where service provision is decentralised, a national body can ensure goals, assessments, and certifications are homogenised.
Evaluate the impact of language training and act on the result

Language programmes that incorporate a systematic and in-build element of evaluation are rare for several reasons:

- costs
- data constraints
- insufficient participant numbers in smaller-scale programmes
- need to identify an adequate comparison group

While there are many studies of language training’s association with language levels, very few focus on the impact of language training on non-language outcomes

- lock-in effect
- long-term employment outcomes
- vocational versus traditional language courses
## Main Policy Lessons at a Glance

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THANK YOU!

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