

## *Guidance for conducting interviews and cultural sensitive information*

### **Immigrants in a new society and adult education**

When providing adults with information it is fundamental to be aware of how people learn in adulthood. Globalization and technology has had an enormous impact on the need for increased knowledge on how adults learn.

Changing demographics with more cultural and ethnic diversity must be tackled at all levels. Simply providing people with brochures and funding Icelandic courses is not an effective way of providing newcomers with understandable information, or courses that actually teach them a language. (Sharan B. Merriam, 2007).

Therefore learning activities for immigrants have to be both society targeted and meet individual needs for information and teaching methods.

It should not be difficult to understand newcomers basic need for information and that this need is personal and depends on many variables such as former education, language skills, age, social status, income, personal factors etc.

However, achieving this is easier said than done. To begin with more research needs to be done on how adults learn and how the variables mentioned above affect people's abilities to receive information, learn new language and play an active part in their new society (Brookfield, 1995).

The changing of western societies from societies producing goods to societies providing services along with the technological revolution has had great impact on education, and to be efficient in the labor market adults need to learn new things (Jóhannesdóttir, 2010). Research has shown that it is the people who have good education who seek further education.

At the same time minority populations are growing and all estimations predict they will keep on growing. So adult educators are presented with this special challenge. Today's immigrant population reflects this pattern of demographics which reveals this deep polarization between the rich and educated and the poor. This polarization shows that planners of adult and higher education programs face a challenging task as they attempt to meet the variety of needs and expectations that immigrants bring to the new country (Sharan B. Merriam, 2007). This challenge has even been identified as the megatrend of the twenty-first century (Naisbitt, 1990).

The need to develop methods of providing newcomers with information and screening for individual needs for services and education is unquestionable and we believe that the Bridge Builder project is a very important step to meet these new challenges.

#### **Bibliography**

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## Access to information

Access to information for newcomers differs between countries and many other issues add to that difference. Without question, people who speak English have by far the best access to information. A lot of material has been translated into English and the majority of public servants speak at least some English. Polish immigrants are by far the largest ethnic minority group in Iceland and they also have more resources available than most other groups or individuals who do not speak English. Polish speaking people that have learned Icelandic, are working within the system, and can provide assistance to Polish speaking newcomers. They have a Facebook [page](#) where people can ask questions and the public institutions have good access to Polish speaking interpreters. There is also a some written information available in Polish It is also important to note that due to the EU and EFTA agreement it is not difficult for Polish people to settle in Iceland.

## The guidance for Welcoming Interviews and Cultural sensitive information

is built on the results of several focus groups:

- Focus group of Arabic women (13)
- Focus group of Polish people (21)
- Focus group of Lithuanian people (18)
- Focus group of asylum seekers from Iran, Macedonia and Somalia (7)
- Focus group of people with mixed nationalities (17)
- Focus group of Thai people (9)
- Focus group of Spanish and Portuguese speaking people (23)
- Two groups of Icelandic speaking Public servants
- Immigrants seeking legal advice at the Icelandic Human Rights Centre, 922 interviews total after launching the pilot project. This guidance was used as a basis for conducting the interviews and the interviewers found that since information on legal issues relating to divorce (custody, division of property etc.) is very much sought after that these needed to be added in more detail into the information material.

**The most common source for information is information from friends, relatives and coworkers**

## What is important –main themes from the focus groups

- Legal domicile/residence permits
- Information
- Assessment of former education
- Learning Icelandic
- Religion and Beliefs
- Families with children
- Religious, ethnic groups and language groups
- Women's groups
- Mother tongue groups
- Leisure activities
- Housing
- Health
- Further information-mcc.is
- And the most important question; anything else you need information about?

### **Interview with or without partner/spouse,**

When planning the interview it must be taken into consideration that some immigrants did not want their spouses to be present during the interview. The most common trend was that if the spouse was from the same country they wanted them to be present because they needed the information too. If the spouse was Icelandic it was more common the interviewee wanted to be alone so they could be more independent.

## Icelandic learning

- The Icelandic courses available are not sufficiently introduced/advertised.
- The Labour Market Unions take part in the cost of the courses and workers are not always aware of that.
- Workers have quotas for courses and immigrants have to use them all for learning Icelandic and are missing out on the possibility of attending other courses.
- The woman in the Thai and Arabic speaking groups showed interest in learning some vocation like cooking and knitting along with learning Icelandic.
- There are quite different methods and approaches available within adult education especially in the capitol area, but immigrants lack information about the different possibilities.
- All focus groups stressed the importance of learning Icelandic. One of the obstacles is that the courses are held by many different institutions and firms so they are not necessarily attending the course that would fit best but this differs from one group to another.
- It was suggested that Facebook could be used more to introduce courses since many language groups have an Icelandic Facebook page.
- Often information on courses specifically aimed at language groups like Thai or Lithuanian speaking people got lost because they were only advertised in Icelandic and English.
- Participants in the focus groups suggested that Icelandic courses should be free for the first three years. In some groups, a discussion on the need of receiving salaries while attending Icelandic lessons. The most difficult time both socially and financially for immigrants is when they are newly arrived. The course in Icelandic not only gives them the opportunity to learn the language but also to meet people.

## Residence permit /Legal Domicile

In all groups the importance of information soon after arrival came up in the discussion. That is the most important time to provide immigrants with information. It goes without saying that the information must be provided in a language that people understand and by a person who has cultural competence and understanding of the cultures people are coming from. Otherwise that person does not realize what information newcomers need and how to present it.

Information in brochures and on websites does not seem to reach immigrants. The Multicultural Centre has issued an information brochure „First steps in Iceland“ in 8 languages both for citizens of countries included in the EEA and EFTA agreements and for those from third countries.

This brochure is being updated and will be available in 9-10 languages.

The individuals who had received the brochure were quite pleased with it. More information about the school system, more detailed information on housing and mother tongue groups were the most frequent recommendation for improving the brochure.

In the Thai, Arabic and Portuguese/Spanish speaking groups it was very obvious that people were lacking information on very important rights like family reunification. For example those who have children in their country of origin did not know if they could bring them to Iceland.

E-administration is not introduced to immigrants although most schools and municipalities are using it. People need assistance to access this service and to apply for access and codes.

## Evaluation of Former Education

People need much better information on how and where they can have their education assessed as the system is complicated. Finding information about what, where and how to have your documents assessed is so difficult that even Icelandic speakers have a hard time doing so.

## Religion and beliefs

Parents have the responsibility of their children's upbringing, and religious or non-religious upbringing is a part of that responsibility. Schools and all public institutions working with children and immigrant families have to take into consideration that a family belonging to another religion than the Evangelical Lutheran Church might have a different calendar of important celebrations and holidays and might have different rules concerning food and customs around fasting, such as Muslims during the month of Ramadan.

The Arabic speaking women belonging to the Islamic faith claimed that their children face prejudice within the school system due to the negative way Muslims are portrayed in the media. All news about their culture and faith are negative and narrowly interpreted. The women wearing a hijab also stated that they faced negative attitudes at the workplace because of wearing them. They were the only group who talked about much needed education for Icelanders and wanted a platform or meeting place where people belonging to different beliefs and religions could meet and talk together.

## Families with children

Immigrant families with children need to be better informed about the system and laws and regulations regarding children such as the Child Protection Act.

They also need information on how the laws and regulations are put into practice.

There was high demand within the groups for information about the education system, rights and duties. When is it obligatory for children to attend school and when not. What education is available for teenagers and if they have any access to assistance or support with their studies.

People needed information about the communication between schools and parents. Some municipalities issue a leisure pass for children which gives them substantial discounts on leisure and sport activities which not all parents were aware of.

All groups stressed the need for better information about schools, from kindergartens to universities and it that it needed to be introduced in an organized manner.

Most parents seemed to know about mother tongue groups for children.

## Health Care System

Participants knew very little about the health care system in Iceland or how it functions. They lacked information on how the discount system for health care and medications works. To mention some of the issues that came up, they did not know if they would have to pay for their children if they needed to go to the dentist.

Some parts of the health care system do not seem to be available for immigrants who need interpreters, like the services of psychologists. That also seems to be the case for specific services for children, if the child does not speak Icelandic the service is not provided. It was also clear that many of the immigrants did not know which public institutions are obliged to offer an interpreter, what rules applied and that they needed more information.

**Trust is crucial when providing people with information.**

To be prepared to receive information we need to trust the information and the informant and we tend to trust information from people who understand our situation and where we come from.

Therefore the welcoming interview with a qualified Bridge Builder is such a fantastic idea.

Immigrants who have learned the language and the function of their new society often play a very important role for the new arrivals.

## **Interpretation-translation**

Interpreters must rephrase as needed to properly deliver the meaning of the information being presented.

The challenges and complexity of simultaneous interpretation must be considered. In Iceland interpreters are all self-trained and have acquired the skill “on the battlefield”. That needs to change, as can be imagined.

### **Interpreters need to:**

- Be familiar with the general subject in the spoken language that is to be interpreted.
- Be familiar with the cultures of both the original language and the target language.
- Have extensive vocabulary in the original language and the target language.
- Express thoughts clearly and accurately.
- Have quick decision making skills; generally there is no time to assess which variant is best.

People must be trained to do the interviews and the professionalism and quality of the information provided must be secured. For this to be possible, the Bridge Builders need to have a support system.

Hopefully sooner than later education for social interpreters will be available as a part of the adult education system. Courses should run on a regular basis.



## The setup and conducting of the welcoming interviews

There are many things to keep in mind while conducting the interviews.

- Active listening is the first thing to keep in mind since it is an empowering way of communication and builds up trust. The settings matter and a round table would be our first choice. People being interviewed can sit beside the Bridge Builder and watch his computer screen.
- The bridge Builder must explain his role, and what is in his power and what is not, to the person being interviewed.
- As a Bridge Builder you have to be able to define yourself and your role as an interviewer.
- This helps the Bridge Builder and the person he is working with to better understand the purpose of the interview and also helps with building up trust. The professionalism of the Bridge Builder is not just to know a lot about moving to Iceland but also to know his limits and not be afraid to admit that he does not have all the answers right away.
- If there is a need to send out an e-mail it is very important to include the person being interviewed although she does not understand. The best option of course would be to include a translation.

## Important tips for Bridge Builders on the purpose of the welcoming interview

- Basic information and where to seek more information.
- Take into consideration peoples' legal status such as what is the basis for their residence permit.
- When does the subject have to renew his/her permit?
- Screening for illiteracy.
- Who can people trust?  
Who are the gate-keepers of information in your language or ethnic group? You are probably one of them.
- Keep in mind that wrong information can have a serious effect on peoples' lives.
- Have all information material available in the language of the interviewee both brochures and where to find information on websites.
- Be careful that this information is not out of date, laws and regulation are under constant change and information in English and other languages in brochures and on websites often do not keep up with these changes.