

Migrants and the Labor Market

The Role and Tasks of Adult Education

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Abstract: The process of migration to a new country brings with it a host of challenges, and therefore also learning needs. Some countries have systems in place to facilitate the transition of migrants into society, often including adult education programs. Those programs, however, cannot be effective if blithely designed in ignorance of the interrelationship between established systems for facilitating integration and the experiences of migrants during the integration process. Focusing on the transition into the labor market and drawing on the expertise of adult educators who work in these systems in Germany, this article explores several stumbling blocks that make a successful integration for migrants more difficult and describes three strategies to address them: challenging the logic of the labor market, dealing with failure, and acknowledging multiple forms of discrimination. The analysis of Germany can provide insights that are useful in other national contexts.

Keywords: migration, German adult education, transitions, integration, workforce education

“MIGRANTS OFTEN HAVE DIFFICULTIES DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL PLANS DUE TO LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF CONFUSING BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS.”

Leaving one's home and starting anew is difficult under any circumstances, but in addition to, because of, and amid all these difficulties, migrants that cross national borders must often adapt to a completely new language, cultural norms, and deeply embedded facets of social, political, and economic life. These challenges which migrants face are a worldwide concern. According to the United

Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as of 2017, 257.7 million people worldwide lived in countries other than where they were born. More than half (51%) of all migrants live in only 10 countries, with 19% in the United States and approximately 4.7% in both Saudi Arabia and Germany (UN/Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017). For Germany, this percentage equates to 10.5% of its total population (due primarily to the refugee crisis of 2015).

An important component of any national integration system for migrants would be institutions of adult education, and Germany has arguably the most extensive educational system for facilitating the transition of migrants into their new society (Blossfeld et al., 2016). Research has

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demonstrated that adult education institutions serve as important contact points for migrants to address their educational, social, and employment needs (Alfred, 2015). These programs, however, cannot be effective if blithely designed in ignorance of the interrelationship between the various components of the overall system and the concomitant challenges faced by migrants (Kloubert, 2019).

This article presents a study exploring migrant counseling as a form of adult education for migrants in Germany. Taking into account the experiences of migrants as they interact with formal structures, requirements, and social prejudices, it focuses on services intended to facilitate their transition into the labor market and to otherwise assist them in developing and pursuing an individual professional life path in their new country. This analysis highlights important considerations for other countries facing similar challenges.

The research reported here adds to a growing discourse on adult education and migration. The challenges that migrants face (such as transferring professional skills into the labor market, acquiring competencies, and navigating new societal contexts) have been the subject of numerous studies (e.g., Gray, 2019; Guo & Shan, 2013; Slade, 2015). These studies have tended to either examine migration policies or to query migrants about their experiences. The study reported here attempted a different tack: to understand the perspective of adult educators who (1) work within the systems created by migration policies and (2) have worked with hundreds of migrants each. This article therefore provides insights into the implementation of policy and its effects in supporting (or inadvertently hindering) migrants through a successful transition.

The success of adult education programs for migrants requires a reflective, (self-)critical approach by those who implement them. As Slade notes, although expectations of professional migration are high (i.e., it is supposed to be beneficial for society), the potential of migrants is seldom realized (Slade, 2015, pp. 65–66). Guo (2015) and Lange and Baillie Abidi (2015) emphasize the need for adult education to find new approaches and strategies beyond the traps of the “difference as deficit” perspective or “sameness” approach (which assumes that all learners have the

same background and learning needs) (Guo, 2015, p. 14). Likewise, Alfred (2015) emphasizes the need for adult educators to critically reflect on existing policies and practices around migration and promote pedagogies that enhance migrants’ agency and identity. Considering these critical voices and demands, this article turns to the actual adult educators involved in the work of providing individualized services to migrants. It illustrates the insights these educators have into the interrelationship between the systems in place to facilitate the transition of migrants and the actual experiences of migrants. It contributes therefore to the development of critical reflection on adult education practice from the perspective of the core values of adult education, which although many and varied, include in various forms ideas such as commitment to human thriving, equity, empowerment, and agency (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Schrader, 2016).

Adult Education for Migrants in Germany

Historically, the role of adult education in German society can be described as social-integrative: where adult education tries to counter “the isolation and drifting apart of social groups” (Siebert, 2012, p. 65). Many institutions, especially the largest and most traditional institution, the Volkshochschule (folk school), have committed to facilitating the process of integration for migrants through education, especially since the 2015 refugee crisis. These institutions provide differentiated offerings for learning the German language, basic education, and vocational trainings.

Systems of education vary in each country, and in the case of migrants trying to establish employment, they are often dependent on the labor market regulations of each. If a worker with certain qualifications crosses a national border where labor regulations are different, problems with recognition of their qualifications and access to their profession can arise. Migration therefore poses an urgent question of how to manage different access requirements to professions/trades, and how to certify/validate previously acquired competences in a new country. The urgency of this question is augmented if we consider the obvious fact that migrants usually need employment to have the means to live in their new country. The question of access rights to the labor market, as well as the recognition of existing

competences and skills required in a certain occupation, becomes a question of succeeding, persisting, or even surviving in a new country. In Germany, different regulations exist that, on one hand, provide migrants with temporary financial supports (e.g., board and lodging), and at the same time prohibit asylum seekers (with some exceptions) from engaging in paid work. This latter regulation exemplifies, however, a myopic view of integration into the labor market. It is not only about having a source of income, but is one of the central forms of participation in society, which deeply affects the self-image of migrants as a symbol for whether or not they are accepted as members in it (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, 2016, p. 171). Therefore, if the skills and competences of migrants are not appropriately recognized and validated, the challenges already inherent in their integration are exacerbated.

In addition to the recognition of formal qualifications, a system for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired competencies is of particular importance. Some countries have established systems of providing qualification training for migrants: Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) or Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) which works in different countries more or less effectively (Singh, 2015). In Germany, for instance, different procedures are currently used to assess non-formal and informal skills, such as “analysis of potentials” (under the name “KomBI career advice”), ProfilPASS, and Competence Pass for Migrants (Döring et al., 2015, p. 25). In trying to navigate these systems, migrants often receive differing, if not contradictory, information from various channels about the relevant regulations and requirements which can differ across state and national borders (Münk & Scheiermann, 2020, p. 33). Such confusion can combine (a) to create an experience of frustration, and also (b) to undermine migrants’ sense of their ability to function in society.

Other educational offerings address language proficiency, which is required for participation in the labor market, bureaucratic procedures, and sometimes for social life. Germany provides free language courses to migrants to help them progress in this important milestone as part of their so-called Integration Courses, introduced through the *Zuwanderungsgesetz* (2004)

(Immigration Law). Completion of the program allows migrants to obtain a settlement permit, extend their long-term residence permit, and/or reduce the time period normally required for naturalization. Research has demonstrated, however, that these courses often do not address the urgent and practical needs of migrants trying to adapt to their new lives in Germany, as they seldom acknowledge the experiences, expectations, and interpretation patterns from the lifeworld of the migrants (Kloubert, 2019). This creates a double problem for migrants, as not only do their existing learning needs remain unmet, but they now must also invest time and energy completing additional educational requirements which are not meeting those needs. It is essential, therefore, to examine existing structures of adult education specifically designed for migrants.

Framing Thoughts

Beyond the recognition and validation of professional qualifications described above, migrants often need further vocational training. Providing such training, however, does not automatically ensure equitable opportunities for migrants. For instance, in German adult education scholarship there is a discussion around the principle of double discrimination through education: Individuals who do not receive a solid education in their childhood seldom participate in adult education, thereby deepening the divide between those born with access to education and those who were not (Boeren, 2009; Desjardins et al., 2006). This phenomenon is known within adult education jargon as the Matthew effect.¹ Bağcı (2019) observed the Matthew effect among Turkish migrants in Germany and concluded that although many migrants with higher levels of education do not feel a need to utilize adult education programs, almost all of the migrants who do utilize them are already highly educated (p. 289). The level of education acquired by migrants in their country of origin is highly polarized; research shows, for example, that war, persecution, and discrimination have a significant impact on the educational structure of refugees (Brücker et al., 2016). In sum, adult education may increase the socioeconomic disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged migrant groups. It is therefore essential that adult education programs are designed to

counteract these negative effects, by attracting and supporting educationally disadvantaged migrants who otherwise may not take advantage of those opportunities.

A possibility to counteract challenges such as this is by offering specialized counseling for migrants. In Germany, non-governmental organizations funded by the federal government offer individual counseling services to help migrants with specific questions and challenges (Förderprogramm IQ, n.d.). Underlying this practice is the acknowledgment that the other mechanisms to help migrants are often inadequate on their own; sometimes people need individualized advising. Adult educators who work within this counseling field have special insight into the challenges that migrants face, which are not adequately addressed by the other support structures described above.

Equally important, the existence of multiple forms of discrimination that migrants face in nearly every society impacts their readiness to engage in any educational effort. In her empirical research on highly qualified migrants in Germany and Austria, Sprung (2013) pointed out that discrimination of migrants can be observed in institutional, structural, and individual contexts. Besides obvious prejudice, migrants can be confronted with sources of discrimination even through the design of well-intentioned educational practice. These design features can be as simple as the use of bureaucratic, complicated language (that is difficult to understand by non-native speakers) in vocational training entrance exams, or questions/scenarios on tests that presuppose tacit cultural knowledge usually understood only by the dominant group (Sprung, 2013).

Shan and Fejes (2015) speak about the so-called regime of skills in the context of migration: a “new mode of control and modulation that defines the desirability of individuals in the labor market, shapes the subjectivities, sensibility, and emotionality of migrants and workers” (p. 227). They argue that this regime of skills is a social construction, or a “floating discourse” (p. 231) which needs to be critically examined to not reinforce the existing power and privilege of dominant groups.

Methods

This study sought insights from professionals who provide education counseling services for migrants.

The overall research question was: What are the learning needs of the migrants with whom they work—from the short-, middle- and long-term perspectives—and how are those learning needs addressed through educational support offerings? This article presents findings related to migrants’ integration into the labor market. Interviews were conducted with 10 educators between December 2019 and January 2020. For our study, we chose educators who had worked at least 4 years in this domain. Based on the tasks of adult education identified above, interview prompts addressed the following questions in regard to the research participants’ work with migrants:

1. What are their educational strategies and pedagogical methods in working with their learners?
2. What subjective factors (e.g., biographies, aspirations) of learners present the greatest assets and/or challenges in their process of integration?
3. What do they perceive as societally imposed barriers to integration and how do they respond to them?

The interviews were semi-structured. Educators were prompted to talk freely about their professional experiences, and then were asked supplemental questions. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The resulting data are considered to be the interviewees’ subjective understandings of their work. Research participants were given the option to use either German or English for their responses; all chose the latter. English is a foreign language for the interviewees, and some of their responses contain grammatical or lexical mistakes. For the sake of authenticity, we left the quotations in their original forms with only rare and slight grammatical corrections. The data were then analyzed thematically using a qualitative content analysis method (Mayring, 2002), while applying deductive categories from the previously formulated theoretical lenses and research questions, and developing inductive categories from the material. To enhance the reliability of the study, the coding of data was performed simultaneously by both authors and a research assistant. Interviewees gave their consent to participate in the study, and we used pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. This article presents three of the major themes from analysis of the research data.

Findings

In our interviews, the adult educators described several stumbling blocks that make a successful integration for migrants more difficult and described their strategies for addressing them.

Challenging the Logic of the Labor Market

Participants described a challenge that many migrants face in being funneled into particular jobs based solely on the immediate needs of society and ignoring the long-term effects of these employment decisions. This perspective underlies many of the existing structures and practices in place to help migrants. It frames the needs of migrants to find gainful employment, not in terms of what people need to provide a life for themselves and their families and otherwise integrate into their new society, but rather in terms of migrants meeting the needs of the local labor market. Migrants are mostly expected to take those jobs where there is a scarce labor supply, low wages, and poor working conditions. Wilhelm, one of the interviewees, criticizes this existing practice for ignoring the individual skills, desires, biographies, and inspirations of the migrants. Not only does this perspective focus solely on the perceived needs of the host country, it does not even fully address those needs.

That's not the (right) approach because in many cases it's not sustainable: if you are doing a job because right now there is a lot of need for this job. But not everybody is a good nurse. Of course, (the) opportunities in the German labor market right now is one aspect, but not the only aspect when I am choosing my future professional career [. . .]. There are many different pieces we have to fit together.

This exclusive focus on the immediate needs of the local labor market can lead to situations where migrants take jobs without considering their previous qualifications and aspirations. This situation is less favorable not only for migrants, but also for the local labor market—considering that Germany (typical of most economically developed countries) is in need of an influx of high-skilled, motivated workers. Even if a migrant does not have previous qualifications for a

career for which they are well suited and enthusiastic, it is likely better for the state to fund their education for such a career than to lead them down a vocational path that is not life-sustaining. Wilhelm explained,

And even if you see it from an economic perspective, I think it's very uneconomic what they're sometimes doing in the job center. Because when they keep people in the low qualified jobs, what will happen? They will over and over and over become customers of the (job office) again. If they finance them once, a vocational training or whatever, the probability that they are out of this social (support) system is quite high. Just a different approach, what I am doing and the job center are different approaches.

The perspective which leads to the funneling of migrants into low-skilled labor regardless of their qualifications or aspirations not only hurts the migrant financially, it also undermines their vocational identity, self-efficacy (in terms of being able to accomplish their goals in their new country), and even their sense of competence and professional aptitude. Wilhelm advocated for a change of focus in the counseling work with migrants, emphasizing the empowerment of the individual migrant to find and develop their own path for professional life and development.

And even if they don't know their specific goals, I try to figure out what could be the options and step by step we are making (them) more concrete . . . At the end it has to be always very concrete. You have to give these people a . . . lead-map. A time lead-map. What will be the next steps? Where do I have to address in order to make it more transparent and in order to empower them?

Alexander also criticized the logic of the prevailing current practices that treats humans as if they are things to be used for others' purposes.

They are people spending their lifetime with a goal that is not . . . theirs . . . (I) think this is the perspective from which those programs are made,

like: “OK. How do we get them to become like we want them to be, or like we need them to be?”

The given examples describe the logic of the labor market as problematic for adult education practice in at least two ways. First, in the long-term perspective, it is not economically beneficial. The logic of the labor market is thus detrimental to both migrants and, ironically, to the local labor market itself. Second, from the point of view of the core values of adult education itself, it is unjustifiable to treat adult learners as means to achieve others’ goals.

Dealing With Failure

There is a general need for migrants to understand existing educational systems and networks (including tacit knowledge) of their new country. This understanding increases the equity of access opportunities, and promotes personal and professional growth on the basis of skills and aspirations rather than on the basis of arbitrariness and false assumptions. As Thomas described,

We had more and more people here who didn’t know at all the German educational system, which can become a big problem if you make decisions about your future career on the wrong basis. That means on the basis of the educational system that you know from your home country. Then quite often these are wrong decisions, which don’t lead you to the point where you want to go. They have a clear goal, but they choose the wrong way to reach this goal.

Participants argued that in addition to providing the migrant learners with procedural knowledge of the German system of education and professional requirements, there is also a need to make the system of validation comprehensible and transparent. Participants explained that the process of recognition and validation is neither intuitive nor transparent, and the experience of trying to figure it out can be frustrating and demoralizing. These negative, disempowering experiences accumulate and can prevent migrants from considering themselves as capable or qualified for certain jobs. Although some

qualifications can be acquired “on the job,” the doubt of one’s own eligibility and suitability for the job can prevent a person from even applying for it. This situation leads to increased labor force scarcity for the host country, and the discrimination of migrants in terms of their potential opportunities and (perceived) barriers.

This study’s participants reported that migrants often have repeated experiences of failure, as they attempt time and again to create a sustainable life in their new country. Because of language barriers, lack of knowledge of cultural norms, complex and opaque bureaucratic structures, and similar obstacles, migrants can easily develop a sense of frustration in their attempts to accomplish all the necessary steps of acclimating to a new environment. Wilhelm described the situation in terms of migrants often having an underlying belief that their own wishes and projects are unrealistic:

And of course if you were told very often . . . if you come from a context where you were only told: “That doesn’t work, that doesn’t work,” then it is [difficult] to say: “Well, it’s not not realistic.” It is [surely] not easy, but some things are realistic quite well. Maybe not in one step but in small steps.

Participants emphasized how, overwhelmed with endless and seemingly futile tasks necessary for building their new life, migrants often begin losing self-esteem and trust in their own capacities. Michel described a typical situation in his counseling work.

I have [many] people who feel a lot of challenge. Mostly it’s about: they are at the point where self-esteem becomes a problem. They don’t know what to do. They come to me and ask me: “What should I do?” And that’s not what I can offer . . . I have sometimes the feeling, they are like (. . .) they cannot move. Because they say “Ok, I came here and everybody told me, this is not enough, this is not enough. Tell me what to do. I will learn totally new thing. I will study again. I will do anything, just tell me what to do. I don’t know

any more what to do.” And these are the most, the hardest situations . . . I have to be some kind of psychologist or something in those cases, and this is really not that easy. So, I think this is the most challenging thing, when people come in this situation. If they are not [yet] in that situation . . . you can talk to them. You can talk about perspectives, learning perspectives and tell them: “Ok, you cannot really start as a manager or whatever (right now). Try this path and perhaps in five years, you will get there.” We can make plans like that with most of them. But if they are in this situation, where they really do not know where to go, what to do, totally lost, that’s where it gets really really hard, because they don’t trust in their own capabilities anymore.

Research participants indicated the problem of increasing feelings of inferiority, which they witness in their practice, as a barrier for their integration into the labor market. They advocated that anyone working with migrants purposely address this issue: For example, acknowledging with migrants their feelings of frustration and helping them learn strategies for dealing with them, concentrating on the migrants’ strengths and assets, and co-creating a series of concrete steps toward a certain goal.

Acknowledging Multiple Forms of Discrimination

The official recognition of previously obtained competences does not automatically lead to equal professional and social prospects. Discrimination (both symbolic and real) is often a ubiquitous part of the migration experience. For instance, Alexander described how the structure of adult education for migrants as constructed in Germany presupposes the existence of certain skills, which cannot be automatically assumed. This simple assumption can lead to additional discrimination for certain learners.

We have people who came from Kabul, they have no problem about learning. Most of them were long time in school. But then you have other people who came from small villages and they were about two years at school and then they left

because they had to help at home for getting (food) and earn money. They never learned to learn. They don’t know how I get something in my mind, something abstract, theoretical. And we have many projects in Germany, how to learn math, how to learn German, anything. But most people don’t get it because they don’t know how learning is.

In addition, some migrant groups are attributed with negative stereotypes. Those negative and racist attributions limit their professional chances and social networks. Michel explained how a migrant’s country of origin plays an important role in the unofficial evaluation of their professional aptitude.

If you come into the same hospital and say: “Oh, we have Syrian doctors. They speak German, their qualifications are recognized. Are you interested?” “No.” This is a thing; a lot of employers and also other people do not think that refugees have the same qualification as other migrants. So they think, Mexican doctors are good, they are friendly, they are well qualified. Syrian doctors must have many problems because they are here in Germany and had no job. Something is not ok with them. And I couldn’t describe it better. I think it’s a mix between not knowing exactly what . . . the qualification is, but also a kind of discrimination, because a refugee couldn’t be so good as other migrants.

Participants observed that German society, especially the labor market, is unprepared to see migration as anything other than just a problematic challenge. In his interview, Sven illustrated the existing prejudices and rigidity of German society, posing as an example the unreadiness or even unwillingness to understand the “migrants’ German.”

Germany is not used to working with people who speak not perfect German. So, the typical thing is, a German person hears (. . .) that the other person comes not from Germany, and he thinks he couldn’t speak good German. Normally it’s not

true. They speak good German, but you could hear that they are not German born. This is a problem.

A third form of discrimination was described by Martin as he observed that many migrants, especially from unprivileged educational backgrounds, are left behind despite existing support systems. They feel helpless and absolutely disoriented, and even then, they do not make use of counseling services, because they do not know of their existence or cannot see the value of them. “So, they don’t ask for the help . . . And the higher educated refugees, they know what they want, and they go straight their way.” Martin explained that the challenge of providing support for these migrants is compounded when they feel shame for being in need.

Most of the time, they don’t want to ask for help. It’s a problem because they don’t want to (say): “Please help me” It’s a problem. (A colleague) told me today also, he has to ask (his advisee) every time: “Should we meet?” And (only then) she says: “Oh, yeah, yeah.” But she herself doesn’t say, “Please help me more than once a week.” . . . For lots of them, it’s hard to ask, “Please help me. Please help me more. I need more help.” And they always want to give something back, and they realize sometimes they can’t, and it’s a problem. They want to give something back and they feel bad, because they want help, but they cannot give something back.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study illustrates the complexity of designing effective adult education programs to help migrants integrate into the labor market and other spheres of societal life. The findings allow us to describe more precisely the role and tasks of adult education in this process. In the following, we interpret the provided examples and discuss their possible implications for larger contexts, while exploring their relevance beyond just Germany.

This study aligns with existing research literature which asserts that the “learning needs” of migrants are

often equated with expectations and requirements of the receiving country. Learning content and settings tend to be deficit-oriented and shaped mostly one-sided, that is, looking at migration through the lens of the host society (including the host labor market), and its existing structures and requirements (Eppenstein, 2017; Guo, 2015; Seukwa, 2016; Shan & Fejes, 2015). In contrast to this situation, we argue that the design of any adult education system must account for the individuality of migrants, whose lifeline includes extreme situations that often leave them unprepared for all the necessary and immediate adjustments to their new society in general and to the labor market in particular. The findings of this study indicate a need to ensure that systems for recognition and development of vocational competences for migrants, which are based on a humane (rather than labor market) philosophical basis, are comprehensible, transparent, and support migrants in specific ways to redress the discrimination they face.

The interviewees believed that in the majority of cases migrants do not get a job based on their professional qualifications. As with Slade’s (2015) observations, many migrants accept work for which they are overqualified, and which has low pay and poor working conditions, and therefore also a shortage of workers. For migrants who come to a country with the specific purpose of such short-term work, this practice is dubious at best, but when it is applied to migrants who are fleeing war or poverty, this practice is particularly onerous because it takes advantage of people’s vulnerability.

Common expectations toward migrants seem to imply that employers expect tailor-made, experienced specialists, precisely fitting cultural, linguistic, and professional norms to their exact workplace. Furthermore, they seem to underestimate the contribution they would need to make in order for this to occur, for example establish a well-functioning diversity-management department, formulate job advertisements in a way that addresses migrants, and provide necessary offerings to train for any missing competencies. For their part, migrants often prefer to start earning money immediately, even if that means restricting themselves to the low-wage sector. In doing so, they do not consider a long-term perspective and the advantages that an investment in time and effort

into education would bring them. Providing confusing, missing information, and contradictory expectations, causes harm for the integration of middle- to long-term outcomes in the labor market.

There is a theme running throughout the data in this study that migrants often need help envisioning and pursuing long-term goals. Such help would include matching individual aptitudes and interests with career opportunities. Also necessary, however, is an educational plan with concrete steps to obtain the particular desired career, including requirements for recognition of current competences and credentials presented in a comprehensible way. This would reduce the negative challenges to identity, self-efficacy, and sense of competence that the adult educators in this study described.

An essential element of such an approach is the recognition that disadvantaged learners are less likely to benefit from standard educational offerings and are less likely to ask for help. Similar to previous studies (Guo, 2015; Lange & Baillie Abidi, 2015), the participants in this study emphasized the need for more individualized offerings rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Ignoring such factors as migration background, life experience, and life plans can lead to unsustainable life choices, with ensuing problems such as not completing educational programs and turnover in the labor market. Engaging in adult education has its costs. It requires considerable personal resources and commitments (e.g., time, money, effort), which are not usually available during the time when a person may be struggling to find immediate solutions to live their lives (e.g., work, money, shelter).

Migrants often have difficulties developing and implementing specific educational plans due to lack of knowledge of confusing bureaucratic systems. The interviewees acknowledged the complex network of measures, responsibilities, and different legal regulations that make it exceedingly difficult for migrants and refugees to gain access to adult education, including counseling and vocational training. This breeds feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. As it is beyond the purview of most adult educators to change the legal framework of existing systems, the available educational offerings and instruments should be organized and designed in such a way that the migrants do not experience an incapacity to act and to find orientation

in their new society. We see these two elements (i.e., system design and its effects on migrants' sense of capability) as essentially intertwined. Therefore, a focus on helping migrants explore learning and advancement opportunities (in a short-, middle- and long-term perspectives) and to discover their own possibilities to act (agency) would improve education's effectiveness in helping migrants integrate.

Conclusion

In this article, we discuss the interrelationship between migrants' experiences in their new society, local labor markets, and the related adult education systems. We draw on the expertise of adult educators reflecting on their practice through the lens of their professional values. They highlight important challenges in the process of supporting and facilitating the crucial learning process of migrants into the host society. Those challenges are many: empowering the migrants to take responsibility for their life-choices in a new environment, providing them with competences needed in this environment, and creating a space for them where they can overcome their feeling of frustration and inferiority (especially, but not only) with regard to their vocational competences.

Adult educators, just as the participants in this study, are often bridgebuilders, facilitators, and translators between different worlds who support the learning processes of people in situations of transition. Therefore, any integration system should consider adult education's role in promoting learning as a multilayered lifelong and life-wide process. There is a shared responsibility among individuals (whether a current migrant or the descendent of migrants, as we all are), institutions, and governments to meet the inevitable challenges of migration through supportive systems, including education. Certainly, there is a shared responsibility to diminish discrimination, which can result from negative stereotypes and existing societal practices, but also from ignorance and thoughtlessness. Reflecting on the ideals and inspirations of adult education—namely to be guided by a holistic and humanistic perception of the learner, and such values as human thriving, equity, empowerment, and agency—helps educators meet those challenges more adequately and to be involved in the process of co-creating better societies.

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Note

1. This refers to Matthew 13:12. “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.”

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