ENGAGE

‘Development of inclusivE iNteGration pAths 4 miGrant womEn’

WP2: Up-Skilling Workshops for Labour Market Stakeholders (LMS) and Third-Country National (TCN) women

National Report by

Stichting Amsterdam European Mobility
The Netherlands

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Contents

AMIF ENGAGE: Aims & Purposes 3
National Report: Investigating practices, gaps & needs 3
Policies, legislation & practices aimed at supporting TCN women in the Netherlands 4
TCN focus group findings 5
Organizations focus group findings 6
Conclusion 8

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AMIF ENGAGE: Aims & Purposes

The project Development of inclusivE iNteGration pAths 4 miGrant women / ENGAGE aims to increase TCN women's capability for entering the labor market and social life of the host society. The above will be achieved via the organization of Up- Skilling workshops, Job Shadowing Programme and Cross-cultural activities. The direct and indirect target groups are TCN women, LMS, TCNs and local citizens (women and men), professionals, policymakers, NGOs and the general public.TCN women, which are representing 45% of refugees in the EU, have lower activity and employment rates, a higher risk of poverty and are more likely to be in lower-skilled occupations. Most of them face particular integration challenges associated with lower education and labor market outcomes compared to refugee men. The main reason is that they are coming from countries with high gender inequality and low employment rates for women. Therefore, an effective integration process of these women in the new social environment can contribute to their social and economic inclusion.

Although the integration issue is at the heart of the political discussion in Europe, many countries face difficulties in absorbing a greater number of migrants, as well as in the latter's willingness to integrate. Much has been said and written on migration and integration, but too little attention, however, has been paid to women. While TCN women are highly qualified, most of them are directed to jobs and training mostly for household, care sector, secretary, and back-office services, unsuitable to their qualifications. Across the EU and specifically in Southern Europe, over 30% of TCN women work in low-skilled jobs, although they have tertiary degrees.

As a direct response to these facts, the project aims to organize targeted workshops for TCN women and Labour Market Representatives and serves a dual aim:
1. to support TCN women's first steps in the host community's labor market through the acquisition of employability skills
2. to increase LMS' awareness of TCN women's specific needs and gender issues
3. to introduce Job Shadowing as an efficient integration measure

National Report: Investigating practices, gaps & needs

This report aims to investigate the current scene in partner countries concerning the integration practices and to identify good practices and gaps for the development of new innovative ways to attract migrant women. Though there is evidence in existing practices and policies for TCN women's integration, the project consortium has organized 2 focus groups from each partner country with local key players such as representatives from NGOs, labor market, local authorities and the target group, TCN women, to collect valuable information about attitudes and perceptions. The data collected, which will indicate the vulnerability of TCN women in specific topics, will be highly useful for the development of the consortium's targeted approach towards TCN women. Mapping and analysis of needs, gaps, good practices and policies in partner countries, is of great importance, as they will be used as the basis for the design of complementary and tailored integration tools. The proposed activities aim to provide useful information for the hosting country, such as introduction to social and cultural aspects, labor market policies and the delivery of an Employability Skills targeted training.
The report will reflect the state-of-the-art practices and the profile of migrant women in terms of needs and gaps in each partner country.

Policies, legislation & practices aimed at supporting TCN women in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands exist different policies and practices that aim to support third country nationals. This is related to the status of the newcomer; refugees receive different and much more support from the state than those who migrate for career purposes and get support also from the employers. The Netherlands is a very diverse country that hosts also a great number of expatriates. Policies are in place to secure the well-being and the interaction of different groups and both the public and the private sectors are making efforts to some extent trying to address the concepts of diversity and inclusion. However, for this national report, we decided to narrow down our focus groups and policies about them to women who have a migrant or refugee status.

With regards to migration different rules apply (such as a Schengen visa or residence permit) based on the reason for migration. For asylum seekers the conditions are different; for example, the reason for leaving the country of origin. The main body responsible for asylum applications is the Immigration and Naturalization Office (IND) of the Ministry of Safety and Justice. At a national level, the minister of social affairs and employment is responsible for integration policies. However, municipalities are very active in fostering integration, as they receive a budget to carry out tasks related to social assistance and social support (for example the municipalities are coordinating language courses)

During the first 6 months of the asylum procedure, asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the Netherlands. In order to enter the labor market, one must have a residence permit and/or a work permit to be able to be employed in the Netherlands. Depending on the field, requirements can vary; for example, the public sector requires a minimum of B1-B2 level of the language, whilst private positions can be fulfilled without a sufficient level of the national language. The educational background of each individual plays an important role in entering the labor market; however again this subject can be complicated based on recognition of existing diplomas, type of work, and skills/competencies needed.

The public sector offers support in this area, as mentioned above, by providing language courses for free as long as the participant does not miss more than 20% of the total program. Depending on annual income and/or status, it is possible to apply for a loan from the Education Executive Agency (DUO) with 0% rate to join an educational program. There are also local organizations that offer valuable support; for example, the Juridisch Lokket, offers free legal advice on various topics. Various organizations offer internships and voluntary work which can be helpful for social integration and gaining experience. Not all offers are in English or for internationals, however there are options. However, Job Shadowing activities are not very common or known; there are options through college programs or European funded projects. There are various supporting organizations (especially in the capital city, Amsterdam) including alcoholism; drug abuse; HIV/Aids; cancer support; victim support; family support; family planning; mental health; women's support groups; children's support; crisis support; eating disorders; and gambling. The support is not offered exclusively to women (unless stated)

In the Netherlands, gender equality is embedded in Dutch law, even though there are still several issues that need to be tackled within the society. The female labor force often varies across different ethnic groups. Traditional roles are still in place in many cases and the

implementation of the Dutch civic integration policies often fails due to cultural stereotypes and the complexity of the subject.

TCN focus group findings

The participants of our focus group come from diverse backgrounds, representing on a fair level the ethnic groups of the country. Four young women (ages 18-35) coming from Morocco, Chile, Turkey and Yemen offered insights about their experience in the Netherlands. All of them have a minimum of B2 level in English, are native speakers of their national languages (Turkish, French, Arabic, Spanish) and learning Dutch. Living in different places (capital city; town; village), none of them has children and half of them are living with their parents. All have an educational background; three of them within a higher educational institution (law; finances) and one has completed a technical school. Two out of four were working in their country on a field related to their studies. However, it is worth mentioning that the choice of studies was not purely based on personal interest.

Since the relocation to the Netherlands, they have received language support and only one of them received a cultural training - funded by the European Union. No integration process or activities were offered to them with regards to the labor market (it should be mentioned that the current national report took place during the pandemic COVID-19) However, the language courses and the cultural training had a positive impact on the participants, as in their view and experience the language is necessary to enter the labor market and connections/networks can help as well. In their opinion, the most needed employability skills are communication skills, language sufficiency, networks and previous working experience. Depending on the field, they agreed that digital skills are necessary especially those necessary for remote work, external communication and content development (social media, Microsoft office)

Currently, only one is employed and not in a field related to her prior experience. They agreed that skills training would be highly beneficial to get access to the labor market and their field of interest, such as training for communication; teamwork; cultural awareness; empathy; digital skills and they also believe that networking events can bring additional value. They have experience different kinds of challenges with number one the language barrier, which they are actively trying to overcome. Further difficulties they have faced are lack of prior experience in the hosting country; unknown reasons for rejection; competition; discrimination; lack of network. They are aware of general employee's rights such as minimum wage; sick leave; maximum hours of work. However, none of them is familiar with any labor unions. For finding information about employment and opportunities they are aware of the most known sources (LinkedIn; Indeed; Gemeente)

Two out of four women have had an unpleasant experience with an employer: one wished to not speak about it in further detail and the other explained that the payments were not according to the law. In their view, there is a lack of empathy and respect, a lack of professionalism and sometimes employers openly discriminate, more concerning ethnicity than gender. In relation to their gender, they have experienced discrimination more in their

social life. They were not aware of legal authorities that can protect labor rights. Overall, they would rate their access in the labor market from intermediate (there are chances but not so many) to very difficult (little access and high demands). In their experience there is still systematic racism; previous educational and working experience is not recognized, and the labor market is not very open to other cultures. The rate in similar levels their participation in the social life of the country; the pandemic makes it exceptionally hard to make connections and the locals, even though they are polite, they are not very open. Voluntary work has helped one but it is still not enough and it is not always easy. For overcoming both challenges they wished to receive more networking opportunities (for social and employment reasons), further educational training and activities, while they are also trying on a personal level to increase language acquisition.

Organizations focus group findings

The types of organizations that joined our discussion were local non-profit organizations that work a lot with migrants and refugees, especially in the two major cities of the country, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. They offer their services upon arrival and post-arrival and they are not exclusively for women, however gender equality and women empowerment and guidance are their priorities. Participants can find them through community services and personal research or via friends who have participated in their activities (on social media or events as well) They work with the target groups mainly on education and training programs and the participants stay close to them from one to two years. During the programs the activities are designed in a way that ensures that language is not a problem; programs are offered in a mix of Dutch and English to encourage them to practice the language and they also encourage mentorship among the participants (for example translating in Arabic if someone needs extra help)

In their experience, regarding the labor market, minimum language acquisition is required; between A2 to B2 depends on the field and if they are fluent in English or not. Previous educational experience might be recognized or not, depending on the country of origin. They mentioned that there is a tendency to require further educational training especially for those coming from the southern hemisphere. Legal status and residence permit are necessary to enter the system and often asylum seekers are treated differently. To identify needs, gaps but also strengths and potentials they use participatory flexible methodologies that use group dynamics and intake process. More specifically, observation; personal and group reflection; record of learning and experience portfolio; professional discussions are among the practices they use.

The key problems they have faced, with regards to offering support to migrants and refugees, are the lack of cooperation between the public and the private sector and often language and cultural understanding of those providing services. Within the participating organizations, non-formal educational activities and training related to equality and diversity awareness are ways to ensure cultural sensitivity and empathy of employees. Based on that,

they can respond in a culturally responsive way and a gender-responsive way; to encourage skills development; promote social engagement and develop connections. This leads to further opportunities for women concerning their participation in the social life and positive impact on employment; improvement of mental health and general well-being. However, according to the focus group there is still a need for development within the society; for example, including more migrant women in decisions made for them; promote more the skills that women have to offer instead of focusing on those they need to develop; and provide activities that raise awareness on systematic discrimination and cultural sensitivity also for the locals.

The major difficulty that women are facing when entering the labor market is discrimination according to all participants. In their experience, companies are not always socially responsible and the gender factor can be challenging even for locals (for example fear of pregnancies). Also, without any negative intentions, employers are looking for very specific professional experience and there is a mismatch in offer and demand. According to the participants, there is a need for knowledge and competence development on the side of the employers, such as awareness of ethics and values; empathy; intersectional approaches; and acknowledgment of different worldviews and ideas. Gender equality policies are made but implementation is challenging as there are still gender dynamics in place and male representation is bigger especially in higher-level positions. Nonetheless, several organizations implement quotas and work on gender equality within the workplace, hence there is an effort to overcome these challenges. The intentions are most of the time very positive, nonetheless, it is a difficult subject as it requires letting go of certain privileges.

Best practices that could contribute to the direction of the project according to the focus group include trainings offered not only to newcomers but to the local communities as well, especially targeting attitudes and mindsets. This would help to approach the topic in an intersectional way, which is needed especially for a deeper understanding of certain subjects. Refugees are forced to leave their country and this can be already a traumatic experience; hence require them to overcome the challenges on their own can be exceptionally difficult and unfair. There is a need to overcome systemic racism and also the way people are treated based on their skin color. There is a need to listen to women's voices and treat them more like equals. The existing trainings are very helpful for social and economic integration (especially the language support) and job shadowing would help; however, this would help anyone starting a career. Lastly, it is important to note that the participants value the language used to talk for or to other groups and the connotations that follow certain words. Even though the term third-country national is used on a European level and by European institutions it implies a categorization and carries connotations that shape world views which do not necessarily promote equality.

Conclusion

Based on the existing policies and the data collected from the two focus groups, it is safe to conclude that the Netherlands is focusing on a direction to address the challenges of a very complex subject. This is not an easy process and there is a need for constant effort and share of knowledge and best practices. The language of the hosting country is perhaps the number one element that was present in all areas; from social and economic integration to small routines of the everyday life. Changing the labor market is not an easy process, however there is a need to tackle the current situation on different levels and sides. Policies that are in place can be helpful, however the implementation fails as these women are often seen as oppressed or not skilled enough. The level of de-centralization of integration policies provides the opportunity to tackle challenges related to the geographical context especially about educational and social policies. The role of civil society is crucial and vital; local organizations are at the core of the implementation of the policies and stronger collaboration with the local authorities would increase the impact of these policies (especially since the local organizations are in direct contact with the target groups). Furthermore, concerning the proximity of local inhabitants and those from different origins there is a need to close the gap. There are efforts to connect different groups and encourage communication, however there is not enough visibility of such initiatives and there is limited involvement of NGOs and civil society in policy making and implementation. Concerning the labor market there are some formal agreements with companies and refugee hubs that are in line with the existing policies. However, there is a need for sensitization mechanisms to change existing mentalities and attitudes within the labor market. A closer collaboration of local authorities, employment agencies and local associations could influence the role of the private sector and what added value migrant women could bring to the existing businesses. Lastly, the level of engagement of the women needs to be strengthened as they are not always aware of existing policies, opportunities and ways to acquire further information.