

## **MOTHER TONGUE HAS A POWERFUL IMPACT ON IMMIGRANTS' LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Language acquisition by immigrants is crucially affected by the degree of similarity between their mother tongue and the language of the host country, according to research by **Ingo Isphording**, to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London this week.

Migrants with a very distant mother tongue – for example, Turks in the Netherlands – face distinctive hurdles in acquiring literacy skills in the host country language. This disadvantage of a distant mother tongue in language acquisition is greater for older migrants.

The research analyses a combination of linguistic information on the differences between languages with rich data on literacy skills in OECD countries. The results demonstrate that the role of the linguistic background outweighs the importance of socio-economic factors such as age, education or exposure to the host country language.

Ingo Isphording says:

‘The diversity in language background is a factor not to be ignored if we want to understand the integration process of immigrants into host country societies.

‘Language skills are an important prerequisite for this integration and have significant impacts on the success of immigrants in the labour market.

‘Thus, hurdles by distant language background are likely to be translated into economic disadvantages.’

ENDS

‘Disadvantages of Linguistic Origin – Evidence from Immigrant Literacy Scores’ by Ingo Isphording at the Department of Economics at the Ruhr University Bochum, Germany, is available at:

<http://www.rwi-essen.de/publikationen/ruhr-economic-papers/525/>

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