

# THE IMPACT OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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**Abstract.** *In 2015, Europe experienced a migrant crisis – The European Union has faced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants. More than one million people arrived in the European Union, most fleeing war and terror in Syria and other countries, for example, the number of immigrants crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece per day (October 20, 2015) was 1,0006 people, as shown by the data of European Commission (European Commission, 2017). The migrant crisis in Europe and its consequences are our collective responsibility as Europeans and the ability to show solidarity by providing immigrants with much needed support, based on generally accepted human rights and moral responsibility issues. Along with the challenges posed by the migrant crisis the issue came up of better integration of immigrants into society, providing the necessary information regarding the assistance offered, providing the necessary information regarding the assistance offered social guarantees, protection, and knowledge of local culture, traditions, history and educational opportunities. The aim of the article is to share good practices in the field of lifelong learning by implementing an international pilot project aimed at training migrants in the context of lifelong learning, based on theoretical research methods on the consequences and challenges of the migrant crisis, as well as based on empirical research (statistical analysis, analysis of survey results, development of interactive learning environment). The main findings of the authors of the study are reflected in the interactive learning platform created within the framework of the international project, as well as the authors' recommendations for non – formal education of migrants in the context of lifelong learning.*

**Keywords:** *European Union, lifelong learning, migrants, migration crisis.*

## Introduction

The European Union's approach to migration has created a crisis of solidarity. As it stands, the bloc has no system through which member states can share responsibility for hosting migrants in a fair manner. As a consequence, they continue to wrangle with one another over which of them should host the asylum seekers and other migrants who reach Europe's shores. These disputes go to the heart of member states' current inability to agree on the reform of the

Dublin Regulation. Member states on the EU's southern border call for the institutionalisation of relocation quotas and greater shared responsibility for migrant arrivals, but the members of the Visegrád group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) refuse to support any form of solidarity mechanism. Meanwhile, countries in northern and Western Europe tend to emphasise their relative openness to limited relocations yet seem mostly concerned about stopping secondary movements. (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). The social inequalities observed among the Member States of the European Union in the context of the migration crisis may, in the long term, only break the founding values of the European Union and highlight some of the threats to European unity. There are many precedents, wars, catastrophes in Europe's multifaceted and complex history that make countries unite and help migrants. Providing migrants with all the necessary support is a challenge for us as Europeans in providing financial assistance, a haven in our country where migrants can fully integrate into the local community and into the labor market. Through lifelong learning, various non – formal education methods can help migrants to integrate purposefully and successfully into local communities, with a genuine interest and willingness to help people in distress from the governmental and municipal authorities, from the non – governmental sector perspective.

The aim of the article is to share good practices in the field of lifelong learning by implementing an international pilot project aimed at training migrants in the context of lifelong learning in order to better integrate different ethnic and religious groups into the Latvian labor market and society by learning Latvian and cultural. The main results of the authors of the study are reflected in an interactive learning platform created within the framework of an international project <http://migis.eu/>. The study uses: (I) theoretical cognitive methods to describe the consequences and challenges of the migrant crisis and to raise the profile of lifelong learning; (II) methods of empirical research – statistical analysis, analysis of survey results, content creation and research of interactive learning environment.

### **Consequences of the migrant crisis**

The European migration crisis and its consequences are a challenge for us Europeans today, so that we can contribute European solidarity, respect for human rights and unity – diverse stakeholders must manage the myriad social, economic, political, legal, and humanitarian implications that come from the mass exodus of millions of people. The effects of the conditional migrant crisis can be divided into several categories: the economic, social and political consequences of this, as pointed out by several researchers and reports by

international organizations. For example, Shellito K., a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, admits that the migrant crisis have a positive consequences. Refugees can often bring positive economic impacts to the countries that receive them: “(I) the presence of refugees ensures enrolment stability, thereby helping to keep the schools open and functioning for all children; this in turn encourages continued investment and can improve the educational infrastructure of the country and boost long – term economic productivity; (II) many of the factors that drive refugee crises – especially war or terrorism – are relatively indiscriminate to class. Because of this, refugees can often come from skilled and educated backgrounds; (III) labor market disruptions, although often viewed as a negative, may be positive.” (Shellito, 2016, p. 8-11). The oft – cited view that refugees will drain the economy by taking jobs that would’ve otherwise been taken by locals may be driven more by rhetoric than fact. In reality, refugees often take jobs that native citizens are unwilling to take, such as in construction or low – wage agriculture.

In order to mitigate the possible negative economic consequences of the migrant crisis, it is essential to promote the integration of migrants into the labor market. In turn European Commission report “An Economic Take on the Refugee Crisis. A Macroeconomic Assessment for the EU” (2016) states that: “based on the information available today, the short – term economic impact of the refugee inflows on the EU’s GDP appear small and positive, though it is more pronounced for some Member States than others. The short – term effect is mainly driven by higher public spending. In the medium to long – term, how well refugees are integrated into the labor market will be a key factor in determining the macroeconomic effects that refugee inflows will have on Member States' economies. If well and quickly integrated, refugees can help to improve the performance of the labor market, address demographic challenges, and improve fiscal sustainability. Nevertheless, the earlier and better the integration, the more likely migrants are to make a positive contribution to growth local economy and public finances in the medium term. While the current situation of refugee inflows to the EU suggests that there is a potential for moderate economic gain ahead, downside risk appears substantial, if the required investment is not urgently undertaken to facilitate the management of flows and, for those who are granted international protection, their subsequent integration.” (European Commission, 2016, p. 31). The potential positive economic benefits and preconditions for implementation are also characterized by researchers Kancs, D. and Lecca, P: “the rising numbers of forced civil war migrants pose important social and fiscal challenges as well as offering economic opportunities for EU Member State societies and economies. In the short – run, the social – beneficiary status quo of asylum seekers, by providing welfare benefits and the necessary access to education, language and the

sociocultural infrastructure, increasing the budget costs of EU Member States.” (Kancs & Lecca, 2017, p. 38).

### **Concept of lifelong learning in Latvia**

The Lifelong Learning profile presented in the study outlines new trends in adult education that could contribute to the economic growth of the participating countries and the development of civil society. Traditionally, three basic aspects are relevant to characterizing education: motivation and learning; accessibility and learning; integration and learning. Lifelong learning in the sense of modern education policy means everything that happens to a person in the field of education throughout his or her life. Every member of society, throughout their lives, from kindergarten to retirement, acquires or develops knowledge and skills according to their own interests and needs. It characterizes a modern understanding of education, as opposed to the outdated view that education is acquired once in life – in youth. These components of lifelong learning were formulated during the discussion of the European Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European communities, 2000). Consequently, lifelong learning is in general a process which encompasses both labor market participation and participation in civil society, as well as the process of self – improvement throughout life. Thus, lifelong learning has a crucial role to play in better integrating migrants into the local community and helping them to fully participate in the local labor market, making a significant contribution to national economic growth.

Adult education policy in Latvia is determined by the Education Development Guidelines 2014 – 2020. This is a part of our daily lives, a conscious choice and a necessity. The overarching goal of education development policy is “quality and inclusive education for personal development, human well – being and sustainable national growth.” (Latvijas Republikas Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2013, p. 13). The guiding principles of education development policy are to shape the future education in which the individual and his / her benefits are the most important value, and the educational opportunities are created based on the needs of the individual's personal growth and self – improvement. Adult education policy in Latvia is closely related to almost any area important for the development of the country, but most closely to the economy, entrepreneurship and employment. Alongside the Education Development Guidelines for 2014 – 2020, there are a number of other policy planning documents, both at Latvian and European level, which determine the directions of education development. It should be noted that in 2016 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the “Implementation Plan for the Adult Education Management Model 2016 – 2020” which foresees a 15% increase in

the share of adults (aged 25 – 64) in 2020 (Latvijas Republikas Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2016). Taking into account the financial situation in the country, attraction of EU funds is very important in solving adult education issues.

### **Education of adult immigrants – international pilot project experience**

Immigrants, especially in their first year of life in the host country, have language problems, making it difficult to offer them any educational programs (with the exception of language learning) and learning possibilities. In view of this fact, the proposed project was specially designed to create an intellectual product that would be more accessible as possible for immigrants. As a result the project developed e – Educational Tool migis.eu. Most of the measures offered to immigrants are aimed at solving individual problems (for example, only in the training of a particular national language, only information on employment, etc.), therefore the project team has developed an e – Educational Tool migis.eu, which includes interactive detailed information on the host country (60 hrs. of prepared (text and videos) for immigrants and their educators in English and native country language. In addition, Bulgaria and Lithuania prepared the material in Russian, Italian in French languages. On the migis.eu immigrants will be provided with the information on how to behave at hospital, what to do in the case of their children's illness, where they can learn national language for free, what to do if you want to recognize the qualifications acquired in your home country, how to deal with children in the host country, etc. The international project was implemented under the Erasmus + program KA2 Strategic Partnership Nr. 2016-1-LT01-KA204-023223. The aim of project: to develop the intellectual product, which would improve and extend the offer of learning opportunities for migrants. The partners of the project was: Klaipeda University (Lithuania), Universitatea Stefan cel Mare din Suceava (Romania), PIXEL – Associazione culturale (Italy), Arteveldehogeschool Gent (Belgium), Liepaja University (Latvia), Social – educational initiatives centre PLUS (Lithuania), Shelter Safe House (Latvia), Fundația Euroed (Romania) and Foundation for development of the cultural BPOCS (Bulgaria).

It is often not easy for immigrants who wish to move to another country or who have just arrived to live in Latvia to find information about the country in a language they understand. This is why the project created an Internet platform with information on the Latvian state, its history, traditions and cultural values, education and job opportunities, business start – ups, health system and social security and other topics. The interactive platform was designed so that immigrants of any nationality can easily translate this material into one of the languages of the participating countries (Belgium, Romania, Lithuania, Italy,

Bulgaria and Latvia). In order to create the interactive Internet platform envisaged in the project, 3 tasks were set out (search of innovative ideas, Development of the educational tool and Product testing and dissemination).

**1. Search of inovative ideas**

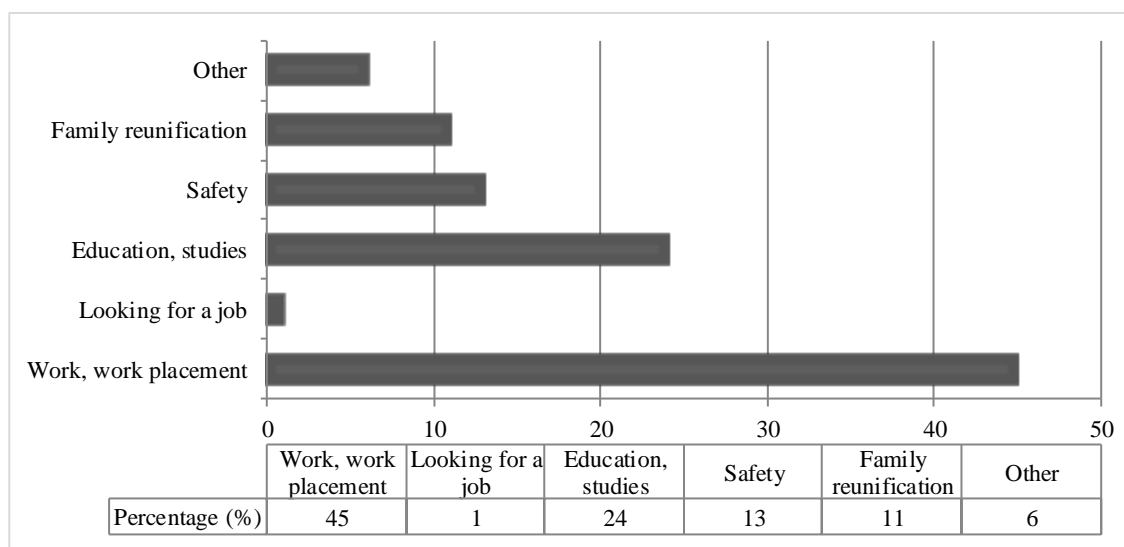
In this phase the study about the partner countries and other European Union immigrants' educational traditions will be collected, also best practices of immigrants' education will be taken into account (especially focusing on the education of the first year immigrants). This study will be based on the opinion of immigrants and immigrants' educators in participating countries (survey with 200 immigrants in each participating country and 15 interviews with immigrants' educators working in different institutions). The aim of these two methods is to investigate what are the specific needs of both immigrants' educators and immigrants.

The follow – up to this article presents some of the results of the study, which is based on data collected in Latvia. The results of the survey are available at the Institute of Educational Sciences of Liepaja University.

- Were distributed 300 questionnaires, filled in 200.
- 53% of respondents – male; 47% – female.
- Average age of respondents – 29,9
- Nationality (or citizenship as it was requested in the questionnaire):

China – 1, Turkey – 2, Bulgaria – 2, Lithuania – 10, Nepal – 2, Ukraine – 49, Columbia – 1, Egypt – 2, Indian – 17, Thai – 1, Russian – 46, Palestine – 2, Uzbekistan – 2, Kazakhstan – 6, Moldova – 4, Georgia – 4, Belarus – 20, Armenia – 6, Sri Lanka – 1, Pakistan – 8, Azerbaijan – 2, Eritrea – 2, Afghanistan – 5, Tadzhikistan – 4, Algeria – 1.

The main reasons for migrant coming to Latvia are shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 Respondents` main reasons for coming to Latvia*

## 2. Development of the educational tools

The aim of this phase II is to develop unique innovative educational tools to acquire basic knowledge and understanding about host country's sociocultural life. For this purpose moderating partner will prepare the core tools which is called main body. This main body will consist of optimum topics and themes, on the bases of which other responsible partners will fill these topics with information from their countries peculiarities of the host country's sociocultural life for immigrants. Comparative views of migrants and teachers are presented comparing the results obtained in Latvia (table 1).

Table 1 What kind of information they lacked the most when arrived to the country?

Kind of information	Number of respondents (answers of migrants)	Number of respondents (answers of educators)
Latvian history	34	8
People (residents) and their main traditions	60	9
The main social demographic characteristics	7	1
Political System	19	2
Economic System	38	6
Employment legislation	91	7
Ability to learn the official language	70	7
Health Care	85	9
Education System	31	7
Culture 38 19	38	7
Food and culinary traditions	37	3
Leisure	30	5
Security	34	6
Quality of service	19	4
Geography, climate conditions	7	7
The main national and local holidays	23	7

Survey data show that 43% of the immigrants surveyed live alone or are married – 44%. Asked if any information about Latvia has been obtained previously: 13% of the answers indicated no information and 39% of the answers indicated that there was little information about Latvia. When asked if they would like to receive some information about Latvia before arriving in their country of residence, 47% of the respondents approve the offer, indicating that they lacked information about the country. When asked where home? information was obtained, the internet and friends (other immigrants or locals) were identified as the main contributors. The findings prompted the project members to develop a single e – platform on topical issues for migrants.

Characterizing teachers who work with immigrants, the study found that not everyone was willing to share information without explaining the reasons.

### **3. Product testing and dissemination**

During this phase created packages of the educational tools will be presented to immigrants' educators, tested on immigrants and improved. Educators from each country (from participating institutions) will be asked to participate in the training for trainers' activity, during which educational tools for immigrants will be presented. Also teachers will be taught to use these tools, same as how to use the e – platform. During this last phase of the project educational tool is improved on the bases of the migrants' and migrants' educators' suggestions and opinions. The final version of the educational tool will be presented in the e – platform in English and national languages of the partners.

The authors made testing with 34 immigrants. Almost all positions in each questionnaire are evaluated as „very good“. Everyone will definitely suggest migis.eu to other immigrants. Just some of the respondents would recommend to make such information also in Russian. Videos and pictures quality evaluated as very good and very interesting presented. Just some of the respondents marked that there were problems with some videos opening via phone. And some links on page migis.eu did not work at all. Immigrants advice recommendation was to make own channel on YouTube to manage the availability of each video. Few of the respondents emphasized that they gained a lot of new and interesting information about different countries, like already have visited each country. Each respondent admitted finding information that they were looking for. However, there was too much information, respondents would recommended to check all textual information and leave the necessary one.

At the end of the project innovative educational tools based on digital technology for immigrants to acquire basic knowledge and understanding about host country's sociocultural life will be created and tested. Easy to understand tools for all immigrants and their educators will help them to integrate into a host society.

Developing an informative learning platform, the project partner countries assessed the Internet resources available in each country in the national language and English, focusing on the relevance of the information to the appropriate target group.

## **Conclusions**

1. The European migration crisis and its consequences are the challenge for the Europeans today, so we can contribute to European solidarity, respect



for human rights and unity – to manage the myriad social, economic, political, legal and humanitarian implications that come from the mass exodus of millions of people. Providing migrants with all sorts of support is a challenge for us as Europeans in providing financial assistance, productive training in the context of lifelong learning, a haven in our country where migrants can fully integrate into the local community and into the labor market.

2. Characterizing the migration crisis in Europe in the framework of an international pilot project, each project member countries (Belgium, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania) sought its own solution to the issue and to the development of civil society, distinguishing between two main groups – migrants and asylum seekers – offering their own norms. In the context of lifelong learning, there is a common need for both target groups, namely general information on the host country.
3. A good practice example (international pilot project) highlighted the following social portrait of respondents: average age 29.9, coming to Latvia to look for a job 45% or 24% study, 44% married or living alone, 39% have little information about Latvia or in 13% of cases there has been no information, in 93% of cases migrants want to get some information about Latvia. The Internet and friends (other immigrants or residents) are mentioned as the most popular sources of information.
4. The experience of migrant teachers shows that integration and education issues are particularly important in the first year since arriving in Latvia, focusing on learning the state language, providing a place to live, and providing direct support in a specific life situation. At this stage, especially important provide professionally oriented and accessible lifelong learning, which can contribute to the better integration of migrants into the local community and the labor market.
5. According to the respondents, the efforts of the project Member States to create a single e – platform migis.eu, which brings together the most important information on the host countries, is commendable. The resulting information platform is expandable, focusing on future video and image quality technical solutions, translations into other languages such as Russian. As a separate target group, non – English speaking asylum seekers, who need information on a potential host country, appeared in the project.

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