

NEWSLETTER 8

Later-life Learning for Older People from Minority Ethnic, Migrant, Refugee and Roma Communities

Key issues

- Many older people are marginalised in Europe. Older people from minority ethnic, migrant, refugee and Roma communities are marginalised to an even greater extent.
- Many older people from diverse groups testify to the health, social, mental and physical benefits of engagement in learning. However, few views or statements about their needs or experiences have been obtained from older people from the marginalised minority ethnic, migrant, refugee and Roma communities.
- There is increasing research evidence of the value to all society as well as to individuals of the benefits of later-life learning.
- The Eurostat population and education participation data suggest that as few as one person in 25 over the age of 65 is engaged in learning. Even if the data only refer to 'formal' learning, previous education participation data suggest that the overall figure is unlikely to be more than four out of 25. Between 84% and 96% of people over the age of 65 in Europe are not engaged in learning of some kind.
- A good deal is known about the educational needs and achievements of the small proportion of older people involved in learning. Very little is known about the needs, dreams and aspirations of non-learners.
- The evidence from Grundtvig-funded later-life programmes indicates that for many older people the most successful learning is that which satisfies their own needs at their particular time of life and which takes place in locations and settings where they feel comfortable and confident.
- Research in this field indicates that the rates of participation of minority ethnic, migrant, refugee and Roma communities are much lower than indigenous populations.
- The limited evidence from education projects shows that successful programmes have often focussed initially on older people's life journeys and life stages as a way of coming to terms with their world today. This approach can help them explore with confidence the skills and information they require to make better sense of their lives, take greater ownership and challenge the prejudices they face.

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- Migration and refugees are issues across Europe with a great deal of media attention which often obscures efforts to understand the needs of these communities – particularly the older people among them.
- This is often the case for Roma people who also suffer social exclusion and marginalisation. There is also a movement of Roma communities from south-east Europe as a result of different forms of oppression: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/europe-failing-to-protect-roma-from-discrimination-and-poverty-a-942057.html>
- In summary, key issues include the following:
 - Older people from minority ethnic, migrant, refugee and Roma communities are unlikely to be beneficiaries of education and learning programmes.
 - There is little information about their needs to help create meaningful learning activities.
 - There are few European examples of good practice to provide guidance.
 - The statistical evidence about participation levels is inadequate.
 - There is a lack of government policy or funding to assist with this work.
- Relatively little research is being undertaken in this area and hence there is a lack of knowledge of the learning needs of minority ethnic,

migrant, refugee and Roma communities.

What is known?

- Despite the European Directive on Racial Equality, intended to prevent discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, many Roma people continue to be victims of prejudice and deep-rooted social exclusion: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm
- *Roma Routes* was an EU Culture Programme partnership of heritage organisations and Roma representatives from Germany, Greece, Slovenia, Romania and the UK. It aimed to encourage intercultural dialogue between Roma and non-Roma to promote European Roma cultural heritage. The project's emphasis on cultural issues highlights the role of older people as transmitters of traditional values and community history: <http://www.romaroutes.eu/about/>
- Within the *FRISM50+* learning partnership six organisations from five countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands and Turkey) looked at ways to find, reach and involve senior migrants in learning opportunities. Information about this project is now archived: <http://www.vhs-hamburg.de/%C3%BCber-uns/projekteprojects/archiv/frism-50-1102>

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- *AAMEE* focussed on the promotion of active ageing and the social, cultural and economic integration of migrant and minority ethnic elders, emphasising volunteer activities and the emergence of new culturally sensitive products and services in the fields of, for instance, housing, care, education, leisure, culture and marketing. The project's final report, in 2009, stated that the educational needs of minority ethnic elders had been neglected because they were often viewed as economic migrants or guest workers who would return home upon retirement. *AAMEE* also felt that where education opportunities did exist they were for the more 'affluent' people: http://www.aamee.eu/Final_project_report/Project-report.pdf
- Workshops at the 2013 ForAge conference in Budapest drew upon the experiences of the delegates. In Romania the government is very aware of Roma issues with the Roma

population more than doubling since 1930. There is now a national government agency for Roma communities, but as yet there is little activity with elders from this community. Experience in the Netherlands is that there are now 3rd or 4th generational issues showing the extent and durability of marginalisation. Some of the interventions are too prescriptive with objectives externally set rather than being created by the communities themselves. Overall it was felt that barriers to working in these areas are due to stereotypes, prescriptive interventions and negative media portrayals with any community-based developments likely to be subject to 'bad press'.

What can be done?

- More effective data acquisition and analysis is required to underpin the arguments for more, better and different educational opportunities.
- What little evidence that does exist needs further analysis to help ascertain the key lessons leading to success (and failure).
- Greater knowledge of national and regional actions with respect to these communities is required.
- Links should be established with representative community organisations at European, national and regional levels to highlight the learning needs of their older people and to



Workshop at ForAge conference, Budapest
 30 Sept- 1 Oct 2013

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better ascertain current awareness and future intentions.

- Further concrete research evidence is needed about the health, social, family and personal benefits of later-life learning, with a special emphasis on older people from minority and marginalised communities.
- Further knowledge and understanding is required of life stages and life routes approaches to encouraging socially-excluded groups into learning.

Some questions for readers

Can you please provide the ForAge project with examples of:

- Practical projects to reach, teach and empower older people from minority ethnic, migrant, refugee and Roma communities.
- Relevant national, regional and local policies.
- Research evidence or details of research currently being undertaken.
- Statistical evidence of populations, based on ethnicity, migration and age, and relevant education participation data.
- Testimonies by relevant older learners of the benefits of their learning and the personal and societal barriers they have overcome.
- Collaboration between government departments, cross-sectoral NGOs and representative groups leading to greater awareness of learning need, targeted provision and better funding.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this newsletter, ask ForAge any questions about this or other aspects of the network's activities, or raise any relevant issue neglected or misrepresented, please contact us via our website www.foragenetwork.eu, or make use of the ForAge discussion forum <http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/forum/>, or contact your relevant national partner.

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