



**Policy Brief**

POLICY@SUSSEX | SPRING 2017



**English language for resettled refugees**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Research conducted at the University of Sussex finds that the very diverse needs of resettled refugees in the UK are not being met in relation to English language learning. There is also a great diversity in educational background and employment outlook. Learning English is considered essential for social integration yet there is no national strategy and success is a very hit or miss affair. Contact with English speakers alone does not facilitate language development. Instead, refugees need to develop their language skills before meaningful contacts can be made. Other benefits of learning English include:

- increased confidence in engaging with public services
- improved quality of contact experiences with other people in the UK
- empowerment and greater belief in their own abilities
- greater job satisfaction and satisfaction with education in the UK
- better health

This is the first longitudinal study of its kind and took place over three years. A key finding is that higher levels of English language can increase refugee well-being. Certain groups tend to have lower English language proficiency: women, older refugees, those with limited pre-migration education and those with poor health. These groups face particular challenges, are most likely to struggle to learn English and are most at risk of exclusion. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes are essential to enable contact and integration.

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**Key findings**

- Resettled refugees are a diverse group with wide-ranging language-learning needs that are not being met
- Day-to-day social contact alone is not sufficient to learn English
- English Language skills lead to more contact with other communities
- The most vulnerable refugees struggle to attend classes
- Accessible English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes are needed by all and not just those on work-related benefits
- Intensive, tailored courses are needed
- Higher-level and fast-track (ESOL) courses should be provided for those that need them for faster employment prospects

**DEFINITION OF RESETTLED REFUGEES**

Since those who enter the UK as asylum seekers, resettled refugees have rights to study English in UK classes on arrival and therefore have access to English language classes. The two main resettlement programmes in the UK are the United Kingdom Programme and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme.

**AUTHORS**

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“Better language skills lead to more contact with the host community and more contact leads to greater well-being among the refugees. The reverse is not true.”

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=policy-brief-on-language.pdf&site=252>

Recognition of the socio-cultural nature of language learning encourages us to develop models of language learning that go beyond the classroom and support adult migrants in developing the language that they need to engage in the sociocultural practices that are important to them.





Formal classroom language learning has an important role to play in supporting language acquisition, but language learning does not only happen as a direct result of language teaching.

Much learning of the host language takes place informally through engagement with the demands of daily life.



# Introduction



## Working with volunteers in migrant language education: roles and competences (VIME)

- European Commission
- Erasmus +
- KA2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices: Strategic Partnerships for adult education
- 2016 – 2018
- England, Denmark, The Netherlands, Slovenia



## Objectives



To develop a model that:

- identifies specific roles and tasks within within the language learning process of migrants;
- defines the competences, knowledge and skills required for each role or task
- suggests ways to maximise the positive impact of volunteers within the migrant language learning journey.



# VIME Partners



VIME works in four countries: Denmark, England, The Netherlands, and Slovenia. In each country there are two partners: a practice partner engaged in teaching and learning of the host language for adult migrants; and a university partner with expertise in this area.

## The Netherlands:

- ITTA UvA BV (co-ordinator)
- Stichting Het Begint met Taal,
- Stichting ROC West-Brabant,

## Denmark:

- Slagelse Sprogcenter,

## England:

- UCL Institute of Education;
- East London Advanced Technology Training

## Slovenia:

- Center of Slovene as a Second and Foreign Language, University of Ljubljana;
- Žalec Adult Education Centre



## VIME Data



- In each country partners carried out 24 interviews/focus groups with:
  - Learners
  - Volunteers
  - Teachers
  - Policy makers/providers
- The interviews followed a common interview protocol and reporting template.
- This presentation is based on preliminary analysis of the data collected.



## Some considerations



- Volunteer as an economic description
  - Someone carrying out a role without pay
- Informal language learning
  - Multilingualism, translanguaging.



# Learning goals



# Activity domains

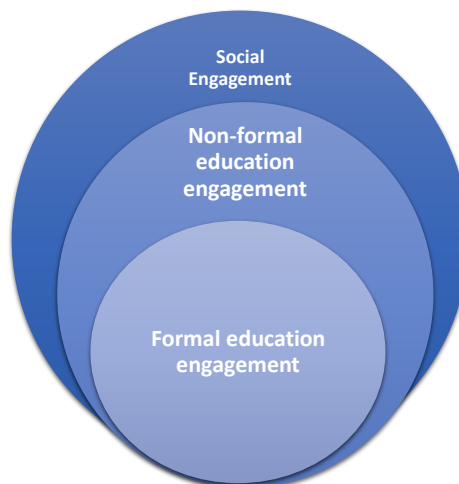


The migrant language learning activity we have observed can be described as taking place within three distinct domains:

- Formal education engagement
- Non-formal educational engagement
- Social engagement

Fuzzy boundaries

Descriptive, not prescriptive



## A. Formal education engagement

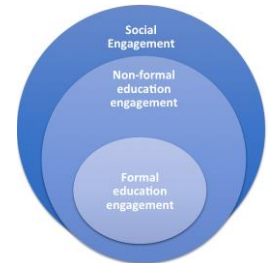
### Formal classroom teacher

- Group learning,
- Leads to recognized qualifications as part of a formal education pathway,
- Taught by qualified teacher

### Teaching assistant

- In-class/out-of-class.
- Coordinated by teacher?

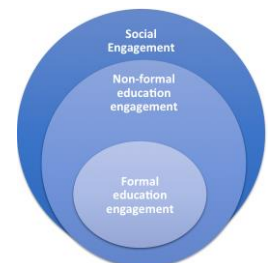
Facilitation of differentiation and practice of language learnt in the formal class.



## B. Non-formal educational engagement

- Timetabled / Drop-in
- One to one or in small groups
- Oral skills / practice
- Homework support
- Volunteers working under supervision / independently
- No formal curriculum / accreditation

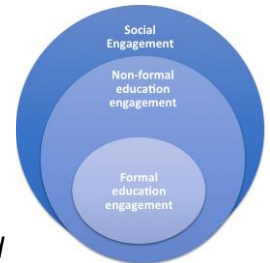
*“With official teacher we learn systematically, with volunteers we talk [conversation] and repeat and play games. I find it important that teachers and volunteers cooperate.”* Learner Slovenia



## C. Social engagement

- No explicit language learning goal – opportunities for use
- Social support: cooking clubs, gardening groups, choirs, drop in cafes providing help with forms/official letters etc. or just someone to talk to.
- Cultural integration: opening a window to society: often a cultural focus with visits to local places of interest, explanations of local holidays and customs etc.

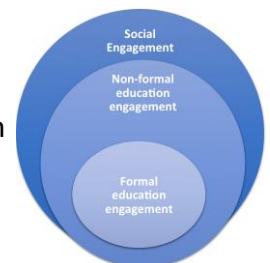
*“Volunteers have taught me about laws and regulations – new things i.e. about cycling, understanding culture, visits to museums and churches, about Denmark and songs from the main festivals and days of celebration.” Danish learner*



## C. Social engagement

- Shared social space – community/other learning.
- Role as facilitator/companion
- Learners as volunteers.

*“According to my experience, migrants really appreciate the fact that you’re exactly the same as they are – a human being.” Slovenian teacher*



# Outreach



“...a process that involves going out from a specific organisation or centre to work in other locations with sets of people who typically do not or cannot avail themselves of (make use of) the services of that centre”

Staff activity: “to physically go outside the institution”,

Marketing or recruitment strategy "activities to make people in different locations or groups aware of what an organisation or centre can offer;

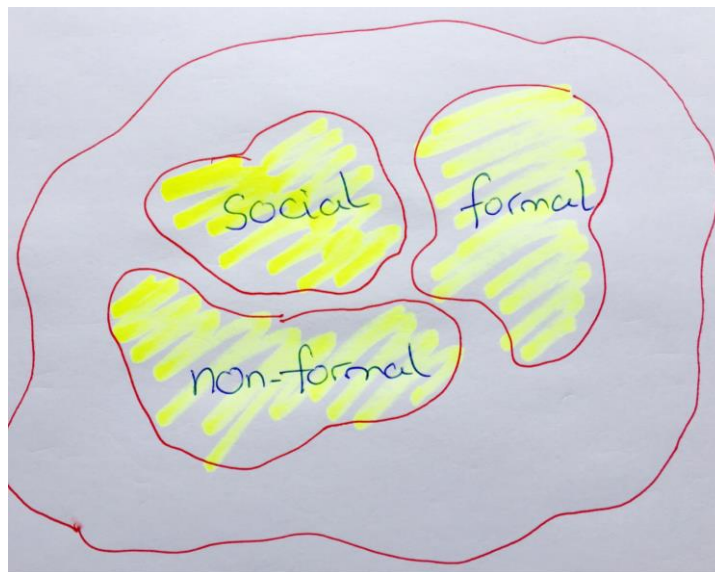
Delivery mechanism “provision of learning programmes in informal community locations (); liaison and contact with other organisations or particular sets of people (a networking activity); working in particular ways with people outside the main centre or institution (a method or approach).



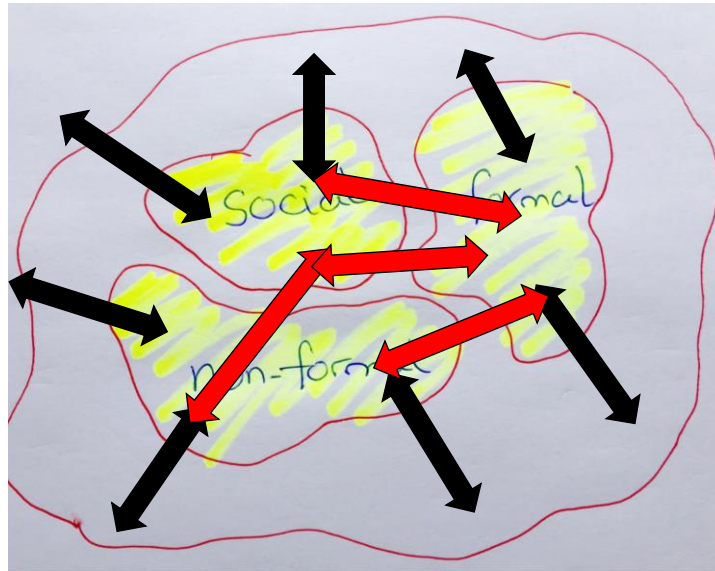
McGivney V. Recovering Outreach: Concepts, Issues and Practices. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (UK); 2000.



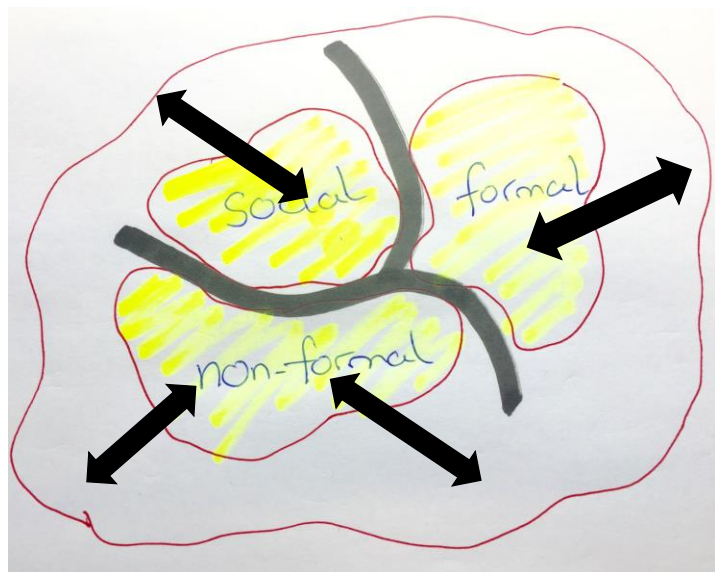
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In attempting to meet the language learning needs of adult migrants we should not take a limited view of language learning. We should not make the mistake of imagining that there is a direct relationship between teaching and learning and that only within a formal language learning paradigm can a language be learnt.



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While formal learning has an important role to play, not only does it require very specific competences of the teacher, competences that volunteer are unlikely to have, it also limits the way in which we make use of the qualities of the volunteer and the ways in which those qualities might be better suited to supporting their language and social integration.





To design interventions to support language learning for adult migrants we need to look beyond the paradigm of the formal language-learning classroom, and recognize that there are other ways to support language acquisition. Rather than using volunteers to replicate a formal model of language learning we should use them to create opportunities for language use alongside and in support of that formal language learning.



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