Overarching trends and recommendations in language training and education frameworks

Key findings and recommendations

Overview

This policy brief will provide an overview of cross-cutting trends in language training and education for adult asylum seekers and refugees across the localities of Malmö and Eslöv (Sweden), Cosenza and Catanzaro (Italy), Nicosia (Cyprus) and Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, and Glasgow (Scotland). Specifically, this brief will discuss key issues that have consistently been identified as contributing factors to programme completion and language acquisition. This brief will organise these cross-cutting trends into three overarching categories that ultimately influence educational access, provision and quality of language training for migrants: 1) individual factors; 2) education system/programme factors; and 3) policy and programme governance factors. Key policy recommendations correspond with each thematic category.

GLIMER is informed by a combination of rigorous policy analysis, qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders and secondary analysis. This policy brief is reliant on policy documents, statistics and evaluations together with interviews with stakeholders from national, regional and local authorities and the third sector collected in 2019 in all four countries. In Sweden, GLIMER members worked across the region of Skåne and the municipalities of Malmö and Eslöv, two municipalities in a close geographic distance and part of the Öresund region that connects Sweden to Denmark and continental Europe. In Italy, researchers worked in different locations covering the territory of Calabria, focusing on two main cities (Cosenza, Catanzaro) and on places with a high density of non-Italian residents (Lamezia Terme). In Cyprus, work consisted of ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from devolved and local government, as well as the third sector. Lastly, in Scotland consortium members worked across several locations that

included both the site of Dispersal – Glasgow – as well as areas involved in the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) – Aberdeenshire and Argyll and Bute. This policy brief does not represent an exhaustive depiction of each country's findings. To access each country's full report, please visit: http://www.glimer.eu/outputs/.

Policy and programme governance factors

Each country has a policy framework at the national level with ultimate responsibility for service delivery devolved to the local level which, in the majority of cases, uses the third or private sectors as a 'safety net'.

With the exception of Cyprus, language training for refugees and asylum seekers is embedded into broader policy and programme frameworks geared towards the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. In Sweden, local municipalities are responsible for implementing language training and education programmes for asylum seekers and refugees. The state provides funding for refugee reception, including language education 'Swedish for Immigrants' which can be provided by the municipal adult education or outsourced. In addition to these official programs for refugees, voluntary language training initiatives are available for asylum seekers. Initiatives include, but are not limited to, 'Swedish from Day One', 'Everyday Swedish' and 'Early Initiatives for Asylum Seekers'. Lastly, the upper secondary school 'Language Introduction' program is provided to children aged 16 and above who do not qualify for a national upper secondary school programme.

In Scotland, the devolution of education policy from the UK Government to the Scottish Government has enabled the

development of a distinct approach to language education for asylum seekers and refugees. In contrast to other parts of the UK, both asylum seekers and refugees have the right to access language training 'from day one'. Language education is informed by the Scottish Government's English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): Welcoming Our Learners (2015-2020) Strategy, which envisages language training both in formal educational environments and in community settings. It therefore is situated across policy areas, including Adult Literacies, Community Learning and Development (CLD); and for matters related to asylum seekers and refugees, the 'New Scots' Integration Strategy. ESOL education is broadly available in two forms: through formal classes, which result in a nationally-accredited qualification, and through informal, non-accredited classes, usually in community settings. ESOL classes for displaced migrants therefore have three main types of provider: Further Education institutions (colleges), Local Authority providers (through CLD initiatives), and third sector and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

In Calabria, Italian language education is provided by either the government through Centres for Adult Education (CPIA), or by third sector organisations offering courses within the Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and Unaccompanied Minors (SPRAR/SIPROMI) and the Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS) frameworks. CPIA are an autonomous teaching institution divided into territorial service networks operating at the provincial basis while SPRAR/SIPROMI language courses are autonomously managed.

Lastly, while language training has been evolving on legal and policy levels in Cyprus since the Refugee Law of 2000 was enacted and within the European Union (EU) framework, language training is only implemented through individual projects carried out by government entities or third sector/private organisations. This means that unlike in Sweden, Scotland and Italy, language training for asylum seekers and refugees is neither part of a co-ordinated, national 'integration' programme, nor situated within a formal educational framework.

Across these cases, challenging governance structures often result in fragmented or inconsistent language education services, which acutely impact learners with asylum seeking or refugee statuses.

Across these cases, whilst the governance structures enable a variety of educational responses to language training, they also raise significant challenges. Though the devolution of language education delivery to 'local' stakeholders enables a flexible and sometimes responsive approach, (1) an absence of central co-ordination and (2) inconsistent or impermanent dialogue between stakeholders within and across localities results in complex or disorganised governance structures, services with divergent availability and quality, and an absence of expertise-exchange between organisations. As a result, systems are sometimes burdened with overlapping actions, lack continuity and do not facilitate long-term evaluation. This can make it difficult for organisations to sustain services. Across all the cases, these issues are exacerbated in rural areas where language training provision is already underdeveloped and in need of attention, and where top-down governance structures may present challenges to the provision of community-based language development programmes.

Educational system and training factors

The challenges and barriers raised by language education governance structures are also often exacerbated by issues related to pedagogical design or delivery.

In cases where language education is integrated into a national qualifications framework (such as Scotland, Italy and Sweden), language learners benefit from clear progression routes and accredited qualifications. However, over-emphasis on accredited language learning results in the devaluation of other forms of learning (such as community learning), and in other educational or employment settings, may cause disadvantage for those without formal language qualifications. Accredited systems may be unsuitable methods of learning for asylum seekers and refugees, as they have attendance and assessment demands that displaced migrants may be unable to fulfil due to other immigration obligations (such as employment training, or legal appointments). Furthermore, the interaction of immigration restrictions and formal education systems can create inequity between displaced migrants of different immigration statuses – for example, in cases in which asylum seekers are prevented from accessing formal education systems (such as in Sweden). Accredited systems also often make inadequate provision for literacy

education, in which asylum seeking and refugee populations are over-represented.

In cases where language education is not integrated into a national qualifications framework (such as Cyprus), there are clear issues related to resourcing, inconsistent pedagogical design, the availability of teaching materials and further educational, employment or social opportunities available to learners.

Within the classroom, there are also formal and informal factors that impact learners' opportunities and progression. Across the cases, educators report that there are disparities between the 'official' language taught in the classroom and the prevalence of local dialects, resulting in potential communication difficulties in learners' everyday lives, and barriers to progression within the classroom. Across the cases, teaching staff report that they have limited opportunity for developing course design and teaching methods that specifically responded to learners' profiles or environmental difference.

Across the cases, stakeholders also report that language classes were frequently required to 'compete' with other 'integration' activities required of their learners, such as in Sweden, where learners' obligation to undertake additional 'integration' activities, including employability training, disrupts their language education. Elsewhere, though teachers recognise the value of 'applied' language training, they also report that approaches which over-emphasise the utility of language education for labour market access dilute the effectiveness of language training.

Factoring in displaced migration status

Challenges related to pedagogical design and assessment methods have particularly acute consequences for asylum seekers and refugees, who are highly likely to experience formal and informal barriers to language education as a result of their immigration status.

Though governance and pedagogical issues are experienced by all language learners, they materialise in distinctive ways for asylum seekers and refugees. For instance, displaced migrants may experience different language education depending on the services available to them because of their residency status. Mainly, refugees

are afforded formal education opportunities while informal education options are made available for asylum seekers. Disaggregation of language education by immigration status impacts who has access to accredited or consistent language education, and who is subsequently likely to access educational, employment or residency opportunities. It is therefore likely to result in long-term social inequalities between displaced migrants of different immigration statuses, displaced migrants and migrants of other statuses, and displaced migrants and long-term residents.

Displaced migrants may also experience conditions which create barriers to attendance, study, progression or accreditation, including:
- Precarious housing
- Precarious immigration status
- Poverty
- Ill mental and/or physical health.

Displaced migrants in rural locations where integration networks or language education opportunities are underdeveloped may also experience geographical penalties. Finally, language education policies and programmes consistently fail to consider how gender inequality interacts with displaced migration status. Policies and programmes which do not actively take into account (1) gender based violence and (2) gendered inequalities create further barriers to language training for displaced women's and gender minorities' access to language education.

Issues within language education systems related to governance, accreditation, pedagogy and continuity are therefore particularly likely to disproportionately impact displaced migrants because they already face additional barriers to attendance, progression and completion. To promote and support long-term integration for asylum seekers and refugees, policy solutions must therefore address the formal and informal barriers to language education for displaced migration across the categories of language governance, pedagogy and social inequality.

Recommendations

While more context-specific recommendations are laid out in each country's full report, the following select recommendations may help address cross-cutting findings

related to access, quality and overall collaboration.

Policy and programme governance

1. Increase collaboration between national, local and third/private sector organisations to improve language training and education services for displaced migrants. Cross-cutting recommendations include:

- Ensure there is a national action plan that supports the integration of asylum seekers and refugees
- Work with existing infrastructures coordinated by government education ministries to improve geographical reach of language training programmes.
- Ensure displaced migrants' associations and informal groups are consulted when developing language and integration policies.
- Adopt a holistic approach to how language training resources are allocated with a particular focus on high-need areas.
    - Improve upon oversight and guidance provided by central decision makers to ensure full transparency in services across localities.
    - Incentivise resourcing of language development for displaced migrants in remote and rural areas and consider establishing temporary offices in areas where there is strong refugee and seasonal worker presence.
    - Encourage dialogue between different service providers as well as regional actors to identify joint resource management and maximise impact.

Educational systems and training programmes

2. Create more consistency in language training programmes across jurisdictions to facilitate programme completion and foster long-term integration. Recommendations towards that aim include:

- Adopt specific and dedicated protocols for how refugees and asylum seekers are received in all educational institutions.
- Identify new recruitment criteria for teaching staff which consider demographic trends and historical presence of displaced migrants and encourage recruitment of linguistic mediators and intercultural support staff.

- Adjust teaching methods to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees to ensure they are flexible, needs-based, include learning excursions and take into account diverse living conditions.
- Ensure there are formal mechanisms for tracking literacy progression among displaced migrants accessing language training programmes and improve guidance about accreditation for practitioners.
- Identify common parameters that can be used to evaluate language skills
- Update guidelines and promote professional training among language teaching staff to resolve conflicts, long-term problems, entrenched or outdated approaches
- Resource or incentivise partnerships that connect providers with organisations that have expertise in displaced migration and the unique issues associated with it.

Language education for displaced migrants

3. Improve informal barriers that interact with refugees and asylum seekers on an individual level and affect their ability to benefit from language training and education services.

- Design suitable and highly equipped spaces that allow the different requirements of migrants and refugees to be considered.
- Undertake a mapping exercise of providers and funders to identify gaps.
- Consider introducing place- and gender-sensitive class quotas for asylum seekers and refugees.
- Mainstream gender in language and integration policies by collaborating with migrant and women's organisations when developing policies to ensure they cater to the needs and realities of women.
- Assess and evaluate variations in performance to identify factors that may be impacting language acquisition outcomes.
- Pay special attention to specific populations that may be especially vulnerable, such as asylum seekers who may already be excluded, or at-risk of aging out of services.