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Promoting the Inclusion of Migrants in Adult Education

Gaps and Best Practices

National Research Report Summary: Malta, 2018

The SMILE Project

SMILE is a 2-year Erasmus+ project, started in October 2017, and led by the Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants (FSM) in Malta, together with Integration for All (IFALL) in Sweden, the Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Education Technology (CARDET) in Cyprus, and the Institute for African Studies (IAS) in Slovenia.

The SMILE project is developing information and training resources to support policymakers, teachers, migrant communities, learning support staff and adult education institutes in promoting migrant inclusion in adult education. This Country Report Summary is developed from a Transnational Report compiling research carried out in the four countries. All the project resources and information can be found on the project website: <http://www.project-smile.eu/en/>.



Context

The education policy in Malta is guided by premises of equity and quality, translating into inclusive policies at all levels of education, and the provision of free education from kindergarten to tertiary level. These policies underline the importance of adult education to sustain a knowledge-based economy. Courses for adults are offered free of charge, or at subsidized prices, by public bodies such as the Directorate for Research, Lifelong learning and Education, as well as Jobsplus, the national employment corporation. Other key institutes in the provision of adult education courses are the Malta College of Art, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Malta Tourism Institute.

In December 2017 the Ministry for EU Affairs and Equality issued a Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan, which provides pathways for integration, certification and residency for third country nationals, asylum seekers and refugees.

Research conducted with migrant students in Malta revealed that third country nationals face major challenges in accessing stipends, even when they are entitled, and often there are major delays in renewals of their ID cards which effects their studies, internships and employment. Code switching is a challenge for teachers, especially when classrooms have diverse language backgrounds and needs. Most adult migrant learners have to work in order to support themselves, and therefore find it difficult to pursue their course and to commit to reaching their educational goals, especially when they are supporting family members or when they face financial risks.

Good Practices in Adult Education

Some good practices were gathered during the research. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning in Malta, for example, pursues a policy of inclusivity and collaborates with civil society. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) offers access to education without the need for prior certificates, through the provision of foundation or level 0 courses. Its Skill Kits programme helps students to tailor-make their own course, explore different career choices and progress to higher course levels. These practices facilitate migrant inclusion for those without access to validation of prior learning. Employment is important for migrant adults, and MCAST considers career goals in developing, adapting and suggesting courses. Personalized learning, counselling and language support services are provided to address individual needs, improve transverse skills, and manage risks that may lead to drop out.

A small number of NGOs, including FSM and migrant NGOs, offer Maltese and English lessons free of charge in a structured programme or on a drop-in basis. NGOs support migrants with information, career guidance, and referral to other service providers.

FSM, in partnership with migrant-led NGOs, provides basic English and Maltese language classes in community based programmes, which address geographic, language and inclusion barriers. FSM also provides training for migrant leaders in mentoring, education, peacebuilding, and other areas. Spark15, a refugee-led NGO, also provides refugees with free English lessons specifically oriented to prepare them for the International English Language Testing exams required to access University.

Some methodologies are recognized as good practices because they promote inclusion while respecting the needs of adult learners, and even recognizing that their different cultural experiences is an asset for group learning. Teachers often value this resource and seek to improve their pedagogies to address the needs of a globalized society. Educational institutions also involve international stakeholders and networks, such as embassies, migrant communities or international partners in teacher training, curriculum preparation or bilateral agreement for student intake. Migrant learners may have different social norms, cultural experiences and expectations; it is good practice for teachers to be culturally sensitive, but to also support learners in overcoming their own personal barriers in order to improve their inclusion in society. It is a good practice for teachers to support peers in cultural mediation and translation for other learners.

Recognizing the needs of diverse learners is important, and therefore good practice includes the training of teachers in reaching out to all students, especially those who might not be so visible or audible. Identifying vulnerability and having a good system of social support and referral is critical for any student, especially for migrants who often struggle with multiple social issues and responsibilities. In MCAST for example, the Deputy Director of Programmes Manager (DDPM) monitors student progress and refers students to support services which are provided internally by the institute.

Vocational institutes can develop courses for workers in particular industry sectors, facilitate private-public partnerships, and improve skills and competences that raise workers' grade and salary prospects. Migrant workers in certain sectors can benefit greatly from such initiatives. There are also programmes offering diverse learning pathways for adults who left school at a young age, and who are at risk of social exclusion. Career services are also critical in providing guidance to migrant learners and connecting them to these pathways.

Blended courses improve chances for adults to complete courses and obtain qualifications, offering online courses, coaching and examinations; supporting migrants with technological skills and providing online tools for promoting language learning is found to be a good practice because it makes learning more accessible.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were mentioned by research participants, including administrators, managers, teachers, support workers and migrants:

- Establish a register of information about all persons migrating to and living in Malta, monitor and protect vulnerable individuals and develop inclusion strategies based on demographic information;
- Adapt current curricula and assessment frameworks to reflect the inclusion of adults in education;
- Develop the 'skills card' concept, including Prior Learning accreditation tools for the skills building and validation of individual workers interested in specific industries;
- Promote vocational and tertiary education among migrant communities through focused outreach;
- Improve access to education through the availability of evening and flexible courses;
- Improve relations with government offices to support students on aspects of immigration, education and other areas;
- Improve institutional standards for acceptable gender frameworks and practices; preparing migrant learners on these standards, and teachers on how to mitigate gender expectations and conflicts in the school;
- Increase awareness on the relevance of the Maltese language in vocational education, internships and employment among students, and improving Maltese language provision as preparation for the scholastic year;
- Establish a one-stop shop for advocacy and support of migrant students;
- Improve access to education for prisoners through online courses;
- Update guidelines for students, including their right to services available;
- Develop curricula, methods of assessment and pedagogies with student participation to build communities of trust;
- Develop continuous and accredited professional training for teachers, including training on:
 - Building trust and a sense of belonging among students
 - The context of migration and development, and its impact on migrant education
 - Empathy, communication, social and sensitivity skills
 - Available support services
 - Human rights and conflict resolution
 - Personal and social development in learning
 - Pedagogies and approaches in adult education
- Improve helping, teambuilding and counseling skills for Learning Support Staff;
- Increase awareness on the role of support services to engage staff in identifying persons for referral and for promoting self-referral;
- Inform and support migrant through peer-to-peer programs;
- Support migrant networks to share information and personal experiences of the education system in Malta and of Institutes of Learning, to promote education and prepare prospective learners;
- Empower learners to advocate for their needs by training and coaching them;
- Improve outreach interventions to inform migrants on the education opportunities available to them for improving employability;
- Improve the flexibility and accessibility of courses to particular groups, considering their financial, time or other restrictions;
- Improve financial efficiency and effectiveness by reaching those who are most in need of financial support.