



Better Education of (young) TCNs as Basis for Economic and Social Integration in Rural Areas

MATILDE Policy Brief 4

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INTRODUCTION

Especially in a knowledge and information society, education is an important prerequisite for the social, economic and cultural participation of each individual. The successful promotion of knowledge and education contributes significantly to securing personal development, quality of life, employment and future prospects for each individual. Exploiting the educational potential of migrants is a particular challenge in this context and plays a significant role in all sectors of education. Social and economic inclusion is a necessity for the functioning of a diverse society and can be significantly advanced through education, not only by providing the necessary language skills, but above all by improving opportunities for social and economic participation (Ruttensteiner-Poller 2017, p. 82-85).

When it comes to the topic of education of third-country nationals (TCNs) the MATILDE regions Austria (AT), Bulgaria (BG), Germany (DE), Finland (FI), Italy (IT), Norway (NO), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Turkey (TR), and United Kingdom (UK)¹ face several challenges such as a **lower education level among TCNs** coupled with difficulties in **accessing education for TCNs and their children** as well as a **lack of language courses**. This situation is a vicious circle, as the language of the receiving country is also a (necessary) key for acquiring further qualifications in order to be better placed in the labour market of the respective country. In addition to formal qualifications, it is also a matter of recognising and evaluating informal and non-formal qualifications in order to identify and develop potentials with regard to the needs of the local and regional labour market and to create employment opportunities.

The goal must be to create an equitable, accessible and inclusive education system that provides everyone with the same individual and best possible support and offers them the opportunity to develop – also in rural and mountainous regions. Education should be understood as a holistic, lifelong process that enables participation and equal opportunities regardless of social or ethnic background (European Commission 2022; Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung 2021a).

In this fourth policy brief, we present policy recommendations to create good conditions for education and qualification for TCNs and their children as well as how to strengthen the labour markets of the MATILDE regions and the TCNs economic independence. In addition, we will discuss required framework conditions in order to profit from the benefits of a strategic education offer for TCNs and their children.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

The main problems and policy recommendation of every MATILDE country are the outcomes of a **continuing analysis process with a multidimensional approach** basing on the results of the previous work packages and policy roundtables with stakeholders at different governmental levels². A **qualitative content analysis after Mayring (2000)** of the policy recommendation reports was conducted with dual control principle of the coding. At this stage of analysis, the focus was to identify the most important problems, based on the quantity of coding, in the MATILDE regions. Out of numerous challenges in the areas of integration, corresponding with the integration model after Ager and Strang (2008), the **four with the highest quantity of coding** were selected and refer to the integration areas of rural development, economy and employment, rights and citizenship as well as education. These four topics as well as the related policy recommendations and solutions were **further analysed and clustered in sub topics**. Hence, the four policy briefs base on the results of a qualitative content analysis. In the policy briefs, the arguments are linked to the mentioned MATILDE countries and regions, and good practices as well as possible solutions are presented. The fourth policy brief is dedicated to education and what framework conditions are needed for TCNs and their children to bridge educational gaps and acquire the language skills to contribute to the labour market needs of the respective country.

EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE SKILLS: PROBLEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The aforementioned specific challenges of the education and language situation in rural and mountainous regions across Europe were discussed in several interviews, focus groups and action research activities in the previous work packages as well as in the MATILDE Regional Policy Roundtables. TCNs find themselves in a situation where, in contrast to natives, they often have a lower formalised level of education, but frequently acquired some informal and non-formal qualifications and competences as well as professional experience, which are, however, not recognised. Learning the language of the host country is the key to integration (Council of Europe 2022; ÖIF n.y.; WöBmann 2016), but requires time and above all practice. In many MATILDE regions, especially in rural areas, there is a problem of a lack of courses and insufficient opportunities to use the language in everyday life, which has a negative impact on educational as well as labour market opportunities. Furthermore, appropriate framework conditions and infrastructure are needed to enable TCNs, especially migrant women, to participate in education, training programmes and language courses, which is often hampered by long travel times from remote homes due to inadequate public transport or insufficient infrastructure.



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Lack of formal qualification of TCNs and unseen potentials for the labour market

The basic problem leads to the **de facto exclusion of low-skilled TCNs from the labour market, which is in turn intensifying the labour shortage** by which several MATILDE regions are affected³. In addition, and in line with the labour shortage, there is a **lack of coordination about TCNs potentials and existing knowledge gaps** as well as a **lack of support for TCNs in school and education**. This means that TCNs often do not receive the education they need and which is missing at the labour market, as it is the case e.g. in Austria. The named challenges also lead to a **lack of encounter and opportunities for learning and improving the language competencies**, as it is pointed out e.g. for Sweden and Austria.

In addition, during the Austrian roundtable, it was discussed that the **public integration efforts focus almost exclusively on (highly) qualified migrants**. For the majority of TCNs, there is a **lack of recognition of qualifications** or these are too restrictive, time-consuming and bureaucratic. Also, in Norway, mapping of both formal and informal skills of immigrants is a lengthy process which imposes certain limitations for TCNs' employment opportunities. From the TCNs' point of view, this leads to a restricted access to the labour market and continued economic dependency, which in turn promotes a deeper lack of workforce on the labour market. In order to counteract this process, a **quick recognition of existing qualifications** is needed as pointed out by the MATILDE regions in Austria and Norway. In Austria, for example, for the recognition of academic degrees and academic titles, the National Information Centre for Academic Recognition, ENIC NARIC AUSTRIA, has been implemented since several years. (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung 2021b).

In Norway, on the other hand, the **Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT n.y.)** contributes, among others, to recognize whether vocational education and training obtained abroad can be comparable to Norwegian craft and journeyman's certificates⁴.

¹ Short references to the specific MATILDE countries/regions are made via country codes in brackets. For the detailed country and regional reports please refer to the bibliography.
² The analysis processes result in country reports with defined policy problems and validated policy recommendations.

³ For details, see also Policy Brief "Migration as a Chance for Rural Economies".
⁴ For details, see also Policy Brief "Migration as a Chance for Rural Economies".

However, **migrants without formal qualifications and certificates** face entirely different challenges, as their **lack of formalized qualification** become a barrier to labour market participation, even in professions in which they have several years of prior work experience, but lack the formalized skills to execute. An important barrier to labour market participation, as reported by the informants, was thus the lack of formalized qualifications.

To address this, there is a need, as reported by Norway and Austria, for **more structured support and recognition procedures for formal as well as informal and non-formal qualifications**. Structured support and recognition procedures to assist immigrants to have their formal, informal and non-formal competences evaluated and recognized, thus can be an important solution to facilitate a quicker transition into the labour market. The target group of such a policy would be immigrants who possess skills and competencies but lack the formalized qualifications required to practice their craft or to partake in further education in the new country of residence. During the Austrian policy roundtable, it was recommended to **create an institution responsible for the evaluation and recognition of practical, non-formalised skills** (not just academic degrees, as mentioned before), in order to save time and costs and to minimise bureaucracy.

Insufficient Access to Education Opportunities and Language Courses

Building on the recommendation of the assessment of formal, informal and non-formal competences by a competent institution, **TCNs' access to education and training** should be promoted. Opportunities should be created for TCNs to acquire missing qualifications or to upgrade their skills in order to improve their employment opportunities (AT, NO, TR). Therefore, the **supply of education and language courses** should be **promoted**, which are also adapted to the needs of the local labour and regional markets (AT, DE, ES, IT, SE).

During the German policy roundtable it was emphasised by the stakeholders that **target group-specific educational offers** for all migrants are central, which is why **specific educational offers for migrants**, such as the Carinthian (AT) project **"A.Life"**⁵ (Diakonie n.y) are needed more often. As Italy puts it more holistically, this could be implemented through a **community strategy consisting of flexible and inclusive education and training as well as formative activities accompanied by psychological support**. These offers should be attractive to the rural population in general, as it was emphasized by Sweden, since all would benefit from improved access to education. The following good practice-examples from Norway and Spain provide a possible approach to tackle this problem.

The Norwegian parliament decided in 2021 that **module-based education** will be the future model for adult education. This model with the title **„Modulforsøket“** ("The Module Pilot Project") (ideas2evidence n.y) is being piloted and tested in the period 2017-2023. In the pilot project, local adult education centres work together with participants with limited Norwegian proficiency to develop a **tailor-made qualification programme based on the competences, qualifications and needs of the individual participants**, which in the end can lead to a formal certificate of competence (trade certificate). The flexibility of the programme allows participants to **combine previous experience and skills more easily with elements (modules) of formal education programmes**. This is important for immigrants as it allows the development of further formal qualifications over time in combination with work experience and language skills.



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So far, the experience from the pilots has been positive and it is expected that this will become the new 'norm' in adult education perhaps not only in Norway, helping to improve access to educational opportunities for TCNs in rural areas. The recommendation from the Norwegian policy roundtable for policy makers was to **continue these experiments with module-based vocational training and to continue systematic evaluation as a basis for implementation and scaling beyond the pilots**.

Furthermore, there is a good practice in Spain that has been existing since the 1980s in the form of so-called **Adult Education Centres** (CPEPA 2022). They are public services for training people over 18 and for minors with a work contract. Participants (not only targeted at the immigrant population, but also at locals) can obtain an official qualification, **improve their basic education and promote professional integration**. According to Spain, the autonomy of these centres should be **increased in order to expand their training offer** to other topics related to labour demand at the local level. Funding could be provided by the districts in coordination with the municipalities. In order to adapt the training to the sectors with the greatest economic activity in rural areas and to address their needs more efficiently, **vocational training courses should be planned which consider the proposal of employers in those areas**.

Another issue discussed during most of the MATILDE policy roundtables was **language acquisition and access to language courses**. Migrants' opportunities for work depend highly on their language skills and the improvement of the language expands not only the chances for labour integration, but also social integration. However, in many MATILDE regions there is a **lack of language courses**, although migrants are eager to learn the language (AT, BG, ES, SE). During the Norwegian policy roundtable, it was discussed that for many immigrants **their educational progress is delayed** as they are forced to interrupt their education until they have acquired sufficient Norwegian language skills to be able to follow classes. Thus, the recommendation of the MATILDE regions is to **increase the availability and accessibility of language courses in rural and peripheral municipalities** as well as to **increase the offer of special language courses** (e.g. construction industry or nursing).

Finland has an innovative approach to this, but still faces some hurdles in practice. As the issue of **work life integrated language education** was discussed in multiple interviews and focus groups in Finland, the **new curriculum for the integration education program** (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022) is coming into effect in August 2022 and it contains more work-based integrated learning. However, as we learn from Finland, the problem with the new curriculum for small and rural municipalities is that they often **lack both, the on-the-job learning positions and the resources to help the immigrants find those opportunities**.

Lack of Access for Child Care and Schools affecting (young) TCNs' education and integration paths

Child care was discussed many times in the MATILDE regions (AT, BG, DE, TR). On the one hand, the **lack of access to child care** significantly **influences the level and possibility of participation of migrant women in particular** in education, training programmes and language courses. On the other hand, there are framework conditions of child care facilities and schools in which migrant and refugee children are cared for.

In Austria, childcare is a big issue. In the case study region of Villach, for example, places offered for 1,141 children aged 3-6 years. However, in the years 2016 to 2021, an average of 2,121 children aged 3-6 years lived in Villach (Statistik Austria 2022). This means that there are about 1,000 children more than kindergarten places. This lack of (full-day) kindergarten places as well as the lack of afternoon care services **hinders the social integration of migrant children and their mothers** and also makes their language acquisition more difficult. For many mothers and single parents, adequate **childcare is also a prerequisite for participating in language and integration courses**, if they are not connected to a childcare facility. The condition of kindergarten places for participation in language and integration courses can become a vicious circle for mothers and single parents, as course times often do not fit into kindergarten or school opening hours, as the examples from Austria and Germany have shown.

During the German roundtable, participants requested that the status quo of language and integration courses as well as childcare facilities should be evaluated in order to better adapt them to the participants' possibilities, also in relation to rural and mountainous areas often characterised by poor infrastructure coupled with insufficient public transport. Hence, as the examples of Austria and Germany show, the expansion of childcare provision is recommended, in order to be able to offer every child a guaranteed place. In addition, **services need to be expanded and adapted**: longer opening hours, flexible pick-up times and price scales to meet the demands of the labour market and to increase the compatibility of education/work and family life as well as access to the labour market for (migrant) mothers, in order to increase also the social integration of their children.

Aside from childcare for youngsters, also the education of migrant children should be in focus. Following the departure from the country of origin, migrant and **refugee children suffer from the forced interruption of their education**. All the more important is, as it was pointed out for Turkey, that children benefit from primary and secondary education of a satisfactory quality. Also, in the German case study region the securing of places in all-day care and school infrastructures was discussed as a way of promoting social integration and providing children with education.

However, there is also a need for additional staff for kindergartens and schools as well as smaller group and class sizes to improve the ratio of caregivers to children in order to deal with the diversity of children and to be able to help all pupils (AT).

Apart from the quantity of teaching staff, a lack of knowledge in the context of multilingualism, integration and inclusion was also assessed negatively during the roundtables in Austria and Germany. Therefore, it is recommended to **promote the training and qualification of existing and prospective educators and teachers**. The curriculum of pedagogical staff could be expanded to include **qualification measures for language education and promotion in the context of migration-related multilingualism, diversity and interculturality**, as it was also emphasized in addition by Bulgaria. Bulgaria also recommends that psychological support and interventions should be integrated better into the daily routines of childcare and school life to meet the needs, especially of refugee children, who often have experienced trauma. As this requires additional professional care the role of educators and psychologists should be strengthened to support the well-being of children and thus improve their quality of life and future development. This policy recommendation requires a **strategy of training school staff to implement practices that proved to be effective in other European countries** for the inclusion of migrant children such as for example **“Interactive groups”** in which children learn in groups through dynamic communication with each other or **“Expressive Therapy”** which includes (psychosocial) activities organized for TCNs and refugee children like theatre, art, and music workshops.

CONCLUSION

TCNs in MATILDE regions are often facing a vicious circle when it comes to education, language training and child care, as these three areas are mutually dependent and influence each other.

It starts with the **lack of formal qualifications** that prevent TCNs from accessing the labour market, even if they may also have skills and experience. What is needed here is an **institution responsible for evaluating formal, informal and non-formal qualifications**. As a result, there should be **individual and target group-specific training measures** that are also adapted to the **needs of the labour market**.

Access to such tailor-made educational opportunities must be promoted. This needs to be accompanied by an **adequate number of language courses**, as without adequate language skills there will be a delay in the educational process and TCNs will remain economically dependent for longer.

On the one hand, childcare is needed to enable migrants with children, especially mothers, to participate in language and integration courses and educational measures. Here, an **expansion of childcare facilities** with enough places and adapted opening hours is needed to enable migrant women to attend educational measures and thus to integrate socially and economically.

On the other hand, there is also a need to expand childcare to meet the needs of the youngest, the migrant children, to ensure their education and social integration in the new country. This requires a **holistic concept and trained staff** to deal with **diversity, interculturality, multilingualism and also psychological challenges** of some (migrant) children.

By implementing the aforementioned policy recommendations, the vicious circle can be broken and TCNs and their children will be able to integrate socially and economically, potentials can be discovered and promoted and they can provide their labour force, which is urgently needed especially in rural and mountainous regions.



Migration ImpAct assessment To Enhance Integration and Local Development in European rural and mountain regions

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Work Programme

- H2020-EU.3.6.1.1. The mechanisms to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
- H2020-EU.3.6.1.2. Trusted organisations, practices, services and policies that are necessary to build resilient, inclusive, participatory, open and creative societies in Europe, in particular taking into account migration, integration and demographic change

Deliverable 6.3 - Policy briefs for improved governance and policy arrangements

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