

Supporting and Encouraging Migrant Women

WOW-e Framework for an Employment and
Education Path for Migrant Women



Project n° 2021-1-FI01-KA220-ADU-000028330



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Foreword by

Director of Migrant Services, Kristel Kivisik

Dear reader,

Congratulations, you have an important piece of our work in your hands.

For the past two years, project partners across Europe have been working hard to find solutions to bring migrant women closer to the workforce.

The work has been challenging yet rewarding! We have conquered several milestones on our way to create the Framework of Employment and Education Path of Migrant Women.

Our international group of enthusiastic migrant services, adult education, and career counseling experts have worked intensively in Finland, Iceland, France, Germany, and Portugal to find solutions that are truly beneficial for migrant women. At the same time, efforts have been made to increase the engagement of employers in this important task to increase the employment of women.

During the project, altogether 86 migrant women participated in our pilots across Europe. Persistent work by project partners with women resulted in mutual positive experiences and realizations of how migrant women can be successfully supported. More importantly, our work increased women's understanding of possible futures in the workforce.

A challenging situation to enter the workforce was common for all women participating in our project. The key barriers varied to some extent by country and, of course, by each person's life situation.

Low capabilities to enter the workforce included various issues from language skills to knowledge of workforce practicalities and vocational skills.

Low language skills are usually considered the most crucial barriers for migrants in general to access the workforce. However, in our project, we noticed that the role of language skills varies in migrant women's pathways. In countries like Finland and France, language skills play a crucial role in whether women can access the workforce. Language skills play a central role in other countries as well, but solutions vary. For example, in Iceland, it is easier to work in English or start one's own business than in other project countries, while in Germany manual jobs that do not require high language skills are available. On the other hand, in countries like Portugal, the majority of the migrant population is generally more educated than in other project countries, and language barriers are not as high as most migrants come from Portuguese or Spanish-speaking countries.

However, despite differences, a challenging situation to enter the workforce remained among women participating in our project due either to bureaucratic obstacles or structural barriers, like cultural prejudices and discrimination.

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We wished to engage employers closely in our project. Discussions with employers were positive. There is a clear willingness among employers to provide opportunities to everyone, including migrant women. Openness stems from challenges in attracting enough employees for businesses to thrive in certain industries. However, tight resources sometimes blur the vision to employ people with different backgrounds and capabilities.

What you have in your hands is our project's final Framework. In practice, this framework is a compilation of our best practices and experiences during the project turned into a practical source of tools and approaches.

The framework is a handy tool especially for migrant counselors. The added value is that the tools have been tested, and with these methods, you are more likely to succeed in your efforts to support migrant women in their employment and educational pathways.

The core of the framework is the counseling model developed in the project. The WOW-e counseling model compiles all the counseling phases we have had with women and is a product of our experiences and best practices.

In the next pages, we will explain what is included in the framework and guide you on how to use and adapt the approaches, best practices, and tools provided within the framework.

I sincerely hope the counseling journey that you are about to take will be as thrilling, emotional, and enlightening as it was for us!



Director of Migrant Services

Spring House, WOW-e project coordinator



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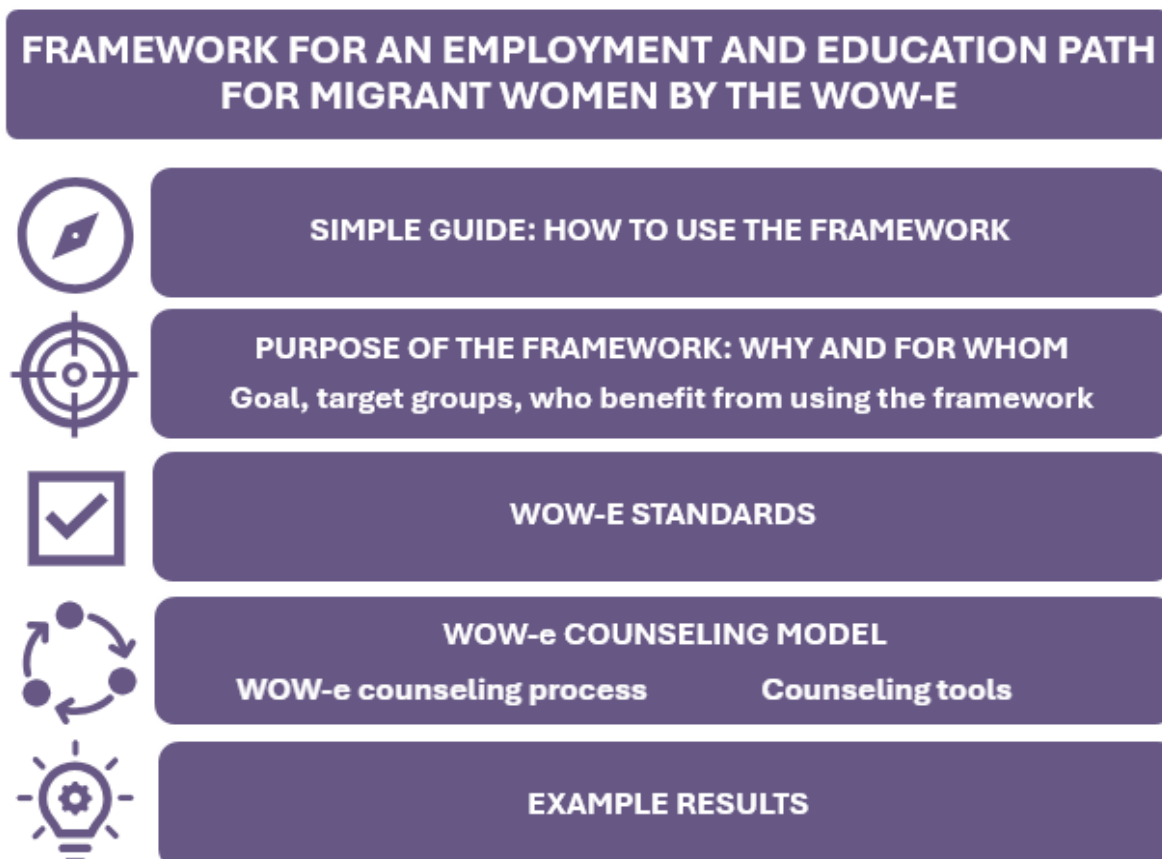


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Framework for an Employment and Education Path for Migrant Women

The framework is a compilation of the project's best practices and experiences turned into a practical source of tools and approaches to guide migrant women to work and education.

The WOW-e framework consists of several parts.



In each part, key insights from project countries are presented. The key insights are compilations of findings, thoughts, discussions and realizations on how to successfully guide migrant women, and what kind of everyday challenges counselors need to solve during the process.

Key insights reveal both similarities and differences between the project countries.

Thus, one key insight can be based on several discussions or thoughts of several people, or it can for example represent a summary of a discussion.

SIMPLE GUIDE: HOW TO USE THE FRAMEWORK



SIMPLE GUIDE: HOW TO USE THE FRAMEWORK

Framework for the Employment and Education Path of Migrant Women by WOW-e

- Follow the entire process of the Simple Guide, step by step, if you are creating a service or counseling group from scratch, OR
- If you need additional support in your daily counseling work, you can apply the phases of the Simple Guide as they best suit your purposes.

We recommend always visiting “Why and for Whom” phase to familiarize yourself with the Framework’s purpose.

It is recommended to review the WOW-e standards. The standards compile the project’s experience-based solution strategies for successfully navigating the counseling process.

SIMPLE GUIDE: HOW TO USE THE FRAMEWORK

PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK: WHY AND FOR WHOM

Familiarize yourself with the principles of the framework. In this section you’ll learn about the goals, target groups, and who will benefit from using the framework.

WOW-e STANDARDS

Tips prior to the counseling! Learn from project experiences on how to find and engage migrant women, how to form a workable group, and how to approach employers

START THE COUNSELING PROCESS

You can select the encounter point with your client depending on their needs. Remember, the counseling process is iterative in nature, allowing you can move freely from one encounter to another.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE COUNSELING MODEL

Learn about the iterative WOW-e counseling model.

APPLY THE TOOLS

Visit and use the tools related to the specific counseling encounter to support your own counseling work

VISIT THE EXAMPLE RESULTS

Get inspired by the examples of results achieved through the WOW-e counseling model.

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PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK: WHY AND FOR WHOM



PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK: WHY AND FOR WHOM
Goal, target groups, who benefit from using the framework

Familiarize yourself with the purpose and principles of the framework.

In this section, you'll learn about the goal, target groups, and who will benefit from using the framework.

GOAL

The WOW-e Framework for Employment and Education Path of Migrant Women will:

Empower, encourage, and motivate migrant women to continue forward in their personal employment path

Work with women to sort out their situation and define a more clear path with relevant and realistic work-life goals

KEY INSIGHTS: Goal

“Empowerment and gradual steps”

“These women are in such complex and challenging situations in multiple ways. It is unrealistic to think that giant leaps toward the workforce can be taken with short-term interventions.

However, peer group support, empowerment, and an increase in self-esteem as the first step building blocks are essential. From there on, motivation can be built gradually. Only when the solid basis is set, can we start to define work goals with women, and support them in pursuing these goals.

By addressing this kind of starting point with migrant women, we can make a crucial change in their workforce paths. In this way, the path becomes much more purposeful once it stems from their personal ambitions.”

(Project coordinator Finland on behalf of all project partners)

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TARGET GROUP – MIGRANT WOMEN

The WOW-e Framework for Employment and Education Path of Migrant Women benefits profiles with:

- Low work life capabilities
- Difficult and unclear work and educational situation
- Basic language skills (at least oral) of the country of residence acquired

Note. *Language skills are one of the key enablers for migrant women to enter the workforce. The project partners determined at the start of the project, that the targeted women should have some basic language skills when entering the project activities. This minimum requirement made work and education goals more relevant and realistic for project participants. An exception was made for participants in Iceland, as Icelandic skills are not broadly demanded by their labour market.*

KEY INSIGHTS: Target group “migrant women”

“Managing women’s expectations”.

“Tackling root causes of challenges in the workforce”.

“Women’s work capabilities formed the basis of our counseling work. To bridge the gap between their starting point and employment was a longer path than expected. For some women, it was difficult to stay motivated when facing this fact, while others had challenges accepting the situation and overcoming unrealistic expectations.

Thus, we needed to manage women’s expectations while motivating and empowering them to move forward in their work and education paths.” (Finland)

“Migrant women who looked for support in Portugal, at Qualifica Centres (1), were generally more educated compared to other countries in the project. Also, they did not face similar language challenges (spoken languages usually Spanish or Portuguese). However, challenges remain in structural barriers such as difficult validation processes, challenges accessing education, or long educational paths despite degrees achieved in the country of origin. Discrimination in workplaces is also common, and women do not have equal opportunities compared

¹ Qualifica Centres in Portugal are specialized institutions aimed at enhancing adult education and vocational training. They provide personalized guidance and support for individuals seeking to improve their qualifications, whether through formal education, recognition of prior learning, or vocational training programs. These centres facilitate lifelong learning by helping adults acquire new skills, achieve higher educational levels, and better adapt to the evolving labor market. Additionally, they play a crucial role in fostering social inclusion and personal development by offering tailored educational pathways and professional counseling.

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to their peers in the country of residence. Thus, these women require support in sorting out their situation and defining their next steps.” (Portugal)

“Although migrant women in general would have been in the workforce for years, they might lack language skills and their knowledge of workforce practicalities can be limited. Migrant women in Iceland are often part of tight national communities from their country of origin, which hinders raising awareness of workforce topics, for example. Thus, incorporating workforce information in the counseling process was crucial for us to succeed in our goals.” (Iceland)

“In France, many migrant people speak basic French that may be enough to get low-level jobs. However, the requirement for writing and reading skills in all types of jobs has increased, and because of this, some women might be blocked from their career path. Furthermore, new migrants from non-French speaking countries face more challenges due to language requirements in the job market. In the past few years, employers have been increasingly hesitant to employ people without any language skills, often due to job safety.” (France)



Accentonic's second pilot group included women from Senegal, Nigeria, Guadeloupe, Algeria and Mali. The workshops with CEFIL, assessed transversal and non-formal skills, helping participants to understand French working life. Interviews with NGO workers from Morocco and India assessed the support they received in their job search and, employees of the cleaning company GSF shared their working life experience. (Picture: Accentonic)

TARGET GROUP – EMPLOYERS

THE WOW-e Framework for Employment and Education Path of Migrant Women benefits employer profiles with:

- Labour shortage
- No or little experience in recruiting or employing migrants
- Open to new ways of recruiting and employing migrants

KEY INSIGHTS: Target group “employers”

“Motivate employers to engage”.

“In principle, employers who face the challenge of finding workforce are open to hiring migrants. However, in practice, the process of supporting employers to hire migrant women is challenged in many ways. For example, in our project, employers’ time constraints, strict company policies, or limited resources challenged the development of innovative new recruitment practices tailored to hire our target group.

Thus, based on WOW-e project experiences, the work with employers should start from motivating them to hire persons from different backgrounds and make the employers understand that it is not that difficult if you are determined to do so. Our work is to pave the way and make the employers understand that to find a workforce, they need to broaden the scope of people they are hiring.

Based on WOW-e’s employer surveys, we noticed that employers value job seekers’ motivation more highly than their technical skills. We should support employers in hiring motivated migrant women who could realize their potential through work”.

(Project Coordinator Finland on behalf of project partners)

COUNSELORS WHO BENEFIT FROM USE OF THE WOW-e FRAMEWORK

Counselors working with migrants in any context will benefit from the framework.

Counselors who work with migrants in the following settings will benefit *most* from using the framework

- Social services
- Employment services
- Integration services
- NGOs working with migrants

Counselors are the link between migrant women and employers.

KEY INSIGHTS: Counselors who benefit from using the framework

“Counselors’ organization sets the boundaries of work”.

“Social workers, career counselors, and even teachers could benefit from the materials. Also, counselors working in refugee services”. (Iceland)

“Integration counselors and counselors in job centers would definitely benefit from the materials”. (Germany)

“In Portugal, especially Qualifica Centres and non-governmental migrant support organizations could benefit from the WOW-e project framework”. (Portugal)

“How much women can be supported really depends on which organization the counselor works for. This is because the organization creates the operating context for counselors, that is providing certain network structures and varying possibilities for the women to profit from social benefits during the counseling process”. (Finland)

WOW-E STANDARDS



WOW-E STANDARDS

In this section, you'll learn about WOW-e standards which were developed during the project's two pilot phases, thus being based on concrete experience in all partner countries. WOW-e standards will support solving the usual challenges faced, for example, in engaging migrant women, forming workable counseling groups, and approaching employers.

The standards also describe solutions based on the project's experiences on how to prepare successful skills assessment, capacity building, and career counseling with the target group(s).

Standards were developed with a solution-oriented approach that first specifies common challenges and then suggests strategies to address them.

Apply freely in your own case!

WOW-e STANDARD 1: How to find and engage the target group migrant women

COMMON CHALLENGES WITH THE TARGET GROUP AT THE BEGINNING

Women are difficult to reach for a number of reasons, including

- Situated outside of any (social or employment) services
- Situated outside of work and education
- Engaged only in networks of their own nationality
- Family reasons (e.g. childcare responsibilities)

Once reached, the women are difficult to engage for various reasons, such as

- Family reasons (e.g. childcare responsibilities)
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of understanding for the service ´s benefits
- Mismatch between skills and services offered (e.g. lower skills than expected leading to lack of motivation)
- Lack of language and communication skills in a language shared with the counselor and the group
- Logistical difficulties in reaching the workplace

STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING CHALLENGES AND CREATING A FITTED SOLUTION WITH THE MIGRANT WOMEN YOU WORK WITH

- Go where women already are and work with local networks and/or NGOs that work with migrant women to reach them
- Work with ongoing courses, activities, or other counseling services, in which women are already involved – usually services welcome “extra hands” to provide specific counseling on education and employment
- Ensure that women understand the goal of the counseling process. The description of your activities must be concise, appealing, and responsive to women ´s needs.
- Motive women from the first meeting. F2F meetings are most effective for this.
- Be flexible with schedules and willing to change content to meet women ´s needs
- Sometimes solutions are close at hand: Apply the WOW-e counseling model in your own ongoing service to migrants.

KEY INSIGHTS: How to find and engage migrant women

“Prepare to be flexible, innovative, and persistent.”

“Migrant women are very difficult to reach. Reasons are always very diverse and individual. Counselors need to be accommodative in the situation.” (Germany)

“It is important that service leaflets are clear and easy for the women to understand what it is all about”. (France)

“Communicate first face-to-face. This is key for creating trust and, of course, getting to know the women and their situations.” (Iceland)

“Migrant women in Portugal face a number of challenges, including discrimination in the labor market, language barriers, and difficulties in accessing health and education services. In addition, they often deal with job insecurity and a lack of social support networks, which exacerbates their economic and social vulnerability”. (Portugal)

WOW-e STANDARD 2: How to form the group of women and schedule the counseling

COMMON CHALLENGES IN GROUP FORMATION AND SCHEDULING

Women find it difficult to engage in counseling for a variety of reasons, including

- Time constraints due to family reasons (childcare responsibilities)
- Sense of exclusion and lack of motivation
- Lack of understanding the benefits of the service, resulting in dropping out of the group
- Not used to independent homework

STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS AND CREATING APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS WITH THE MIGRANT WOMEN YOU WORK WITH

Appropriate group size is approximately 5-8 migrant women. Preferably similar language and/or cultural background*. This allows for

- Group and small group discussions
- Individual counseling
- Empowering approach
- Peer support (also in women's preferred language)
- A sense of trust

The schedule should take the women's situation into account and create a sense of personal progress

- Adapt the schedule to the woman's life situation. And be willing to make adjustments on the way.
- Appropriate length of counseling process is relatively tight to create a sense of personal progress and ensure commitment (e.g., 8-10 weeks)
- Approximately 2-3 hours per day, a few times per week is feasible, taking into account women's life situations
- Prefer face2face meetings.
- Begin with personality or strength tests. Based on WOW-e's experience, they work well before skills assessment and increase motivation.
- Allow time for self-reflection and homework. This supports personal progress.

*The same language background is not necessary as the main target group should have basic language skills of the country of residence.

KEY INSIGHTS: Forming the group of women and setting the schedule

“Be flexible, yet forward-looking”

“It is difficult to say what would be the exact suitable length for the counseling. It really depends on women's situation and availability to participate. So, you need to be ready to accommodate women's needs.

For example, first we tested a longer process of 10 weeks but that did not work at all. Women lost the motivation and goal of the counseling as time passed and only half of the participants finished the program.

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A shorter and tighter schedule functioned better when there was space for homework as well.” (Iceland)

WOW-e STANDARD 3: How to approach and capacitate employers

COMMON CHALLENGES COOPERATING WITH EMPLOYERS

Employers are difficult to engage in activities such as capacity building to promote hiring migrant women for various reasons, such as

- Not being interested in your service (not understanding the benefits)
- Not recognizing the need for capacity building to recruit migrants and/or manage diverse work communities
- Lack of understanding of what are different types of employee skills and how they can be adapted in different work tasks
- Time constraints to participate in offered capacity building activities
- Rigid company policies
- Despite need for labour, not interested in hiring people who are expected to require special attention, e.g. during recruitment or induction period
- Managers' prejudices against the recruitment of migrants
- Prejudices and resistance of future team to work with migrants (usually related to experience of fear of the unknown if there are no international colleagues yet)

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND CREATING AN APPROPRIATE SOLUTION WITH THE EMPLOYERS YOU WORK WITH

Understand the employers you are working with

- Start with a needs assessment and get to know the needs of your employer contact.
- Raise interest by providing a brief description of what can be gained from participating in your activities and how they address employers' needs.
- Employers with previous (positive) experience of employing migrants are usually more open to participating in activities supporting migrant employment. Prepare to facilitate meeting(s) with migrant women and employers.
- Target employers facing recruitment challenges if these industries are in the interest of the participating women. Across Europe, industries such as hospitality, maintenance, and social and health care are particularly open to new staff.

Be clear about what you want to do

- Be persistent! Employers want to see immediate benefits from your activities. Employers need to see a clear goal and benefit before they are willing to engage in capacity building activities, for example.
- Be concise and efficient! For many employers, "time is money" is a reality. Therefore, short interventions are more likely to take place than longer capacity building courses.
- When planning collaboration, be clear about what is required of employers to participate in your activities.

Support for both employers and jobseekers

- Familiarize yourself with the social benefits and/or employment subsidies available to employers in your context. Promoting these could facilitate the recruitment of migrant women.
- Familiarize yourself with the legal context and vocational training or apprenticeship opportunities in your context to be able to identify opportunities that benefit both employers and migrant women.

KEY INSIGHTS: How to approach employers

“It is essential to understand employers’ needs and the context the company is operating in, to be able to match rising talent”

“Counselors need to understand the employer context and the targeted company to be able to match the skills of the women to a work opportunity. Only with comprehensive understanding of the contacted employer can the counselors support the women and employers during the process.” (Iceland)

“There are substantial structural barriers related to language. Employers are just not interested in hiring people if they don’t speak and write the language. Yet, speaking is not enough; they need to read and write well also.” (France)

“Employers are impatient and they follow rigid company-specific policies, which do not open windows of opportunity for new interventions or a chance to try something innovative.” (Germany)

“For Portuguese employers, the ability to communicate in Portuguese is essential, to be able to understand and learn how to perform the tasks. The work applicants should have all legal documents and demonstrate willingness to work.” (Portugal)

“Generally, employers are open to providing opportunities for women, and workplace visits are relatively easy to arrange. These experiences are usually valuable for migrant women, and sometimes for employers as well. However, if there is no immediate open position to be filled, employers are not that interested in receiving any support in the recruitment practicalities that could be beneficial for them in the future. Thus, any capacity-building efforts for employers, even to support them in the future, can be difficult to carry out without immediate need of staff.” (Finland)



WOW-e’s multiplier event in France brought together employers from different sectors, NGOs and stakeholders to discuss the project’s interim report and conclusions. Participants engaged in lively debates on identifying skills and digital tool requirements, emphasising the importance of migrant women’s voices and experiences. (Picture: Accentonic)

WOW-e STANDARD 4: How to prepare a successful skills assessment of migrant women with low work capabilities

COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY MIGRANT WOMEN

The skills of migrant women are usually difficult to define. There are several reasons for this, such as

- Lack of education in formal learning environments
- Lack of vocational skills
- Lack of validation and/or recognition of education
- Lack of work experience in the country of origin and/or residence

Sometimes women have gained work experience in the country of origin and/or in informal work or learning environments, such as at home or in hobbies. In this case, challenges include

- Women's skills have not been recognized or expressed, for example, in the form of a curriculum vitae.
- Women do not see their knowledge and skills as skills, nor do they see how these skills could be applied in working life or formalized through training.
- Counselors do not take an individualized approach and follow-up in skills assessment.

STRATEGIES TO SOLVE CHALLENGES AND PREPARE FOR SUCCESSFUL SKILLS ASSESSMENT OF MIGRANT WOMEN WITH LOW WORK CAPABILITIES

- Recognize the difference between formal, non-formal and soft skills
- Select methods that are appropriate for identifying different types of skills
- If the women are unaware of their skills and potential, choose methods that are particularly suited to assessing non-formal and soft skills.

For successful skills assessment, the best results are usually achieved with tools that

- Use a lot of visual aids - this helps women to reflect, although there would not be a common language.
- Are simple - in order to empower women, it is important to recognize basic skills that are transferable and demonstrate a person's personal strengths.
- Are concrete, using as little abstract terms and concepts as possible
- Picture life as a cycle and recognize skills acquired in different life situations.
- Take a pragmatic approach. Ask additional questions and provide examples to support the identification of skills and demonstrate how they can be used.

KEY INSIGHTS: How to prepare a successful skills assessment of migrant women

“Focus on increasing women’s sense of capability”

“Skills assessment tools should be simple, include picture cards or similar, and not include abstract concepts to be suitable for the target group of the WOW-e project. Also, tools should focus on assessing skills acquired from non-formal learning environments.” (Finland)

“Starting the work with peer sessions was essential. It glued the group together and enabled women to focus on work ambitions in a different way. Based on our experiences, the best introduction to skills assessment is knowing one’s personality type and strengths. It can be done through a test and



The 2nd pilot in Iceland focused on immigrant women from Grindavík, who had been displaced by seismic and volcanic activity. The programme emphasized self-awareness, personal strengths and empowerment. The participants took part in job shadowing in kindergartens and elderly care, gaining valuable knowledge in these areas. (Picture: Mimir)

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discussion. It shows the women in a positive light and empowers them, which leads to a better understanding and awareness of one's skills. In our experience, the women had a narrow understanding of skills. We tried to show them that the skills they have are transferable and how they could use them in the job market.” (Iceland)

WOW-e STANDARD 5: How to prepare a successful career counseling for migrant women

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

Migrant women's career opportunities are often challenged for a variety of reasons. The reasons are related to both structural, institutional and personal issues, such as

- Discrimination and prejudice in the workplace and in society at large
- Lack of knowledge about subsidies to which women are entitled
- Family responsibilities and cultural norms that slow down the career process
- Low language skills and lack of awareness of opportunities
- Slow integration process, including unclear residency status, low social, financial and cultural support leading to missed opportunities

STRATEGIES TO TACKLE THE CHALLENGES AND PROMOTE THE CAREER PATHS OF MIGRANT WOMEN

The key to successful career counseling is a culturally and gender-sensitive approach.

It takes into account women's social environment and circumstances, as well as cultural norms and social obligations. These factors interact in women's lives to create personal situations that should be considered when beginning career counseling. Career counseling aims to find a balance between women's social, cultural and personal obligations and the new expectations created by the host country.

The key to successful career counseling is to empower women and facilitate their self-realization of their opportunities in work and education.

- Base career counseling on skills assessment. Women's skills and capacities are at the core of building the way forward.
- Ensure that basic work skills are in place. Increase capacities as needed, e.g. through work life learning or educational aspirations. This usually includes increasing knowledge of work life and work opportunities in general in the country of residence.
- Set clear goal(s) and plan step by step how to achieve them. Use the WOW-e framework for goal setting (see tools). Walk through the chosen career path to the goal with the woman. Motivate and support ownership of the career decision!
- Build professional identity through the process. Sometimes the idea of entering worklife can be distant. Peers already in worklife are powerful motivators! You can invite peers to share their experiences in group sessions.
- Use both peer group counseling and individual counseling.

KEY INSIGHTS: How to prepare a successful career counseling for migrant women

“When working with migrant women, the vocabulary used along the counseling process should not be too technical or abstract. Also, based on our experience, the best results are achieved when varying approaches like group, small groups, and individual counseling. When the counseling process is supported by easy and pragmatic tools and includes follow-up of an agreed career plan, it is more likely that we succeed together with migrant women.” (France)



The pilot in Germany included a job shadowing experience in a hotel for 15 migrants from countries such as Eritrea, Ukraine and Afghanistan. Participants explored job roles, took part in discussions about the culture of working life and received guidance from a migrant restaurant manager who shared her career path. (Picture: SPX Consult)

WOW-e STANDARD 6: How to prepare a successful capacity building for migrant women

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

The working capacities of migrant women do not usually meet the requirements of working life in Western Europe. There are several reasons for this, such as

- No formal education or training
- No work experience
- Lack of understanding of the work environment in the country of residence (e.g. work requirements or opportunities)
- Lack of understanding of recruitment processes and what is required of a candidate
- Lack of understanding of education systems and how education is applied
- Lack of minimum skills to enter the workforce or education, such as language skills, digital skills
- Cultural differences in soft skills such as communication skills and clashes between traditional gender roles and new expectations of the country of residence.
- Women are not aware of their hidden skills! Inadequate assessment and recognition of skills

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES AND PREPARE FOR SUCCESSFUL CAPACITY BUILDING FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

Personal motivation is the key to success.

- Capacity building for migrant women should always be based on skills assessment and understanding of women's aspirations and life situations to understand motivational factors.
- Capacity building aims at empowerment through increased understanding of women's possibilities, confidence in their own competencies and sense of capability.
- Capacity building should be iterative along the counseling model based on women's individual needs.
- Capacity building can include information sessions and practical learning, e.g. in workplaces and peer groups.

Capacity building should be practical and include concrete examples and experiences. WOW-e recommends emphasizing work experience, such as

- Job shadowing
- Work practice or apprenticeship
- Visits to workplaces
- Interviews with employers
- Real life examples of migrant women (role models) who have found their place in the labour market.

The duration of the workplace visits can vary from one day to several weeks.

Key topics to be included in the capacity building are

- Work-life culture
- Education and training systems
- Overview, needs and opportunities of the local labor market
- Job search skills
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Learning about the tools (e.g. social subsidies) to make working life possible in one's personal life situation

KEY INSIGHTS: How to prepare a successful capacity building of migrant women

“Key to success is a tailor-made process that takes the women’s personal situations into account. It is a balancing act between cultural norms, personal aspirations and obligations, and new requirements of the hosting society towards these women to enter the workforce. However, neither motivation nor empowerment or capacity building can be achieved in one day. Although activities themselves should be relatively concise, the process for these women to realize their possibilities, potential, and create their ‘working identities’ in the new home country will take time.” (Germany)

“It is important to involve employers at the early stage of the capacity-building and counseling processes. In this way, employers learn about challenges migrant women have in seeking employment and are able to find solutions to enable the recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, migrant women learn about companies in the new country context.” (France)



Ana Ribeiro from AEVA led an interesting conference in Portugal, which included participants from various educational institutions, companies and NGOs. The positive reception underlined the relevance of the project, especially with regard to the need for qualified staff in elderly care centres. (Picture: AEVA)

WOW-E COUNSELING MODEL



WOW-e COUNSELING MODEL

WOW-e counseling process

Counseling tools

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE WOW-e COUNSELING MODEL

In this section, you'll learn about the iterative WOW-e counseling model.

The counseling model binds together migrant women's skills assessment, capacity building, career counseling, and employer collaboration.

The WOW-e counseling model includes an iterative and tailored counseling process, combined with pragmatic tools, and is available in multiple languages.



ITERATIVE WOW-e COUNSELING PROCESS

The WOW-e counseling model is based on iteration.

The counseling process moves forward in a spiral or circle where different counseling moments with women and employers can be repeated as needed.

For example,

- The woman's goals and skills are assessed. She starts a work trial. During and after the work trial, her skills may be further assessed. After the work trial, her work goals can be revisited and redefined.
- The employer offers a work trial. Skill-building tools and motivational discussions can be used during the work trial. This can be repeated after women have completed their work trial to ensure that the employers' capacity to recruit migrant women is enhanced.

TAILORED COUNSELING: START COUNSELING PROCESS AT KICK-OFF OR ANY OTHER COUNSELING MOMENT IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

Once you have established your group of women, you are ready to begin.

- The first point in the WOW-e counseling process is the kick-off meeting with the women. In the kick-off meeting, you'll discuss what the process and the peer group commitment is all about.

OR

- Any other counseling moment in the process. This works well, for example, if you are using the WOW-e framework to support your ongoing counseling work.

Be flexible and focus on listening to the women and their needs, hopes and concerns.

PRAGMATIC TOOLS AVAILABLE AT EVERY STAGE OF THE COUNSELLING PROCESS

The tools are available along the counseling process for both migrant women and employers.

- The tools are mainly compilations of existing tools in each country and across Europe. Some new tools have been developed in the project.
- The added value is that the tools have been tested during the project and proved to be useful and appropriate for the target group.
- Country specific tools (tools in different language versions) provide solutions to country specific challenges in local language.

Tools are available on the WOW-e's project site wow-e-platform.circle.so/home

The tools are structured on the WOW-e project website in each country specific section as follows

- Job Seekers
- Counselors
- Employers

Counselors can use materials available in all sections.

For example,

- Tools in the *Job Seekers* section can be used when working with migrant women in different counseling moments in the WOW-e counseling process.
- Tools in the *Employers* section can be used when engaging employers in the recruitment of migrant women.

Note! Migrants and employers can also use some of the materials in the *Job Seekers* and *Employers* sections independently. For example, HR, management and supervisory roles can benefit from the materials. Familiarize yourself with the materials and guide your clients in using the materials.

Based on the experience of the WOW-e project, we always encourage face2face encounters supported by the tools rather than primarily independent study of the materials.

AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

The WOW-e counseling model is similar in all partner countries.

However, due to contextual and target group differences, the tools associated with the counseling model are mostly country-specific.

Therefore, different language versions provide tools that fit the country-specific needs and contexts.

Language versions include

- Finnish, German, Icelandic, French and Portuguese.

Some tools that are not language specific (e.g. visual skills assessment tools with pictures) are available in all languages.

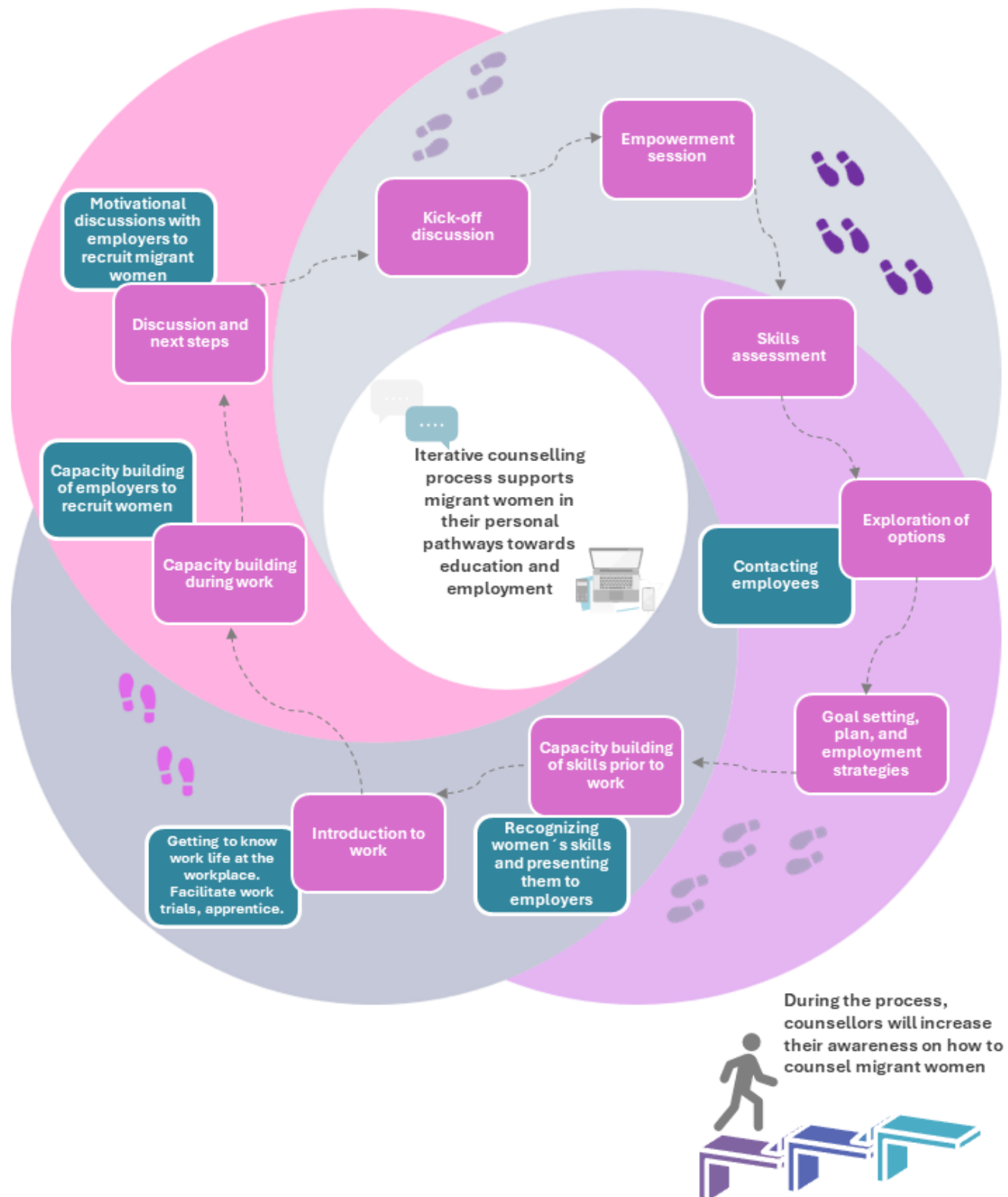
KEY INSIGHTS: Familiarize yourself with the WOW-e counselling model

“Face-to-face counseling moments on these topics with migrant women in this target group are essential to gain results. Having said this, there are always exceptions and for some individuals, materials can, of course, be provided online as well.” (Finland)

“Employers can for sure use independently most of the materials available online. However, the most efficient use is for counselors to use the materials to support their counseling process with women or to engage and capacitate employers. In fact, during the WOW-e project, we came across situations where employers wished to have support in using the materials.” (Project coordinator on behalf of all partners)

WOW-e COUNSELING PROCESS

The visualization of the WOW-e counseling process provides common steps that the project partners have taken with migrant women and employers. The process highlights the iterative nature and derives from the model's guiding principles: iterative and tailored counseling.



WOW-e COUNSELING TOOLS

Support your own facilitation and counseling work by visiting the Wow-e-website and making use of the tools suitable for the various counseling moments specified in the WOW-e counseling process.

Below is a brief guideline on which section of the WOW-e platform particular materials can be found.

To access the platform, visit the following address

www.wow-e.fi

TOOLS FOR COUNSELING MIGRANT WOMEN

Kick-off
discussion

Empowerment
session

Skills
assessment

EMPOWERMENT AND SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Visit sections

- Job Seekers
- Counselors

to find tools for working with migrant women in groups and individually.

The country-specific sections (i.e. different language versions) contains country-specific tools and some common tools that were used in the pilots in the WOW-e project countries. The common tools had different language versions or they were in a visual format without a specific language and therefore could be used in different languages. The topics of these tools are e.g. competence profiles, competence self-assessments, personality and strength tests.

Useful, valuable and effective tools that were commonly used in the WOW-e project were

- River of life
- Profilpass (Profile Pass)
- Meine Berufserfahrung (My Work Experience)
- Rectec
- Biographic interviews
- Competence Cards

Exploration
of options

Goal setting,
plan, and
employment
strategies

GENDER AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE CAREER COUNSELING

Visit sections

- Job Seekers
- Counselors

to find tools for career counseling. The tools refer for example to materials for facilitating group discussions, pre-structured individual interviews and individual coaching.

The Career Counselling Handbook was developed in the WOW-e project to guide the work of counsellors in the career counselling phase of migrant women.

The Career Counseling Handbook can be found in the section "Counselors".

Further relevant tools are referred to at the end of the handbook.

Capacity
building of
skills prior
to work

Introduction
to work

Capacity
building
during work

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

Visit sections

- Counselors
- Job Seekers
- Employers

The tools compiled here represent the best country specific tools that support and inspire capacity building activities according to WOW-e capacity building standards.

Available are tools to e.g. to equip women with knowledge for example about working life cultures, intercultural communication, job search and interview skills and expected behaviour at the work place.

Tools for Working with Employers

Contacting employees

Recognizing women's skills and presenting them to employers

Getting to know work life at the workplace. Facilitate work trials, apprentice.

Capacity building of employers to recruit women

Motivational discussions with employers to recruit migrant women

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Visit the section

- Employers

to find tools related to employer capacity building and engagement.

The tools focus on topics such as

- Recruiting migrants
- Culturally sensitive induction
- Building diverse workplaces

Visit also materials developed in the WOW-e project

- Employer needs assessment questionnaire and guideline
- Short videos to support employer engagement and capacity building. Topics of the videos include diverse working cultures, mentoring migrants in the workplace, language support in the workplace, the recruitment process of migrants.

EXAMPLE RESULTS



EXAMPLE RESULTS

Get inspired and motivated by the examples of results achieved through the WOW-e framework in the WOW-e project.

France



Source: image bank

Salimata is a woman from Comores who came to France first to The Reunion island to help her disabled children get better medical follow-up. She came here without any ability in french and as a single mother. She was able to find organizations in order to follow a training in catering and the French language. She was eager to work, to find any work she could. She was very diligent and attended all the workshops in order to understand all her skills. She was happy to answer all the questions, and was finally able to create a nice CV. We interviewed her about her life path, her few profes-

sional experiences, in order to highlight her abilities. After this training and the workshops, she found a job in a cleaning company. She still wants another training in French to improve more and more her skills in writing French.

Germany, Bildungsmarkt:

When R. came to counseling, everything was a mess for her. Alone with her baby, she didn't have any job or organization to help her. A very clever woman who needed stability to find her way and get as successful as she wished to be. Through biographical interviews, the River of Life, and using all the useful tools, we supported her in seeing her strengths, and experiences, and of course, her shortcomings. Once she could see that what she had done in her home country counted and her experiences and skills were also valuable in Germany, she felt



Source: image bank

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confident to continue. After a few sessions together, we managed to create a career path for her where she can do part-time vocational training in a restaurant and learn more German online. According to her, the most important support was to show her the way because she is sure that when the right path is shown to her, she will walk it with steady and strong steps even if it can be very tough sometimes.

Portugal

Jenifer is 39 years old and comes from Venezuela. She came to Portugal with her family in 2004 in search of better living conditions. She had a higher education in the field of Educational Action and she came to our Adult Education Center to obtain an equivalence to her school education or at least to have an academic degree recognized in Portugal.

Without being able to obtain equivalence for her studies in Venezuela, she went through a secondary school RVCC process in 2022 and a professional RVCC process in 2023, through which she was certified as an Educational Action Technician. During this process, she participated in WOW-E pilot sessions where individual counseling sessions were conducted to provide her with personalized guidance and support. These sessions focused on identifying her skills, interests, and career aspirations. She also received advice on resume building, job search strategies, and interview preparation. We used a combination of methods to provide career guidance/coaching, skills assessment, work life/labor market skills, and work life experience. These included individual counseling sessions, group workshops, a visit/job shadowing activity, discussions with an entrepreneur, and online resources designed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by Venezuelan women in pursuing their career goals.



Source: Image bank

Jenifer was a candidate who demonstrated skills in all areas, and she continued to develop her language skills, always striving to communicate correctly in Portuguese. She was always very available and eager to grow and learn more.

Jenifer is currently working in a Private Social Solidarity Institution, as she always wanted to, as an educational assistant.

Iceland

One of our participants was a refugee who had never worked in Iceland, although she had lived here for a number of years. She had little formal education from her country of origin, but some work experience in the beauty industry. During the pilot and counseling phase it became clear that she wanted to enter the job market in Iceland and had an idea for her own business, but unfortunately she had no funds and no way to save money due to her unemployed status. We were able to find a business incubator program for women and helped her

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apply. The main challenges for her were lack of knowledge about the different opportunities and how the system works, social isolation and dependence on her caseworkers. The most important thing for her during the pilot and counseling was the individual approach to each participant, but in a safe environment where women with similar backgrounds and needs could finally make their voices heard. She created a network of peer support. She was finally able to think about her future in Iceland without giving up hope, just by being pointed in the right direction. This was the turning point for her and the driving force for her next steps. She was accepted into the program and was given a mentor, an experienced business owner. She also applied for a job and started working and saving for her future business.



Finland

Zahra had been living in Finland for 3 years when she joined our pilot group. She had run her own clothing and shoe business in her home country, but had no vocational training.

During the pilot, Zahra participated in a 6-week internship in a home for the elderly. Through this experience, she discovered that she felt well suited to care work. She also received excellent feedback on her work. In addition to her personal interest, she was also motivated by the good employment prospects. Zahra even tried to apply for seasonal work in the same retirement home, but her language skills were not yet sufficient for paid work. At the same time, with the help of our counselor, she applied for and was accepted into a one-year nursing assistant training program. The pilot had helped her move closer to her career goals in a very concrete way.



Source: Image bank

Germany/spx consult

We don't want to spotlight just one woman. All the women who participated in our pilot phases came in different states of mind. Some were curious, some were inquisitive, some didn't really know what they were doing here. The women all had different levels of German. But even then it became clear what was important in the counseling process: Women with similar mother tongues or similar levels of German helped each other to understand, for example, the "River of Life" method we wanted to practice in our first pilot. By supporting each other, the women came into dialog with us and the other women. They opened up and were

surprised at what they had already achieved. With this strength, they were able to continue their path of work or education.

In the second pilot we visited a hotel and the manager of the restaurant - a woman from Mongolia - showed us her way to Germany and how she got to her current position. All participating women listened attentively and the following discussions were very lively, positive and focused on the next steps of their individual career or educational paths.

To sum up: The question is, what does success mean? Is it signing a contract, or can we say that the success of WOW-e is that the empowerment of migrant women takes place on several levels? So, our experience is that if you want to empower migrant women, you need time to listen, women who are in similar situations or who share the same or similar language, or other migrant women as role models, people who can show and help the women to name their goals and what is necessary to get there. Because every step counts, no matter how small.



Source: Image bank

The Value of International Collaboration

"It was interesting to learn and compare the labor markets and structural similarities and differences in the education systems of the countries. It was eye-opening to see how much migrant groups differ between countries and even within countries. In other words, although the challenges and goals are similar in each country, i.e. women's challenges to enter working life and at the same time countries' efforts to integrate migrant women into the labor market, there are as many situations and appropriate solutions as there are migrant women. However, in the project we were able to find ways to work together in different contexts and standards that work in each country". (France)

"It was extremely useful to learn about all the tools available in the project countries. There is such a wide variety of existing and useful tools, and by working together in the WOW-e project we were able to learn about and even test tools from other countries. Many of the solutions in other countries proved to be suitable in our context as well. All in all, the framework and counseling model created in the WOW-e project is something that we can later use in our daily work in our organization". (Iceland)

"It was a bit surprising how different the challenges can be for the same target group of migrant women in different national contexts. The international cooperation showed in a concrete way how much the structures of society affect the situation of women and how these structures either limit or support the integration of a similar group of migrant women. In addition, networking with project partners has been remarkably valuable. We have already worked together outside of the project on staff capacity building." (Finland)

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"The international cooperation has been a self-learning journey. Through the exchange of experiences and increased knowledge of new approaches, we were reminded of our limited knowledge of such a broad phenomenon as the integration of migrant women. Thus, the learning curve on this issue has been remarkable". (Germany)

"The exchange of best practices and success stories from other countries during the project has been useful for the implementation and planning of our organization's own work. It has also broadened our resource pool in terms of expertise, networks and access to relevant tools". (Portugal)

