

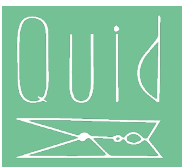


WORLDPLACES

Meaningful engagement
and integration of
migrant women



AWSA-Be
Arab Women's Solidarity Association - Belgium
جمعية تضامن المرأة العربية - بلجيكا



UniversidadeVigo



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iWORLDPLACES

Meaningful engagement and integration of migrant women

Authors: Alyssa Ahrabare and Alicia Arbid



This toolkit was produced by Arab Women Solidarity Association (Belgium) in the framework of a transnational project funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and implemented by a partnership consortium comprising the lead partner Quid (Italy), the European Network of Migrant Women (EU wide), Impact Hub (EU wide), Speak (Portugal), Generation 2.0 (Greece), and University of Vigo (Spain). The content of this toolkit should not be taken to reflect the views and positions of the European Commission.





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1. FOREWORD AND OBJECTIVES

AWSA-Be

AWSA-Be - Arab Women's Solidarity Association-Belgium - is a feminist association based in Brussels that promotes the rights of women from the Arab world, both in their host country and in their country of origin. Inspired by AWSA International, founded in 1982 by Egyptian feminist Dr Nawal El Saadaoui, the association was founded in June 2006 and is independent of any political or religious affiliation. For 15 years, AWSA-Be has been creating toolkits on different topics: feminism, Arab cultures, identity and stereotypes, women's body, sexual and emotional health, interculturality, etc. AWSA-Be provides training programs based on these contents. These trainings are directed towards professionals who conduct activities with migrant women and men (between 18 and 65+) and with youth (in schools and youth centers). In addition, AWSA-Be also provides self-development workshops around the themes of building self-esteem, challenging limiting beliefs and improving emotional management, with the support of a professional life coach. On top of its educational activities, AWSA-Be organizes socio-cultural events to raise awareness on women's rights and build bridges between different cultures. Finally, the organization is actively involved in various feminist networks and platforms to combat violence against women and girls and improve all women's access to fundamental rights.



AWSA-Be

Arab Women's Solidarity Association-Belgium
جمعية تضامن المرأة العربية - بلجيكا

AWSA-Be identifies migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls as being at the intersection of several intertwined systems of violence (racism and sexism in particular). Thus, strengthening the self-esteem and capacity building of these women, from the Arab world and elsewhere, aligns deeply with the values and purpose of the organization. This toolkit is a mirror of years of grassroots actions with migrant women and girls. It is the result of the collaboration between AWSA-Be and the European Network of Migrant Women, a platform gathering over 50 organizations working with migrant women and girls across Europe.

More info: www.awsa.be

AWSA-Be toolkits: <https://www.awsa.be/fr/page/outils-pedagogiques>

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Objectives of the toolkit

The goal of this toolkit is to provide advice and good practices on the topic of meaningful engagement and integration of migrant women.

The pedagogical materials displayed have been tailored for the specific needs of the consortium of the WORLDPLACES project but can be applied by any organization providing services to or working at grassroot level with migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls.

This toolkit focuses primarily on providing a methodology for activities regarding confidence building, body and identity and cultural heritage, as well as safe space building for women and girls of migrant background.

By promoting a better understanding of the problems faced by migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women in Europe, by encouraging professionals to develop intercultural and feminist approaches, and by breaking down the prejudices about migrant women, this toolkit aims to promote dialogue and mutual understanding between different communities.





Authors

This toolkit was written by: Alyssa Ahrabare and Alicia Arbid.

Alyssa Ahrabare is a legal expert specialized in human rights and fundamental liberties. Feminist activist, she is Project Officer of the European Network of Migrant Women, spokeswoman of Osez le féminisme ! (Dare to be feminist!) and vice-President of the French coordination for the European Women's Lobby. Alyssa provides training to professionals on women's access to rights and justice. She is also the founder of a company that uses artistic practice to work with youth on the promotion of equality between women and men and the fight against all forms of discrimination and bullying.

Alicia Arbid was born in 1986 in the DRC. Half Lebanese/half Belgian, she holds a Master's degree in Press and Information. She has been working as the coordinator of Arab Women's Solidarity Association-Belgium since 2010. For the past 12 years, she has been developing intercultural field experiences in Brussels and an expertise on women's rights with a special focus on women from the Arab world. She facilitates in EVRAS (the Belgian program for the promotion of sexual and emotional education) and gives training to professionals in the framework of the missions in permanent education. She speaks at conferences and seminars in Belgium and internationally to share good practices and raise awareness on the importance of a feminist intercultural approach. She is also involved in the European Network of Migrant Women and volunteers in other women's and cultural associations.

With special thanks to Ihssan Himich (AWSA-Be), Séverine Micheroux (La Voix des Femmes) and Adriana S. Thiago (European Network of Migrant Women).

2. WORLDPLACES: PROJECT AND PARTNERS



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The project

Across the European Union, migrant women encounter substantial barriers in accessing and retaining employment, enjoying as a result fewer opportunities for integration.

Workplaces are formidable integration hubs; nonetheless, not every workplace is equally accessible to migrant women without formal education and skills. This results in exclusion from integration processes and work life. Leveraging on workplace-based best practices for integration, **Worldplaces** aims to bring together the public and non-profit sector with for-profit employers in multi-stakeholder permanent local networks to bridge the persisting discrimination against women of migrant backgrounds.

The WorldPlaces project involves partners in Italy, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, Austria and Germany, as well as European-wide organizations such as the European Network of Migrant Women. The collective goal of the consortium is to promote better and more fulfilling integration of migrant women in the workplace. To do so, the project aims to build a series of toolkits and conduct actions and workshops across Europe on different themes: **engagement of migrant women, leadership, work-life balance, workplace based language and culture exchange, body and identity.**



The partners

European Network of Migrant Women (EU-wide)



The European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) is a migrant-women led, multi-ethnic secular umbrella platform of NGOs that works for the rights of migrant women in Europe. ENoMW is rooted in the core values

of equality, justice and feminism. The Network's membership ranges from grassroots service providers to NGOs focused on advocacy and research. ENoMW members cover a diverse range of subjects in the area of human rights of migrant and refugee women, with economic empowerment, anti-discrimination and access to justice, and combating Violence against women and girls (VAWG), being the most frequent activities. ENoMW strives to combat discrimination and promote the rights and interests of migrant and refugee women within Europe through coordinated advocacy, exchange of information, capacity-building activities, projects and events and representing ENoMW members at both the European and national level. The Network is committed to strengthen migrant women's leadership, increasing their visibility and celebrating their contributions to European societies. ENoMW recognizes that discrimination against women is historically entrenched in other patriarchal projects such as colonialism, imperialism, warfare and the exploitation of natural resources. The sex-based discrimination of women is intrinsically linked with and compounded by other forms of oppressions based on race, ethnicity, class, age, legal status, disability and sexual orientation. Male violence is a pandemic problem affecting women across cultures, classes and ethnicities and manifests at interpersonal, communal and institutional levels: this is why we are committed to political goals of eliminating systemic root causes of this violence.

More information: www.migrantwomennetwork.org

Impact HUB (EU-wide)

Building a better business. Designing impactful solutions. (Re)imagining the future... Impact HUB is a community of impact-driven entrepreneurs, creators, innovators and intrapreneurs who want to take action – today – to create a better tomorrow for people and the planet.

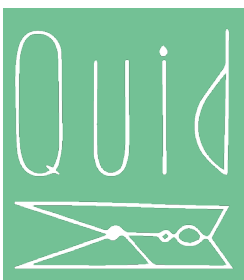
Impact HUB has been a catalyst for entrepreneurial action for 15+ years. The organization started in 2005, with one community, in one city. It was a space for anyone who had an idea for a better world to meet and collaborate – a place where ideas turned into impact. Today, Impact HUB is a global network of 24.250 people driving change – made up of 100+ communities in 60+ countries across 5 continents.



More infos: www.impacthub.net



QUID (Italy)



Quid's social enterprise model is rooted in the belief that by transforming the limits of the world and society into starting points, the market can develop new and innovative business models. The structure's mission begins where others stop. Where the fabric value chain ends, Quid's design and manufacturing process begins. Where the labor market discriminates, Quid builds inclusive leadership and training experiments.

Today, Quid counts 133 employees, 67% with experience of work marginalization, 83% women. The company has created over 213 jobs since 2013. And thanks to its circular supply chain, it has extended the life cycle of over 1,170 fabrics by collaborating with 50 textile manufacturers, companies and brands in all historic Italian fashion districts.

More infos: www.quidorg.it

SPEAK (Portugal)

SPEAK is an organization based in 24 countries that provides language courses to groups that meet in-person and online to learn together. The platform is open to everyone who wants to learn a language without any conditions or restrictions. SPEAK's teaching methodology is based on games, conversations and group activities. Beyond providing a safe space to learn new languages, SPEAK aims at building bridges between different people and culture. SPEAK counts 60k participants from across 203



countries, sharing in 60 languages. The organization partners with service providers working with specific vulnerable groups who direct their beneficiaries towards them. Some of these partners work with migrant and refugee women, as a result specific groups have been created, tailored to this public needs.

More infos: www.speak.social/en/





Wonderlane / UNSPLASH



Generation 2.0 (Greece)



Generation 2.0
For Rights Equality & Diversity

Generation 2.0 RED is a non-profit organization of people of diverse backgrounds working together to promote equal participation in a multicultural society through community empowerment. The organization combines action and research, with the aim of promoting human rights, equality and heterogeneity, fighting racism, xenophobia and discrimination in general. Generation 2.0 RED has over 10 years of experience in social action, sociological and legal research, program management and organizing cultural events. The organization participates and cooperates with the largest human rights networks in Greece and Europe, claiming the rights of sensitive social groups, regardless of origin, nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It provides free services to migrants, free of charge, everyday, has participated in festivals and has organized numerous events and actions that promote human rights. In addition, the structure has completed campaigns that led to the right to Greek citizenship for children of migrants. Generation 2.0 RED resulted from the merger of Second Generation, which had been active as an informal group since 2006, and the Institute for Rights, Equality & Diversity (i-RED), in December 2013.

More infos: www.g2red.org/el/about-us/

3. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS





This section addresses general recommendations on the preemptive steps and overall approach the authors of this toolkit advise to be taken when conducting activities with migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls.

Interrogate personal bias and stereotypes and develop intercultural sensitivity

Migrant women face stereotypes and prejudices that shape their perceptions of the world. Media and literary representations, loaded with stereotypes and cultural bias, play a big role in the social construct of what a migrant woman is, should be, or is allowed to do. Professionals working with migrant women and girls also have their sensitivities, experiences and internalized stereotypes, along with a greater or lesser degree of intercultural sensitivity. As facilitators, we are human and our experiences have made us and shaped our perceptions. Faced with certain situations, emotions can rise: it is natural. The key to addressing these is to be aware of its own feelings and limits. Thus, a process of personal reflection is essential in order for the person conducting the activity not to project their personal biases onto the beneficiaries. This is also instrumental in creating a space where migrant women and girls are allowed to feel free to share their experiences, their fears and the barriers they face in their everyday lives.

In addition, it allows for the facilitators not to take the beneficiaries reactions or interventions personally, which is an important aspect of working with a vulnerable group. Someone leaving the room or not engaging in a specific activity can mean many things: from trauma coming to the surface to not fully understanding or misinterpreting the purposes behind an activity. If the facilitator manages to remain flexible and understanding, it can defuse tense situations and allow for everyone to fully experience and enjoy the proposed activity.



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Find a balance between achieving the program's objective and maintaining each beneficiary's agency

Professionals working with migrant women can sometimes show attitudes of alienation, moralization, disempowerment with regard to their audiences: this can be an expression of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism can be expressed in different ways. For example, some professionals can be reluctant to discuss topics related to sexuality with African women as they expect that the topic is taboo for them. However, these women, very much like anyone else, need proper access to information when it comes to their health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. Some professionals express their difficulties in questioning the frame of reference (culture, religion) of their audience because of their fear of offending them, or in the name of a so-called "cultural respect". Other professionals report that they do not feel legitimate to address some topics, especially in relation to religious or cultural values. From the authors' perspective, fighting these barriers through engaging with specialized organizations, participating in training, reading, or simply engaging openly and honestly with one's target group is very much needed. Indeed, sometimes, good intentions such as not offending anyone lead to infantilization and prejudice whereas women's human rights are non-negotiable and inalienable, no matter the origin, culture or religion.

It is advised not to project any preconceived idea of what the beneficiary wants or what is 'best' for her. An approach where spaces for dialogue and flexibility are opened is very much encouraged. One of the challenges is finding a posture that is encouraging and respectful of each person's autonomy and individuality. It is not a question of thinking or saying things in the place of the beneficiaries. On the contrary, it is about helping them to collect the information and tools they need to solve their own problems, and being encouraging while respecting each woman's agency in order to avoid creating situations of dependency.

How to give the space for beneficiaries to make their own choices? - Good practice: La Voix des Femmes (Belgium)

When migrant women subscribe to literacy classes, many service providers tend to direct them towards specific professional paths that they envision as appropriate for the target group. However, this can have the pernicious effect of antagonizing the woman if she feels something is being forced upon her that she has not been prepared for.

A good practice is to accompany the reflection around a career path progressively. For instance, discussing social security, the advantages of having a job and gaining independence as a woman, and so on. Giving meaning is essential: what they can expect goes beyond earning a salary: it can be getting out of the house, participating in a system of solidarity, being independent, opening up possibilities, doing something other than always being with the children, rebalancing a relationship, etc. Addressing these different topics can drive the beneficiary to want to take concrete actions to be employed (if it was not the case in the first place).

In some countries, such as Belgium, women are pushed to find a job and be productive in the labor market, sometimes before they are ready or without acknowledging their will. Often, the career path that is pushed upon them is stereotyped (it is often related to cleaning and cooking). Assuming that they can only be employed in these areas comes from a place of prejudice. However, thinking they cannot flourish in so-called “feminine” sectors can also have an inadequate impact. The key is to adopt a feminist approach and work with the beneficiaries on independence, empowerment and self-worth. If they are not employed, many women do not consider the invisible work they provide for the family (childcare, accounting, administrative work, etc.) as carrying any value. Changing the way in which they perceive themselves and their work can give them more confidence and encourage them to find employment according to their own conditions, objectives and standards.

In addition, promoting positive examples can also be a powerful way to inspire women. For instance, organizing workshops or informal meetings where women who have successfully completed one of the service provider’s programs (whether it is language courses, employment integration or any other activity) can meet women who are currently involved in the same program can have a great motivational effect.



Work in network



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When conducting an activity or a program with migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls, the roles of each co-facilitator should be pre-decided and clear from the beginning in order to optimize the work and results. It is also advised to work in network and prepare the contacts of trusted organization working on various issues related to violence against women, women's access to rights and health (including sexual and reproductive health), legal advice, administrative support, family services, etc.

Migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls face multiple forms of violence and discrimination upon arrival in the host country, amongst which administrative delays and bureaucracy, as well as lack of consideration from some public and political entities. As a result, this target group can lack trust in institutions. It is therefore all the more important to provide them with a clear and reliable support network, and to be able to direct them towards relevant partners when our structure cannot provide them with adequate service in accordance with their specific situation.

When possible, personal and targeted individual work with each beneficiary allows to properly understand each individual situation and provide the best possible solutions. This requires a rather consistent time of accompaniment and a multidisciplinary team with diverse qualifications (social workers, psychologists, teachers, legal experts, etc.). When not possible, as mentioned above, working in a network is a good alternative. If and when properly trained, the team in charge will be able to make effective referrals so that women do not have to go through several unnecessary contacts.



Be mindful of the dynamic of the session when conceiving the program

Regardless of the topic, the purposes and the length of the activity, efficiency in achieving the objectives relies for a great part on thinking the program through in order to provide for sufficient space and time for the beneficiaries to fully integrate the contents that are provided to them. Fighting the urge to do too much at once is an important aspect of planning a manageable and effective activity. In addition, it is useful to alternate between different tools and techniques. Dynamic and participative activities can follow theoretical sessions. Moments of relaxation and free time can be included to ensure the beneficiaries are not overwhelmed by too much information. In addition, these informal times are useful to allow participants to meet and enhance the cohesion and trust within the group. It is advised to allow participants their own space and time management, especially when it comes to addressing heavy topic such as violence against women. Allowing participants to leave the room when they feel like it can prevent instances of retraumatization and allow for the creation of a safe space.

Adaptability remains a key aspect when conducting an activity with any kind of public: sensing whether the beneficiaries are engaging with the content and proposed activities, assessing whether the dynamic of the group is positive, and acting upon these aspects on the spot (while maintaining coherence within the team of facilitators and in accordance with the objectives of the session) can seem like a hard balance to find, but it comes with experience and proper planning.

Working in a team of several facilitators with clearly defined roles is a big help to that aspect. For instance, if one facilitator is focused on time management, this person is less active than the one who is presenting the content, and can maintain a global vision on the participants to assess whether someone is feeling left out, not engaging or reacting badly to the content or to one facilitator in particular. While making this assessment, once again, it is important not to assume anything: someone not talking does not necessarily mean that they are not paying attention for instance. When spotting a beneficiary that does not seem to be fully engaging with the activity, going to them privately, in a sensitive fashion, and opening a discussion can provide for a clearer idea of what is happening. When the assessment is done, addressing the situation in collaboration with the other facilitators is important. Indeed, making sure the team conducting the activity is at the same level of information, and on the same wavelength regarding the approach and objectives is a crucial aspect as any discrepancies can be easily spotted by the beneficiaries and create a loss of trust.

Think about accessibility

Accessibility of the planned activities should be considered in relation to the specific realities of the target group. When it comes to migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls (or women in general) workshop hours, single-sex settings and access to digital tools (Internet, computer, specific software or programs, etc.) are relevant aspects.

Following the COVID pandemic, the civil society sector (and society as a whole) has come to the realization that acknowledging our beneficiaries' access to technology and existing digital skills (or lack thereof) and adapting our activity and content to this is crucial. It is for instance possible to create digital skills training for women, to enable them to access online programs or support them in their employment research.

Adapting the materials to the reading and writing levels of each group is another aspect to be mindful of. When possible, providing translations and interpretation, materials in several languages and conducting activities in a language that everyone can understand is of course advised. When this is not possible, the difficulty and discomfort of the situation can be acknowledged by the facilitator through encouraging solidarity between the participants who can help each other fully understand what is going on and express themselves.

The location and environment of the workshop (noise, business, outdoor or indoor, accessibility for people with disabilities, lighting, privacy, etc.) also have an essential role to play in order to create a proper space in accordance with the objectives of the session.



Create a risk assessment policy

It is important to assess and anticipate the risks that participants will take when engaging in the proposed activities. Who do they leave behind at home? Do these activities leave a digital trail for which they may suffer reprisals? Are they in danger? Do they live in a highly controlled community? How is it possible to assess the risk someone faces once he or she has participated in an activity? All of these questions need to be asked and answered before the workshops take place.

- Train participants to acknowledge and understand the risks they are undergoing and to have a safety plan.
- Ensure that professional secrecy is respected.
- Be ready to deal with trauma and share useful contacts.



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See Trauma Tapping and Havening Techniques: Havening techniques and trauma tapping have been created by Ulf Sandström and Gunilla Hamne from Sweden, who have for over 10 years worked internationally among the populations exposed to stress and trauma from genocide and conflicts, in prisons, child soldiers and women victims sexual violence.



Be mindful of the way you communicate

Open and clear communication is key to the proper realization of the program's objectives. To that extent, it is useful to be mindful of the words the facilitator uses during the activity so that the ideas are properly understood by all. Explaining the words and concepts, even when they may seem obvious to the facilitator, is another important aspect. If it appears that one or several participants do not grasp what the facilitator is saying, it is recommended to use another wording or to invite another participant to explain with their words.

The use of crude language to describe situations of violence should be avoided in order not to trigger bad reactions on the beneficiaries. When asking questions to the participants, it is advised to keep in mind not to expect one specific answer but rather try to bounce on every statement to allow for collective thinking and a non-judgemental approach.

There is no unique style or posture that should be more valued than the others when it comes to facilitating, participants will not feel comfortable if the facilitator is not. Therefore, attempting to mimic someone else's approach is not advised.

For the facilitator to be careful not to convey stereotypes or generalizations in their discourse is also instrumental. Defining the words and expressions that are used can help: what does it mean to be a "migrant woman", who are we talking about?

Finally, from a pedagogical point of view, it appears more efficient to take as a starting point what is collectively known, the experiences and background of the participants, what they already know, and then, from there, lead them to discover new ideas.

Advices for a communication style that optimizes the engagement and wellbeing of the beneficiaries:

- Clarify the expectations and expected outcomes of the program.
- Opt for shorter sessions within a more comprehensive program.
- Identify priorities with participants.
- Focus on small group.
- Include time for personal - not just professional - exchanges.
- Work slowly, taking into account the background of the participants, allowing them to express themselves at length in order to identify their fears and concerns.



Keep evaluating and adapting

There is no single recipe or adequate way to do things, but it is necessary to constantly evaluate and readapt according to the audience's needs and reactions, the context(s) and the means available.

Evaluation is an essential aspect of providing good and well tailored services. This suggests spending time with the beneficiaries to talk about what they have taken from the activities and how it relates (or not) to their own lives and experiences. These evaluations can be done by different means: interviews with the beneficiaries, forms, online questionnaires, open and closed questions, feedback with specific tools such as pictures, etc.



- It is important not to change the words and formulations used by the participants in the evaluations in order to give proper meaning to what they experience and feel. For example, this sentence collected in an evaluation form "With this workshop, I got out of the silence" indicates self-empowerment and personal awareness in addition to collective breaking of silence.

Some questions to ask the facilitators (or for the facilitators to themselves) to evaluate their work and progress:

- How do you feel and evaluate yourself? (bias, communication, posture, etc.).
- How do you see the evolution of your activities/workshops regarding the specificities of your participants?
- How is this workshop/project experienced by the beneficiaries (testimonies and feedbacks)?

4. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH MIGRANT WOMEN:

Understanding the target group specificities

Each group has its own specificities and needs. Analyzing those while not maintaining too much of a rigid framework for action is another balance to be found when working with a vulnerable group. This section aims at providing the reader with some analysis models that ought to be confronted with the realities of the field, which are always different, changing and surprising. Understanding a group and its specific needs should not prevent from acknowledging the individuality of each person within this given group.



To better understand the difficulties and needs of a target group, an intercultural, feminist and sociological approach is recommended. When it comes to migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls, especially those who have newly arrived in the host country, it is important to learn about the realities that they face and have faced, according to the different contexts and regions where they come from.

Migrant women are at the intersection of patriarchal, colonial/racist and capitalistic systems of oppression. Therefore, in order to fully understand this target group and its specificities, it is useful to consider them through their experiences as women, as women of migrant background, and as women who can be facing other forms of discrimination (age, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc.). While considering all of these aspects, it is also key to understand that, in the life of a migrant woman, they do not manifest themselves separately and one after the other but they are rather intertwined and inseparable.



The social group of women

Women, as a group, face discrimination and violence committed because of their sex. This violence can take the form of verbal, psychological, physical, sexual, economic or administrative abuse. In its extreme form, it can amount to murder, which can be referred to as “femicide” (murder of a woman because she is a woman). We count 50 femicides every week in the Member States of the European Union. To speak about this type of violence, many feminist organizations choose to use the expression “male violence against women and girls”. Indeed, in the overwhelming majority of cases, this violence is perpetrated by men against women (95% of domestic violence against girls and women is committed by men, for example). Male violence against women and girls exists in every country in the world and affects all aspects of the victims’ lives. It occurs across cultures, religions, communities and ages. The idea that violence against women and girls constitutes a continuum was conceptualized by



Professor Liz Kelly in 1988. The concept of a continuum implies that male violence against women and girls, whatever its kind, is the result of structural power relations between the sexes. It also implies that such violence, however diverse, relies on common roots.

In addition to this violence, women, as a group, face inequalities in every aspect of private and public life (household, workplace, political spaces, street, etc.).

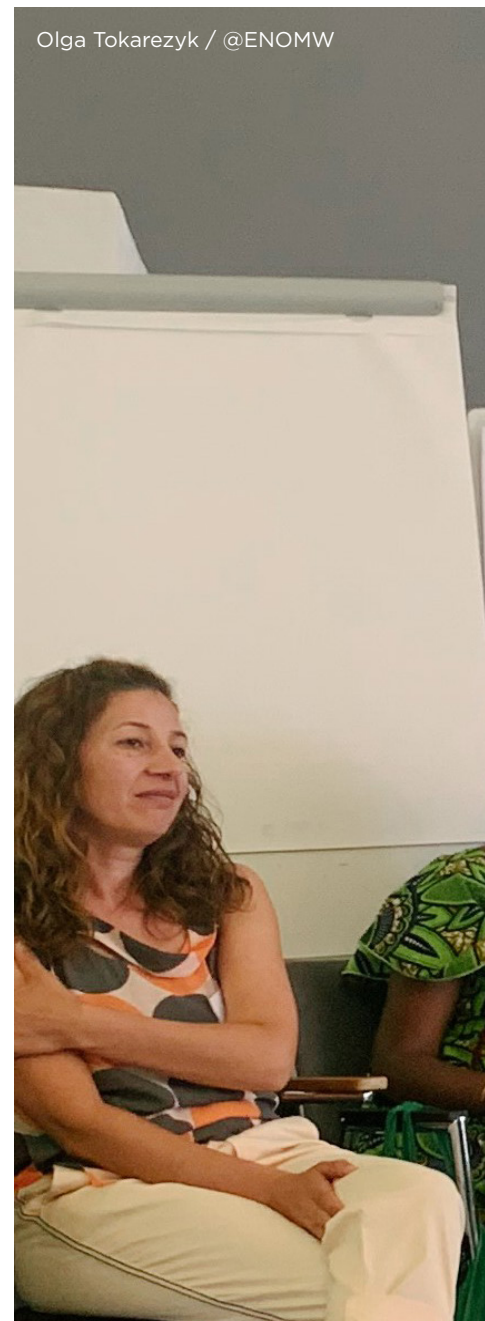
Some figures:

- According to the latest figures from Eurostat, the burden of domestic chores still rely mostly on women in Europe. On average in the EU, 79% of women cook and do household chores every day, compared to only 34% of men. In addition to this mostly invisible, unpaid and under valued work of cooking, cleaning, planning and organizing, women also carry an 'emotional' and 'mental' burden in taking care of their families. This role of primary caregiver for the children and spouse is still largely understood as incumbent to the mother.
- According to the European Commission, the pay gap between women and men in the EU stands at 14.1% and has only changed minimally over the last decade. It means that women earn 14.1% on average less per hour
- than men.

In Council of Europe member states, men still represent on average approximately three quarters of members of national governments and parliaments.

Symbolic or cultural violence against women is also sometimes invisible. However, it serves as a foundation for the entire continuum of sexist and sexual violence. Patriarchal cultures nurture gender stereotypes that lock women and men into pre-established roles presented as an inalienable reality when, in fact, they are mere social constructs. Sexist stereotypes convey the idea that women are submissive and docile by nature, dedicated to domestic tasks and caring for others. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to be dominant and able to conquer the world. Thus, it is considered logical by patriarchal societies for women to be under the authority of men, or even to belong to them. We can find these deeply rooted conceptions, with different manifestations, all across cultures and societies. As a result, the will to control women's lives, bodies and sexualities can be found in religions, laws and customs in the entire world.

Olga Tokarezyk / @ENOMW



Migrant women

The intimate and structural male violence that all women face, in their different contexts and capacities, is compounded in the case of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking girls, who face multiple factors of discrimination and are therefore socially more vulnerable. In addition to male violence against women, migrant women girls are also confronted with racism, cultural exclusion, segregation, ethnic glass ceiling, lack of access to public services, difficulties related to the recognition of diplomas and qualifications, legal obstacles, and specific sexualization and fetishization based on their origins. Some migrant women also belong to other discriminated groups (lesbian women, women with disabilities, underage girls, undocumented women, etc.) which puts them at disproportionate risk of facing violence and exclusion.

To understand these intersecting vulnerabilities and barriers, it is necessary to examine spe-





cific groups and analyze their needs. When policy makers consider "migrant women" as a collective entity, it is very easy to fall into stereotypes and amalgams that undermine the well-being and access to rights of certain groups of women. It is therefore essential to adopt an approach specific to the group we are targeting. This is the basis of the intersectional approach, which is necessary to effectively address women and girls' realities.

At institutional level, migrant women face discrimination, which impacts greatly their mental and physical health - which, in turn, has an impact on their attendance of different activities and commitments. For example, some institutions systematically make appointments at the time of language courses that migrant women have to attend in Belgium as part of their integration path, while also demanding that they attend these courses regularly.

It is important to note that migrant women often feel exhausted. Psychologically, their self-esteem can be low (due to the exclusion that they experience) and there can be an urgent need to give them more confidence and value, to provide caring spaces. Therefore, regardless of the topic and purposes of the program an organization conducts for migrant women and girls, it is advised to put a specific focus on creating a pleasant atmosphere that allows them to feel they are making progress, be encouraged, motivated and recharged.

When it comes to conducting ongoing projects and programs with migrant women and girls (or women in general), specific attention to potential contexts of violence is required. Sustainable development (whether it is professional, soft skills, or empowerment) cannot exist if situations of violence are not properly addressed (either by the structure providing direct service to the beneficiary or by a trusted organization the woman can be referred to). Health and mental well-being should not be ignored when it comes to the design and implementation of activities with migrant women and girls - especially as access to care is not always easy for this target group. This is why a sociological analysis of the group's need is a prerequisite for delivering support services and programs while avoiding a negative psychological impact on potential victims of sexual and gender-based violence within the group.

Some questions to help identify migrant women's specific needs:

- What are the challenges that migrant women face and what can be the barriers for them to join an activity? - cultural barrier, schedule, time, fear of what to expect, unknown environment, etc.
- What can push them away? How to make them feel comfortable?
- What to take into consideration while planning the logistics?
- How to adapt the content and materials to the specific needs of migrant women? What is the most effective way?

Newly-arrived migrant women

When providing support to a newly-arrived migrant woman, the advised first step is to help identify the priorities of the woman that are specific to her situation (without projecting any 'ideal' solution or putting pressure on her). This is especially relevant when it comes to migrant women lacking formal education and degrees because they have a reduced set of options.

Language is a key barrier for newly-arrived women to integrate in the host society. However, it is not always the woman's priority or what she identifies as more urgent. She can be more focused on survival and providing for her family. We strongly discourage alienation and moralization, which can have a very big toll on migrant women's mental and physical health.

Migrant mothers as single parents

In the case of women who are single parents, there are also points of attention to enable them to better consider their professional project: time management, child-care, limiting self-beliefs, among many others. It is useful to keep in mind that for some migrant single mothers the option of a day care center raises deep questions related to their cultural status as mothers. It is therefore essential to approach this issue from an intercultural point of view without falling into cultural relativism or ethnocentrism, but rather to accompany the women in their reflections, proposing that they spend a day in a day care center, for example, to observe how the children are treated, and to initiate discussion circles around this issue with other migrant women.



Specificities linked to cultural background

Some specificities can arise according to the beneficiaries' cultural backgrounds.

For instance, women from Russia, Eastern Europe or China (former communist countries) often grew up in an environment with a strong system of government control that did not encourage them to develop their capacity to act.

Women from South-West Asia (India, Pakistan), the Middle East and some Arab countries may have experienced strong community pressures that can impact their sense of self-worth and sometimes make them afraid to make choices.

The specificity of women who have experienced community or intimate control (family and close circle) compared to those who have experienced state control lies in the reasons that lead to the numbing of the capacity to make decisions: on the one hand it is a question of maintaining peace and avoiding conflicts, on the other it is a question of social conditioning. A religious and intercultural sensitivity is required, without hindering the purpose or the messages to be conveyed.

How to maintain harmony within a multiethnic setting - Good practice: AMAL association (Tunisia)

Ensuring a successful cohabitation between women of different ethnic backgrounds, religions and cultures is an objective of many organizations working with migrant women.

- *This cohesion ought to be created by the team: when people are treated in the same way, without discrimination by the actors in charge of the activities, it creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and solidarity, a positive dynamic between women.*
- *Use of creative and informal activities to express, learn, share, put words to experiences can be a very successful tool. For instance, developing culinary exchanges and enabling women of different backgrounds to cook together and get to know products, tastes and smells from other cultures can allow for meaningful exchanges and building of trust.*
- *At the beginning of each workshop, it is important to explain rules of confidentiality and mutual respect, possibly showing (even collectively creating) a common Charter of Values.*
- *Not being afraid to confront tensions openly is also very important to be able find common ground without infantilizing the beneficiaries.*

How to keep beneficiaries engaged in a program tailored for them? - Good practice: AWSA-Be (Belgium) and La Voix des Femme (Belgium)

When working with vulnerable groups such as migrant women and girls, keeping the participants engaged can be a key issue. Sometimes women are reaching out but not coming to the first session or they are leaving after the second or third one. Online sessions are not always helping. Many participants do not complete the whole program and therefore do not get the proper tools and information. How can this issue be addressed?

- *Find the causes in order to find the solution. Very often, the causes of a beneficiary disappearing are to be identified on a case to case basis. It is not always possible to reach out to every beneficiary (most organizations lack the capacity). However, when possible, it is useful to assess from the beginning whether the beneficiary faces socio-economic problems, whether her focus is elsewhere (sense of urgency/priorities), and whether the beneficiary has access to a supportive environment. According to the answer to these questions, special attention and support can be provided as a pre-emptive step to avoid women dropping out of the program.*
- *Adapting the focus of the activities/programs to the interest of the group is also recommended. It is possible to start out with a large range of topics: human rights, women's rights, violence, culture shock, secularism, housing rights, institutions, social security, reproductive and sexual rights, etc. Step by step, according to the interests of the group (both individual and collective), you can tailor your content. This is applicable no matter the purposes of the program the organization is conducting as any given topic hides a vast range of preoccupation for migrant women. For example, behind access to employment we can find digitalisation, child-care, self-image, stereotypes and discrimination, violence, and so on. It is also possible to plan workshops dedicated to open questions and directly ask the group about their needs, expectations and wishes, which can help build trust and come up with a tailored program of activities.*
- *Many women drop out of long-term training programs because of vital needs, or because they get discouraged after their request for legal status is rejected for instance. It is therefore relevant to offer short-term programs so that participants in a precarious situation can follow the training courses to the end.*
- *When possible, it is also useful to provide "à la carte" workshops, adapted to the personal situation. This gives beneficial results in a very short period of time.*

What kind of short or “à la carte” workshops can be provided?

- Workshops related to increasing self-esteem;
- Awareness raising workshops to equip women against violence;
- Post-training workshops for women not to feel lost after completing a training program. These post training workshops are a good way to follow-up with intermediate tools according to the beneficiary’s situation in order to prepare her for autonomy.



According to the capacity of the organization, maintaining the most possible contact with the beneficiaries is recommended (without putting pressure on them): regular communication several times, being close to the participants at an individual level, adapting to their experiences, encouraging them, etc.



Olga Tokarezyk / @ENOMW



Ideas to maintain beneficiaries' engagement for the whole duration of a program:

- Highlight the benefits of the training;
- Organize sessions with women who have successfully completed the training;
- Provide monetary support for travel expenses;
- Provide childcare and child related support;
- Provide convivial spaces where women can speak freely;
- Organize individual and multidisciplinary support (before, during and after the program).



5. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH MIGRANT WOMEN: Focus on mental health and well-being

In the course of their migration, in addition to traumatic experiences prior to migration, many women have faced various challenges, such as restrictions and barriers in accessing housing, education, health, career, low or no income, painful and unwelcoming processing of their asylum application, lack of support from the government and discrimination in services, which have led to anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Some of these women often associate their negative emotions, such as stress and anxiety, with the loss of their professional status and the lack of power over their lives. Women are more likely than men to be confronted with external risk factors for mental health. These factors include male violence, patriarchal family and community control, harmful traditions, sexual or occupational exploitation, lack of social support, unemployment and poverty. These risks are often interrelated and result in aggravated and prolonged conditions of discrimination and violence. This has a long-term negative impact on the psychological well-being and health of women which has to be taken into consideration when implementing a program targeted towards migrant women.

More information on this topic, see: www.migrantwomennetwork.org

In concrete terms, how can a program designed for migrant women address the issue of mental health and wellbeing?



Safe space building



Christina Wocinte / UNSPLASH

Creating a sense of belonging, emotional support and a healing environment is important to conduct a program with migrant women without negatively impacting their wellbeing.

Some advices for safe space building:

- Start from a place of comfort/knowledge.
- Prioritize circle settings, bring the participants closer, put people at ease, create a sense of excitement.
- Allow everyone to work in their own time.
- At the beginning, prioritize activities that will allow participants to speak about themselves in a comfortable way: through sharing and time, trust will be built.
- Prioritize small groups.
- Make participants interact, ask and answer questions.



Confidence building

As a result of the violence they may have suffered, migrant women often have low self-esteem. Working on self-confidence and identity with women and girls allows to strengthen their social commitment and to optimize their capacity for action.

Lack of self-esteem can create fears that lead to self-deprecation. To work on this with the beneficiaries, it is possible to ask the beneficiaries to collectively reflect on where low self-esteem comes from:

- From childhood.
- Absent or non understanding parents.
- Shortcomings during adolescence.
- Accidents in life.
- Traumas and violence.
- Discriminations and internalization of discriminations and stereotypes.
- Bad influences.
- Hypersensitivity.
- Negative words and self-judgment.

Then it is possible to identify, discuss and better understand the fears that are linked to lack of self-esteem:

- **Fear of criticism.**
 Placing too much importance on the opinions of others and what they will say.
- **Feelings of inferiority.**
 This feeling can be traced back to childhood, to a time of humiliation, ignorance, a feeling of being unloved.
- **Difficulty or inability to assert oneself.**
 Inability to say no, stand up for yourself or express your needs.
- **Perfectionism.**
 Fixing inatteignable objectives that lead to feeling frustrated and disappointed.
- **Guilt.**
 It can be an obstacle to be able to move forward.





6. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH MIGRANT WOMEN:

Team building in a multicultural setting

Developing a base of common values within a given group, structure or institution is always the first step of building a sense of community. While setting this framework does not mean agreeing on everything, it implies being intransigent when a core principle is transgressed (for example, racist and sexist comments). This clear framework allows for beneficiaries to feel safe as there is coherence between what is said and done.

When working as a team, whether multicultural or not, clear communication and a framework of mutual respect are key.

Advices to improve a team's cohesion in the workplace:

- Encourage self-awareness and expression of personal value systems. Knowing one's frame of reference as a professional can allow to identify misunderstandings, irritations and reactions of resistance;
- As a coordinator or manager, work on the coherence of the team by communicating, being aware of each person's background, strengths and weaknesses and keeping in mind these when delegating, creating working groups, and dispatching the work;
- Share practices of empowerment and solidarity among the team.
- Schedule informal team meetings. Moments of exchanges and sometimes confrontation are important to give everyone the opportunity to reflect on their own representations and to reaffirm shared values;
Schedule times for collective evaluation of processes, projects and activities;
- Organize team building activities for the team - beyond the professional projects - to experience personal moments within the team during working hours.

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Ideas of team building activities:

- Activities related to body and motion
 - Movement session: hand to hand, the participants imagine that they are magnets that attract or repulse each other. They have to follow someone else's motion. This is a way to release control and build trust within the team;
 - Active sports;
 - Meditation and relaxation activities.
- Activities connected with nature
 - Terrarium building: composting kitchen waste into soil, learning to grow and use herbs in an urban, small environment and developing basic growing techniques;
 - Ikebana: art of floral arrangement but not sophisticated and difficult or expensive. This technique focuses on 3 elements: a rooting element that symbolizes the earth, a middle one that represents individuality and a last one that goes up to materialize one's goals;
 - Guided walks in nature.







7. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTACTS

This toolkit offers the opportunity for professionals working at grass-root level with migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls to question their representations and limits, and to take a step back on situations that they may have encountered in their practice. The advice provided here will hopefully allow for open discussions within multicultural teams and between teams and beneficiaries.

A toolkit is always living, breathing and adaptable and we encourage the reader to make it its own, to develop its own expertise, to keep up to date, and to show flexibility and resilience in the face of the specific challenges they face.

Finally, we recall the importance of the work of civil society organizations and other structures working directly with migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls and encourage women's rights movements led by migrant women in Europe and elsewhere.

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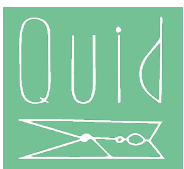


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