

Improving language training for displaced adult migrants in Cyprus

Key findings and recommendations

Executive Summary

Adult language training for asylum seekers and refugees has historically been offered through public services as well as a service offered by the third sector. As language is considered key to the integration of third country nationals into Cypriot society, over recent years, relevant training has been provided via projects implemented by NGOs, governmental organisations and the private sector. While many positive steps have been taken, a number of gaps and challenges remain. Language training is provided sporadically and usually on a project basis.

This creates difficulties for asylum seekers and refugees in accessing the training and also for organisations to sustain the provision of relevant services.

Also, language training is not usually streamlined with other integration measures and its long term impact has never been estimated. A long-term, gender-sensitive policy framework must be established for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees, where sustainable language training will promote their access to key arenas including higher education, the labour market and society in general.

The GLIMER (Governance and the Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees) Project is jointly funded by JPI Urban Europe and Horizon 2020.

Bringing together researchers and practitioners from five lead institutions – the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Università della Calabria, Malmö Universitet and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies – it researches how issues relating to governance impact displaced peoples' experiences of integration in contemporary Europe.

Web-page: glimer.eu

Methods and empirical research

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 ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from devolved and local government, as well as the third sector.



Context

According to Eurostat's records, Cyprus had the highest number of first-time asylum applicants in Europe (relative to population) in the second quarter of 2018. Language training policies in Cyprus have been evolving on the legal and policy level since the enactment of the Refugee Law 2000 and within the framework of European funded projects following Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004.

Findings

GLIMER research has identified the following gaps affecting language training for displaced migrants in Cyprus.

1. Language training is not tailored or accessible for diverse groups of asylum seekers and refugees

Our research has indicated that both the state and the third sector tend to ignore the diversity within migrant communities and have a tendency to see them as a homogenous group. While the target audience of language training courses vary greatly in terms of educational background, gender, age and nationality the relevant policy that has been implemented has largely failed to address this diversity. Different types of inequality have thus emerged and impacted this segment of the population. These inequalities are based on gender, educational background, residence permit status, and geographical location (i.e. those who live in urban vs rural areas).

2. Lack of sustainability

Language training is provided sporadically and on a short-term basis. This creates difficulties for asylum seekers and refugees to consistently develop their linguistic capabilities via training and also for organisations to sustain the provision of required services.

3. Lack of long-term evaluation

Other than sustainability, project-based programmes also hinder long-term evaluation and monitoring. Interviewees have confirmed that projects are

What are the implications?

Language training is currently being implemented exclusively via projects. This model does not allow for sustainability, long term evaluation, nor more widely a holistic approach to integration.

evaluated only within their own framework via pre- and post-project questionnaires, participant exam results (if available), and in terms of project spending, but crucially, no evaluation tends to take place on the quality of the trainings. A project ends, and most implementers move on to the next one without being able to evaluate the long-term impact.

4. Minimal collaboration among the stakeholders

Our research findings suggest that substantive collaboration among the stakeholders implementing different projects is missing, save for the short-term partnerships that occur within the framework of projects. This is clearly problematic, burdening the system with overlapping actions, a lack of both continuity and sustainability, as well as hindering long-term evaluation.

5. Gender-blind language policies

With regards to gender, most language training programmes available in Cyprus are gender-blind. The specific needs and realities of women are not taken into account and this leads to unequal opportunities to access language training. The training tends to overlook migrant women's double role as family providers and caregivers, and more specifically the impact this role has on their availability to attend language courses. The main barrier for women is



Findings continued

the fact that the classes take place mostly in the afternoons, which clashes with their children's school timetables. As the primary caregivers, women are busy taking care of their children at that time of the day, whereas they might have a more flexible schedule in the mornings. Gender blind policies that hinder linguistic integration into a Cypriot society not only adversely affect women's everyday lives but also their access to justice. According to a 2018 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) report, migrant, asylum seeking, and refugee women face language barriers when they try to claim their rights.

6. Lack of comprehensive teacher training

Language teachers employed by both the public and the third sector are not offered adequate training to teach this segment of the population, especially on issues like cultural differences, diversity, and gender sensitivity. The interviewees noted little or no teacher training had taken place in the framework of past projects and comprehensive training is not foreseen in upcoming projects.

7. Monolingual approach

Integration policies with regards to language favour a monolingual approach. Institutions supporting adult asylum seeker and refugee language competencies focus on Modern Greek. Such an approach, which is dominant in Cyprus, can hinder migrant populations in preserving their own languages and passing them on to future generations.

8. Inequality regarding geographical location

Due to population density, access to language classes is eased in highly urban areas, leaving those in rural or suburban areas at a disadvantage.

9. Lack of consideration of educational background

This creates inequality among people who receive language training. The classes are not tailored according to student needs: prior evaluation or segmentation of students according to competence is not common practice. Classes can include anyone from university graduates to those lacking basic literacy skills. The classes end up being either too basic or too advanced for the students, depending on their educational background. It also puts extra pressure on the teachers to be accommodate a wide range of abilities through the use of diverse pedagogical tools in the classroom. Most lessons follow set textbooks, and take place in a classroom, so for those lacking literacy skills, their initial exposure to the new language is limited to listening in.

10. Teaching challenges due to bidialectalism.

Cyprus is a bidialectal country in which the Modern Greek language and the Cypriot dialect co-exist. Foreigners new to the country are faced with the situation of hearing the Cypriot dialect used in everyday interactions, while formal curricula are strictly in the Modern Greek language. The Modern Greek language curriculum at times fails to capture Cypriot reality, which goes beyond the fact that the former disregards the (oral) local dialect. The textbooks often come from Greece, which can create confusion for asylum seekers and refugees looking to become familiar with Cyprus culture and society.



Recommendations

Below we make recommendations designed to improve the access to and provision of language training for displaced migrants in Cyprus.

1. **Radical changes to the current refugee law.**

Integration policies cannot work if not supported by radical changes to the refugee law currently in force, which does not permit asylum seekers and refugees into the full spectrum of the labour market, education and society in general. The law states that asylum seekers can seek paid employment six months after they submit their asylum application, but only in specific sectors such as agriculture, fishery, waste management, cleaning, food delivery and, since May 2019, the hospitality industry. With low-level jobs in these sectors not requiring advanced language skills, policies have instead chosen to focus on language classes as a means to improve social cohesion. However, if changes were to be made to the refugee law, language training could be used to help promote the mobility in the labour market and better social integration.

2. **National Action Plan (NAP) for integration.**

The findings of this research also confirm the need for a relevant NAP. In the course of GLIMER, one that addresses integration has been announced as drafted. The key requirements for the eventual NAP should be the inclusion of long-term objectives, a sufficient budget, as well as short- and long-term evaluation mechanisms and the flexibility to make adjustments.

3. **Holistic approach in the allocation of integration funds.**

National and European funds for integration should follow a holistic approach in order to serve the wider integration policy.

4. **Gender mainstreaming of language and integration policies.**

Integration policies need to cater to the needs and realities of women. Collaborations among policy makers, migrant and broader women's organisations, and informal groups can inform these policies

5. **Improved geographical reach** by involving the existing infrastructure of schools should be coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

6. **Collaboration between national, local, third sector organisations, and migrants' associations and informal groups.**

The expertise of diverse stakeholders, especially those working with displaced migrants, should be taken into consideration in developing language and integration policies. It is also crucial to take into consideration the voices of the specific segment of population in order to tailor the services accordingly.

7. **Teaching methods that are adjusted to the needs of adult asylum seekers and refugees.**

A more flexible way of teaching, learning excursions and needs-based learning has been shown to produce better results. Also, classes need to be designed in a way that takes into account the diverse living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees and especially those who reside at reception centres.

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This policy brief is supported by our full report into language training for adult migrants and asylum seekers in Cyprus, available at: glimer.eu/outputs | Further enquires: ellen.cummings@ed.ac.uk

