

Promoting Dynamic Integration in Europe

Language & Integration



Language is an essential tool in not only building social connections but is relevant to most aspects of integration. Therefore the role of language in integration was touched on in many different aspects of FOCUS' work. This policy note points to some of the relevant findings and implications for policy and practice in relation to the role of language.

What do we mean by dynamic integration?

"In the EU context, a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States."

Action 1, section 2 of Communication on a Common Agenda for Integration, COM(2005) 389 final

FOCUS is an international consortium funded by the European Commission which has undertaken the first research programme looking at both socioeconomic and sociopsychological dimensions of integration. In particular, this research has explored integration with post-2015 refugees from Syria and the communities where they now reside.

Results show very high levels of support amongst both receiving and arriving communities for the idea of integration and important findings which show positive developments, there are many issues to be addressed before the potential for integration can be more fully realised. Language emerged in each element of the research programme as an important issue.

Overall, findings in relation to language show it as a crucial aspect of both socio-economic and socio-psychological integration. Its importance is emphasised by both receiving and arriving communities, it is significantly linked to the readiness to engage in close intergroup relationships, and is strongly related to the perceptions by refugees of their membership of the society they live in. However, the restricted ability to use their native language where this would be enabling for them, together with other factors, reinforce the need to see the wider role of language in integration. These findings have important implications for both policy and practice.

In previous research, language is widely identified as being linked to a range of socio-economic and socio-psychological aspects of integration. In the core integration framework used to help guide FOCUS (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019) it is included as a **'facilitator' of integration** which gives access to the key 'means and markers' of integration, and **enables the forming of 'social connections'**.

FOCUS FIELD STUDIES

Over 5,000 people participated in extensive **qualitative and quantitative studies** undertaken in Germany, Sweden, Croatia and Jordan. The research was carried out with post-2015 refugees from Syria (the arriving community) and the longer-term residents of the cities where they now live (the receiving community). In the quantitative surveys levels of language competence were explored and language emerged as a consistent theme in the focus groups. These qualitative insights were particularly valuable as they provided a fuller understanding of how language is used both as a facilitator of integration and a practical barrier.

- ◆ Language is viewed by both communities as central to integration with refugees actively engaging with efforts to learn the new language when opportunities are available.



- ◆ Language proficiency is a significant predictor of social proximity of refugees toward the receiving community members, and their sense of societal membership.
- ◆ The level of language proficiency achieved in the local language is linked to the quality and availability of language courses and motivation to remain in the country.
- ◆ Results showed near universal participation in language courses where these were available as part of the state-sponsored initial reception programmes. The lack of longer-term language support is a direct hindrance from deepening language competence.
- ◆ Language proficiency does not in itself break down structural and institutional barriers when accessing the labour market, and can be used as a barrier when required for positions where it is not essential to performing the role.
- ◆ There is little evident reciprocity amongst receiving community members in terms of acknowledging the importance of the arriving community's language or how the use of the native language might be beneficial in particular situations.
- ◆ In Jordan, while language proficiency was not an issue, some arriving community members considered that speaking the Jordanian dialect of Arabic would be a help to them. In the European sites, speaking with an accent was felt to encourage racist and discriminatory behaviours.

See FOCUS's **qualitative and quantitative field studies in detail** [here](#).

FOCUS PRACTICE & POLICY WORK

A core part of FOCUS's work has been to engage with what is a diverse community of policy and practice – identifying effective practices and aiding a more systematic engagement with 'what matters' and 'what works' in the field of integration. The key output of this work is the [FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration](#).

The FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration is a practical framework to strengthen existing promising integration practices and support the development of new ones.

At its core is the idea of fostering social bonds, connections, and bridges among arriving and receiving communities. The FOCUS Approach highlights key elements to promote trust and reciprocity, social connectedness, wellbeing, resilience and a sense of belonging of all community members.

Read more and find further resources on the different dimensions of the FOCUS Approach in the [Living Well Together Resource](#).



Validation of the Approach as a means of developing, implementing and evaluating integration practices was carried out in a series of five [practice case studies](#).

In some of the case studies the use of Arabic-speaking facilitators with a migratory background made a very positive contribution in enhancing the accessibility and engagement with programmes.

- ◆ In Sweden, a civic and health communication for the arriving community members was significantly enhanced by the use of facilitators with migratory background speaking in their mother tongue. The Civic and Health Communicators (CHCs) were acting as a social bridge between arriving and receiving communities. Swedish Case study summary

- ◆ In Denmark, a programme to aid integration for migrant women was felt to increase its impact through having some discussions in Arabic. Danish Case study summary
- ◆ In Austria, the development of an Arabic-language podcast aided members of the arriving community in engaging with the process of seeking international protection. Austrian case study summary

Overall, in no case did the use of Arabic undermine motivation to learn the receiving community's language, rather it enhanced the sense of belonging and provided opportunities to seek to develop new language competencies.

The FOCUS approach is operationalised in the [Implementation Guide to Dynamic Integration](#); a practical guide developed in a co-creative process by and for policy makers, civil society organisations and local communities. The guide was co- designed to help integration practitioners understand important dimensions of dynamic integration and how to implement them, both in programme and policy development.

Read and download the full **FOCUS Implementation Guidance** [here](#).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Language is a core element of dynamic integration and needs to be addressed in a more comprehensive and flexible way.

- ◆ Quality language courses in the early phase of integration are essential. There is substantial unmet demand from arriving community members for language courses and an eagerness to seek to continue to increase fluency. A significant increase in the availability of language courses beyond the early reception phase would likely aid increased bridging between the communities and enhance integration.
- ◆ The weak link between language competence and socio-economic outcomes should be investigated further especially in terms of structural issues. As part of this, relevant authorities and networks should be requested to monitor the application of unreasonably high language proficiency standards in order to access some employment and training positions.
- ◆ Authorities should review their policies towards making provision for the languages of arriving community members in important services and integration practices. The availability of this language support would directly enhance the achievement of integration goals.
- ◆ For the receiving community, programmes which give them a basic appreciation of the languages of arriving community members and for their multi-lingualism should be supported.

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