

STUDIEFÖRBUNDEN

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**Inclusion of refugees through
non-formal education**



**Nordic best
practice**



Considering its resources non-formal education operates at a low cost and with good results. Unlike public agencies and private education, non-formal education combines paid staff with non-profit organizations, offering significant benefits. However, quality operations cost money and need financing. In order for non-formal education to be able to make a truly significant contribution to the inclusion of newly arrived immigrants into society, it depends upon reasonable funding.

“The center is run by three employees, one trainee and 170 volunteers. It is important to have a vision and a good framework, as well as to trust and cooperate with the volunteer leaders of the center; Give them the opportunity and knowledge to lead on in their own way. Find a good balance between the volunteer leaders’ independence and the organization’s support and responsibility. “
Stella Red Cross Women’s Center, Denmark

10. Making people’s skills visible - validation

Non-formal education is familiar with linking the efforts of newly arrived immigrants to the needs of the job market. Within its large networks, there is regular contact and cooperation with local employers and with the job market’s needs. Assessing and adapting existing skills according to need is done through validation. Through various forms of validation, newcomers’ knowledge, skills and abilities can be valued and made use of, making social and work life easier. The common perspective is to both strengthen self-esteem and increase opportunities where skills and previous experience can be described for employers, interns, educational institutions or in other contexts. Non-formal education is always based on the individual’s current situation and adapts methods accordingly, unlike formal education institutions, municipalities and employment services based on curricula, laws and regulations. Non-formal education always aim at describing the skills of the person as a whole.

Assessing capabilities and knowledge is included in practically all activity examples. You can choose to formulate it differently, as it is often about strengthening self-esteem and having the opportunity to show what you can.

Inclusion of refugees through non-formal-education - Nordic best practice

The number of asylum seekers is greater today than at any point since World War II. The Nordic countries received a large share of the refugees coming to Europe and have developed different models and activities to include and integrate the refugees in working life and society. The civil society and non-formal adult education actors have taken great responsibility and have experience of activities that should be taken into account for future policy of integration in society. To highlight some examples and formulate conclusions and models on successful inclusion, Folkbildning Norden (the sister organizations from the non-formal adult education from the Nordic countries) has been carried out a project with support from the Nordic Council of Ministers and in collaboration with NVL, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning.

Twenty two good examples of non-formal education’s work on the inclusion of newly arrived immigrants and five research articles formed the basis for the day-long program at the NCAEL 7th Nordic Conference on Adult Education and Learning. The research has been led by Mimer, with national responsibility for research on non-formal education in Sweden. The final result, based on these findings, leads to the following conclusions on non-formal education’s view on successful inclusion. Each conclusion has been linked to one or more researchers and comments based on the descriptions of various examples.

1. Participation creates conditions for inclusion

Non-formal education is based on the fact that inclusion is a process that involves participation from those who are new to a society and those who already belong to one. Newly arrived immigrants, like those who have lived in a country for a long time, must become co-creators, both of their own lives and of their new country. This is a prerequisite for the sustainability of inclusion. Non-formal education provides the conditions required to create this new reality together. Successful inclusion is achieved with and not for newcomers and together with the already established population.

Participation gives people the opportunity to bring forth and demonstrate their full range of skills and capacities, which can then be used in the the work force and in society. People who meet and find each other within the context of non-formal education then have further occasions to continue networking and expanding opportunities. The emphasis of this approach in non-formal education is a key difference to formal education and leads to better results.

“Many questions arise about what is actually meant by inclusion and the ways in which popular education activities could be able to contribute to this. Is it about getting into a work as quickly as possible, to become employable, or it is about a person’s way to develop an understanding of himself and his new situation?”

Eva-Marie Harlin & Henrik Nordvall

“Two main features of the project are learning in groups and numerous individual support and guidance sessions.”

Västerås Folkhögskola, Sweden

“Case studies indicate positive effects in terms of self-confidence among participants, as well as indicating an increased interest for further learning as well as bringing migrants closer to the labour market.”

Andreas Fejes, researcher

2. The person as a whole must be included

One of the basic values of non-formal education is that you must have a citizen’s perspective on education in order to be included in society. It is not a one-sided transfer of knowledge and skills but more of a true meeting of equals where the meeting adopts a holistic perspective and includes topics such as cultural and social life, exercise and health, in addition to work life. A holistic approach to people offers a broader perspective and a more comprehensive picture, opening up for various opportunities in the work force and in society.

Too few newly arrived immigrants begin to work or study soon after their arrival. Non-formal education can quickly provide the social context needed for newcomers to land in their new reality and later create the necessary networks that can lead to better work and social life. Non-formal education would like to give the person as a whole space to create favourable conditions for the full spectrum of his or her capacities to flourish. An inclusion process can begin with learning about health, diet and physical exercise, all while working parallel with language proficiency leading to formal education and work. A narrowly directed education does not offer the same sustainable results.

“The varied and broad focus on work experience, culture, society and health is structured on the basis that a holistic approach can best take care of and help the individual.”

FOKUS Flexpraktik - Daghøjskoleforeningen, Aalborg, Denmark

“The aim of the project was to give newly arrived adolescents a taste of outdoor

“Through public education, women learn to take care of themselves, gain new knowledge, build a network, and to participate in society. In short, they get increased well-being, inclusion and integration into society.”

Shahrazad – Dansk Oplysningsforbund Copenhagen, Denmark

“The special thing about this project is that babysitting can be arranged at the very place the course is held in order to provide equal opportunities for both women and men to attend the courses.”

Borgå National Institute

“Separating the genders in classes often resulted in better discussion.”

Simey Nordic Project, Iceland

8. Genuine inclusion is based on lifelong learning

Free non-formal education shows opportunities to develop continuous personal pathways for newly arrived immigrants for personal learning and transitioning to worklife. Early and lasting education is key for successful inclusion and the prevention of marginalization. Non-formal education’s view on knowledge is open and inclusive.

Non-formal education has a long tradition of working with education and culture. We have a well-developed pedagogy with active participants and extensive experience in educating those who have considerable shortcomings in their previous education. This advantage gives non-formal education a good opportunity to quickly create activities aimed at new groups, such as newly arrived immigrants.

“The project is a good example of the opportunities non-formal education has in developing prolonged study paths for immigrants, ranging from continuing education to transitioning to work life. The early and uninterrupted implementation of integration programs has a major impact on the success of the resulting integration and in the prevention of marginalization.”

Finland Vastaus SKY

9. Inclusion must be a long term and sustainable effort

Successful inclusion through independent structures such as non-formal education must be long term both in relation to the participants and the organizations involved. Time-limited projects that are not continued risk being unable to provide long term results and putting participants in a tight spot. To make good activities permanent, a follow up plan needs to be in place when a successful project ends.

“The coaches have been an important player in this project. They have immigrant backgrounds and feel integrated in their second country. The coaches have served as a positive model for newly arrived immigrants. “

Fatima, NBV, Sweden

7. Conscious gender equality perspective gives results

The message of non-formal education is clear: there is a need for an agreed gender equality perspective in all activities. Awareness is required in form and content in order to get a great deal of female participation and equal education. Non-formal education can create the safe space needed to meet the challenges of many women with young children, who in many cases have to live up to patriarchal expectations about the role of women in the home. A possible solution may be creating activities tailored for female participants. When non-formal education apply well-thought-out strategies for gender equality, women have successfully been included in activities.

It is also important to have a long term perspective on the work with gender equality, where both men and women are included. In order for both men and women to be included in a new society, the long term aim must be that they both participate together in joint activities. Both genders need to be part of the dialogue on how this vision can be transformed into reality.

The Nordic countries have a uniquely high proportion of women in the workforce. This is an important value that requires deliberate efforts as this ethic often looks quite different in other parts of the world where many of the newly arrived immigrants come from.

“Because the evening school was not a government agency, and because the women felt it was a safe place, they dared to meet up and participate in the project. For many of them it became their entry into Danish society – and to increased self-esteem, better language skills and a larger network, also among ethnic Danish women. “

Genbrugsdesign - DOF Allerød Fritidsskole Allerød, Denmark

“A few more women than men belong to our groups, which contributed to the decision to create a separate group for women only in 2001-2002. The main objective of this activity was to strengthen the role of immigrant women in society through many discussions on women’s rights, gender equality, child education, as well as a major focus on health and well-being. “

Substral, Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, Sweden

life that permeates Norwegian culture. This can contribute to more learning and understanding through trying activities the youngsters have not tried before.

These activities contribute to a more concrete form of integration into society by taking part in an important part of the Norwegian cultural heritage. “

EMA prosjekt Den Norske Turistforening, Norway

“Participating in an orchestra consists mainly of musical development in a social setting. Research shows that this contributes to a significantly increased quality of life. Participation in music activities can have a preventive and health-promoting effect for both children and adults as learning in partnership, among other things, fosters teamwork, sense of accomplishment, networking, belonging and identity. “

“The musical activity is the focal point and creates a sense of belonging. It is in itself including and is also a good arena for getting work experience. “

WinterPULSE, Norway

3. Flexible non-formal education meets shifting needs

Newly arrived immigrants have different backgrounds and hence different needs. Non-formal education represents a more flexible educational contact than traditional education. Those who are well-educated or have professional qualifications can easier get into the workforce and need a different context and a different educational approach in comparison to those who have had poor education and may have a longer road ahead. Both formal and non-formal learning must be matched with the right individuals. Studies must be based on the participants own choices, while at the same time balancing with the needs of society and the job market. For successful and long-term inclusion, everyone should be given the opportunity for lifelong learning based on their own abilities. Therefore, a combination of group activities and individual support and guidance counseling is needed

“An important aspect is also that students choose themselves and within their individual interests. The free choice of subjects and dedication strengthens the individual development in balance with the joint project. The balance between having subjects exclusively for students with refugee backgrounds and subjects for mixed groups also provides reciprocal activity that can help create a feeling of safety in the Danish subjects and the learning challenges that are created in the mixed groups, especially challenging the pupil’s linguistic learning.”

Silkeborg Højskole, Denmark

4. Language paves the way to employment, culture and society

Language proficiency is necessary not only to earn a living and for further education, but is also useful in meeting new people in a new society.

Earlier it was said that language comes first, then work. However, many decision-makers are now talking about language skills being developed through work itself. But not all professions require language skills, and not all workplaces offer a context that promotes learning a language. Non-formal education would like to highlight language as a fundamental way into society, opening the doors to a new culture, not just focusing on the labor market. Inclusion requires a common language.

“At a time when the understanding of integration is sometimes reduced to participation in the labor market, this project also emphasizes introducing Danish working culture and creating confidence in the transition to Danish society.”
Kursustrappen - Frederiksberg, Denmark

“The most important factor for integration is considered to be sufficient knowledge of the Finnish language, which enables both progress in studies and employment. In addition to that, language proficiency also helps to find Finnish friends. Getting acquainted with Finnish culture and finding hobbies consequently supports integration.”
Kiteen Evankelinen Kansanopisto, Finland

“A balancing act between serving target groups that are considered to be important for popular education, and the aims and goals set out by the state specifically when it comes to integration. A noteworthy goal, prescribed by the states, is that of fast entrance into the labour market.”
Annika Pastuhov, researcher

5. The non-formal education network creates bridges to the new society
Inclusion should not be reduced to simply being part of the job market, it also involves establishing security and trust in society during a transition to a new country and the introduction to its culture. Having a job and being able to support oneself is central, but is not enough. One important element of non-formal education is its building of networks in a society. Non-formal education also acts as a hub in civil society organizations. Participants in non-formal education can access various social contact areas and networks. Becoming a part of a network naturally creates inclusion. We also know that networks increase the chance of getting a job. As a newcomer there is a big difference between only meeting public employees, and participating in non-formal education and getting involved in society's many different networks

Openness for different opinions and individual solutions is beneficial when meet-

ing newly arrived immigrants. It goes without saying that a meeting between Nordic cultural views and the views from a newcomer's country of origin can create tensions that need overcoming.

“Several programs have an explicit aim of providing a social network”
Sissel Kondrup, researcher

“All of the examples create opportunity-room for building social networks. Given that social capital consists of trust, social norms and shared values character-ized by reciprocity and commitment for common goods, these examples for sure promote confidence, trust and common values.”
Jorn Stenøien & Christin Tønseth, researcher

6. Build the activities from the ground up to broaden participation
There is a need to actively reach out to newly arrived immigrants who may be far from the job market. It is not enough to reach out to only those who actively seek help. In this area the administrative authorities often don't succeed fully. It is the experience of non-formal education that successful activities must be built from the ground up based on existing needs and by people who know the target group well. Working from that principle, the road leading to employment and society is faster. Through the non-formal education approach – to meet people as they are – people with weak social networks or disabilities also get the chance to increase their quality of life, even if they remain far from the job market. This way, we meet people where they are and as they are.

Through validation, newly arrived immigrants' unique knowledge, skills and abilities can be valued and applied, making the transition to work-life smoother. A shared perspective is to both enhance self-esteem and expand opportunities by putting forth skills and qualifications to employers, intern hosts or educational institutions. Non-formal education always begins from the individual's current situation and adapts methods accordingly, unlike formal education institutions, municipalities and employment services who function based on curricula, laws and regulations.

“The most important understanding is that initiatives of this kind should not come from the outside or, so to say, top-down. The people from our side who participated in the project all had relatively extensive experience with Swedish civil society organizations whilst also having good knowledge of the other participants' various ethnic and religious backgrounds.”
Ibn Rushd, Sweden