

THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN: A GUIDE FOR POLICY MAKERS



WEMIN

Migrant Women
Empowerment and Integration

AUTHORS:

- POLINA KONTODIAKOU, OE
- LAMBRINI STYLIU, HOU (DAISSY GROUP)
- ASPASIA (SISSIE) THEODOSIOU (DAISSY GROUP)
- CATHERINE SOTIROPOULOU, OE
- ACHILLES KAMEAS (DAISSY GROUP)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“	Introduction.....	3
	The WEMIN project: a brief overview.....	3
	Rationale and methodological framework for the development of the GPG.....	4
	Key findings and recommendations on MRW's well-being and social integration.....	5
	Health related issues.....	6
	Employment opportunities.....	7
	Opportunities for social participation and the role of parents.....	9
	Good Practice Guide: Considerations for Policy Makers.....	12
	Annex: The selected 10 Good Practices.....	14
”		



WEMIN project has been funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund under grant agreement No 776211. This guide reflects the views of the author only. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.



WEMIN
Migrant Women
Empowerment and Integration

INTRODUCTION

The present guide has been designed for policy makers working in the field of the social integration of migrants and refugees. Based on the findings from the **WEMIN Good practice Guide (GPG) for the social integration of migrant and refugee women** and on the accumulative experience gained through the development of the GPG, a number of recommendations for EU and national policy makers are listed below. The recommendations provide specific suggestions for how to facilitate social integration, while safeguarding the rights of migrant and refugee women.

THE WEMIN PROJECT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The aim of the WEMIN project is to implement a comprehensive model for the integration of migrant and refugee women (MRW) in host societies. Nine partners from eight European countries (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Germany, Sweden and France) with different expertise in dealing with integration (Universities, VET centers, NGOs, training organizations) have come together to exchange their knowledge on different aspects of integration (social, cultural, educational and professional) and develop initiatives for greater integration of MRW.

The main objectives of the project are to:

- Achieve social inclusion through cultural awareness
- Empower MRW by informing them about the educational system of the host society and the role of women within it
- Facilitate the active participation of MRW through mentoring on opportunities in education, employment or in volunteering.
- Promote peer learning between MRW and institutions through an online platform
- Promote the socio-cultural exchange and the direct interaction of MRW with the local population, women in particular, by holding and participating in shared activities.
- Transfer good practices between the partner countries
- Disseminate good practices regarding MRW's integration, both inside and outside partner countries

The expected outcomes of the WEMIN project are:

- A Good Practice Guide
- Language and cultural courses for MRW
- Empowerment and mentoring sessions for MRW
- Arts, crafts and cultural activities to help foster relations between MRW and women from local communities
- An online platform for peer learning among MRW

RATIONAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GPG

The selected Good Practices presented in the GPG represent the most useful, innovative and interesting practices in the fields of education from a socio-cultural perspective, but also in relation to empowerment, mentoring and cultural exchange. All of these categories cover different but equally significant aspects of MRW integration and thus together provide a more holistic approach. Out of the initial 26 good practices collected and surveyed by WEMIN partners the selected Good Practices in the GPG were evaluated on the basis of the following criteria: *the clarity of their objectives and activities; the involvement of multiple stakeholders; their impact and effectiveness; their transferability; their sustainability and their cohesion with EU policies.* **The criteria of transferability and sustainability** were more heavily weighted than the other criteria.

The selected Good Practices were developed either directly by participants in the WEMIN consortium or by other organizations in their region or country. Every partner prepared a description of each Good Practice which provided information under the following headings: the owner of the good practice; the beneficiaries/target group; partnership (if any); level of application; rational and objectives; activities; results achieved; sources needed; parameters to be considered (technical, economic, political, social); potential for transfer.

The GPG outlines the resources needed for the implementation of the selected Good Practices and the results achieved. More importantly it highlights the **aspects that can be transferred** to other partner countries, indicating **potential barriers**, and **possible solutions** to overcome these barriers.



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON MRW'S WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The *percentage of refugee women* living in the EU is *growing*, with a large majority being hosted by first reception countries (mainly Greece and Italy). According to various reports, these women share a specific profile and certain characteristics because of their cultural and religious background, the local context in their countries of origin, and the suffering they have endured in order to arrive to Europe.

As a result, Europe has seen a large increase *in the number of women with vulnerable health conditions, victims of rape and of other types of gender-based violence, having lost (or been separated from) their family and home* because of war, and with multiple unresolved traumas. Therefore, in order to address some of these issues a policy approach that reflects the needs and unique characteristics of refugee women is needed.



FINDINGS

- MRW have **little knowledge** of how **local healthcare systems** work as well as **an observed lack of** the relevant **vocabulary needed to access healthcare**. **These factors combined** make their use of the healthcare services problematic. As can be seen in the good practice from Italy a significant percentage of MRW (42%) that the intervention targeted, did not know about available health services on sexual and reproductive health before being involved in the project (see GP "Migrant Women's sexual health").
- As MRW very often experience feelings of **distress and unhappiness, their condition deteriorates** when they do not manage **to address these issues with a healthcare specialist** (see GP "Plurielles")
- MRW often experience a number of cultural and religious, as well as socioeconomic and linguistic **barriers to equitable access to health care services** (see GP "Plurielles").
- **Sexual and reproductive health** is key for the well-being of women, especially given the specific profile of MRW outlined above. Their ability to consult on sexual and reproductive health issues needs to be ensured and their unhindered access to specialised local health services needs to be facilitated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Training on healthcare:** interventions focused on healthcare will increase MRW's understanding of their own health needs and how to access services as well as enabling MRW adopt more protective behaviours.
- **Enhance the cultural and interpersonal competencies of people working in health and social services:** develop health literacy skills and deliver more effective services to migrant users.
- **Develop and provide holistic psycho-social support and therapy programmes especially for MRW who have suffered GBV:** employ trauma specialists and therapists in national healthcare services, and create a network of experts that would build the capacity of the local healthcare systems to deal with female population, since statistics show increased incidents of GBV in all of Europe.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

- **Integration into the labour market**, which is the key component of social integration, is still an area where more progress is needed. In all partner countries, the **unemployment rates of foreigners** are **very high in comparison** to that of EU citizens. The same is true for **women**, who **tend to be even more vulnerable in terms of job inclusion**. Italy, in particular, reports refugee and asylum seeker women as the most vulnerable in terms of employment, due mainly to their low, if not non-existent, level of education, and to the high percentage of human trafficking victims among them (see GP “Migrant Women’s Health Promotion”).
- For certain partner countries (Greece would be such a case) the integration of **professional MRW is even more difficult** due to the economic crisis and to the **lack of job opportunities**.
- MRW are usually engaged in **low-skilled, low-paid and less prestigious jobs**, regardless of their education and previous work experience, which in turn leads to their **stigmatization and the development of stereotypes concerning their professional and working abilities**.
- There is **a lack of inspiring role models** and **examples for young MRW** that could affect their professional development and their future plans. Data from France for instance, revealed that MRW from disadvantaged neighborhoods had difficulties in identifying their strengths and dreams due to the limited opportunities available for them for personal development, which in turn leads to a lack of self-confidence (see GPs “Rev’elles”, “Plurielles”).
- Due to language difficulties, cultural differences and the economic situation, **digital illiteracy of MRW is sometimes high**. Concerning the digital competences needed nowadays in the job market, MRW’s access and inclusion to it is further hampered (see GP “Computer and Catalan for the families of the Drassanes school and CEIP Rubén Dario”).
- Access to the labour market for migrant women is not always positively perceived and encouraged by the general public. Particularly in Portugal, there are “myths” about the burden migrants place on state budgets, although in reality their social contributions are greater than the social benefits they receive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Monitor labour market trends:** Provide MRW with information about “real labour market issues” in the host society and in the EU in general. Ensure that MRW are aware of skills and jobs in demand on the labour market and design/ update vocational education based on these trends. This would guarantee that any **vocational training** project targeting MRW would aim to meet this **demand**. In addition to this, **training** courses/seminars should be **certified** providing MRW with proper skills that correspond to the needs of the labour market.
- **Develop communication channels that help MRW connect with the local market/businesses:** the participation of the authorities that provide services to the unemployed would be crucial. They can **review job descriptions and business activity**, **evaluate** the acquired and/or **certified skills** and competences of MRW **and refer them** to relevant employment opportunities in the local job market.
- **Foster and facilitate social entrepreneurship and/or support the development of entrepreneurial skills for MRW:** A first step could be the implementation of a **mechanism** that provides **updated** and **well-informed expertise on starting a business** in the host country (**legislation, taxation, opportunities for funding** etc.). **Migrants** who have already established and **run their own businesses** in the host country, could be of particular help and support to newcomers. A **specific registry and/or network** of **migrant/ refugee entrepreneurs** would be ideal in this case, while this measure could act as an inspiration to MRW and motivate them to take up business opportunities in the host country.
- **Design projects that improve basic technological/digital competences of MRW:** This could contribute to help them undertake **everyday tasks (email, online banking** etc.), to ensure their **active participation** in the host society, to enhance their **communication** and **networking** skills and to improve their chances of **finding a job** in the host country.
- **Launch information campaigns aimed at the local population: Campaigns on immigrant employment, qualifications and equality of opportunity issues,** deconstructing existing myths and giving real and credible information to the host societies.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND THE ROLE OF PARENTS

FINDINGS

- MRW are often isolated in the societies they live in. This can happen because of many factors: their employment in certain jobs with unsociable hours (e.g. caring sector, live-in domestic servants, and cleaners), cultural or religious reasons (see GP *“Computer and Catalan for the families of the Drassanes school and CEIP Rubén Dario”*), lack of linguistic skills (see GP *“Time to Grow”*), or scars left from migration to Europe (traumatized, exposed to the risk of violence etc) (see GPs *“Rev’Elles”* and *“Aid Program for Yazidi Women”*).
- For social integration it is very important to bring together the local and the migrant population, create opportunities for both groups of women to meet, converse and exchange ideas about their shared experiences as women. Yet, not many good practices target both MRW and women from the host countries and bring them together in projects (see GPs *“Local Book Club for MRW”*, *“International Women’s Breakfasts”* & *“Grupp 39”*). Shared activities, workshops and events implemented in Sweden, Germany and Ireland showed that direct interaction of MRW with locals helped to develop a sense of community and enhanced mutual cultural exchange.
- Not much attention is given to the support of the migrant parents’ educative role in relation to their children. According to reports, in most of the partner countries, migrant mothers, and especially those recently arrived, do not participate in school activities, face difficulties in helping their children with homework, and are not integrated in the national educational system (see GPs *“Plurielles”*, *“Time to Grow”* & *“Computer and Catalan for the families of the Drassanes school and CEIP Rubén Dario”*).
- Within this context, migrant children are reported as experiencing more educational disadvantages and lack of educational opportunities than any other major school population. This becomes evident as in some partner countries (e.g. France, Italy) migrant students have a higher repetition rate than native students, and a higher early school leaving rate as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Design projects /policies targeting both MRW and women from the host countries: this measure is of great importance since it enhances the direct cultural exchange of both target groups and should go beyond the level of exchange of traditions/festivities/customs. Women have the opportunity to come together and talk about everyday issues, understand the different mentalities informed by different cultural and gender norms and structures and realize that there are more commonalities in their lives as women rather than differences.
- Promote peer-to-peer learning activities as a means of enhancing the exchange of knowledge between women: measures and actions that guarantee the participation and the engagement of members of the migrant community who are not integrated with members who already are, often have a greater positive impact. In many good practices (e.g. France, Italy, Portugal, Greece) peer to peer methodologies have proved to be effective since they motivate MRW to participate in integration activities/ courses/ projects, eliminate any feelings of hesitation and distrust and promote fruitful interaction and dialogue.
- Develop projects specifically targeting migrant mothers: it is of utmost importance for migrant mothers to fully understand how the educational system of the host society works and the school environment in general. Since school is considered to be a microcosm of society, this could form a first step in their own integration in the host society in general. This could be further strengthened by projects that encourage and support the involvement of migrant parents in everyday school activities, such as study groups or parents' associations, which entail constant contact with teachers and school employees as well as with parents from different backgrounds. In this way, migrant mothers would be helped in acknowledging their parenting role, being actively engaged in their children's education, meeting and forming relations with the native population on a regular basis, and gradually achieving better levels of social integration.

- Design practices and interventions that enable MRW to become autonomous, informed and active citizens in their host society: for this to be achieved, MRW should firstly acquire a thorough knowledge of the local society, of its administrative system, and of their legal obligations in relation to residency as well as their rights in the host country. For this purpose, it is important to design interventions that increase MRW's self-esteem and self-confidence, help them become autonomous and independent women that are able to navigate in the legal and administrative landscape of the host country as well as handle personal and family matters, by themselves.
- Develop projects that combine activities for migrant women and their children: the evaluation of good practices, showed that projects that included women working together with their children contributed to reducing the inter-generational gap and had a dual positive effect on both mothers and children. Children's academic performance at school was improved, mothers were more involved in their children's formal education and parenting skills were increased. Furthermore, the delivery of shared activities of mothers with their children helped resolve one issue which often acts as a barrier to developing initiatives with MRW, and that is the problem of childcare. As can be seen in all contexts, family obligations are one of the main factors for not attending and/or not completing a programme/course/meeting. Especially in countries that are characterized by a lack of sufficient childcare services (e.g. Portugal and Greece), it would be a very worthwhile undertaking for policy makers to design and implement activities for mothers and their children. This could also result in reduced operational costs, while at the same time would provide a rational and effective solution to this problem.
- The involvement of the school in policy interventions, could also work well in attracting certain target groups (e.g. Muslim women): according to findings, specific target groups due mainly to religious / cultural reasons, are usually reluctant or even prohibited from actively participating in activities that promote their social integration in the host society, and that take place outside the house and family environment. As data from Spain showed, projects that are designed to take place or involve the school environment, have proved to be effective in curbing and eliminating any doubts or opposition to participation.

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE: CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Level of implementation

- Most of the Good Practices reviewed seem to be disperse actions, delivered mostly by private organizations and NGOs (this was the case in the majority of countries except for Sweden and Germany), rather than part of a general policy/ strategy towards integration and inclusion.
- As a result of the lack of a more general policy, and although most of the GPs reviewed have proved to work well at local level, their use is not applied at wider levels and they do not seem to have had impacts at a national level.
- There is a lack of channels to support the dissemination of the GPs and their results among partner countries, while only a minimum of knowledge, know-how and exchange of experiences has been observed

Lack of sustainability and exploitation planning

- There is also a lack of a long-term strategy for their exploitation. In most of the cases, projects and activities are implemented, without securing in advance the necessary resources for their sustainability.



Lack of a holistic approach to women's needs

- Few projects implemented specifically target migrant women. When they do, they often focus on specific issue(s), rather than adopting a holistic approach to women's needs.
- The majority of the initiatives aimed at the social inclusion of the migrant population usually target newcomers' needs. They rarely provide further support to foster full social participation and integration, and they are not offered on a permanent basis.
- A major difficulty in ensuring regular attendance / participation/ long term commitment of the target group to the training programmes / linguistic courses / workshops or other interventions has been noted. This can be due to numerous restrictions that MRW face that are often related to household and family obligations, time limitations and cultural or religious reasons.

Lack of synergies

- In some partner countries, difficulties were reported related to collaboration and synergy between the different institutions and organizations involved in the field of migrant's social integration. This was due to strictly bureaucratic contexts bound by regulative and complex procedures.



ANNEX: THE SELECTED 10 GOOD PRACTICES

- “
1. Plurielles – France
 2. Grupp 39 – Sweden
 3. Time to Grow – Portugal
 4. International Women's breakfasts – Ireland
 5. Sonetor – Greece
 6. Rev-Elles – France
 7. Local Book Club for MRW – Germany
 8. Computer and Catalan for the families of the Drassanes school and CEIP Rubén Dario – Spain
 9. Aid Program for Yazidi Women – Germany
 10. Migrant Women's Health Promotion – Italy
- ”

The full publication "Detailed description of 10 good practices" is available on WEMIN's website at:

www.wemin-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/D1.4-Detailed-Descriptions-of-10-Good-Practices.pdf



WEMIN

Migrant Women
Empowerment and Integration

Hellenic Open University (HOU) - Greece (Coordinator)

Contact Person: Sissie Theodosiou

E-mail: info@daissy.eap.gr

Tel: +30 2610 367 969



Southside Partnership - Ireland

Contact Person: Daniela Naab

E-mail: daniela.naab@sspship.ie

Tel.: +353 1 7060100



Colectic - Spain

Contact Person: Esther Subias

E-mail: esther.subias@colectic.coop

Tel: +49 34425867

Colectic

Tecnologia per la
transformació social

European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) - France

Contact Person: Solène Falk

E-mail: solene.falk@aldaintranet.org

Tel: +39 0444540146



Ifa Akademie - Germany

Contact Person: Dr. Martin Kilgus

E-mail: kilgus@iga-akademie.de

Tel: +49 7112225101



Folk Universitetet - Sweden

Contact Person: Ingmarie Rohdin

E-mail: ingmarie.rohdin@folkuniversitetet.se

Tel: +46 701465601



Association Mouraria a Renovar - Portugal

Contact Person: Filipa Bolotinha

E-mail: filipa.bolotinha@renovaramuraria.pt

Tel: +35 1935036681



Oxfam Italia Intercultura - Italy

Contact Person: Francesco Lucioli

E-mail: Francesco.lucioli@oxfam.it

Tel: +39 0575182481



Olympic Training & Consulting Ltd - Greece

Contact Person: Catherine Sotiropoulou

E-mail: olykek@olympiakokek.gr

Tel: +30 2621040200

