

# Language for Work

## New approaches to work-related language learning

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Language for Work Network

<http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>



# Language for Work network

**Learning network** for professionals supporting work-related second language development for adult migrants

120 members from 29 countries

Sponsored by **European Centre for Modern Languages**, Council of Europe

Aim Share expertise, resources to enable effective local responses

## Current project

‘New approaches are emerging across Europe. Some adapt established methodologies. Others are wholly innovative, focusing on non-formal and informal learning.’

Project aims to make approaches more widely available

# What are work-related language skills?

## Language skills to

- **Find suitable employment:** Job-search, CV writing, job applications, interviews, etc.
- **Make a positive contribution at work:** Job-specific tasks, health and safety, team working, quality management, customer care, employment processes, rights, responsibilities
- **Progress and develop:** Formal workplace training, informal on-the-job learning, further vocational education and training outside the workplace

# Why focus on work-related language skills?

## 1. Key enabler of labour market integration: employment, skill utilisation

‘Across Europe, most migrant groups have lower employment rates, and a greater tendency to be overqualified for their jobs, than non-migrants.’

Stirling, A. (2015), *Employment outcomes for migrants in European labour markets*. London: IPPR.

## 2. Over-reliance on pre-employment, generic language courses

‘Generic language courses suffer from two central problems. [They combine] students with mixed educational levels (and thus varying levels of literacy and cognitive ability) ... and they contain little employment-related content.’

Benton, M. (2013), *Maximizing Potential: How countries can address skills deficits within the immigrant workforce*. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute.

## 3. Significant opportunities to broaden support for labour market integration in cost-effective ways

# Why do language courses for migrants fail to develop work-related language skills?

Skills are highly **context-specific**, i.e. depend on

- Vocational area, level
- Communicative demands
- Technology in use
- Work-organisation, job design
- Workplace practices



**Courses would need to focus on specific vocational area – but which?**

**Teachers would need specialist knowledge of vocational areas**

Also **language level required is quite high**

? **CEFR level B1** *‘able to communicate essential points in familiar contexts’*

= Minimum ‘safe’ level to work autonomously in low-skilled job = ?300-500 hrs study

# Which migrants are most in need of support?

## Migrants with limited language, limited financial resources

Arrives → needs income, support network **immediately**

→ Seeks work, friends (support network) **immediately**

→ Work = *job for person with limited language skills*

= *low-paid, low-skilled job*

= *long hours + problems of low income*

→ Friends = *people who speak migrant's language(s)*

Migrant starts language/integration course → finds job, friends → stops course

*No time, energy, money, etc. + no need: is working, has friends*

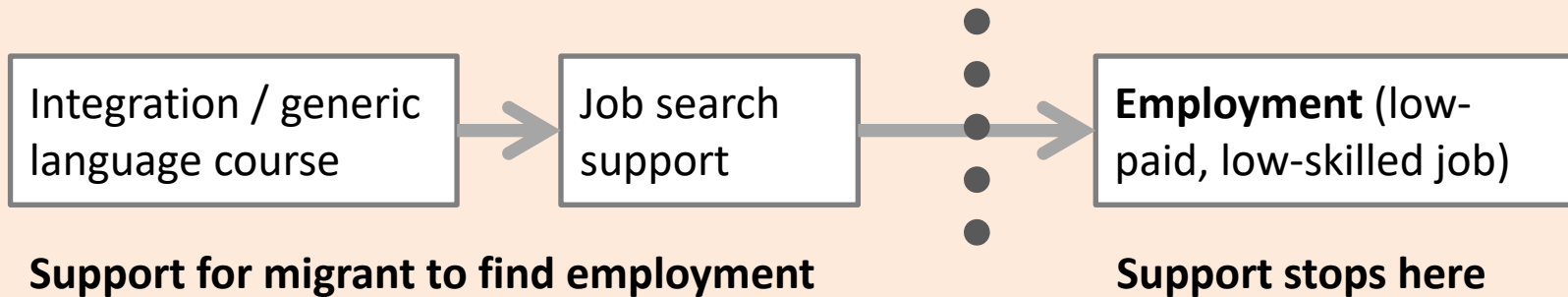
Result = **low-pay, limited-language trap**

→ Limited exposure to language at work, at home

→ Study in **non-working hours** difficult, unattractive

# How can we extend support for migrants?

What happens now



## Opportunities to extend support

Language learning outside of work

- Vocational courses
- Employability courses for job seekers
- Web-enabled self-directed learning

*Opportunity with biggest potential impact*

Language learning **at work**  
for migrants in low-pay, low-skilled employment

# Different perspective: learning (not teaching)

How do adults **learn** another language?

By **using it** for **real-life communication** over an **extended period of time**

- Environmental + personal factors affect how **well** adults learn the language
- **Instruction** can be helpful, but most language learning is **informal** + **self-directed**

## What does the workplace offer?

- **Structured opportunities** for **real-life communication** linked to role & task, team work, customer service, safety & quality management etc.
- **Established systems of support** e.g. management, supervision, teamwork, training, etc.

**Question** How can we realise the potential of work for language learning?



# New approaches

Approaches focus on building **sustainable** (i.e. effective, affordable, scalable) systems of support for workplace communication

*Some examples*

**Sweden ArbetSam approach:** Two new roles created for staff (reflective discussion leader + language champion) to support language development for all staff (migrant + non-migrant)

**UK Learning through Work:** Guided learning materials focused on workplace communication to support on-the-job coaching and mentoring

**Germany Sprachpaten** (Language godparents): Informal language learning support at work from German-speaking colleagues

# What can we learn from these new approaches?

Possible to extend cost-effective support into workplaces via employer systems, based on support for workplace communication

Employer involvement is essential – initiatives must support workplace goals (i.e. safety, quality) and respect workplace constraints (e.g. work pressure)

Make support as inclusive as possible: all low-educated workers will benefit from language development, whether migrant or not

## More generally

Formal instruction is not the only way to support language learning

Share social responsibility for migrant language learning as widely as possible

Digital technology is opening new horizons

# More information, support

## Language for Work network

Join the network as an individual

<http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>

## Council of Europe: LIAM programme

Help for member states to develop **inclusive language policies**

[www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants](http://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants)

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