

E-LIFELONG LEARNING – STRATEGIES FOR MIGRANTS’ INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN EU (CASE STUDY: INTEGRA PROJECT)

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to present a strategy developed to support and guide the migrant students (and not only) who came in a new home country to improve their integration into local society by providing them with opportunities to gain language skills on basic financial matters. The first steps for their language integration is made through an non formal approach, based on open interaction, simulation scenarios, improvisation and creative use of e-learning materials, permanent exchange of questions and answers, reflection time and feedback opportunities. The paper will provide the answer to one of the vital needs of migrants who benefit from work and study mobility in new political and economic conditions, which is the need to communicate and to solve survival issues among which the financial ones come top of the list. The answer being the Migrant Integration Kit developed within the INTEGRA project (LLP Grundtvig Multilateral project, 510258-LLP-1-2010-1-LT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP, co-funded by the European Union) and which contains financial terminology, a financial glossary, and sources of financial information that will assist migrants by equipping them with the most useful social and financial vocabulary which can be helpful in unfamiliar situations in a new country.

1. Background

Romania remains an emigration country and becomes not only a transit country, but also a destination country more attractive to migrants. According to Eurostat forecast, from 2008 - 2060, Romania will have at least a net migration rate of 18.4 per thousand (1.84%). Unlike the Romanian migration quantified at approximately 10% of Romanian people, migration phenomenon in Romania is relatively modest. Data available at the end of 2010 shows that legal migration holds 0.3% of the total population (total non-EU migrants / total population). According to the National Commission for Prognosis, in 2013-2015, the number of migrants is likely to increase to 200,000 to 300,000 migrants, which would mean 1% - 1.4% of the population.

The number of foreign students coming to study in Romania doubled in the last 10 years is estimated currently at around 40,000, reveals a study by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES).

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The majority of foreign students studying in Romanian universities came from Republic of Moldova, Albania, Greece, Ukraine and Israel. Main reasons why foreigners come to study in Romania are low cost and the quality of education in Romania, higher than in their home countries. Students are particularly interested in the faculties of medicine, economics and technical, is shown in the study by ISE.

The integration process and the involvement in the social, economic and cultural life of the new country, is for migrants very difficult. Language and cultural barriers lead to a lack of information that has as main result the failure to comply to the rights conferred by the law and therefore an inefficient integration program. Foreigners staying in Romania is a category of people who, while enjoying a status comparable to the Romanian citizens, not infrequently encounter obstacles in accessing these rights due to lack of knowledge of Romanian language, lack of information on rights and obligations or services they can access, unable to communicate or understand written text message without no support information.

The role of the support organizations, like Romanian Association for Integration of Foreign Students (ARISS), Nongovernmental Organizations or within the Universities, the Department of International Relations and European Integration - Office for Foreign Students, are:

- To mediate human relations especially between students, and cross-cultural democratic principles by creating collaborative interactions and situations, and inter-cultural relations between Romanian students and foreign students in order to facilitate the integration of foreign students in the Romanian community;
- To foster knowledge of the other, claiming inter and multi-platform trans-culturally and creating programs and projects that meet community needs and student interaction between students of diverse nationalities, with the Romanian society and culture and background and interests and objectives of the association.

But their separate actions are enough? There are efficient strategies? The migrants know about all these organizations? Integration cannot be done in a static society. Migrants are inserted into a joint fluid, dynamic and constantly changing society. Integration is a long-term process, nonlinear, multifaceted requiring adaptability both from a multitude of factors belonging to the host society and to the migrants. *Migration should be approached as a process to be managed rather than a problem to be solved.*

2. Ever heard of financial integration?

If it's important for you (as migrant) to integrate with the local community of your new home country, then the **Migrant Integration Kit** developed during the INTEGRA project contains financial terminology, a financial glossary, and sources of financial information that will assist you by equipping you with the most useful social and financial phrases which can be helpful in unfamiliar situations in a new country.

The INTEGRA project answers one of the vital needs of emigrants who benefit from work and study mobility in new political and economic conditions, which is the need to communicate and to solve survival issues among which the financial ones come top of the list. The INTEGRA project (<http://integra-project.eu>) brought together partners from 11 countries (LT, GR, DE, ES, TR, IE, NL, RO, GB, PL and BY) who worked together with social partners such as migrant communities and financial institutions from a range of different European countries to create a Europe wide network of relevant institutions in order to reach migrants in partner countries to improve their integration into local society by providing them with opportunities to gain language skills on basic financial matters. The first steps for their language integration into the new society is made through

an non formal approach, based on open interaction, simulation scenarios, improvisation and creative use of the learning materials, permanent exchange of questions and answers, reflection time and feedback opportunities.

Within this context, the partnership managed to develop the following activities:

1. Research

- needs analysis in partner countries produced to find out about the problems and experiences that migrants face in a new country because they do not speak the host country language and are not familiar even with the basic norms of everyday life (results are uploaded on the project website under the heading "Summary")
- good practice examples in each partner country collected following the template developed by the coordinating institution on the financial language training and country specific financial and banking operations (results are uploaded on the project website under the heading "Summary")
- comparative analysis produced on the life situation of migrants in the old and new EU countries (results are uploaded on the project website under the heading "Summary")

2. Contacts and training programs

- Contacts established and cooperation agreements with migrant communities in partner countries signed
- Contacts established and cooperation agreements with the social partners – financial, non-governmental and state institutions working with migrants, signed
- The training methodologies and programs for training representatives from migrant communities and migrants as final beneficiaries developed
- Collection of the materials and work on the creation of the active in the future portal www.integra-project.eu with the assistance from social partners are underway

3. CD – Migrant Integration KIT

- Useful phrases: a list of essential useful words and phrases in English, Lithuanian, German, Dutch, Polish, Greek, Spanish, Romanian, Belorussian and Turkish that could enhance not only your language but also general skills for better adaptation to local society of your new country and labour market.
- Simulations: dialogues on different situations dealing with financial and social welfare issues for simulating real life situations and in such a way as to develop your skills and confidence in managing your personal matters in your new country.
- Country specific financial tips: specific information and advice on how to deal with everyday financial needs in partner countries.
- Useful info
 - Links to financial institutions or other financial information sources in all partner countries
 - Links to governmental institutions or other support organizations working with migrants in all partner countries
 - Links to migrant communities in partner countries
 - Links to other projects or programs working on migrant integration issues
- Info on representatives from migrant communities. List of contacts of representatives from migrant communities in partner countries that you are welcome to get in touch with.
- Good practice examples in partner countries. Examples of good practices for improving migrants financial integration from various projects, activities or actions being carried out by financial, educational or other kind of institutions in partner countries, could help you understand and deal with unfamiliar situations in your new country.

3. Methodology

One of the most important activities of the project was the organisation and implementation of the trainings together with language professionals and financial experts to representatives of migrant communities in order to cascade that training to ultimate beneficiaries-migrants from the partner countries.

Trainings for representatives - instructors from migrant communities organized, who will later cascade the acquired knowledge and gained skills to the final beneficiaries – migrants from partner countries.

Community representatives were selected according to the pre-agreed criteria (one of the most important – good local language skills and good knowledge of national culture). In each partner country 8-10 persons were trained. The most active representatives (3-5 per country) were included into the European network of trainers.

The trainings (training time-10 hours) were meant for training the instructors on how to use the developed by the project financial language teaching program and methodology, based on elements of drama and introduce the project website containing the collected teaching/learning materials and useful info. Every potential instructor was equipped with a CD containing materials and methodology guidelines to be used for teaching final beneficiaries.

Trainings for final beneficiaries – migrants from partner countries organized with migrant community representatives.

Each partner country - 10 migrants (average 3 migrants per community), 16 hours training program (2 hours for project presentation, introduction into the project website, 12 hours for trainings following the program, 2 hours for reflections and summing up).

Trainings were run by the migrant community representatives - instructors, who have already integrated in the new environment.

4. The innovative character of the project

The innovative character of the project INTEGRA consists primarily on the target groups' typology which address, i.e. groups of migrants may benefit from study or why not labour mobility, but often do not have the tools to actually benefit from this advantage.

Multilingualism is an essential element which led to the development of this project. Whether talk about immigrant communities and the countries from which they originated beneficiaries came from 42 countries (Afghanistan, Somalia, Russia, Bulgaria, Belarus, Romania, Lithuania, Palestine, Poland, Iraq, Syria, Israel, Tunisia, Portugal, Africa, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, UK, Denmark, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Taiwan, France, Greece, Moldova, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Pakistan, Philippines, Ethiopia, Ukraine, India, Eritrea, Turkey, Armenia, Spain and Latin American communities). When referring to classes, then we should mention immigrants, adults, students and seniors, men and women, employed, unemployed, social workers, educational or financially, and so on and obviously we can easily observe the rich diversity.

A second innovative aspect is the contents of the work developed in the project, financial support materials for learning terminology in the host language, knowing that the financial aspect is vital in performing any type of activity in conditions of modern life. It is said the large number and diversity of languages in which it appears set of financial materials and services (Glossary and

phrases), namely 14 languages (of the migrant communities), which may have an impact on a wide range of potential users throughout Europe.

The third aspect that confers innovative project methodology adopted for implementation materials and training activities, namely communicative approach, an informal, with elements inspired by dramatic techniques such as role playing, simulation, situational dialogue that facilitate the acquisition of financial terminology active involvement of the participants and create a relaxed atmosphere, conducive to learning.

Also the idea of the project was to help migrants not to become dependent of services. Such support materials developed are available in many formats. Classical training method through face to face meetings, individual method - individual work at home without the need to use the internet by accessing the CD set and also the individual method, but which stimulates the developmental autonomy - using the Internet and accessing the platform project. Thus the project promotes language learning through e-learning technologies - online platforms, using IT tools.

As a general impact, it may be that integrated projects bring a concrete contribution to combating xenophobia, prejudice and racism, adding to the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU and to address issues of social inclusion.

5. Reflections and conclusions

In figures the results of the training process were:

- 28 training sessions with 104 hours of training for migrant communities' representatives
- 58 sessions with 195 hours of trainings with final beneficiaries.
- Number of trainers, who trained representatives: 15
- Number of trained representatives: 60
- Number of trained final beneficiaries: 275
- Migrant communities involved: from Afghanistan , Somalia, Russia, Bulgaria, Belarus, Romania, Lithuania, Palestinian, Poland , Iraq , Syria, Israel, Tunisia, Portugal, South Africa, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, UK, Denmark, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Taiwan, France, Greece, Moldova, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Pakistan, Philippines, Ethiopia, Ukraine, India, Eritrea, Turkey, Armenia, and from Spanish/Latin American community
- In Romania where involved a number of 104 foreign students from the «Gr.T.Popa» University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi.

All the partners proofed the fact that both trainings were very successful and useful for the participants. They were of the opinion that trainings have shown migrants the way how to start dealing with financial matters by speaking the language of the host country. The activities suggested for the training were the real benefit for people who struggle with a new language in various cultural, economic and social contexts. Combining drama methods with concrete information on financial matters allowed migrants to feel more relaxed and be open to the learning process.

- *The INTEGRA training created a lot of energy and enthusiasm for the two community groups involved. And its innovative approach makes it sustainable.*
- *Very useful to those who are new and don't know where to go for advice or which institutions to approach.*
- *Trainings were successful in terms of the proposed methodology. And what is the most important is that the project products and methodology can be used by trainers-representatives of the local communities also after the end of the project.*

- *Beneficiaries of the project increased knowledge of financial matters and the ability to use the language of the new country.*
- *We believe that the training seminars were a very successful training activity. The director of the organization with whom we organized the seminars, gave us a list of 25 more persons who would like to attend a second training programme. We are very satisfied with this and we are trying to find free dates to repeat the seminars to them.*
- *Very interesting and positive experiences.*
- *The trainings were quite successful and beneficial both for trainers, representatives and trainees:*
 - *final beneficiaries could pick up basic words and phrases for dealing with financial issues*
 - *self-confidence was fostered while dealing with issues in a new context*
 - *cultural awareness of a new country raised*
 - *ability to break cultural and personal barriers developed*
 - *new networking possibilities among migrant communities*
 - *new contacts with migrant communities in other countries via network of representatives will be established*
 - *For institution: experience in communicating with migrant communities broadened and possibilities for new projects with migrant communities opened up*
- *By working on Integra project we cannot say we have taught migrants how to solve their financial problems but we have shown them the way how to start dealing with financial matters by speaking the language of the country!*

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