



L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

The Experience of Language Advising

A summary of the experiences of migrant learners and language advisors during the L2_Paths project

Reference Number: 543020-LLP-1-IT-KA2-KA2MP

Author: Phillip James, Translex

L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

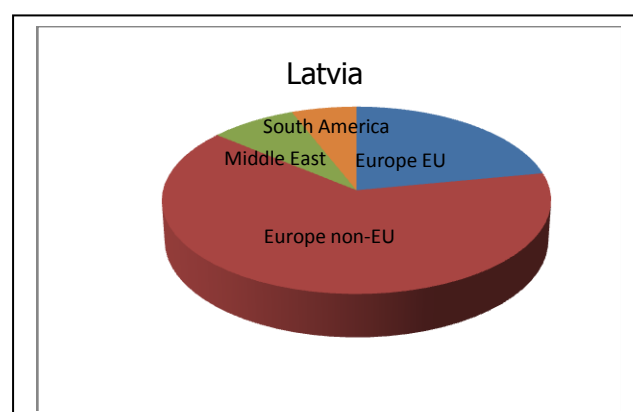
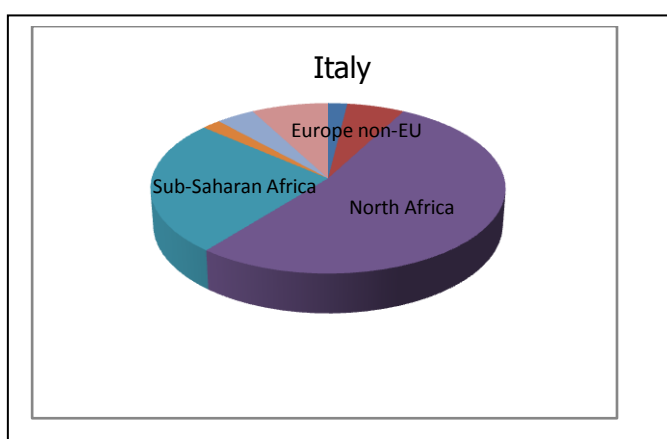
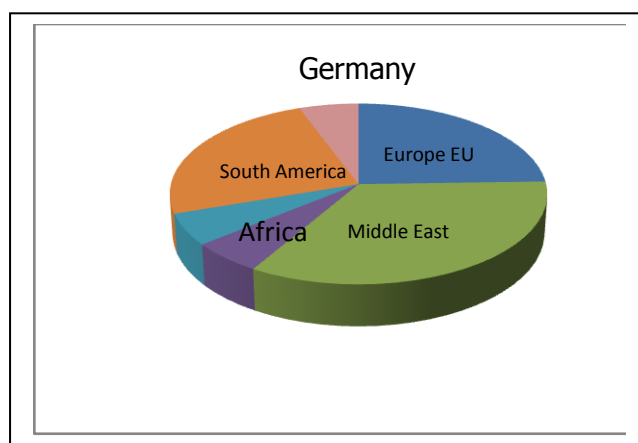
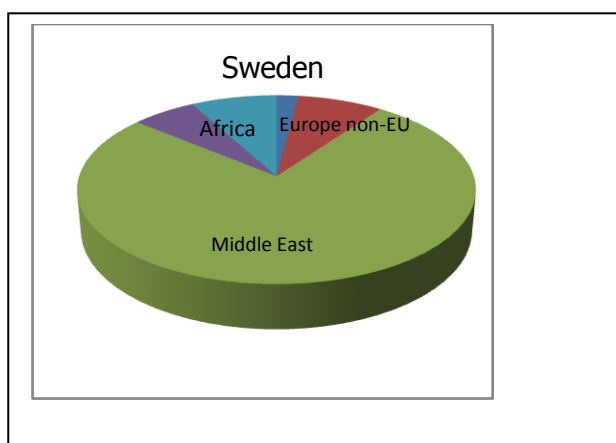
A major part of the L2_Paths Project was to conduct a large number of advice sessions with real migrant learners once a cadre of language advisors had been trained. This report summarises the two hundred and fifty sessions that took place across five countries during the project. Three different types of data from these sessions are presented and analysed in this report:

1. Descriptive data – information from all two hundred and fifty advice sessions was captured on spreadsheets which could then be tabulated and the results graphed. The country spreadsheets can be viewed in the project documents.
2. Subjective data - Twenty-five case studies about the advice sessions were written
3. The impressions, tips, and opinions of the language advisors - captured during the advice sessions and in the language advisor follow-up sessions that were held.

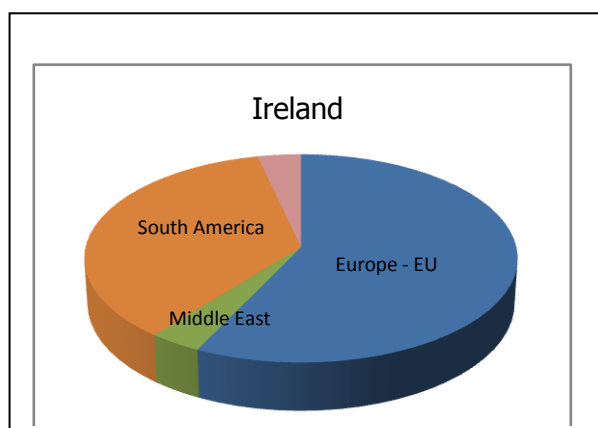
1. Descriptive Data

- a. Where did the migrants come from?

The make-up of the migrant group that took part in the advice sessions in each country



L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants



The original reason for including Germany, Sweden, and Italy in the project was for geographic and linguistic spread. It is somewhat of a coincidence that these three countries have been some of the most affected by the refugee crisis. The graphs tell an interesting story.

At the outset of the crisis it might not have seemed obvious that Sweden would be so greatly affected yet the graph demonstrates the impact of inward migration from the Middle East and mostly Arabic speakers.

In contrast Italy which has also been greatly affected has experienced most of its immigration from Africa both north and south of the Sahara.

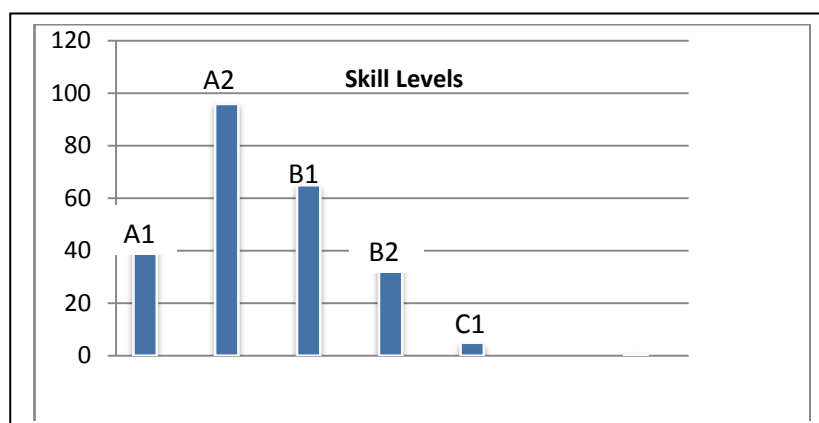
Germany receives migrants from virtually everywhere. The policy of openly receiving migrants from the Middle East has caused a strain on civil society and on resource provision. However Germany does have a very pro-active integration programme.

Latvia, perhaps not surprisingly, receives most of its inward migration from Eastern Europe, mostly from the Ukraine and Belarus.

Ireland has not yet been greatly affected by the Middle East and African political crises. Most immigration in Ireland comes from within the EU and from South America. It is also noteworthy that those immigrating to Ireland generally have a high level of education.

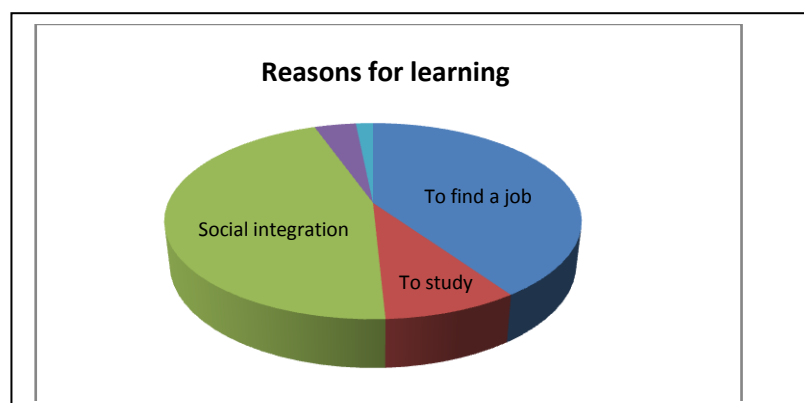
L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

a. What level of language skills did they have?



The above graph demonstrates that the largest number of migrants taking part in the advice sessions were in the A1 to A2 ranges, that is, beginners and advanced beginners/elementary learners. This is what might be expected of people moving to a new country but it does present some particular problems for giving and receiving language advice. This is referred to later in this section.

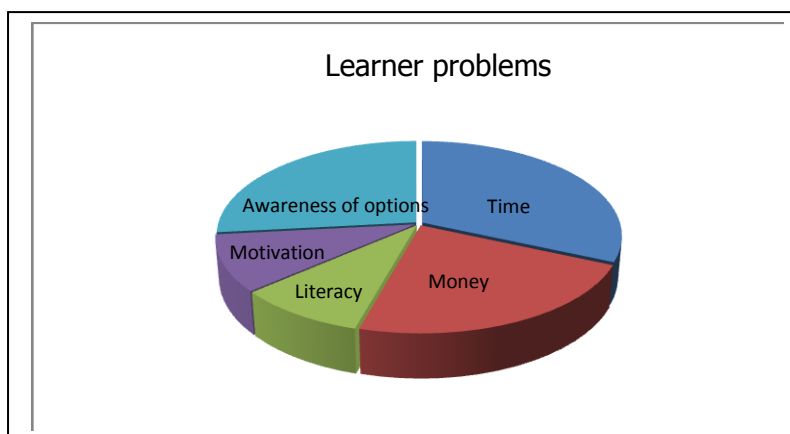
b. What were the reasons for wanting to learn the new language?



The main reason for wanting the host country language was for social integration. This is good news for those concerned with allowing strangers from different cultures into the host country society. This should also inform politicians and policy makers to assist migrants to integrate rather than holding them in limbo which engenders hopelessness and resentment. The second most important reason given was for finding a job. This is not surprising and again makes the point that migrants want to work and contribute and do not necessarily want to engage in social welfare tourism, as some fear.

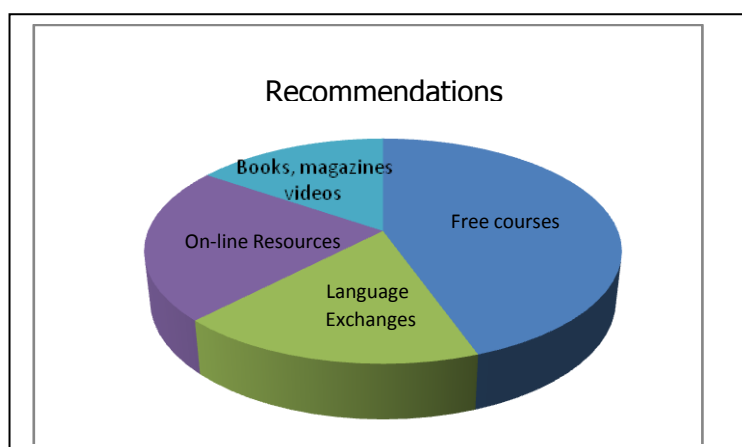
L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

c. What were the main problems that migrants had



It is not surprising that money was given as a problem for migrants given their difficult circumstances and the high cost of commercial language courses. What is perhaps surprising was that a lack of time was given as a problem. One might think that under-employed migrants would have plenty of time but in fact family obligations, shift work and other responsibilities were seen as a major blockage to successful language learning. The lack of awareness about learning options was also given by a significant number of participants.

d. What did the advisors recommend?

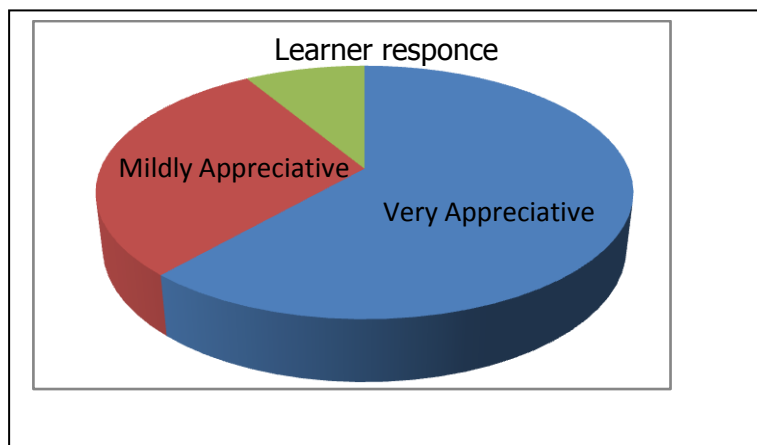


When three of these impediments to learning shown above are considered together, that is, money, time, and lack of awareness of options the benefits of professional language advice become clear. A language advisor or the Pathfinder system can recommend free language courses, language exchanges, and a range of self-study materials including on-line synchronous and asynchronous learning web sites. They can work with the learner to put together a personal learning plan tailored to the needs, resources, goals, and preferences of the learner. In subsequent sessions they

L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

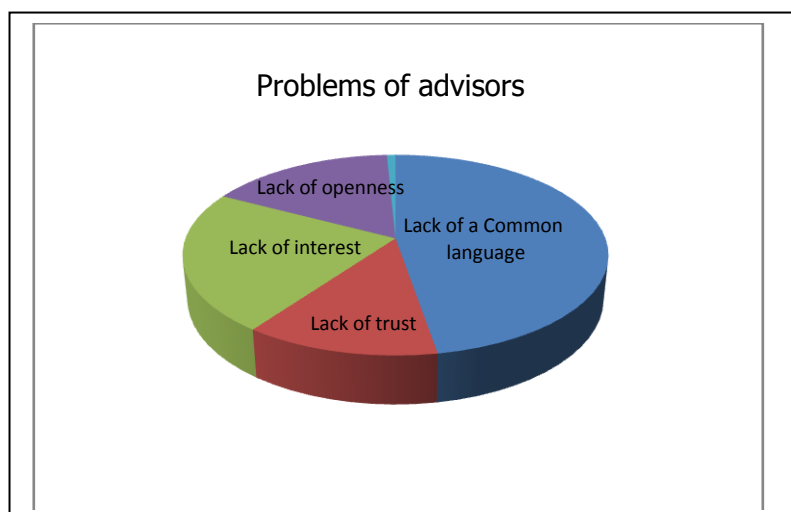
can review progress and revise the plan to take account of the experience of the learner.

e. What was the response of the learners?



The graph demonstrates that the vast majority appreciated the help they received. Considerably more than half were very appreciative.

f. What problems did the language advisors have?



The biggest and most challenging problem that advisors had to deal with was the lack of a commonly understood language to discuss a learning plan with the learner. This is quite understandable when considering that most learners were at the A1 to A2 skill level. Possible solutions are to use an intermediate language such as French or English, involve an interpreter in the advice session, or use the translated version of the Pathfinder software. Another option being actively considered for a future project is to train migrants themselves, who have come through the experience of learning the new language, as language advisors.

L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

Given that many of the learners were asylum seekers it is natural that some would be suspicious of the real purpose of the language advice session or simply not trust the intentions of the advisor. This is something advisors should be aware of and accept, then work patiently to build trust.

Although most learners were appreciative of the language advice they received it has to be accepted that some people don't really want to learn and show this with a lack of interest.

2. Summary of the case studies

Language advisors working in the partner organisations in Germany, Sweden, Latvia, and Ireland wrote five case studies about the learners that they came to know and advise in each country. Twenty-five case studies were written in total all of which can be read on the project web site. One example from each country was published in the Language Advisor Guidelines which are also available on the project web site as a downloadable pdf or ebook file: <http://www.l2paths.eu/results.html>.

A summary of impressions from these case studies is also presented in the Language Advisor Guidelines. These are repeated here:

1. There is as much variation in the factors that influence the success of learning a new language as there are different types of people. These factors range from personality, psychological, social, economic, familial, temporal, learning style, to motivational, etc. The advisor must put all of these factors together to form a picture of what will work for the learner. Fortunately there are now so many learning options available that there is a solution for everybody. The skill is to put these options together into a personal learning plan, then to provide the monitoring and encouragement the learner needs to stay the course and achieve their goals.
2. All of the language advisors took considerable time to get to know the learner personally; to understand their backgrounds, their motivation for learning, and their learning style preferences.
3. There is a special challenge in providing learning advice to absolute beginners when there is no common language shared between learner and advisor. The advisor should bear in mind that the responsibility for the success of the communication resides with the advisor not the learner. Ideally the advisor should be able to communicate in the learner's language. If that is not possible then perhaps an intermediate language might work, for example, French or English. Another possible solution would be the use of an interpreter. The Pathfinder system may also help because it is available in several languages.
4. The most common problem encountered was lack of time because of shift work or family responsibilities, followed in some cases by lack of money to attend formal courses. This made the recommendations for independent learning via on-line resources, radio, television, films,

L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

reading, and social conversation all the more important and relevant.

5. As attractive as independent learning may seem it requires a discipline and perseverance that not everyone possesses. Therefore monitoring and follow-up are critically important.
6. The Language Advisor often acted in an overall cultural integration support role. This involved explaining to the learner the availability of free courses, the importance of mastering certain aspects of their new language, cultural norms, and other opportunities, responsibilities, and obligations associated with life in their new host country.
7. Most striking was the role that the advisor played in instilling confidence in the learner and providing motivation to strive for improvement in their language skills in spite of setbacks and slow progress.

3. Insights, tips, suggestions from the language advisors

The Language Advisors were asked to summarise their observations about the advice sessions as they did them. The advisors then took part in a follow-up training session after the sessions had been completed. The notes from the follow-up sessions with each partner, as well as the combined results summarising the key points, are available in the project groupware. The questions that were discussed and the combined answers are presented below.

a. Have the advising sessions been helpful and effective? How?

- 1) All advisors in all countries answered this question with yes, although one noted that it wasn't so effective if the learner was already in a course, particularly one provided especially for migrants by the state
- 2) All found that getting to know the learner in a face-to-face encounter was the best way to understand the factors that would affect their language learning experience, including such things as family situation, work life, personal history, et al.

b. What worked best for you?

- 1) Developing an empathetic relationship with the learner
- 2) Better understanding of student needs
- 3) Being able to recommend a wider range of options to the learner
- 4) Brainstorming with the learner about options and solutions

c. What didn't work for you?

- 1) Some learners were not interested and didn't engage with the advisor
- 2) The absence of a common language
- 3) In some cases the learner's lack of computer skills
- 4) Pathfinder seemed too complicated to some
- 5) Not having a specific agenda and fixed topics for the sessions

d. Suggestions for improving the advice sessions?

- 1) An awareness of all options, of up-to-date resources and materials

L2PATHS – Pathways to Host Country Languages for Migrants

- 2) Have a fixed agenda with specific topics to be covered
 - 3) Understand the learner's circumstances and mind-set
 - 4) Conduct longer sessions, and follow-up meetings
 - 5) Establish a pleasant, appropriate and relaxed atmosphere
- e. What worked well in the Pathfinder?
- 1) The personal learning plan function
 - 2) The resource offers
 - 3) The diary function
 - 4) Pathfinder worked well as a lead-in or starting point to the meeting
- f. What didn't work in the Pathfinder?
- 1) Sometimes there were no matches
 - 2) More resources needed
 - 3) All resources must be kept up-to-date
- g. Suggestions for improving the Pathfinder
- 1) Resources should be easier to load
 - 2) More resources should be added
 - 3) A listing function should be added
 - 4) Provide better instructions for using the system (on-line tutorials added since this comment)
- h. Has the project enriched your work with learners?

All respondents answered yes to this question. They felt it had deepened their own understanding of the options for language learning, and had given them an opportunity to get to know learners personally, to become more involved with them, and to provide much needed support and encouragement.