



MIGRANT WOMEN AS CHAMPIONS OF LEARNING : POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A policy perspective on how women use their experiences and linguistic knowledge to help newcomers in diaspora communities adapt to the local culture and the new language



**Women in diaspora communities
as champions of learning
to live together**



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As a reaction to the existing challenges in inclusion of migrants in their new host countries, organizations from several European countries decided to come together to shed light on the contributions of migrant women to their diaspora communities, and to reflect on how their activities could be encouraged and further supported. The project WIDHT (Women In Diaspora communities as champions of learning to live Together) united organizations from Italy, Spain, Greece, Romania, Finland, and Belgium.

The project is rooted in several principles: **1) creation of networks; 2) outreach; 3) capacity-building; 4) learner-centred approach** and **5) gender dimension**. The five principles were derived from research on existing inclusion projects in the involved countries that were considered successful. Following the five principles, project partners established objectives of the initiative formulated in five intellectual outputs:

IO1: Data collection on how women use their experiences and linguistic knowledge to help new comers in diaspora community adapt to the local culture and the new language.

IO2: Design and implementation of toolkit for adult educators of disadvantaged people with A1-A2 and B1-B2 linguistic level.

IO3: Design and implementation of toolkit for adult educators of people of high profile.

IO4: Trial of toolkits in courses coordinated by adult educators in Greece, Italy, Spain.

IO6: Implementation of a local interactive map that will show people, institutions, resources etc. helpful for the socio-educational inclusion of migrants.

The current report complements the results of IO6 and builds on all previous results, bringing forward recommendations targeting policymakers representing national, regional and local levels.

Introduction

Migrant women are often in a position of double, or even triple disadvantage and discrimination¹ when it comes to participation in society and the labour market. The concept of “intersectionality” –understood as “relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations”²-while having been present in feminist literature for years, has yet to be commonly acknowledged on a wider scale. Gender analysis is also predominantly absent from policy discourse or research about migration³. As women earn consistently less than their male counterparts⁴, are expected to juggle both family and professional responsibilities, and lack adequate representation in

¹ [Liebigi, Thomas and Tronstad, Kristian Rose. 2018. Triple disadvantage? A first overview of the integration of refugee women. OECD](#)

² McCall, Leslie. 2005. “The Complexity of Intersectionality.” *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (31): 1771–802

³ Jackson, Sue. 2010. “[Learning through social spaces: migrant women and lifelong learning in post-colonial London](#)”. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 29 (2): 237-253.

⁴ European Commission. 2018. [Gender pay gap in EU countries based on SES \(2014\)](#)

decision-making positions, there is still a long way to go in terms of gender equality. Having a migrant background is likely to deteriorate women's social and economic status even further, as language barriers or lack of knowledge about their rights can hinder their access to labour market, learning opportunities, childcare and a number of other services.

As concluded by the OED network⁵, participation of vulnerable groups in adult learning and ultimately in society requires a careful examination of existing barriers (including, but not limited to, those described above) and concrete steps to remove them. What OED project partners have found particularly successful was the concept of "learning ambassadors": members of a community who serve as role models and encourage others to take up learning. Having the necessary language skills and cultural sensitivity, they can serve as a bridge between the ethnic and native communities. However, for enabling migrant women to be learning ambassadors or "champions of learning to live together", as advocated in the WIDHT, policy incentives play an important role. Current policies in the areas of adult learning and education (ALE) and migration can both empower migrant women to actively participate in society or prevent them from doing so.

At the global policy level, the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 has brought more attention to the participation of (migrant) women in society and economy. This was also reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights that includes Gender Equality as its second principle⁶. The SDGs aim to provide "a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet"⁷, with several of the 17 goals addressing gender disparities, in addition to *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. Adult learning and education, although not mentioned explicitly in any of the goals, plays a role in the achievement of most of them⁸, and is paramount to support women from diaspora communities in gaining independence and becoming "champions of learning". That said, the implementation of SDGs across the globe remains fragmented.

The present paper aims to briefly examine policy initiatives launched at the EU level that explicitly or implicitly target migrant women. Some attention will also be paid to national case studies. The paper closes with a set of recommendations targeting policymakers representing different levels. The document is predominantly based on desk research, expertise of project partners, and lived experience of migrant women who were interviewed during data collection of IO1.

⁵ OED Network. 2013. [Guidelines for Trainers and Management Staff in Adult Education](#)

⁶ European Commission. 2020. [The European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

⁷ United Nations. [Sustainable Development Goals](#)

⁸ EAEA. 2018. [Adult education and sustainability](#)

A snapshot into EU adult education and migration policy

Migrant women in European adult learning and education policies

As part of the Skills Agenda for Europe, in 2016 the European Council adopted the Recommendation on **Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults**⁹. It aims at enhancing basic skills in the adult population in the EU to lower their risk of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. Therefore, the initiative provides opportunities for adults with a low level of skills to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy, and digital skills and/or broaden their set of skills. Although these skills are recognised to be important for both the labour market and active participation in society, the initiative focuses on employment. Upskilling Pathways features three consecutive steps that are essential to reach this goal: skills assessment, tailor-made learning offers and validation and recognition of the acquired skills. Depending on their national circumstances, the initiative allows for European member states to define priority target groups.

In 2019, a **stock-taking report on the implementation of Upskilling Pathways**¹⁰ was published by the European Council. In the introduction, the importance of targeting non-EU migrants to facilitate their integration and realise their potential is highlighted. When it comes to the target groups addressed on a national level, the report concludes that not all member states made use of the possibility to prioritise. Some states, like Greece and Spain, seemed to target all adults who lack basic skills within the initiative. Nonetheless, the report identifies some specific target groups, among them migrants. Countries like Finland targeted non-EU migrants, including refugees, and especially those who had arrived recently in the EU. However, neither women nor migrant women are mentioned as target groups of Upskilling Pathways.

Regarding adult education, the new **European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience**¹¹, published in 2020, is another important framework of the European Commission. The Skills Agenda calls for a shift in skills to respond to both the green and digital transition and to support economic recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and migrants are mentioned as a target group to ensure social fairness. Working together under a Pact for Skills, developing skills for jobs, empowering people to build skills throughout life, setting ambitious skills objectives and unlocking investment are the agenda's building blocks. Migrants are mostly addressed in the second building block, developing skills for jobs, and their upskilling is consequently related to inclusion into the labour market. In

⁹ [COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults.](#)

¹⁰ European Commission. 2019. [Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures](#)

¹¹ European Commission. 2020. [European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#)

addition, legal migration is mentioned as a tool to attract talent. The focus on employment is even stronger than in Upskilling Pathways, as participation in society is not stated as a goal. Again, migrant women are not considered a specific target group.

Societal participation of migrant women: a target of European migration and asylum policies?

In addition to adult learning and education policies, migration and asylum policies play a crucial role in promoting or hindering the active participation of migrant women in society. One of the key European policies in recent years in this respect is the EU Migration and Asylum Pact, published in 2020, which includes the **EU Action plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)**¹². The Action plan emphasises the importance of fostering social cohesion and building inclusive societies for all and does not only focus on newly arrived migrants, but also EU-citizens with a migration background. It also highlights the responsibility of the host societies to create opportunities for the economic, social, cultural, and political participation of migrants. Based on learnings from the 2016 Action Plan, the new Action Plan identifies the need to promote the integration of migrant women more strongly. It recognizes the “additional obstacles to integration” that migrant women and girls face due to being both migrants and female and points out structural barriers. Stereotypes and care responsibilities for family members are cited as factors that prevent migrant women from fully participating in the labour market and integration measures, such as skills assessments. Furthermore, the plan points out that migrant women, when employed, are often overqualified for their jobs. Based on these findings, the Action Plan proposes several actions both on the European and national level to foster the integration and inclusion of migrant women.

Although the EU Action Plan considers migrant women a specific target group, civil society organisations like the European Network of Migrant Women¹³ criticize that the **EU Migration and Asylum Pact**¹⁴ does not. Therefore, the Pact does not consider the specific challenges and needs of migrant women and fails to take concrete actions to protect them. In addition, the focus on attracting skilled and talented migrants for the European labour market especially disadvantages women. On the one hand, the process of recognizing skills is particularly discriminatory against migrant women. On the other hand, on a global scale a lot of women do not have access to formal education and therefore cannot achieve the required skills. This, consequently, reduces their chance for legal migration.

¹² European Commission. 2020. [Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#)

¹³ European Network of Migrant Women. 2020. [EU Migration & Asylum Pact through the Eyes of a Woman](#).

¹⁴ European Commission. 2020. [PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on asylum and migration management and amending Council Directive \(EC\)2003/109 and the proposed Regulation \(EU\)XXX/XXX \[Asylum and Migration Fund\]](#)

Funding instruments for promoting the inclusion of female refugees and migrants

The European Union has two key funding instruments to implement the above policies: AMIF and Erasmus+. AMIF stands for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, and has a total budget of a little less than €9.9 billion in the Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union from 2021 to 2027. The objectives are:

- Strengthening the common asylum policy;
- Developing legal migration in line with the economic and social needs of Member States;
- Supporting third-country nationals in effective integration and social inclusion;
- Contributing to the fight against irregular migration.

Other objectives are to ensure the return and repatriation of persons who do not have the right to stay in the EU in a safe and dignified manner, and to help them reintegrate in non-EU countries to which they have been returned.

The AMIF has a particular focus on the integration and inclusion of women refugees and migrants, and could therefore also be used to scale up small local or regional projects.

Erasmus+ supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe, and has an estimated budget of €26.2 billion in the Multiannual Financial Framework from 2021 to 2027. Although originally known as a programme for higher education, it now covers all education sectors, including non-formal adult learning and education. Its objectives include:

- the social inclusion of marginalised (and educationally deprived) groups in society;
- the green and digital transformation of the EU economy;
- the promotion of participation in democratic life.

It supports the priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area, the Digital Literacy Action Plan and the European Agenda for Skills. The programme also supports the European Pillar of Social Rights.¹⁵**National level: a mixed picture**

The **Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)**¹⁶ of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning provides an overview of the state of ALE around the world. As part of the most recent GRALE 4, published in 2019, countries were asked several questions about the state of ALE in relation to different target groups, two of them being women and migrants and refugees. According to the GRALE 4 survey data¹⁷, in comparison to 2016 the ALE participation rate of women had changed a little in Spain in Finland, while it had changed somewhat in Greece and much in Italy.

¹⁵ European Commission. 2020. [Erasmus+](#)

¹⁶ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. [The Global Report on Adult Learning and Education \(GRALE\)](#)

¹⁷ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. [Data on Adult Learning and Education](#)

The participation rate of migrants and refugees in ALE had changed a little in Finland, somewhat in Italy and much in both Spain and Greece. Thus, there was a rise in ALE participation rates of both target groups in all project partner countries, although it was higher for migrants and refugees.

When asked about changes in the provision of ALE for both target groups, Spain, Finland, and Greece indicated it had only changed a little for women, while in Italy it had changed much. For migrants and refugees there was a slightly bigger change in ALE provision, with Finland, Greece and Italy stating it had somewhat changed. Finally, the survey asked whether the countries' governments prioritize financing of ALE for women on the one hand, and migrants and refugees on the other hand. While in Finland the financing of ALE for women is not at all prioritized by the government, it is somewhat prioritized in Spain and much in Greece. For Italy there is no answer to this question. ALE for migrants and refugees is prioritized somewhat by Spain, Finland, and Italy and much by Greece. The survey results of GRALE 4 show that migrants and refugees seem to be a more important target group for ALE than women, although they are not strongly prioritized either. As migrant women are not included as a specific target group in the survey, it is difficult to draw conclusions about their participation and inclusion as a target group in ALE.

Case studies

The following case studies have been shared by the WIDHT project partners as best examples of policy and project initiatives that are inclusive of the needs of migrant women.

Italy

Language and new citizenship, an AMIF project, intended to complement the Latium Regional Plan for language, cultural and civic training of third-country nationals, favouring the increase of the level of linguistic competence as a key to social inclusion processes. This has been done in particular by reinforcing and supporting spontaneous pre-literacy initiatives set up by the communities of non-EU citizens residing in the province of Frosinone; by testing language, civic and social training services, tailored to their needs, according to the logic of proximity; by facilitating access and information, in order to favour their social integration in the regional and local territory. The EU skill profile tool has been used as one of the main instruments to acknowledge the skills of migrant women, also at informal and non formal level.

The general objective of the project was to foster the integration and social inclusion of non-EU migrants, in particular women, through training in the linguistic, civic and socio-occupational fields thanks to proximity devices, thus facilitating access and information in connection with the offer of the network of schools and other local institutions.

Finland

In the summer of 2020, the Vantaa Skills Centre in Finland received a special grant from the ministry of Education and Culture for the *Involving the Parents to go to School and Work* project¹⁸. This is an equality project that aims to integrate immigrant parents and help them find a suitable study or career path.

The collection of research articles published by the Ministry of Economic affairs and employment in 2019 showed that the employment of migrant women is weaker at all levels of education compared to both immigrant men and those born in Finland. New types of solutions to this equality problem were being sought in this project, which specifically targeted housewives: those parents whose Finnish language skills were still weak and who did not necessarily have previous educational background. In the project, mothers' language skills were developed in an encouraging and safe school environment. In addition to the language, parents learned e.g. mathematics, social sciences and information and communication skills.

Studying in a school environment continued until February, when a 1-3-month language-conscious work trial was introduced. After the work trial, parents will be able to train their job search skills, identify and articulate their skills, and participate in other services of Vantaa Skills Centre. At the center, a follow-up plan is prepared towards the place of work or study together with their personal supervisor, and even after it is found, the supervisor is supportive in the new phase of life. The aim of the project is thus to promote equality in the labor market and to ensure that each participant finds a suitable further path.

Greece

Based on specifications from the European Council and the European Union, the National Integration Strategy for 2019¹⁹ asserts that a successful social integration program necessitates the active participation of the state, institutions, and civil society.

Local communities in Greece are crucial for the proper implementation of social integration initiatives in this setting. Local Greek government administrations, by involving and engaging local populations, serve as important instruments for social integration.

Some of the national strategy's action pillars, as well as their related policy actions and initiatives, are listed below:

- Collaboration with local government administrations to promote local integration, which includes actions and measures such as: improving collaboration between the central administration and local government administrations, allowing local administration bodies to participate in integration initiatives, and improving reception services, offering accommodation services to beneficiaries and applicants of international protection (M.I.C.).

¹⁸ [Vanhemmat mukaan - Careeria](#)

¹⁹ Greek National Integration Strategy. 2019. [Εθνική-Στρατηγική-για-την-Ένταξη_final_.pdf \(opengov.gr\)](#)

- Promote labour market integration through identifying and recognizing the skills and credentials of third-country nationals, facilitating their entry to the labor market, and encouraging entrepreneurship.
- Enhance Intercultural Mediation, which includes actions and measures including strengthening and extending the intercultural mediation profession and encouraging intercultural connection and communication.
- Encourage civic participation, which includes activities such as facilitating civic and community participation for third-country nationals through participation in community sporting activities and volunteerism.
- Combating racism and xenophobia entails detecting and monitoring racist and xenophobic phenomena as well as increasing awareness about them.
- Implement specific integration strategies for disadvantaged populations, such as boosting women's integration, special needs individuals' integration, and geriatric integration.
- To improve second-generation citizens' assimilation into Greek society, implement tailored programmes.

Policy recommendations

Promote the concept of learning champions to reach out to those furthest away from learning – and give ownership back to communities

Although there is still relatively little data on this, the experience from the grass roots of adult learning and education and from a number of projects and initiatives²⁰ shows that "learning champions" as role models can motivate other people from their communities to participate in learning themselves. This is especially true for particularly disadvantaged target groups, including female migrants. Champions show what paths there are to learning, where there is help and support - material, but also, for example, in the form of childcare - and what can be achieved through learning. This is not only a form of guidance, but also gives ownership back to communities and their members to determine ways of learning for themselves. Targeted funding could help to scale up the model of learning champions and to reach out to those furthest away from learning, who are often those most deprived of learning opportunities and information on where to start looking for them.

Recognise the importance of non-formal adult learning for fostering participation in society

Non-formal adult learning has an important role to play, improving skills, creating new social networks, increasing participation in society. It provides a platform for citizens of diverse backgrounds to meet and can also serve as a safe space for migrant women to exchange experiences and skills. Adult education providers, community centres, cultural venues all make an important part of the larger ecosystem of non-

²⁰ For instance, for the most recent Global Education Monitoring Report, the UNESCO looked for champions in inclusion and learning; another well-known initiative is the Adult Learners' Week Award for champions in adult learning by the Learning and Work Institute UK

formal learning and should be provided with recognition and adequate funding to continue and expand their daily activities.

Acknowledge the role of life skills in building inclusive communities and supporting employment

Life skills are building blocks of independence and self-efficacy. They are combinations of different capabilities that in general enable adults to become lifelong learners and to solve problems in order to live an independent life as individuals and participate in a collective life within society. Many of these, such as taking care of one's mental health or improving self-esteem, are particularly important for migrant women, especially those who have suffered from traumatic experience. The benefit of a life skills approach in national, regional and local strategies supporting inclusion of migrant women should be widely acknowledged.

Include migrant women as a target group for ALE strategies

Targeted ALE strategies can better cater for the needs of migrant women, taking account of the specific struggles and obstacles that they face: from language or socio-economic barriers to family responsibilities or relevance of the learning offer.

Lived experiences matter!

“Start from concrete experiences for building theory”
(participant of an online event organised during the project)

Targeted or tailored learning programmes can also provide better information about learners' needs and existing gaps in service provision, therefore generating data that can feed into future strategies. In addition, EU funding programmes, whose importance for national, regional and local initiatives cannot go unnoticed, should mainstream a gender perspective and keep a sensitivity for intersectionality.

Make sure that everyone is at the table when making decisions

Setting up a strategy that is inclusive of migrant women is impossible without making them part of the decision-making process. All parties concerned by policy measures need a seat at the table, from learning and service providers to civil society and learners themselves. Their active participation should happen at all stages of policy-making, from needs assessment to implementation and evaluation.

Implement ALE and integration measures regardless of migration status

A truly inclusive ALE or integration policy avoids eligibility requirements based on migration status. As has been advocated by various international European civil organisations such as the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, “social inclusion initiatives through EU funding should be targeting all migrants regardless of their status”²¹.

²¹ PICUM. 2020. [The Future EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion Ensuring and Approach Inclusive for All](#)

Ensure policy coherence between different fields

Adult learning and education is closely connected to various policy fields, such as employment, health and welfare or social inclusion, all of which also play a role in migration policies. In order to ensure greater coherence between different policy initiatives, more cooperation is needed, both horizontally and vertically.

Change the narrative and fight stereotypes in the public perception of migrant women

More often than not, women from diaspora communities face a distorted public perception of their capabilities, achievements and ambitions. Meaningful participation of migrant women in education, society and economy will not be achieved unless openness, cultural diversity and change are encouraged. More awareness-raising and opportunities for dialogue between all members of society are needed to fight stereotypes and prejudice. Adult learning and global citizenship education have an important role to play here, fostering the transformation of unequal power relationships²². Change does not happen overnight and needs small steps taken at all levels to counteract discrimination and misconceptions about migration.

Foster partnerships between different stakeholders

A key question for learning providers as well as local communities, local authorities and service providers, is how to include migrant women in adult learning. Evidence collected within the framework of the WIDHT project shows that cooperation between these stakeholders and forming networks is crucial to reach out to migrant communities. Outreach activities are more likely to be successful when they are held at meeting places of migrant women, for instance parks, kindergartens, or libraries²³. Collaborative partnerships need a policy environment that encourage cooperation between stakeholders instead of pitting them against each other in calls for funding proposals.

Red tape hinders participation

“[There is a need] to make easier and shorter the time that you have need to have for documents, to join trainings, to have health insurance”
(a woman interviewed for WIDHT IO1: data collection)

Set up arrangements to validate informal and non-formal learning, and facilitate recognition of academic diplomas

Too often women in diaspora communities struggle to find gainful employment or to access learning opportunities because their prior learning experience remains unrecognized. All adults with a migration background should have an opportunity to validate the learning they acquired in informal and non-formal learning environments, or to have their qualifications and degrees recognized in a swift and transparent

²² Bridge 47. 2019. [The Envision 4.7 Roadmap](#)

²³ WIDHT project. 2019. [Migrant women as champions of learning. Data collection on how women use their experiences and linguistic knowledge to help newcomers adapt to the local culture and the new language](#)

manner. Comprehensive information about existing validation and guidance systems should be readily available to everyone concerned.

