

Why involve volunteers in migrant education?

Migrants seek to learn their host community language to help with their daily lives, to access services, support their children, find work and for many other reasons. Successful language acquisition requires a combination of **good language teaching, supported practice, and language use** in real life contexts, with learning programmes tailored to the aspirations of the migrant learner.

*Research shows that volunteers add value to migrants' language education, increasing language proficiency, reducing social isolation and accelerating participation in society.***

The VIME Model



VIME research suggests that the most effective language learning occurs when migrants have access to the three domains of **Professional Teaching Formal Learning, Volunteer-led Non-formal Learning and Social Experience Informal Learning** according to their needs and goals.

Trained teachers support migrants to learn using a variety of techniques in the classroom. Volunteers* have a key role to play in helping people access the language, motivating them in their learning and supporting them to use their learning outside the classroom.

Working with volunteers

The skilled coordinator

Successful use of volunteers in adult migrant language education starts with a skilled coordinator: the person who guides the volunteers and language learners. The coordinator is responsible for recruiting, training, and providing continuing professional development for volunteers; matching volunteers to migrant learners; providing resources and guidance to volunteers; and communicating with external stakeholders.

Yvonne: 'It's challenging to coordinate many elements of a volunteer programme but the rewards are amazing!'



The four key volunteer roles

The level and focus of training required by individual volunteers is largely dependent on their background and the role that they want to play. There are four key roles identified by the VIME project:

1: The Language Assistant– Assisting in class

The main focus of this role is to provide **extra help in the classroom**. The volunteer has a direct connection with the teacher (formal educator) who directs their work with the learner in the classroom.

Example tasks: *reinforce and practice language, focus on particular areas of the learner's language, facilitate differentiation.*



Fatima: 'Asma helps me in the class so I can follow everything the teacher explains.'

2: The Language Coach - practising language use

The main focus of this role is on **language practice** (individuals or small groups). The work of the volunteer is directed by the coordinator or teacher. The learner might not be studying in a formal class, so the volunteer and learner may meet in the learner's home, public space, or community venue;

Example tasks: *Working on class homework together, practising roleplays, discussing a book/article/text together, playing language games, oral and written.*

Mounira: 'To practise in 'real life' helps me to learn to speak the language.'



3: The Language Buddy– Providing opportunities for social engagement

The main focus of this role is to **promote the value of the host community engaging with migrants**; to advocate for improved and more frequent language learning opportunities; and to encourage people to improve their language by using opportunities in their local area. The work of this type of volunteer is often not directed by a coordinator, but liaising with coordinators in the local area increases their effectiveness.

Example tasks: *Explaining necessary processes about daily life, acting as a reference point, going to local places of interest together, participating in activities together (gardening clubs, cooking clubs), or just meeting for a chat over a cup of tea.*



Maria: 'I used to be so lonely, now I meet every week with my language volunteer.'

4: The Language Champion- Promoting and encouraging language improvement

The main focus of this role is **to promote the value of the host community engaging with migrants**, to advocate for more and better language learning opportunities and to encourage people to improve their language by using opportunities in their local area. The work of this type of volunteer is often not directed by a coordinator, but liaising with coordinators in the local area increases their effectiveness.

This role may be particularly relevant to people in organisations that work with migrants, but not in a language education capacity. For example, local GPs, housing associations, libraries, municipality councils, social workers, hospitals, schools, NGOs, law centres, and migrants who are current or previous language learners. All of these can promote language learning as part of their interactions with migrants.

VIME provides training modules to help understand the language needs of migrants, for people who want to promote language improvement.

Example tasks: *Referring people to language courses, encouraging migrants to participate in language learning activities such as conversations clubs, promoting benefits of language learning to their client groups; advocating for language learning opportunities.*

Janet: 'Talking to our clients about their housing needs can be so difficult, and now I know where to refer them to activities that can help them.'



Benefits for volunteers and the wider community

For volunteers there are also benefits. They learn about their community and develop a more positive view of migrants. Volunteers can also play an ambassadorial role within their own community. The more people who gain understanding of migrants' situation through volunteering, the better the image of migrants becomes.

Getting started and working with volunteers in migrant language education

The VIME Toolkit consists of useful guides and training materials for you if you're thinking of starting to work with volunteers in migrant language education, or if you are currently working with volunteers and would like to support their further development in migrant language education. It is very important to clearly identify the roles that professional teachers and volunteers can play within migrant language education and to ensure that their work is effectively coordinated, especially when several organisations are involved.

Go to our website: www.languagevolunteers.com

1. Where to start? Why work with volunteers to support migrant language learning?

*See our VIME Framework for working with volunteers in migrant language education
VIME Case studies of typical language learners and volunteers*

2. How to select volunteers?

*Advertise- use The VIME Model
Use VIME Selection tool for volunteers
Use VIME Tasks for language volunteers*

3. How to train volunteers?

*Use VIME Training Modules:
Module 1 How Language is Learned
Module 2 Working with Migrants
Module 3 The Bigger Picture*

*A volunteer is someone carrying out a role without pay.

**Research from the Netherlands: [Verduurzamen van informele taalondersteuning](#) – Verwey-Jonker Instituut (2013),
[Meer dan taal alleen](#) – Regioplan (2011)