Liechtenstein Languages project

In February 2016 Liechtenstein introduced the Liechtenstein Languages project (LieLa) to help asylum seekers and refugees integrate more quickly in their new country. Based on the New Learning Method developed in Liechtenstein in the 1990s, this language teaching method focuses on speaking skills – so that participants learn how to make themselves understood in German as quickly as possible – and on reducing barriers to learning.

The focus is on making learning fun, varied and active. LieLa trainers include games and movement in the sessions, and the teaching materials are designed to enable as many learners as possible to be active at the same time. Initial experiences have been positive, and suggest that the method is effective in engaging participants from very early on, regardless of age, gender or circumstances. Sessions focus on topics of immediate relevance to the asylum seekers’ situations, such as dealing with public authorities, health care, getting about in town, and other aspects of everyday life.

Throughout the classes, LieLa aims to promote a sense of self-worth and the values of peaceful co-existence.

Liechtenstein receives a significant amount of asylum seekers each year (154 in 2015) compared to its population size of 37,686 inhabitants. Many come from the Western Balkans, in part at least because Liechtenstein took in more than 1,000 displaced persons from the Balkans during the 1990s. Meanwhile, although not an EU state, Liechtenstein participates in the EU refugee relocation programme on a voluntary basis and took part in UNHCR’s resettlement programme. Since 2014, 23 Syrian refugees have been resettled from Turkey. 43 asylum seekers will be relocated to Liechtenstein from Italy and Greece.

The main LieLa website is in German but a video in English introducing the methodology and showing classes in action is available at http://liela.li/videos/. For more information, please contact office@liela.li.

‘Matching’ refugees

In 2016, we published an article in Forced Migration Review called ‘Choices, preferences and priorities in a matching system for refugees’ in which we argued that refugees to be resettled should be allocated to countries through a centralised matching system, using preferences of refugees and priorities of countries, similar to systems used around the world to allocate school places. The idea is now being discussed by the European Asylum Support Office as a possible approach in the search for solutions to the European refugee crisis.

We soon realised that an equally pressing problem is the allocation of refugees to local areas within a particular hosting country. There is a lot of empirical evidence that the initial location in which refugees are resettled matters a great deal in terms of how they succeed in areas such as education and employment. We have therefore suggested that matching systems should also be used at the local level. For example, two-sided matching could be used: by the United Kingdom to allocate 20,000 Syrians arriving by 2020 under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme to specific locations; by any of the nine Voluntary Agencies that resettle refugees to the United States; by the Canadian government that has recently expanded its government-assisted refugee programme; or even by the Swedish Migration Board to allocate refugees who currently live in temporary accommodation to permanent housing across Sweden.

To this end, in September 2016 we launched a project called Refugees’ Say (supported by the Skoll Centre for Entrepreneurship at Oxford) which aims to influence and reform public policy in the resettlement sphere. We welcome enquiries and hope to be able to design or redesign many effective matching systems for resettlement around the world.

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