

BETTER EDUCATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES: A key way to tackle Europe's problems of high youth unemployment

Increasing foreign language proficiency could be a key policy tool for encouraging greater mobility of labour between countries of the European Union and reducing the huge differences in rates of youth unemployment.

According to research by Professors **Ainhoa Aparicio-Fenoll** and **Zoe Kuehn**, to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London this week, including foreign language studies in the compulsory school curriculum fosters migration across European countries.

Why is there so little movement of Europeans from high unemployment countries to low unemployment countries?, the study asks. Legal barriers to labour mobility have been abolished since the emergence of the single European market in 1993. Yet still labour mobility in Europe is much lower than it is in the US.

In a survey by the European Commission in 2010 (Eurobarometer) 19% of Europeans declared that difficulties in learning a new language are the main deterrent for migrating to another member of the European Union.

The research by Professors Aparicio-Fenoll and Kuehn shows that including foreign language studies in the compulsory school curriculum increases migration flows to those countries where the foreign language learned is spoken.

Ainhoa Aparicio-Fenoll says:

‘Labour mobility within the EU is guaranteed in theory. But to guarantee effective labour mobility within the EU, governments should also remove language barriers. The most direct tool to do that would be to include foreign language studies in the early stages of education.’

Zoe Kuehn adds:

‘While many European countries now include foreign language teaching at early ages in their compulsory school curriculum, little is known about the macroeconomic benefits of doing so.’

‘Our research aims to provide a better grasp of possible benefits for improved allocation of labour across countries, which would reduce unemployment differences.’

ENDS

‘Does Foreign Language Proficiency Foster Migration of Young Individuals within the European Union?’ by Professors Ainhoa Aparicio-Fenoll (Collegio Carlo Alberto, Turin, Italy) and Zoe Kuehn (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)