



## **Policy Briefing 6: Benefiting from transnational experience – migration and the role of lifelong learning**

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This briefing highlights some emerging issues faced by migrants, and cities and regions in relation to lifelong learning policy and practice, particularly in the UK context.

### **Migration benefits society**

Economic integration within the European Economic Area (EEA - the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) encourages the free movement of workers and their families among member countries. EEA migrants continue to be a fast rising group in the UK migration statistics. Registrations of new national insurance numbers for adults entering Britain rose by 19% in 2013 with the highest increases for these coming from Poland, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Migrants can bring a range of advantages to society by filling gaps in the labour market, counteracting the population ageing process and stimulating economic and cultural life. Those from the EEA had made a particularly positive contribution in the decade up to 2011, contributing 34% more in taxes than they received in benefits. Migrants from countries that joined the EU in 2004 – the A10 group -made a notably strong positive contribution as they have a higher employment rate - 81% for A10, in comparison to 70% for the EU15 and 70% for UK natives in 2011. Migrants who arrived since 2000 were also 43% less likely than natives to receive state benefits or tax credits. They were also 7% less likely to live in social housing (Dustmann and Frattini 2014).

In comparison to the other European countries, the UK attracts highly educated and skilled immigrants from within the EEA as well as from outside. In 2011, 32% of recent EEA immigrants and 43% of non-EEA immigrants had university degrees, compared with 24% of the British adult population (Dustmann and Frattini 2014).

## **Major issues with current policy and practice**

### **1. The lack of effective arrangements for recognition of qualifications**

In the UK, similarly to the other EEA member states that opened their labour markets to other European citizens, the lack of transferability of cultural capital (e.g. formal qualifications, knowledge about the functioning of the education and career system, and the language barriers) puts migrants in a very difficult position in societal competition. Recent EEA migrants, characterized as young and well-qualified, are working largely in unskilled or low-skilled employment, in the service sector, industry, and agriculture. Many highly skilled migrants end up either having to repeat lengthy and expensive training, or taking jobs well below their capacities, resulting in a serious waste of resources (McNair 2009).

### **2. The limited or inefficient opportunity to learn English**

The ability to speak the host language and to communicate with a diverse range of people is particularly important not only in getting better access to the host country's labour market but also in gaining a fuller understanding of, and confidence in the host society. Without English, migrants may remain trapped within migrant ethnic enclaves, vulnerable to exploitation and social exclusion (Ryan 2011).

### **3. The opportunities for academic learning are often restricted and absent from young migrants in the UK**

For young people (see Moskal 2014) the challenge of acquiring English served to mask the other skills, knowledge and aspirations of young migrants. Some teachers did not draw on the migrant students' previous educational experiences due to belief that this background was limited. As a result, migrant pupils were not always effectively assessed, and were not expected to perform to their potential. These assumptions may lead to misjudgment of the appropriate pace for learning for each student, and result in the failure to progress appropriately. This was particularly difficult for those who arrived in the country as teenagers (12 years or older) who often failed to achieve in the English exam system. Once they have reached the age of 16, these pupils fall under the auspices of post-compulsory adult education, which provides vocational courses that are designed to prepare adults for entry into the workforce. These migrant teenagers are often placed on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses to improve their language levels, which must be done before they can proceed to vocational training. This strategy to place young people who have not completed their general education into general ESOL classes followed by an adult curriculum has been highly controversial (Cook 2008).

## **How can lifelong learning best facilitate migrant's adaptation in a new society?**

**The role of lifelong learning** should be to ensure that new arrivals have the opportunity to acquire the skills (including language) and cultural knowledge (including labour market orientation) to make a full contribution to, and fully benefit from, life in the UK.

**A transnational perspective is important here.** Transnationalism means that the migrants keep their mobility options open. Instead of permanent settlement and assimilation, migrants maintain the culture of and linkages with the home country while they learn to acquire the lifestyle and the culture of the new society. The transnational perspective has important implications for educational systems that address the needs of new migrant populations. Lifelong learning should recognize people's transnational flows and multiple affiliations and experiences in the country of origin and host country.

### **Recommendations**

It is useful to note how transnational networks are formed through the process of migration and adaptation. These networks impact on lifelong learning process (Guo 2010). On this basis the following recommendations are offered:

- The system for the recognition of qualifications should work transnationally to provide the recognition of foreign qualifications, and updating and/or conversion opportunities for those with established skills in their countries of origin. Strategies that assume that employers will invest in the skills of their workers are unrealistic in many cases, because firms often have no jobs that could make use of the real skills and qualifications of their migrant workers (McNair 2009).
- English language tuition for new migrants should be priority. Despite a general improvement in the quality of ESOL provision, there have been concerns about how relevant provision is (where it is available) to the needs of specific industries and occupations and to people with higher levels of skill or previous education (McNair 2009). English learning can be focus on the skills that migrants need to acquire for work. Their previous learning experiences need to be recognised as many migrants might have substantial work or professional experience in the subject from the country of origin.
- Schools also need to have better and more consistent information on young migrants abilities and achievement. Standardised documents about their background that could be used throughout Europe might be a way forward. Most policies that deal with migration are national/regional policies, yet migration is transnational in its character and requires transnational governance and co-operation.
- National governments, and cities and regions should work together with communities to develop coordinated lifelong learning policies and practices in assisting migrants with their adaptation to their host societies, to the benefit of all concerned.

## References

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