ACTIVE SOCIO-OCCUPATIONAL INTEGRATION OF WOMEN at risk of social exclusion through the recognition of competences and learning soft skills in order to offer new professional opportunities at home society

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TRAINING NEEDS OF WOMEN AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
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_Abstract_

Output Identification: IO.1 – A.1

Date: 21st May 2018

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I. Introduction – What is WhomeN Project about?

The general objective of WhomeN Project is to offer new opportunities and competences to adult women at risk of social exclusion to improve their qualifications and thus their levels of employability and integration into the society, mainly using innovative methodologies of recognition of skills and competences that include transversal and soft skills.

The project focuses on the development of an effective protocol for the evaluation of skills and competences based on EU guidelines for validation and recognition, ECVET and EQAVET tools.

This will be possible mainly by a training program for adult education professionals tailored to learn about the evaluation of skills and competences based on EU guidelines for validation and recognition, ECVET and EQAVET tools. Later these professionals will design an innovative protocol with more effective adaptation to the special characteristics of these women and the needs that should be presented. In their daily professional life trainers detect soft skills that could help women to complete their professional process of socio-occupational integration and cultural integration. But often these trainers don’t know methods of recognition and validation using ECVET and EQAVET tools and how to implement them.

The added value of this project is to reach a consensus about an effective protocol and tools. Women at risk constitute the focus, and soft skills will be the unifying element to offer new job opportunities and a comprehensive development of women at risk of social exclusion.

1.1 CONTEXT AND INNOVATION

Thanks to a European cooperation established by complementary organizations coming from different countries and working fields, but sharing common objectives, this study focuses on the analysis of training needs of women at risk of social exclusion, employed or unemployed, but in a position to get a job.

In this way, training for employability and lifelong learning aimed at these women is the objective of this analysis and recommendations.

Women at risk face several difficulties in their socio-professional inclusion process. Difficulties are:

- a lack of job qualifications
problematic recognition of their previous qualifications due to the lack of a system for the equivalence of diplomas, particularly in the case of refugees or immigrants and women over 45 years
- isolation of women with large families, whose time is demanded by household tasks
- obstacles generated by low qualification and experience and their non-formal learning
- Low training and professional qualifications as well as difficulties by recognition of these qualifications limit their access to specialized jobs.
- work in economical and contractual precarious situations

WhomeN project arises from the necessity to develop new approaches aiming at promoting the professional competence of women at risk of social exclusion.

The proposal is to develop new methodologies and a protocol based on the recognition of women's knowledge and capabilities, which are acquired in different spheres of life (formal education, labor experiences and life experiences) according to European guidelines for validation and recognition, ECVET and EQAVET tools. This will allow a further professionalization of occupations commonly carried out by women at risk of social exclusion as well as a better integration of these women who do these jobs without official professional qualification but with a lot of experience and competences. To enhance social inclusion of women at risk by recognition and validation tools, it will be necessary to consider not only basic skills and competences, but also transversal skills aimed to develop new abilities.

The project will contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy and targets considering the role of education and training for recognition of competences, empowering people and ensuring that adults who have low levels of education, unemployed, immigrants and early school leavers can access lifelong learning to upskill throughout their lives.
II. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to assess the training needs of women at risk in the participating regions of this project. Each partner country (Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Spain) will define a specific objective profile of women on which the study will be carried out (women over 45 years of age, immigrant and refugee women).

This general objective comprises a series of objectives of a more specific nature that guide the research as a whole:

- Acquire knowledge about the training and work experiences of the women at risk living in the participating regions of the WhomeN project.

- Acquire knowledge about the training needs of women at risk in each participating country to improve their chances of obtaining qualified jobs of higher quality.

- Offer guidance for experts and professionals in adult education to develop training materials for women at risk, aiming at improving their opportunities to achieve qualified jobs.
III. Methodology of the study

Research combines quantitative and qualitative methods. WhomeN project partners, who provide training and services to women at risk of social exclusion in Bulgaria, Germany, Latvia, Italy, Romania, Slovenia and Spain, interviewed migrant women, refugees and women over 45 years old, who are the target group that we have chosen as the most representative among the large group of women at risk of social exclusion. They often face problems in terms of recognition of their professional and personal skills.

Qualitative part of the study, it has been carried out by the technique of discourse analysis and conversational analysis with the objective of determining the discourses regarding the training and employment opportunities present in the participant women in each organization. We gained information related to the priorities, needs, uses and customs of immigrants, refugees and over 45 aged women in the field of training. It offers additional information on the elements that affect personal and subjective matters such as motivation, barriers, obstacles or satisfaction.

The bulk of the research is set around a methodology with a brief quantitative analysis and in-depth qualitative analysis.

In this sense, we considered that the most effective methodological strategy is the "bottom-up" approach – from the scenario closest to the possible reality and direct contact with women at risk, avoiding emphasis on large institutions or agencies. It was enabled by the entities that participate in the project. They are entities which train these women, accompany them and advise them in their job searching processes and during their social inclusion.

The qualitative research techniques offer a deep knowledge of the reality of the object of the study from a closer point of view. The analysis provides information and material that is rich in nuances and details and can be very interesting for the conception and global understanding of the analyzed object.

The following table presents the qualitative methodological techniques that have been defined to cover all the specific objectives contained in the study.
Table 1: Objectives of qualitative techniques applied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific objectives of the study</th>
<th>Qualitative methodological approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge about the training and work experiences of the women at risk living in the participating regions of the WhomeN project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- documentary review of studies, reports and other statistics that exist about the training needs of women at risk and specifically about their employment and training situation in this regard  
- in-depth interviews with women at risk:  
  - migrant and refugee women  
  - women older than 45 years |
| Acquisition of knowledge about the training needs of women at risk in each participating country to improve their chances of obtaining qualified jobs of higher quality |  
- in-depth interviews with women at risk:  
  - migrant and refugee women  
  - women older than 45 years  
  - local work group with these women |
| Offering guidance for experts and professionals in adult education to develop training materials for women at risk, aiming at improving their opportunities to achieve qualified jobs |  
- in-depth interviews with women at risk:  
  - migrant and refugee women  
  - women older than 45 years  
  - local work group with these women |

Technical summary of the sample design is reflected as follows:

Table 2: Survey data sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universe (Women – participants – final indicators of WhomeN project)</th>
<th>2190</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>geographical scope</td>
<td>Participating countries at the study: Bulgaria, Latvia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Romania, Slovenia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>size</td>
<td>150 valid surveys (21 per country), 7 work focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>error</td>
<td>without intention to obtain statistically significant results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| type of survey                                                | Face-to-face  
  - self-administered |

(Note: See Annex 1: Methodology O1)

3.1 INSTRUMENTS FOR RESEARCH

Quantitative/qualitative study - use of questionnaires

(For further information, see Annex 3: Questionnaires: interviews templates)

Specific questionnaires were designed – one for migrant and/or refugee women and another similar one for women over 45 years old. These questionnaires are included in the annexes at the end of this document.
The questionnaires have 26 questions and a template for evaluation of soft skills, structured in 4 blocks:

- BLOCK 1: socio-demographic characteristics
- BLOCK 2: education and professional qualifications
- BLOCK 3: training actions and perception of needs
- BLOCK 4: evaluation of soft skills

3.1.1 Qualitative study with focus groups

One local work group of women at risk, belonging to the specific target group chosen by each partner was organized in each partner territory. There was flexibility for all partners to choose the most appropriate profiles for the meeting, following some recommendations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGET GROUPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. active women participating in training courses of the entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. women who belong to women's associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. employed women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. unemployed women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. trained women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. women with no experience in training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The process of development of the focus groups was done following guidelines and templates. *(See additional information in Annex 2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>limited number of participants (not more than 15) + a moderator + an observer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIMETABLE</td>
<td>1 hour and a half (max.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| OBJECTIVES | to gather information concerning perceptions, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and expectations of women at risk of social exclusion concerning difficulties in searching employment  |
|           | to detect training and educational needs of those women and their difficulties to recognize work experiences and training in a formal way  |
|           | to identify transversal and soft skills with the potential to be developed in training courses itineraries  |

| PHASES | 1. selection of participants that fit into the target group |
|        | 2. contact with participants via telephone and email by WhomeN project partners at each territory |
|        | Emphasis will be put in both cases on a brief explanation of the project, its needs and importance for the addressed women. |
|        | 3. logistic organization of focus groups: room, moderator, observer, recording |
|        | 4. Fulfill the questionnaire (Block 4, SOFT SKILLS) (30 minutes max.) |
|        | 5. active discourse (1 Hour) |
IV. State of the art

The recommendation of the Council of Europe (2012 / C 398/01) states that the validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired by non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of socio-economically disadvantaged or low-qualified people.

Non-Formal Education (NFE) has a long history and is seen as an important form of learning, personal development and training for an active participation in society. NFE is a permanent educational process that offers adults the possibility to develop and empower their values, skills and competencies different from those developed within the framework of formal education. These so-called "soft skills" include a wide range of skills.

The study of training needs of women as a representative group among people at risk of social exclusion intends to enable organizations to design an instrument that facilitates the process of recognition of competences and soft skills acquired throughout the professional life.

4.1 MOST RELEVANT CONCLUSIONS OF INFORMATION SOURCES ANALYZED

Migrant women

Refugee and migrant women in the EU have a high risk of social exclusion. The rate of the risk rises with the age of the women. The risk also depends on the education level and the question of having family or other relatives with them. Refugee and migrant women without support from family members often feel demotivated in front of all problems that need to be solved in the new country. Higher aged women have also a higher risk of exclusion.

Furthermore, the risk depends on geographical factors: for women who live in rural areas it is much more difficult to get a job, courses or practical trainings.

More than 90 percent of the interviewed women said, the most difficult challenge is bureaucracy. Often, they get less of information about recognition processes and are confused about conflicting information about their rights and obligations.
Especially for Muslim women there is another problem: most of our interviewed women explained they made racist experiences because of wearing a hijab. It is also difficult to get a job or practical trainings with a hijab. Especially in sectors with a high level of contact with customers most employers don’t allow wearing hijabs. The level of tolerance in this case also depends on geographical factors. The risk of social exclusion for women who wear hijabs is higher in rural areas.

The inclusion of non-European women in the labor market is a serious problem. Beyond the cultural aspects, there are demographic factors (presence of many young mothers with young children) as well as problems of reconciliation of family and available job opportunities. The problem of reconciliation of family and work times is indeed very difficult to overcome for migrant and refugee women, who often cannot count on the presence of a family network.

**Women over 45:**

According data collected in three participating countries (Latvia, Bulgaria and Slovenia). Approximately 30% of the registered unemployed women were over 50 years old. Despite they were more active than men or younger women in informal learning activities, often they declare the need of a particular training as mean to get new opportunities of employment.

Although women over 45 years face many obstacles for participation in education and training: lack of free time, too high costs for the educational program, insufficient offer of adequate training to the job opportunities offered to these women in the current labor market.

These women need to adapt the recognition process of soft skills and other skills acquired along their professional experience. In most of the cases they have many experience and soft skills developed in their past labour experience but they do not have the recognition or accreditation to participate in hiring processes. They often feel demotivation because that problem

**Official national systems for recognition of training and professional skills**

In the participating European countries in this study, professional skills are recognized by a craft certificate if someone successfully completes an apprenticeship and by a University certificate if someone successfully completes a study.

Furthermore, it is possible to gain officially recognized professional skills in special courses/trainings. Such courses/trainings are offered by registered/accredited educational institutions/organizations (like most of the partner organizations participating in the study). The courses have to be certificated by the different chambers, the employment agency and job centers or other superior institutions. These courses can have profession related topics and topics referring to social skills, language skills and ICT-skills.

Informal acquired skills - professional skills, social skills, language skills, ICT-skills are not recognized by a national system. The only possibility for recognition of informal acquired skills is a job reference by an employer. Each employee has the right to ask for a job reference whenever he/she needs it. The employer has the duty to describe in detail the professional, social, language and ICT-skills of an employee if it is required. That kind of reference is very important for employees, if they look and apply for a new job, because there are no other authorities recognizing informal acquired skills.
Recognition of skills of migrants

Professional skills of migrants can be recognized by official institutions depending on the professions. But for recognition, immigrants need to provide their certificates – craft certificate or university certificate. The certificates have to be translated and legally certified by an official institution.

Regrettably migrants have no chance to get their professional skills recognized, even if they worked for many years in a profession. But they have more and more the chance to exhibit their skills to employers by passing hands-on trainings. So, they can make use of the European problem of a lack of skilled workers.
V. Quantitative/qualitative analysis of the study: interviews

(Note: See Annex 3: Questionnaires for immigrants & refugees women / women 45+)

The research team of the WhomeN project has considered carrying out an analysis of results, unifying the data of both questionnaires: the one aimed at the target group of migrant and refugee women and the one aimed at women over 45 years of age.

The characteristics and objectives of both questionnaires are similar and, therefore, they can be unified to obtain more concrete and useful results when working as a starting point.

The analysis will be carried out by thematic blocks, showing in a first phase the graphic representation of the exploited data, and secondly analyzing them in a qualitative and quantitative way.

**BLOCK 1: socio-demographic characteristics**

In the study, 158 women were interviewed, of which 120 were immigrant and refugee women and 38 were women over 45 years of age.

Most of these women (61.4%) are over 45 years old and only 14% are young women (under 30). Therefore, the first conclusion that we can analyze is, that women who come to our organizations to seek training, employment and advice for the recognition of their skills and work experience, are in active situation for job searching. Most of them are at risk of social exclusion due not only to their gender and to origin (in the case of migrant women) but also for reasons associated with their age.

Many women who participate in the study have family responsibilities, with dependent children over the age of 10, and often living with their partner. It should also be noted that 20% of the women interviewed live alone.

Among the migrant and refugee women interviewed, most of them come from Asian countries, South America and countries belonging to the European Union. 36% of migrant women have been in the host country for between 1 and 3 years and 31% have been in the country for 8 years or more. A large majority (67%) of the women, who answered the question about their administrative situation in the country, have permission to reside and work. 18 of these women are in a special situation due to their refugee status.
BLOCK 2: Education and Professional Qualifications

The study shows most of the 158 women interviewed are highly qualified, 38.69% have a university degree, 12.06% have studied Vocational Training and 21.61% have completed compulsory Secondary Education. However, only a 38% of the women have formal recognition of this education received in their origin countries.

Regarding competences acquired in professional experience, women value responsibility as the most important competence, followed by oral and written communication skills, teamwork and self-confidence at work.

Adequate planning and time management are also important as well as IT skills. Hereafter in the study it will be verified how these competences would be closely linked to the training needs they refer to.

Work experience

On the other hand, when analyzing current employment situation, 32.53% of the interviewed women are unemployed while the 28.31% of the women are working with permanent contract. We must emphasize that almost a 10% of the women are currently working without contract. They are the most vulnerable group due their irregular situation and their opportunities of employment are the lowest. Our efforts should focus on providing them with an alternative training while supporting them on their way to regularize their legal situation.

Almost a 54.74% of the women who are currently working would change their jobs. Analyzing the data, the main sectors that agglutinate the workforce of the women interviewed are the service sector and agriculture among others, being dependent caregiver at home and childcare the jobs with the highest level of occupation.

Regarding working experience in the past, a 52.41% of the women have been working for more than 10 years. According to these data, we can conclude that the women interviewed have a wide work experience and the needed training is therefore aimed at achieving greater professionalism in their work.

Regarding migrant women, the more frequently developed occupations in their countries of origin are linked to the service sector too. Occupations in restaurants, bars and hotels reach 23.08%, followed by those related to Education and formal training. Domestic cleaners, factory workers as well as office staff are also common jobs carried out by women interviewed.

On the other hand, a 30.82% of the interviewed women are unemployed. Analyzing the jobs that they would carry out in the project, their motivations and expectations decrease when it comes to changing sector. Not in vain, the most desired positions to be performed in the future are Education and child care, social activities, personal services, HORECA and food processing, which are closely in line with their work experiences developed in the past.

58.2% of the women surveyed said that there is equivalence between their education level and the job they perform. However, almost 24% of these women consider that the job they develop requires a lower qualification than the one they have; while only 5% consider that the occupation they carry out presents a higher professional category compared to the training acquired so far.

Job search
When we came to assess the difficulties that migrant, refugee and 45-year-old women face in getting a job, we found that 23.41% of those interviewed said they had difficulties finding a job, as well as 38% stated that it is sometimes difficult to find a job. Together they represent 61.41% of the total, compared to only 31% who stated that they have no problems when it comes to finding a job.

Among the main reasons why they have difficulties finding a job, the lack of employment is the most repeated (13.55%, following figure 22). Age is another relevant variable regarding the difficulties in accessing to employment (12.02%).

It is very interesting for our study that variables such as limited professional experience (9.46%), insufficient or inadequate training (8.7%), high levels of competencies required for hiring (8.18%), as well as communication skills (6.91%), are among the most repeated.

All these variables are intimately related to training, a vehicle that we consider essential to improve the employment opportunities of women at risk of social exclusion, the general objective of our project.

**BLOCK 3: Training actions and perception of needs**

The access to training for the women interviewed in this study implies a series of obstacles, among others, economic difficulties, barriers to work-life balance…

However, beyond these factors, to materialize their interest at being trained implies, first of all, knowing the training offer and being admitted to a training course; and secondly, carrying it out.

Regarding the information on the training offer, the data obtained from the exploitation of the interviews shows that, 45.57% consider that they are very well informed, while 47.47% of women shows ignorance, or insufficient information.

Regarding the interest in the training courses, an 82% of the women interviewed are interested in training compared to only 12% who are not interested, and who consider training as an activity that does not facilitate access to employment. Among the women interviewed who have done courses to get a job or improve their employment, more than a half (52.53%) affirms they have participated in training courses with this aim. On the other hand, once they have completed the training, only 37.39% of the interviewed women declared that these courses have fulfilled their objective and have helped them find a good job or improve the previous one.

It should also be considered, as it will be seen hereafter in more detail, that there is a certain lack of motivation with regard to participation in training courses, as the expectations regarding the benefit of training are greater than the results obtained.

When we analyze the reasons why they did not participate in the training offered, the lack of information about the courses is the most repeated (24.76%) followed by a lack of interest for the courses because they do not respond to their specific training needs (16.99%).

The high costs of the courses they are interested in (14.56%) is another factor that appears with greater frequency in the exploited data, as well as the schedule, which is often not compatible with the current work carried out (12.14%) or their family responsabilities.
Knowledge of languages is another important barrier they faced (in the case of migrant and refugee women). Moreover, some of the participants in the research do not think courses are necessary.

Furthermore, when we analyze the training needs from their own point of view and motivation, the following areas appear as those for which women have more interest, among others:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Interest Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT skills</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search techniques</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel and management business</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial activities</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public attention</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning and housing</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Knowledge</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geriatrics</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make-up and hairdressing</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at their motivations for training to obtain employment in the future the women interviewed think that training is very useful in a high percentage (82%) and the same percentage of women would be willing to carry them out in contrast to only 13% who do not want to take courses.

In conclusion, we can say that most women are motivated towards training as a tool to improve their employment opportunities, stating that the main reason that motivates them to continue training is to improve their qualifications and abilities (43.96%), as well as socialize with other people (30.77%).

These last data gives an added benefit to the training carried out by women, since training does not only help the job search process, but arises also as an instrument to improve socialization and isolation. This affirmation was very much commented on interviews and affects migrant and refugee women but also women over 45, who have less family responsibilities.

**BLOCK 4: Evaluation of soft skills**

Our aims regarding soft skills evaluation of these women interviewed within WhomeN Project study are:

- Move the women to think over and face the importance of soft skills in working life.
- Enable women to recognize, by collecting evidence, their formal and non-formal skills acquired over their life.
- Enable women to identify and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in relation to soft skills.
- Gather and deepen the migrant's soft skills, resources and strengths under a professional point of view, starting from a soft skills analysis.
- Identify the path that women must follow in order to cope with those issues that concern their full professional inclusion and therefore their full integration.

The first challenge we faced was to decide which soft skills were appropriate to evaluate considering the profiles of the women interviewed and their potential when it comes to finding employment.

The chosen soft skills were those that we considered are crucial for carrying out a job within the occupation sectors to which they are most motivated. After analyzing the exploited results, we find that women have self-evaluated in the soft skills questionnaires and offered items very positively (high marks). Our analysis was based in small differences.
We have ordered them in ascending order, understanding that we must first offer those that are least evaluated, such as those that we must attend mainly in terms of training needs presented by women. The soft skills ordered from lowest to highest score are:

1. Autonomy and personal initiative, where challenge traditional assumptions about how things are done, experimenting to make things better whenever possible, is the item that women scored the lowest.

2. Mathematical thinking, is the soft skill that caused the most controversial comments and which women valued as less important when performing a job. Item “use numerical calculation in order to solve problems at work and in daily life” is the lowest valued.

3. Job searching, where item “I know what are the channels to find employment” has the lowest rating, being a key information to take in mind when designing the curricular contents that will support our protocol within the WhomeN project.

4. Digital competence and information, where item “Use social media to promote the results of my work” has the lowest rating.

5. Achievement orientation, where item “I can measure the results of improvement…” has the lowest rating, but many of interviewed women could not understand very good the meaning of this sentence.

6. Customer service, where item “I am able to understand the needs and attend difficulties of clients with optimism” is the lowest valued.

7. Flexibility – Adaptability, where item “High capacity to face innovative situations” has the lowest rating.

8. Autonomous learning, where item “I identify my learning needs and plan actions to fulfil them” has the lowest rating. This aspect reveals the important task we face by developing this study.


10. Self-effectiveness and time management, where item “I can adjust my tasks to my schedule, without the need to spend extra time” reaches the lower value of the three.

11. Negotiation & conflict resolution, where item “I know how to express my opinions in a positive and unaggressive way” has the lowest rating, a very important information to take in mind when designing the curricular contents that will support our protocol within the WhomeN project.

12. Organization where item “I am able to organize all the steps of the work adjusting them to last-minute needs or problems” has the lowest rating.

13. Responsibility where item “I ask questions about imprecise orders” has the lowest rating.

14. Teamwork, where three items under this soft skill present a high rate.

15. Social and civic competence, where item “I have interest and I help solve problems that affect the local community or globally” has the lowest rating.

16. Quality at work, where item “I participate with required effort and initiative the smallest details of quality” has the lowest rating.

17. Communication, where items “I formulate the necessary questions to obtain feedback” and “I know how to express my ideas in a concise and clear way” have the lowest rating.
VI. LOCAL WORK GROUPS

6.1 FOCUS GROUPS CONCLUSIONS IN EACH COUNTRY

One local work group with women at risk of social exclusion belong to the specific target group chosen by each partner was organized in each partner territory. Although, there was flexibility for all partners to choose the most appropriate profiles for the meeting and the template and methodology as well, some recommendations were given by the coordinator partner to unify criteria. (More information in annex 2).

As conclusions in each partner country a SWOT analysis template was developed. This analysis shows the conclusions and results gathered during the discussion groups.

GERMANY by LEB (Ländliche Erwachsenenbildung Thüringen e.V.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - highly motivated women  
  - high level of education  
  - willingness for practical trainings and further education courses | - Low level of acceptance of wearing hijabs in Germany, especially in rural areas.  
  - high level of bureaucracy in Germany  
  - difficulties for recognition of certificates  
  - proving work experiences with certificates necessary  
  - area of conflict of working time and time needed for family  
  - time management, especially for women with young children |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| In the short run | - worsening political situation because of populists in Germany  
  - long periods of unemployment → frustration  
  - no further financing or lower financing of low-threshold services for refugees  
  - disadvantage of rural areas in Germany for financing low-threshold services |
| - improving language competences  
  - getting recognition of certificates  
  - non-stereotyped employers that give refugee women a chance to attest their abilities | In the medium term |


In the long term
- acceptance of hijab wearing women in common life
- acceptance of refugee woman as an equal partner in all social parts, f.e. labour market, culture, politics and social life.

language course offers increase, especially for higher level courses that are needed for getting work permits or studies at German universities.

ITALY by COSPE (Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo dei Paesi Emergenti Onlus)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many migrant women are available in the job market and looking for training in order to certify their skills and to obtain new ones adequate for local job market.</td>
<td>There are low opportunities for training and work for immigrant women in the territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large number of migrant women are qualified and have previous work experience that can enrich local labor offer if these are recognized.</td>
<td>The training offered is not giving women access to employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the women in the territory are organized in community groups, associations and have created a network that can become a structural support for the women on their arrival in Italy.</td>
<td>Lack of easily accessible information about training creates barriers to immigrant women creating frustration and disempowerment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are immigrant women in the territory willing to work helping to change the situation for other immigrant women.</td>
<td>Many immigrant women don’t have necessary knowledge of the Italian language, culture and system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a number of immigrant women with a good knowledge of Italian language, culture and system, excellent knowledge of their mother tongue, culture and system.</td>
<td>The skills, competences and work experience that immigrant women bring with them are often getting lost because they are not recognized.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the short run&lt;br&gt;More job opportunities to work with immigrant that ever before because of new arrivals requesting International protection&lt;br&gt;Aging of Italian society creates more job opportunities for migrants in the Caring sector&lt;br&gt;Increasing opportunities for training and work experience with new Work policy.</td>
<td>Recent economic crisis reduced domestic work opportunities for immigrant women&lt;br&gt;The increasing number of new arrivals with complex situation create challenges for integration in the local community&lt;br&gt;Lack of adequate information about immigration, portrayed by the local media as a treat create a negative perception in the local community and consequently create barriers for integration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| In the medium term<br>The recognition of immigrant women qualification, training and work experience<br>Woman’s associations as a permanent structural support for the women on their arrival in Italy<br>A more efficient employment and training policy targeting woman needs<br>The aging of Italian society and departure of young people could result in job opportunities for young immigrants in various sectors. | |

| In the long term | |
Immigrant women have equal opportunities as other woman and man, providing innovation in many sectors in the territory
Flourishing Job and training market

ROMANIA by AIDROM (Asociatia Ecumenica a Bisericilor din Romania)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening from employers to hire refugee women without Romanian language</td>
<td>Small extent of Romanian Language classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small unemployment rate in Timisoara – many jobs.</td>
<td>No free trainings in Arabic or English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience of refugee women to make it.</td>
<td>No working system for recognizing of soft skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support and cultural financial base of manhood for their own families.</td>
<td>Small knowledge’s of IT competences in refugee women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small level of self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War trauma and small authorities trust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OPPORTUNITIES
In the short run
Due to internal migration in Romania, more working people are needed therefore migrants can cover this shortage and more and more there will be availability and interest in this population.

In the long term
Developing reliable system of recognizing skills for women by the private sector in Romania and the social projects.
Increasing the number of social enterprises that can hire vulnerable groups of refugees.

THREATS
Discrimination and Ignorance towards migration
Difficulties in getting jobs for women over 45 +
Low skill jobs available, Low salaries available
Attractiveness of working abroad and leaving the country

SPAIN by ALJARAQUE Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level of education</td>
<td>Racism and discrimination in some sectors of employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness for practical trainings and further education courses</td>
<td>High level of bureaucracy in training and education recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High participation in activities to help other immigrant women</td>
<td>Time management to reconcile work and family responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide Work experience</td>
<td>Low opportunities for training and lack of information about available courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower IT skills, communication abilities and self confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OPPORTUNITIES
In the short run
- Improving languages competences
- Improving information about skills and competences recognition formal processes
- Improve and expand the channels to disseminate the training offer

THREATS
- lack of formal recognition for the tools created for accreditation and recognition of work experience and training and skills
- Age discrimination at employment
- the long periods of unemployment lead to
In the medium term
- Design and planning training courses, which respond better to labour market.
In the long term
- Develop tools for recognition of work experience and non-formal training.
- Improve the transnational communication channels aimed to education recognition.

demotivation and mental health problems
- few employment opportunities for immigrant women in occupations other than domestic service

SLOVENIA by CIK TREBNJE (Center Za Izobrazevanje in Kulturo Trebnje Javni Zavod)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility; Knowledge; Experience: large range of soft skills and professional skills;</td>
<td>lack of IT skills; ability to adapt to new situations, flexibility; skills required to remain relevant in a rapidly modernizing workplace; low self-esteem;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OPPORTUNITIES

In the short run
- It is necessary to take advantage of the possibilities of education offered on the market to help women with training for job requirements and career development.
In the long term
- Existing programs in the education need to be adapted and upgraded to recognize the already acquired competencies and skills.

THREATS

- women are often not competing successfully in modern recruitment processes;
- lack of training opportunities or not knowing for them; bad motivation;
- lack of computer knowledge;

BULGARIA by GEN (Association Generations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad range of useful soft skills and professional skills; Loyalty; Experience; Knowledge; Interpersonal skills; Independence - older workers know how to depend on themselves; Responsibility;</td>
<td>Skills required to remain relevant in a rapidly modernizing workplace; Lack of skills to compete (with focus on competency-based assessment); Lack of new technology skills; Balancing work/life Issues; Job-hopping – older workers may regard career change as negative, while young people understand that it can be fulfilling, energizing - even life-changing; Insufficient self-confidence; Lack of ability to adapt to new situations, flexibility; Lack the skills to compete successfully in modern interview situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OPPORTUNITIES

In the short run
- Since there is a lack of qualified work force on the market in our country, the employers are expected to expand the investments in the human resource.

THREATS

- Age discrimination in hiring;
- Elderly women agree to take jobs that do not always match their qualifications;
- Elderly women are often not competing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>In the long term</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women should be supported by the low/regulations with special measures to work flexible as for example as part-time workers, because they have to adopt to the labour market needs and at the same time to perform family duties and responsibilities.</td>
<td>successfully in modern recruitment processes; To not be supported for flexible work for better work/life balance; Lack of training opportunities; To be blocked from the most senior positions; Deprivation of income and a sense of insecurity and humiliation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**LATVIA by LAEA (Latvian Adult Education Association)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>STRENGTHS</strong></th>
<th><strong>WEAKNESSES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High education level and broad range of transversal skills</td>
<td>Low motivation to learn for ¼ of inhabitants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>Women are not eager to take a risk to start their own business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence of women 45+, less family responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to learn and raise the competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>OPPORTUNITIES</strong></th>
<th><strong>THREATS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the short run</td>
<td>Hidden discrimination of women 45+ in labour market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong NGO, which support women with education, consultations, contacts and socialization</td>
<td>Few education possibilities because of lack of money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the medium term</td>
<td>As there is a lack of qualified work force on the labour market in Latvia, the employers are expected to look for working force abroad and not invest in education of local inhabitants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from local governments to non-formal education of local inhabitants, including women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the long term</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from EU Structural funds in 2017-2020 for education of employed, including women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VII. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE EU

Women who participated in this study belong to two different target groups with similar problems to access to employment, common needs for competences and training as well as work experience recognition: migrant and refugee women and women over 45.

Within migrants and refugees group, women present high levels of qualification in general. Most of them obtained a university degree at their origin countries, but all of them face obstacles to recognize this qualification in the EU.

In contrast, most of the interviewed Maghrebi women presented a great diversity of qualifications, although they are, in sum, the migrant women with the lowest educational level.

Once these women arrive in a European country, they face the enormous difficulty of accessing to job opportunities according to their level of education and qualification.

Most of them usually access the same type of occupations: caregivers, cleaning services, positions that requires a lower level of qualification than they have.

There are not enough employment opportunities for women in these conditions and these opportunities are even lower if for women over 45.

There is also a lack of opportunities for them to develop the skills required to compete successfully in current recruitment processes, and those skills are required to remain relevant in a fast-changing workplace. In fact, many women over 45 may be concerned that they lack the skills to compete successfully in current job interview processes, particularly given the increasing focus on competency-based assessment.
Women over 45 years of age often experience double discrimination, because they do not have opportunities to access skills improvement as well as an underestimation of their previous professional experience. This means that employers lose an opportunity to take advantage of that often very positive professional experience. The broad range of skills, knowledge and experience of women over 45 age, is often not recognized by employers.

Matching this group for a new job is extremely difficult, as it is considered to have no professional career and a limited capacity labor force.

Often their education and skills don’t meet the new production structures, but many people in this age group, well skilled, are forced to accept devalued, unskilled and low-paid manual labor. Deprivation of income and a sense of insecurity and humiliation at the end of working life is a common issue for every interviewed women at this age. Migrant women face the same situation.

One of the most important problem women face is work conciliation with family life; often family responsibilities are the most important obstacle to find an adequate job or to participate in a training course.

Women’s careers are often broken or interrupted. Many women have had to adapt to the predominant male model of success by organizing their domestic life in order to be able to dedicate themselves to their careers, which it is very difficult.

As a consequence of this type of low-skilled jobs traditionally done by women, the offer of training aimed at women is basic level in most cases. In contrast, there is also a very specialized training offer for high levels of qualification. However, the training courses most demanded by these women (usually middle level) is scarce and, being highly demanded, is in most cases insufficient.

The most demanded occupations for these women are caregiving and cleaning services, but training in these sectors have not enough quality.

Migrant and refugees women who are employed as caregivers or cleaners, often suffer from loneliness and lack of socialization. Therefore, participating in training activities not only benefits them in terms of increasing their qualification, but also in finding a group of reference that share their same needs and problems.

Regarding language skills, they are necessary in most of the discourses offered by the women. For migrant and refugee women, knowledge of the host country language is a necessary requirement to access to employment. Women argue that the offer of language courses is often at a basic level and that it is insufficient for their needs.

Concerning the training actions’ planning, participants have often different levels of qualification, so courses do not develop in a profitable way for all women participant.

IT skills are a controversial need of training for these women. New technologies are constantly changing, thus, often the training offered is obsolete and does not respond to current market needs. Very basic training is also offered in this sector, helping to leave these women out of access to higher-skilled job opportunities.

From the point of view of immigrant and refugee women, they often face racial or religious discrimination that is often allowed due to the contractor's ignorance of their cultures of origin.

**Envisaged solutions to problems described above**

It is possible and convenient when developing any type of intervention strategy to improve employment and training to address the diversity of women and the different types of social
situations they face. It is important to address the situation of regularity in the case of migrant women, taking into account the conditions of family coexistence, their expectations, their level of training and work experience.

It is also crucial for women to know the processes of recognition of qualifications and/or work experience acquired throughout their working life. After doing so, it is a critical point for us, labour counselors, social workers and other professionals, to accompany them by drawing up a training itinerary to cover the training gaps they face.

Among the solutions discussed by the women under study, we can find the following:

- As for the processes of recognition of competences, greater facilities are needed to certify the work experience developed in certain jobs occupied more frequently by this profile of women, for example, caregivers, cleaning services ... Often the bureaucracy of the process does not offer real solutions to the needs that arise.

- Adapt the offer of training in IT skills to the changing demands of the market. To do this, it is necessary to design training itineraries at various levels adapting them to the needs of women.

- It is considered necessary to offer language training at various levels, starting from the most basic to higher level where skillful communication strategies are incorporated. It is also important that this training is free and easily available to migrant women.

- To reconcile work and family life. One of the proposed solutions is to facilitate more telework options and adapt a more flexible schedule that allows their children education and care.

- Self-employment could represent a solution to the employability of women at risk of social exclusion. It would therefore be very beneficial to provide a greater offer of training aimed at women entrepreneurs to create their own small businesses.

- Regarding the integration of migrant and refugee women in the workplace, the presence of an intercultural mediator is important to solve possible conflicts that arise in an appropriate manner for both parties.

- Training in cultural diversity management for employers and job counselling technicians is a good measure to deal with specific issues derived from cultural issues (use of Hijab, ...)

- Elderly women to have a special tailor-made support for integration to the labour market in accordance with their level of education. To adopt a policy for reintegration of women into the labour market through a system of vocational training and retraining.

- To provide women with more incentives to become entrepreneurs and self–employed through a series of financial and other type of measures for small businesses.

- To fight against negative employers’ attitudes towards women’ career development and supporting their occupation of senior positions.
To introduce the quota approach for decision-making positions in politics, public and private sectors of the economy.

To sensitize the society about the need to strongly support the career development of women.

Actions to promote women’s associations as a measure of mutual empowerment and a way to provide information about alternative ways of seeking employment or even create initiatives of joint entrepreneurship.

### 7.2. MAIN OBSTACLES THAT HINDER ACCESS TO TRAINING IN THE EU

According to participants, one of the main obstacles described that hinder access to training is the lack of information about training, misinformation and miscommunication. They don’t often know where to get information about the training available.

There is a clear need to keep the different local bodies responsible for labor guidance coordinated about the existing training offer available for women. To that aim, effective tools must be created where the training offer is registered in a global and coordinated way not only at public level, but also with third sector organizations, where these women often go to receive training.

Language was mentioned as one of the obstacles, as some women cannot participate in the adequate training to their education level or competences due to their insufficient knowledge of the hosting Language.

The bureaucracy also hinders the women access to the training, because free training is subject to specific requisites, for example, having the certificate of long term unemployment, proof of qualifications, good level of national language and a complex selection process.

The training offered which is not free of charge is quite often expensive and does not guarantee the access to employment. In addition, the training offer frequently does not meet the demand of the labor market.

Public administration should provide public workers with regular training on gender issues and available alternative competences recognition systems.

### 7.3. COMPETENCES AND PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE RECOGNITION SYSTEMS: PROBLEMS & ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Regarding problems with competences recognition for migrants and refugee women, collaborative work between The EU and the embassies of their own countries can help to solve issues concerning the recognition of their qualifications and work experiences in host countries.

The recognition of qualification is quite complicated and an expensive process to be done in The EU now.
The participants agreed that less bureaucracy and lower price to get the adequate documentation to prove their qualifications should be a great help. It should be either simplified in home country or, even better, done in the hosting European countries.

One of the participants suggested that the collaboration between European institutions supporting immigrant women and European companies having business relations with various countries in the world (women’s countries of origin) could work in order to support the recognition of their qualifications and work experiences.

The participants also mentioned the importance of the recognition of their skills and competences acquired from alternative ways, such as cooking, sewing, hair dressing, caring…

Online courses in English or Arabic with official recognition could be an additional way to access to some jobs, as training itineraries aimed at interpreting and translating for migrant and refugee women could become a good way of employability for these women.

Mentoring initiatives from experienced business women to refugee women, could be a good strategy to facilitate the recognition of skills and professional experience acquired previously.

It has been suggested the possibility of establishing a period of voluntary work not subject to employment relationship, which could later be recognized as a professional experience linked to the position developed.

It would also be very useful to create tools that can recognize the work experience acquired through evaluations that are guided by validated formal processes. These tools should be accessible to the migrant population at all ages and origins and be transmitted through the public education and employment services.

Other solutions to support the channels of recognition directly linked with gender issues are:

- Strategic vision and comprehensive policies for increasing women’ employability and adaptive capacity to the labor market through continuous learning and tailor-made vocational training programmes;
- Promoting women’s action, particularly when occupying managerial positions, to overcome the existing negative attitudes of employers;
- Measures for a better conciliation of working-personal life;
- Measures to overcome the gender stereotypes in society in order to make that women and men are equally treated concerning career advancement.
- Training on Diversity Management for both – elderly women employees, but also for employers to be aware of their problem and how to use their skills, knowledge and experience;
- Intergenerational learning courses - The better the companies understand the unique combination of factors that motivate each generation, the better will coordinate the efforts. Education is a two-way street and older workers can also learn from younger generations.

7.4. TRAINING NEEDS OF WOMEN AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE EU

In this section of the study we have collected those recommendations linked to the existing need of topics that must be present in the programming of the training offer addressed to women at risk of social exclusion.
The recommendations on the most necessary training actions for these women will be made at two levels: training aimed at teachers, employment counselors and employment agents; and adequate training to the needs presented by women under study and that best fits their profile.

**Training for trainers, counselors and employment agents**
- Knowledge in immigration laws, residence and work permits
- Management of cultural diversity in the workplace
- Interculturality and intercultural mediation
- English and Arabic languages
- Systems of competences accreditation and titles homologation: information of necessary administrative procedures.
- Pedagogy and psychology.
- Motivation in situations of stress due to long periods of unemployment

**Training for women at risk of social exclusion**
- Communication abilities and active listening
- IT Skills and social media
- Entrepreneurship and self-employment
- English language
- Training in professional itineraries linked to tourism
- Empowerment and self-esteem for job search and professional development.
- Communication techniques and customer service
- First aid and prevention of occupational risks
- Job search techniques
- Systems of Competences Accreditation and homologation of academic degrees and education: information on necessary administrative procedures.
- Food handling
- Compulsory secondary education: preparation courses
- Entrance exams to vocational training courses: preparation courses
- Soft skills:
  - To learn how to work under pressure
  - How to improve their self-effectiveness and time management
  - Conflicts resolution and team work
  - Social skills and abilities
  - Decision-making
  - Development of soft and technical skills that can be applied in different situations within the working environment;
- Training courses to motivate them and to define their interests and personal preferences, which is important for achieving a professional fulfilment;
- Recognition and assessment of one’s own skills, strengths and weaknesses
- Self-confidence;
- Accounting and other knowledge related to business management
- Caring for people at home and in institutions
- Psychology of old age and child psychology.
- How to promote healthy habits and active aging
Aimed to migrant and refugees women specifically:

- Knowledge of labor law and working conditions in host countries.
- Language of host countries at different levels.
- Training in interpretation and translation.
- Host countries cuisine
- How to participate in local communities activities and solve problems that affect to local community